

Theology

Dispensation
Covenant

Replacement (Supersession)
Olive Branch

Cessation
Continuation

My assessment
of six theological viewpoints
behind some Christian arguments

Raymond Harris

2012

Dedicated to
God the Father
YHWH God
God who is One

I count myself among the other servants who have been called by God,
and that God has seemingly made me worthy to be a minister of the Gospel.

I offer this book at His glorious altar of righteousness.
May this labor be judged worthy before him.

Scriptures Quotations

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Abbreviations

ASV	American Standard Version
ESV	English Standard Version
KJV	King James Version
NIV	New International Version
NASB	New American Standard Bible
OT	Old Testament
NT	New Testament
AD	<i>Anno Domini</i> , Latin for “The year of our Lord”
CENI	represents the hermeneutic of: <u>C</u> ommand, <u>E</u> xample, <u>N</u> ecessary <u>I</u> nference, to include Silence of the Scriptures, No Old Testament Authority, and Expediency.
DRCT	Dispensational Replacement (Supersession) Cessation Theology
RT	Replacement Theology
CeT	Cessation Theology
CT	Continuation Theology
MSW	Miracles, Signs and Wonders

Emphasis Mine

When quoting from the Bible, there are times that I want to bring the reader’s attention to a particular word or a particular phrase. In these instances, I show emphasis in one of the following ways:

- a. bold, italics, underline
“...then shall the ***scriptures*** be fulfilled, that thus it must be?”
- b. bold, underline
“...from a child thou hast known **the holy scriptures**...”
- c. underline
“...king of Judah Jeroboam the son of Joash...”

When the reader comes across quoted Bible verses and sees words or phrases having only *italics*, this font format should be understood as being original to the translation version.

Preface

I spent many years looking for answers to dilemmas within Christianity and my experiences with Christendom. My quest for answers led me to learn about some of the major differences in Christian Theology. When 2011 had just begun, I felt greater freedom to express the issues that I believe contribute to Church and Christian arguments and divisions. My work on this topic is no where near exhaustive, but this project began as a web series back in January of the same year, and the series was completed in April.

During that time, I presented some of the topics in a different order. But as I was compiling the material for book format, the topics seemed to better fit in their current arrangement. Additionally, I have taken the opportunity to rephrase some areas of the work, and have taken the liberty to provide a more comprehensive Endnotes section. If the reader were to compare this material to the website series, the reader will find the differences, but hopefully these changes provide greater strength and cohesion.

I ask the reader to keep in mind that it is not my intention to compose a research paper giving a critical examination of each theological perspective because my reasoning tells me that doing such an investigation would appeal to a small audience. Instead, I am attempting to reveal the relevance of each theology in a way that shows how I believe each theology attempts to process Biblical teachings. Within that framework, I will reveal some of my thoughts about why I agree or disagree with the theological perspective.

Theology, its perspectives, and the manner in which it promotes Bible doctrine does not seem to be a focal point of Bible studies, yet Theology should be. It is critical that Bible students, ministers and Christians, irrespective of longevity, understand that Theology is critical to understanding: God, the Messiah, the Bible, your church, your church doctrine, and your own personal interpretation of the Bible. Theology is that important. The greater awareness one has of Theology, the greater ability one has to see the reason behind the arguments. This, in turn, gives one a greater clarity regarding the Bible, and gives confidence to become a peace maker, and “blessed are the peace makers for they will be called children of God.”

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Theology

A Root of Argumentation

Theology: Introduction

Irrespective of church affiliation and whether we know it or not, theology is the background teachings (the underpinnings or foundation, if you will) that you and I received when you and I were new to and growing in the faith. Theology is the informational lens through which our church taught us to interpret the Bible. At best, theology is simply the beginning method for the intellect to understand what God has revealed in the Scriptures.

Because theology represents the mechanism by which our intellect interprets Scripture, when another believer interprets the scriptures differently it is because of their theology. These differing theological conclusions are what drive the debates between and among believers.

As such, our theology will be the background mechanism by which you and I interpret just about anything a fellow Christian says. If the reader agrees, or disagrees, or agrees to disagree the reason is based, in no small part, in differences in theology.

Theology: The Reason It's Important

As I have been studying and talking with other disciples, it was finally revealed to me why there are so many disagreements, it is a theological disagreement. You might read what I just said and reply, “Duh!” but the reality is that the theological backdrop was never in the forefront of my mind when speaking with other Christians.

It seems that in a very general sense we know that the world is filled with all kinds of theology: Jewish, Christian, Islam, Hindu, Buddhist, just to name a few. But it never, and I mean never, occurred to me that as a Christian the reason why I agree or disagree with other Christians is because of theology.

Theology: Background

While it can be rightly argued that the English term *theology* is not found within the pages of the NT, the English term *theology* is a compound word derived from two Greek Words, both of which have abundant use in the NT: *theos*¹ and *logos*.²

The Greek word *theos* (and its variants) is translated into English as: god, gods, and God, among several others.³ While in English there is a theological difference between the lower case *god* and the capitalized *God*, the Greek does not recognize such a convention. In the ancient manuscripts, the Greek is either spelled using all lower case (*theos*) or spelled using all upper case (*THEOS*), the ancient manuscripts did not spell using title case (*Theos*). So, whether lower or upper case, it is left up to the Greek reader to determine if the context is referring to God (Jehovah – the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob). The Greek word *logos* (and its variants) is translated into English as: word, words, and saying, among several others.⁴

What is important about this Greek term is that when we combine *theos* with *logos* to construct the word *theology* which means *god word* or *god saying*. Strictly speaking a capital “G” or a lower case “g” does not matter, but since we are specifically speaking

about the god of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob we have accepted the custom of capitalizing God to know that we are referring to Jehovah. So, this *God saying* refers to the things that we say about God, how we interpret Him, His being, His message, along with the intent of His message.

Theology: Application

Theology is a big umbrella term that encapsulates many various concepts and therefore has many categorical classifications, more than we will discuss herein. However, whether or not we are aware, these categories represent the lenses through which we were taught to see the Bible.

It is my conviction that any who teach Scripture truly, to their core, believe their theology is the proper lens to understand God. While to some, examining theology seems tantamount to questioning God, we must accept that God is coherent and consistent. Since, we believe that God is coherent and consistent then it follows that theology and theological application needs coherency and consistency. This is why hours, years, decades and centuries have been devoted in an attempt to provide clear, coherent, and consistent answers for every theological category, and then giving revisions when things are unclear, or there are incoherencies, or inconsistencies.

During my studies I have found that the theological categories of dispensation, replacement (supersession), cessation, continuation, covenant, and olive branch are root causes for many arguments and disagreements among honest God-loving brethren. The reason for this is faith in God does not require theology, per se; but reading and understanding His Scriptures does. There is not a believer in God who does not want their theology to match what God has taught in His word, because for believers being pleasing to God is important, and properly understanding His word is just as important. Knowing this, agreement or argument among and between believers pretty much depends on which category/categories the believer holds to be true. And for each believer not all categories are created the same.

I will spend a small, and I mean a disproportionately small, amount of time with each of these. The reason my time will be small is because I am not attempting to write a book or thesis about each theological approach, my aim is simply a short discussion of each and what things persuade me for or against a theological category. And in some small way, this is my attempt to reveal to the reader the reason why believers agree, disagree, or agree to disagree. Irrespective if the reader agrees with my conclusions, I encourage the reader to undertake the arduous (and the study of theology is difficult and strenuous) effort to investigate and research theology.

Theology: Aren't We All on the Same Page?

Theology is the unspoken assumed “we’re all on the same page” mentality that every church expects of its people. When questions arise, and questions always do, it is primarily due to differences in two things. One, Biblical interpretation; but two, biblical application based upon the church’s assumed to be “understood by all” theology.

When anyone becomes cantankerous and perhaps to the extreme heretical to the local church or the universal church it is because of differences in Biblical Interpretation driven by differences in Biblical Theology. In a very general sense, and I mean very general, the twentieth-century Church of Christ that I grew up in interprets the Scriptures through a Dispensation Replacement (i.e. Supersession) Cessation Theology, herein referred to as DRCT.

I know it is DRCT because of the following observations about what was taught. One, it is part Dispensational Theology because God manages His interactions with humanity through Dispensations or time frame management. Two, it is part Replacement (Supersession) Theology because God had the NT replace the OT. Three, it is part Cessationist Theology because miracles, signs, and wonders (like speaking in tongues) stopped at one of two times: either when the NT canon was completed, or when those who had received the Apostles laying on of the hands died. These three theological categories support a certain style of interpretation and biblical theology.

The reader might respond, “Big deal! So, what’s the point?” The point is that theology drives the practice of the church and the disciple. Theology is why churches and disciples look the way they look, act the way they act, and do the things they do.

Let us take this DRCT theology and apply to my specific situation. DRCT theology drives the need for the twentieth-century Church of Christ to find and determine “the law of Christ” in order to establish a pattern for normative church worship and discipleship behavior. DRCT seeks to define concepts and terms like: baptism, christian, disciple, repentance, salvation, and worship independent and isolated from OT influences because of Replacement Theology. More specifically, DRCT prevents the twentieth-century Church of Christ from using the OT for normative church practices and discipleship, yet somehow DRCT permits the twentieth-century Church of Christ to use the OT in order to prohibit and restrict church practices and discipleship.

Theology: An Early Conclusion

Whether it is comfortable or not, salvation and eternity do not necessarily depend on one’s theology. While the Holy Spirit and Scriptures inspire us to have faith in God and in Jesus, the scriptures do not come with a specific handbook guiding us into interpretation and theology.

Men and women, throughout the ages, have attempted to specify proper interpretation and proper theology. Volumes have been written and scores of libraries have been created in an attempt to help believers have the best theology, helping us find practices and behavior pleasing to God Almighty.

While I am uncertain of the origins of the saying, there is an axiom that has come down through the Christian ages: “in essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity.” The message of the axiom is a laudable goal having the ideas originate with Jesus;⁵ but Christianity seems to have done everything but have unity, liberty, and charity. Through Paul, the Holy Spirit has provided a starting point and some guidance

about theological interpretation beginning in Romans Chapters Fourteen. But century upon century seems to breed greater discord and division, these discords and divisions are created, in part, by the adversary, but also by the pride of God's people who have to be *the* one who has the correct interpretation of God and His Word.

In some ways, having rock solid infallible theology gives confidence and comfort, but we are people, and as people we fail and fall short in our understandings. But it seems proper that theology should be consistent and coherent. Inconsistency and incoherency lead to misunderstandings; worse they can lead to hypocrisy. At the end of the day, and perhaps at the end of time, theology represents humanity's finite capabilities to grasp and understand the Infinite Creator, and therefore theology seems to take a back seat to faith. Yet. Yet...

Theology is important. Whether we realize it or not, theology is partly the cause of arguments and divisions among Christians. It seems improper and nearly judgmental to proclaim one theology superior to another because, as stated near the beginning, "theology is simply the beginning method for the intellect to understand what God has revealed in the Scriptures." But one thing seems certain: Theology should be Clear, Consistent, and Coherent.

While I am affirming the importance of theology, and providing my findings and thoughts about these six theological aspects, I am by no means claiming to be the final word on this subject. However, and up front, I do believe it is important to let my readers know that I can no longer portray myself convinced of the assertions of Dispensational, Replacement, and Cessation Theologies. As I have studied these various theological avenues, looking for coherent and consistent answers, and by putting the various theologies to the test, I have been forced away from DRCT, by nothing more than finding DRCT lacking consistency and coherency, into a theological paradigm informed by Covenant, Olive Branch, and Continuation Theologies.

Dispensational Theology

What is Dispensational Theology?

Dispensational Theology is a theological system that has its origins in the Protestant church of the 1800s¹ and is based on an application of the definition *dispensation*. Dictionary.com provides several definitions for *dispensation*²

1. an act or instance of dispensing; distribution.
2. something that is distributed or given out.
3. a certain order, system, or arrangement; administration or management.

Notice that *dispensation* is partly defined by the word dispensing which has the root word *dispense* which in part, means “to deal out; distribute” or “to administer”.³ This means that Dispensational Theology wants Bible readers to see the Bible as a structured management system by which God has managed humanity.

With direct application for Biblical interpretation, dispensationalism processes theological interpretation through the belief structure of seeing God manage humanity. Dispensational Theology sees God manage humanity by having Him deal out certain instructions (laws); then God having someone distribute those laws, along with God having someone administer those laws; which ultimately means that God has provided a system of guidance to humanity.

On a certain level Dispensational Theology sounds logical and quite reasonable, and seems that it might even have some NT support when considering that the English word *dispensation* is found within three of Paul’s letters.⁴

Dispensational Theology’s Process of Biblical Teachings

Like all categories of Theology, Dispensational Theology is diverse and quite in-depth. But, for me, it seems that the most succinct way to explain Dispensational Theology is that it is an idea that God has managed humanity and has revealed himself to humanity according to time frame. As I understand it, at the minimum, Dispensational Theology has at least two things:

- 1) Time frames are no fewer than three but can be as many as eight;¹
- 2) Under each dispensation, all humanity is amenable (accountable, answerable, responsible) to certain God-given “laws” or they are eternally lost.

Dispensational Time Frames

This section addresses point number one: Time frames are no fewer than three but can be as many as eight. Within the Restoration Movement, I was taught that God managed humanity in three dispensations: Patriarchal, Mosaical (or Jewish), and Christian. Here is how this teaching works.

1. Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and the Twelve Patriarchs (the 12 sons of Jacob) lived in the Patriarchal Dispensation governed by some “law” that existed prior to the Law of Moses. Dispensational theology seems to hold that this patriarchal “time frame” is found from Genesis Chapter One through Exodus Chapter Eighteen.

2. Moses (specifically the last 40 years of his 120 years), The Wilderness Wanderings, the Conquest, the Judges, Kings Saul, David, Solomon, the Divided Kingdom, the Prophets, those in the Captivity and those in the Intertestamental time period all lived in the Mosaical (Jewish) Dispensation governed by the Law of Moses. Dispensational theology seems to hold that this Mosaical “time frame” is found from Exodus Chapter Nineteen through Malachi and includes the Intertestamental time period (the 400 years of “silence” between the events of Malachi and the events found in the Gospel of Matthew).

3. Jesus, the 12 Apostles, the First Century Church as well as the Modern Day Church all lived or currently live in the Christian Dispensation governed by the Law of Christ. Restoration Movement Dispensational theology seems to hold that this Christian “time frame” is found from Matthew Chapter One through Revelation and through the End of Time.

Interestingly, the number of dispensation time frames may change depending on which Protestant Church you are from, but I was taught the Three Dispensations because of my Restoration Movement association. I am certain there are arguments about the correct number of time frames, but the number of time frames is not my focus. My focus, giving no attention to the number, is that Dispensational Theology believes that God manages humanity through time-framed management. But beyond time-framed management, my understanding is that one dispensational time frame neither influences nor interacts with the other dispensational time frames; in other words, each dispensational time frame is isolated and independent.

Amenability within Dispensational Time Frames

This section addresses point number two: Under each dispensation, all humanity is amenable (accountable, answerable, responsible) to certain God-given “laws” or they are lost.

The three dispensations pretty much follow the book arrangement in the Christian Bible, but the interesting item is that, as I understand it, the three dispensations do not interact with each other. This means that the Patriarchal Dispensation is self-contained and does not interact with either the Mosaical or Christian Dispensations; which means that the Mosaical Dispensation is self-contained and does not interact with either the Patriarchal or Christian Dispensations; which means that the Christian Dispensation is self-contained and does not interact with either the Patriarchal or Mosaical Dispensations. Thereby making each Dispensation isolated from the other two, in essence mutually exclusive of each other.

Dispensational Theology seems nice enough because it breaks the Bible into time frames that are easily identifiable, but this theological system seems to have a weakness. The weakness is amenability (one’s answerability to God by “laws”). This means that Noah is amenable to his laws, but Moses is not amenable to the “law of Noah,” which means that modern day believers are not amenable to the “law of Noah”. But those who lived in the time period of the Patriarchs (the Patriarchal Dispensation – Genesis One through Exodus

Eighteen) are all amenable to the “law of Noah” except, perhaps, for those who lived prior to the Flood.

Testing Amenability

To test the soundness of amenability, let us place a seemingly prominent Christian assertion that every human is amenable to the “law of Christ” because this is the “Christian Dispensation” and apply this amenability assertion to the time period of Abraham.

We know from Scripture that Abraham was called by God,¹ subsequently God entered into a Covenant with Abram² and later God required Abraham and his household males to wear a sign (circumcision) to prove their faithful covenant status.³ Abraham and his household from that moment forward were amenable to God’s covenant and circumcision. But what do we do about all the people outside of Abraham’s household?

If we take the current Christian belief about amenability and place that concept of amenability in Abraham’s time frame; then what we have done is to make humanity amenable to the “law of circumcision.” This would make everyone in Abraham’s time frame amenable to the “law of circumcision” which means everyone outside of Abraham and his household would be lost to hell because they did not wear “the sign” of circumcision. This simply cannot be true, if for no other reason, than it would make the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob an unjust God and unjust He is not.

Application of Testing

The serious truth is that the Scriptures reveal nothing about Abraham’s brothers ever being circumcised, nor the circumcision status of the descendents of the Hamites or the Japethites, or the remaining Shemites (for Abraham is a Shemite descendent). So for us, in evaluating Dispensational Theology the question becomes: to what were those outside of the “law of circumcision” amenable?

These non-Abrahamic peoples, these non “law of circumcision” peoples must have been amenable to something, the question is: to what? The only item that seems to make any sense is to have those non-Abrahamic peoples remain amenable to the “law of Noah” (which was established in Genesis Nine, which is also called the Noadic Covenant). For sake of brevity, it seems proper to conclude that Abraham became amenable for an additional level of faithfulness. His circumcision did not remove nor negate the “law of Noah” (Noadic Covenant). It simply means that Abraham was answerable to the Noadic System, *and* yet he, his household, and his descendents, were also to remain faithful to the “law of circumcision” (also called the Abrahamic Covenant).

Conclusion

Since the Church of Christ has ingrained it in me to seek the first century church, and it seems that Dispensational theology originated in the 1800s, I ask myself: why was I taught Dispensational Theology? To me, utilizing Dispensational Theology seems to violate the impetus (the driving force) of the Restoration Movement: seek the First Century Church and the First Century Church’s understanding of God’s Word.

While I am certain that Dispensational Theology has merit, I am no longer persuaded that Dispensational Theology is the clearest theological method for interpretation of Scripture, especially in light of Amenability Testing.

In the Amenability Testing, we have to accept that God allowed all non-Abrahamic peoples access to Him because God is the God of all peoples, not just the God of Abraham. This amenability test reveals what I consider to be the greatest weakness of Dispensational Theology: What do we do with those who are outside “the law”? In observing this weakness, I believe it suggests that I should ask: How does God work within the Scriptures? The answer to which I am becoming more convinced is Covenant Theology.

Covenant Theology

What is Covenant Theology?

Covenant, like all categories of theology, is somewhat diverse, and if the reader is like me, when I first examined Covenant I found it quite in-depth and sometimes difficult to process because it is quite different than Dispensational Theology. But the most concise way for me to explain Covenant Theology is to say that God interacts with humanity by entering into a type of legal contract with humanity through a mechanism called *covenant*. Please notice I used the words *type of legal contract*. The reason for this is because we (Greco-Roman Westerners) interpret “legal contract” in a much different way than the Hebrew People.

Covenant Theology is called *covenant* because of the various covenants that God entered into with people of the Bible. *Some* of the covenants that God made with humans are:

- God made a covenant with Noah, his sons, the world and every descendant of Noah.¹
- God made a covenant with Abraham, his sons, his household, and every descendant of Abraham.²
- God made a covenant with the Children of Israel (the nation of Israel) and all the descendants of those families.³
- God promised a New Covenant to the House of Israel and House of Judah,⁴ representing the two divisions of the Divided Kingdom and Christians believe this New Covenant is bought with the blood of Jesus.⁵

Covenant Theology’s Process of Biblical Teachings

As mentioned previously, Covenant Theology interprets how God enters agreements with people through the English term *covenant*. The English word *covenant* is a translation of the Greek word *diatheke*,¹ which is also translated as *testament*.²

The Greek word *diatheke* is a translation of the Hebrew word *beriyth*,³ which is translated by the King James Version as *covenant*, *league*, *confederate*, and *confederacy*.⁴ One is able to verify the Greek usage of *diatheke* for the Hebrew word *beriyth* by looking at the Septuagint (LXX) Greek. This simply means that LXX translators believed that the Greek word *diatheke* best represented the Hebrew word *beriyth*. Part of the definition of the Hebrew word *beriyth* is that God *cuts* a covenant⁵ with a human or with a group of humans; and therefore God “cuts” His covenants in blood.

Examples of this covenant cutting can be found:

- It is implied in Eden when God makes coats of skin for Adam and Eve.⁶
- When Noah cuts his offerings upon the Altar,⁷ God responded with a Covenant.⁸
- When God cut a covenant with Abram by having Abram prepare some animals.⁹
- When God cut a covenant at Sinai, the covenant was ratified in blood by the cutting and sacrificing of animals.¹⁰
- The New Covenant is also cut in blood, through the blood of Jesus.¹¹

Many of the Covenants require humanity to do something showing their faith towards God and the covenant. In other words, since God did something for the humans, humans are to do something as well, part of that is wearing a symbol called a sign/token.

- Adam was not given a human symbol.
- Noah and his descendants were not given a human symbol; but God gave a symbol, the sign for his faithfulness was the rainbow.¹²
- Abraham and his male descendants were given a symbol; they were required to keep the symbol of circumcision.¹³
- The Children of Israel and their descendants were given a symbol; they were required to keep the symbol of Sabbath observance, keeping Sabbath holy.¹⁴
- The New Covenant participants are given a symbol; each believer is to keep the symbol of baptism.¹⁵

According to the Scriptures, humans are physically born into one of the covenants: either Noadic, or Abrahamic, or Israelite. Each covenant has specific obligations, but only the New Covenant is by choice, one chooses to be born again by spirit and water being spiritually born into the New Covenant.¹⁶ This seems to be a major reason why the NT spends so much focus on baptism. [See Appendix Covenant Flow Chart]

Works and Covenant Theology

Some Covenant Theology aspects seem to affirm that the covenant cut at Mt. Sinai (Law of Moses) was a covenant of works. However, this does not seem true. While Israel was certainly exhorted to adhere to the Law,¹ adherence to the Law is not what made Israel righteous. And while sacrifices were required, it never was the adherence to doing the sacrifices that made Israel righteous.

It seems that what allowed Israel to be righteous is each person's individual willingness to draw near unto God. This seems upheld by Paul in Romans, when he was discussing how Abraham was justified long before God provided the Law of Moses.²

Blood and the shedding of it is what allowed Israel to be redeemed (as seen during the exodus with the Passover lamb)³ and to remain redeemed;⁴ but the blood of bulls and goats was insufficient for the purification of the conscience.⁵ Since blood is what allowed Israel to be redeemed, this concept is carried over into the New Covenant,⁶ where the blood of Jesus cleanses from all sin, completely and perfectly cleansing the conscience,⁷ and keeping the person redeemed for the New Covenant.⁸

Grace and Covenant Theology

There are some portions of Covenant Theology that seem to affirm that the New Covenant cut at Mt. Zion by the scourging of Jesus¹ and completed at Mt. Golgotha with the crucifixion of Jesus² is a covenant of pure grace. However, this does not seem completely accurate. While believers in Jesus are certainly under grace, there seems to be a type of grace offered to humanity through Noah, because Scripture says that Noah found grace/favor in the eyes of God.³ God through His grace permitted Noah foreknowledge about the flood and the mechanism to deliver he and his family from impending doom, and thereby gave a type of grace to all of humanity in the new world.

So, there seems to be a *general sense* of grace since the flood, and I suppose a *specific sense* of grace since Jesus' death at Golgotha. But God's grace is found throughout the

Scriptures. While speaking with Moses, God said, “[I] will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy.” (KJV)⁴ Interestingly, grace is the basis for God wanting Jonah to preach to the Gentile city of Nineveh. The city and its inhabitants were so moved by Jonah’s preaching that they repented; however, Jonah knew God would be gracious and this is why he was angry with God.⁵

While Covenant Theology seems to grasp that God cuts covenants, some aspects of Covenant Theology do not seem to affirm that both the Israelite Covenant and the New Covenant are between two-parties. This seems to be a concept that the Restoration Movement affirms. God expects human faithfulness by each human demonstrating him/herself faithful to the Covenant as evidenced by the writings of Jesus’ brother,⁶ but this in no way negates that faithfulness begins with a person’s individual faith, their belief in God and Jesus.⁷

Prophets and Covenant Theology

What is important for Covenant Theology is to understand the historic timeline. Jesus was the last prophet of the Israelite Covenant; therefore it seems proper to say that Jesus was the last prophet of the Law of Moses prior to the New Covenant being offered. This means that Jesus cannot be the last prophet of the “last days” because this would negate the preaching of Peter in Acts¹ and the evidence of prophets within the early church.²

Jeremiah 31 and Covenant Theology

Jesus said that the cup represented “the blood of the new covenant”.¹ We must recall that every covenant was ratified in blood (Adam at the Fall, Noah at the flood, Abram/Abraham, Israel at Sinai, New Covenant at Golgotha). While Jesus’ blood did usher in the New Covenant, we have to process the reality that this New Covenant was not a covenant with the Gentiles, per se, the Gentiles are certainly invited and permitted in, but the New Covenant was a fulfillment of Jeremiah’s prophecy² to children of Israel during the Divided Kingdom.

Jeremiah prophesied that the New Covenant would be with the House of Israel and the House of Judah.³ This seems to indicate that the Divided Kingdom would be “reunified” under the New Covenant found through the blood of the Messiah, which Christians believe to be Jesus of Nazareth. This simply affirms Paul’s teaching that the Gospel went first to the Jew and then to the Gentile.⁴

Amenability and Covenant Theology

The reader might say, “Okay, I get it, but what’s the big deal about Covenant?” That is actually a very important question because it means everything.

The reader may recall that when examining Dispensational Theology I gave it an Amenability Test; we need to do the same thing with Covenant Theology. The reader may have been taught something similar to what I was taught: anyone outside of Jesus is lost, doomed to an eternity in hell because all of humanity is amenable (answerable and responsible) to the “law of Christ”. As discussed in Dispensational Theology, such an amenability claim simply does not seem affirmed.

One of the reasons for this is because with God a person is amenable to the covenant agreement into which they were physically born, unless they are spiritually born into the New Covenant. Recall, the Scriptures seem to reveal that each person is born into a physical covenant either through Noah, Abraham, or Jacob (Israel) [See Covenant Flow Chart]. The only covenant that a person is not physically born into is the New Covenant, because one has to be spiritually born into this spiritual New Covenant.

Let us put the “amenability” argument into a pre-Jesus of Nazareth Israelite time frame. By doing this we can examine amenability logic against the Israelite Covenant: anyone outside the Israelite Covenant cut at Sinai through the mediation of Moses is lost to an eternity in hell. Scriptures affirm that this is simply not true.

We know that people outside the Israelite covenant were saved because of God’s desire to save the Gentile people of Nineveh. We know that Nineveh was in no way part of the Children of Israel and therefore was in no way amenable to the Israelite Covenant mediated by Moses at Sinai. But we also know that the Gentile people of Nineveh did have a desire “to save” themselves and demonstrated repentance at Jonah’s preaching.¹

Dilemma and Covenant Theology

Now for the biggest dilemma: If the world is simply not amenable to the “law of Christ” then why take the Good News?

God gave grace to humanity through Noah. God saved the Gentiles in Nineveh by grace through Jonah’s preaching. As seen previously, God told Moses, “[I] will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy.” (KJV)¹ Nineveh received God’s blessings. Even Jesus says that God “he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.” (KJV)²

This means that the Scripture itself testifies truthfully that there are some blessings outside the New Covenant. But only inside the New Covenant will humanity find the complete and fullness of all blessings³ and complete confidence of eternal life.⁴ However, what is just as equally true, is that if one hears the Gospel and chooses not to accept the New Covenant cut in the blood of Jesus, in other words, if a person has heard about this awesome New Covenant and chooses not to take it, Jesus said, “He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day.” (KJV)⁵

A General Review of Covenant Theology

Through Adam, humanity (both Jews and Gentiles) received physical life and a promise of a deliverer.¹

Through Noah, a “general grace” was brought to a new world and the new world was given a very general set of instructions.²

Through Abraham, a family was set apart in order to bring the Messiah, which flows through Isaac.³ And through Isaac comes Jacob, who God renamed Israel, who fathered twelve sons, who begat a nation from which flows the Messiah⁴ from the tribe of Judah.

Mediated by Moses, the Israelites at Sinai cut in blood and agreed to a formal covenant.⁵ This was done partially to teach people about righteousness as instructions through Torah (the Law of Moses) that reveals what God considers pleasing and displeasing in his covenant with Israel.⁶

Through the Messiah, the Divided Kingdom is reunited, and Gentiles are invited to fully participate in the fullness of God, where there is no longer a differentiation because all of humanity is brought into a Unifying Covenant.⁷

It seems that some affirm that the unifying New Covenant negates the influence or existence of any other God originated Covenants. However, we must accept that multiple covenants exist and have their influence in the world. This means that while the unifying New Covenant exists, it does not negate the existence of the Noadic, Abrahamic, or Israelite covenants [See Covenant Flow Chart]. The New Covenant no more negates the other covenants than the Israelite Covenant negated the Abrahamic Covenant. This is strongly reasoned by Paul in Galatians⁸ where he says the Law does not annul God's promises.

Since a Holy Spirit inspired Apostle provided that information in Galatians, then it seems proper to conclude that the Noadic covenant⁹ is truly a forever covenant for perpetual generations¹⁰ being an everlasting covenant¹¹ and was not annulled by the Abrahamic, Israelite or New Covenant. We know this to be experientially true because humans see the Rainbow on a periodic basis and it is Genesis that gives the reason for the Rainbow's existence.

Still relying on the insight of the Apostle Paul in Galatians, this means that the Abrahamic covenant¹² is truly a forever covenant¹³ being an everlasting covenant¹⁴ and was not annulled by the Israelite or New Covenant. We know this specifically from the writings of Paul in Galatians.

Still relying and adapting the teachings of Paul in Galatians, this means that the Israelite covenant is fulfilled, not abolished nor annulled by the New Covenant; we know this from Jesus¹⁵ but also from Paul.¹⁶ Through Holy Spirit inspiration, Paul claims that a "root remains;" the Gentiles simply cannot be grafted in unless there is a root (See Olive Branch Theology).

So Why Take the Good News?

The reader might now ask, "If what you are saying is true, that only those in the New Covenant are accountable to the New Covenant, then what is the purpose of taking the Good News?" This is another good question that needs, hopefully, a good answer. But before I answer the question, we must realize the theological assumption of the question.

The assumption is that the only reason to take the Good News is because if disciples don't take it the world is dead. To claim that everyone "outside" the New Covenant is dead is like an Israelite prior to the New Covenant, saying that everyone "outside" the Israelite covenant was dead. Just because someone died "outside" the Israelite Covenant did not destine that person to die an eternal death in hell. We know this cannot be true because of the Nineveh Narrative. The Gospel is not strictly about death; it is about life, blessings, communion, and spiritual oneness with the Almighty, which can only be found in its blessed fullness in the New Covenant, where the believer can have life and have it more abundantly.¹ That is the Good News. We have to know the Good News if we are going to take the Good News.

The previous reader question assumes a duty to save from death because everyone, whether they knew it or not, is condemned to hell because they are amenable to the "law of Christ." It seems proper to conclude that coming into the New Covenant is a choice and that choice requires awareness, an awareness that acknowledges accountability, an accountability to a covenant you willingly agree to contract until death. As discussed earlier, one is only accountable to the covenant into which they have been "cut", in this case physically "born" into. One chooses to be "cut" into the New Covenant by choosing to be born again, spiritually by water and blood.² But this does not negate the reality that the one who rejects the Good News will have to answer for rejecting the Gospel and does not release the one who rejected the Gospel from being judged by the words Jesus spoke.

The Good News is that regardless of one being in a covenant "outside" the New Covenant, "inside" the New Covenant is assurance, knowledge of salvation, absolute knowledge that one will be safely delivered from the deluge of eternal hopelessness, providing that one remains faithful to the New Covenant.³ Every covenant "outside" the New Covenant is simply guesswork, "on a wing and a prayer" so to speak; "outside" the New Covenant there is little assurance.

Conclusion

As I have been studying covenant, and since the Restoration Movement espouses the idea of using Bible terms for Bible ideas, I am simply baffled as to why Covenant terminology is not a frequent discussion. The KJV OT abounds in the use of the term *covenant*¹ and the KJV NT has about twenty uses of *covenant*,² and about fourteen uses of *testament*,³ both of which refer to the Greek NT term *diatheke*.

It seems proper to conclude that the Bible simply does not reveal anything about the spiritual ramifications for those outside the Abrahamic and Israelite Covenants. The Scriptures seem to reveal that God is simply proclaiming, "Now that you are in a Covenant with Me, I expect you to show yourself faithful."

In the vein of the Restoration Movement that seeks the First Century Church, I am becoming persuaded that *covenant* best represents the method by which the First Century understood their relationship to God and to the Scriptures, and perhaps represents the clearest theological interpretation of Scripture.

Replacement (Supersession)

What is Replacement Theology?

Replacement Theology (RT), like Theology itself, has variations and in-depth discussions, but for me, RT seems fairly easy to define. The core of RT is that the NT fulfills the promises of the OT and that the Church replaces Israel as God's chosen people.¹ But we should be aware that RT is also referred to as: Supersessionism Theology.²

Replacement Theology's Process of Biblical Teachings

Replacement Theology seems to assert that since Jesus fulfilled the OT, He must have ushered in the NT and either established New Law or Modified the Old Law. Thus, the church must determine what doctrine is based upon this New/Modified Law. Since RT asserts that the NT replaced the OT, RT requires a systematic examination of the NT in order to determine the "law of Christ,"¹ which determines how the disciple and the church are to act in the "Christian Dispensation."

For brevity's sake, it is my supposition that RT seems to be one of the driving forces behind many of Christendom's fractures and divisions, the reason for my thoughts on this should become evidenced during the next few paragraphs. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, one of the problems that arises from RT is that *if* the NT actually replaces the OT, then the disciples and the church *must* find the "law of Christ" in order to fulfill the "law of Christ". As one who was given RT, I am certain that finding the "law of Christ" became a major guidepost for the Church and the Christian.

As mentioned, RT seems to base its search for "law of Christ" on Paul's use of the phrase in Galatians thus requiring believers to search the Gospels and the Epistles to determine the Worship and Practice of the church and disciple. This reasoning of the "law of Christ" urges the church and Christian to identify and define ecclesiastical concepts and terms like: accountability to God, to Jesus and to the church; baptism, church, Christ, Christian, disciple, kingdom, messiah, miracle, new, old, repentance, sacrifice, signs, sin, wonders, worship, et al., all from the pages of the NT. What I have found experientially true is that no two individuals, or two churches/congregations who read the NT find the exact same "law of Christ."

One of the difficulties of RT is that depending on which aspect of RT is being promoted, RT will put forward the rationale that the OT has *no* purpose for the Church or Christians; or that the OT has *some* purpose, but the OT seems not to govern the Church or Christian. Again, my experiential evidence is that some churches and/or Christians have taken "law of Christ" so emphatically literal that they look not for "law" (lower case) but "Law" (upper case) and systematically label and condemn those who do not agree.

So, with the assertion that the NT replaces the OT, that the Church replaces Israel, RT must adequately answer the dilemma of how much or to what degree the OT's influence is either negated or abolished with the NT. Unfortunately, this is a dilemma that is not easily resolved.

Replacement of the OT

For sake of brevity, I want to limit my examination of RT, otherwise we will get stuck examining detail after detail. So, let us make the assumption that RT seeks to suggest that the OT is fully, one hundred percent, fulfilled and thereby abrogated.¹ Since we are using this definition of RT, it means that RT excludes the need of the OT; and means that the NT implies or emphatically states that the OT has absolutely nothing for the Church or Christian.

As such, it seems proper to conclude that in having the NT fully replace the OT, this would have a two-fold purpose: 1) NT replacing the OT removes the need to study the OT because the OT is not intended for the Church or Christian; and 2) if the NT fully abolishes the OT this removes the responsibility of answering how much of the OT influences the NT.

One interpretation of Jesus' statement, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill"² is that Jesus is proclaiming that he fulfills the OT and part of Jesus fulfilling the OT is the abrogation of the need for the OT and thereby suggesting the removal of the need for the OT for the Church and Christian. This seems to be done in part, by insinuating that the ultimate purpose of the OT was to prophesy about Jesus and that with Jesus' birth, death, resurrection, ascension and establishment of the church³ the OT is no longer needed.

By using the following two statements from Paul, RT supports its conclusion, these passages are found in Colossians and Galatians:

"Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross;" (KJV)⁴

"²⁴Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster *to bring us* unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. ²⁵But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster. ²⁶For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. ²⁷For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ." (KJV)⁵

RT interprets Colossians as removing the need of the OT and finds Paul's statement in Galatians as the reason why. In essence, RT affirms that the OT points to Jesus and since Jesus has been manifested, the OT has served (fulfilled) its purpose and therefore has no governing influence for the Church or Christians. While RT interprets other NT passages as implying or directly stating that the OT is abrogated because the OT served its purpose, for brevity's sake, the above three passages, used by RT, reveal the theological direction of RT.

Testing the Replacement of the OT

One of the means of testing any Biblical word, passage or verse is to find its literary context. Literary context examines the placement of a Bible word, phrase, statement or sentence among the words, phrases, statements and sentences that surround it.

While there are other contexts (culture, history, linguistic, rhetoric, social, and theology) that should also be taken into account, literary context provides a quality starting point.

We should also keep in mind that the literary context (as well as all other contexts) could, quite possibly, reveal a substantially different intended meaning for a biblical word, passage or verse.

Matthew 5.17

It was shown previously that RT interprets Matthew 5.17 as saying the OT has served its purpose. But it seems that when 5.17 is examined with the verses that follow it, there is at least one problem:

¹⁷Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. ¹⁸For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. ¹⁹Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach *them*, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. (KJV)¹

Verse Seventeen *is not* a standalone statement; it is conditioned by Verse Eighteen. In Verse Eighteen, Jesus makes it plain that *everything* must be fulfilled; part of making *everything* fulfilled is that heaven and earth *must* pass. The challenge is for RT to explain why it interprets the OT as abrogated, having no authority for the Church or Christian, when Jesus seems to claim that the OT will not be abrogated until “heaven and earth pass.” It seems, at best, portions of the OT have been abrogated, like animal sacrifices, but based on Verse Eighteen it does not seem proper to conclude the entirety of the OT abrogated.

Colossians 2.14

The literary context (which goes back into Chapter One and continues into Chapter Three) is far more detailed than our examination permits. But what is significant to our discussion here is that, in context, Paul says that the Colossians should not permit someone to judge the Colossian church if the Colossian church wanted to observe holy days, new moons, or Sabbaths¹ all of which have foundations in the Law of Moses.

Another interesting issue with Colossians 2.14 is that the NIV varies tremendously from the KJV; this is why in the previous section the KJV² was quoted. The NIV³ does not lend the reader to interpret the verse as Jesus nailing the OT to his cross, but nailing trespasses (sin) to his cross; this concept is also supported in the ESV⁴ and NASB⁵ translations. This leaves RT with the issue of determining: What does Colossians 2.14 actually mean? Interpreting Colossians 2.14 to indicate that Jesus nailed sin to his cross helps Paul’s make sense when he states that the Law (OT) is good, holy, just, and spiritual.⁶

Paul tells believers in Romans Chapter Seven that the Law (OT) is not against believers, because it reveals what is displeasing to God, otherwise known as sin.⁷ Additionally, by inspiration Paul claims that the Law *is not* sin⁸ there seems to be no possible way that Colossians 2.14 should be interpreted as “nailing the law” to the cross. Therefore, it becomes manifestly interesting that Paul tells Timothy that the Law is profitable for those who know how to use it properly.⁹

Galatians 3.24-27

In order to keep it very brief about Galatians 3.24-27, I ask the reader to find the literary context, and then ask one major question: Why does RT interpret that because we are under Christ we are to abrogate the teachings taught by the schoolmaster (the OT)?

Here is my answer to the question. In no field of human experience (whether mathematic, scientific, or spiritual) does the advanced studies ask or require the student to abrogate all prior learning, in order to learn all new rules before coming to the new advanced level. If anything, the student is to build on the previously learned material and to grow in capability and maturity. Interestingly enough, there are times that students have to back up and reaffirm/retouch the earlier principles from the teachings of the schoolmaster in order to understand the advanced level.

Allow me to add a thought about Galatians 3.24-27 when using the NIV. Here is the translation:

²⁴So the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith. ²⁵Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian.

²⁶ So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, ²⁷for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. (NIV)

Having the NIV translate Paul's description of the OT as being a *guardian* still, in no way, negates Paul's teaching that Christians are to use the OT in order to be taught by the OT, thereby receiving understanding and gaining hope; this is the whole power of: "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope."¹ Neither the Law nor adherence to Law gives righteousness; if the Law could have given righteousness the Messiah goes unneeded.

So, while it is definitely true that righteousness cannot be gained because one does everything in the Law, the Law should not be interpreted as being against the promises of God² nor should the Law be interpreted as against providing instructions in righteousness.³ Therefore, it seems proper to conclude that the Church and the Christian are to refresh their hearts and minds with righteousness by studying the things written aforetime⁴ as evidenced by Paul's admonition to the Corinthians.⁵

Application of Testing

While RT has its attractions, RT becomes less capable of addressing some passages in the NT, as seen above, but consider also Matthew 7.12. Many know "The Golden Rule" but I was not aware, until recently, that The Golden Rule is a proverb spoken by Jesus encapsulating the entirety of the OT:

"Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets" (KJV).¹

Another problem for RT seems to be Acts 21.17-27. This passage clearly states that James required Paul to perform a vow to demonstrate to the believing Jews who were

zealous of the Law² that Paul himself walked orderly, keeping the Law.³ To RT, it seems contradictory for Paul to be both a Christian and an observer of the Law of Moses.

One last item is from Paul and unfortunately, I have yet to find someone who can adequately address this statement made by Paul in Romans Thirteen:

⁸Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law.

⁹For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if *there be any other commandment*, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. ¹⁰Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law. (KJV)⁴

Aspects of RT postulate that NT verses that incorporate OT teachings become applicable to the Church and Christian. Here in Romans, Paul, in one phrase, “and *if there be any other commandment*,” implies incorporation of the entirety of the OT.

Conclusion

What has been mentioned is that RT seeks to have the NT replace the OT and thereby the Church replaces Israel. It was demonstrated that RT seeks to negate the influence of the OT on the Church and Christian; but as we have seen with Matthew 5.17, Colossians 2.14, and Galatians 3.24-27, there are several questions that arise that RT fails to sufficiently address. Additionally, what was shown is that RT has difficulty resolving passages like: Matthew 7.12, Acts.21.17-27, and Romans 13.8-10.

The goal of this section is to simply reveal that RT seems inadequate to the task. As we have seen, the OT does have a proper influence for the NT, and the NT does not seem to indicate abrogation of the entirety of the OT. But the NT does reveal a paradox that seems resolved only by Covenant Theology and Olive Branch Theology.

If there is no other reason why no one has been able to successfully persuade me back to RT, it is because of Paul’s simple phraseology “and *if there be any other commandment*”¹ through which he implies and incorporates the teachings not just of the Books of Moses, but also that of the entire OT.

Olive Branch Theology

What is Olive Branch Theology?

Olive Branch Theology has its roots (pun intended) in Romans Chapter Eleven. Olive Branch Theology is called such because of one of Paul's comments to the Roman Church:

¹⁷And if some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive tree, wert grafted in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree; ¹⁸Boast not against the branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee. (KJV)¹

Olive Branch, or Olive Tree, Theology basically seems to convey that the Gentile believers are grafted in, as in attached to, or spliced into some type of Hebraic-Jewish root system.

Initial Thoughts

Paul's letter to the Romans is arguably one of the toughest letters to read. Because of its difficulty, I imagine that Romans is not on many Top Ten NT reading lists. The Romans epistle is lengthy and tedious and Paul sometimes seems to wander off point. Yet, Romans is one of the powerhouse NT epistles (along with Hebrews, Galatians, and First John) if for no other reason than because of the Theological propositions that Paul asserts.

I have heard many things about Paul's letters, but it seems that one of the things I remember the most is being cautioned and warned about reading Paul. As such, one of the passages that I had drilled in my head was from Peter. I will quote Peter at length highlighting the main emphasis given to me:

¹⁴Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace. ¹⁵And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, ¹⁶as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures.

¹⁷You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability. ¹⁸But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen. (ESV)¹

I quote at length not to bore the reader, but to reveal something that Peter recognized way back in the First Century, good-minded, good-intentioned Churches and Christians were misunderstanding Paul's writings and they were suffering because of it. I quote Peter because I have heard Churches and Christians quote Peter many times warning Bible students to be cautious with Paul's letters. However, after many years of Bible study and ministry, I am beginning to wonder if the warning is ever used as a self-check mechanism for the ones saying it, myself included.

I am saying up front, Paul's writings are difficult to read and difficult to understand and I don't want to twist them and thereby destroy myself or any one else – I am conscious of this fact. But I am also aware that it is distinctly possible and somewhat likely that someone, including me, can be taught or teach the epistle to the Romans and what was taught may not necessarily correlate to what Paul intended. With these things in mind, neither you nor I want to be ignorant nor unstable in applying Paul's teachings, but I will

set out to do my best to reveal Olive Branch Theology based on Romans Eleven and attempt to communicate what I believe Paul is telling us.

The People of the Roman Church

In order to discuss Olive Branch, it is necessary to look at several aspects of the letter to the Romans. Perhaps, one of the most important aspects is that while the church was in Rome, the Church consisted of both Jewish and Gentile Christians, this may sound trivial, but seems vital to understanding Paul's letter to the Romans.

We can know that the Roman church was Jewish and Gentile in a few different ways. One is surmising how the Church of Rome was established, from the book of Acts Chapter Two:

⁷And they were amazed and astonished, saying, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?
⁸And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? ⁹Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, ¹¹both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God." (ESV)¹

Depending on how one reads verses ten and eleven, it could be interpreted that either a Jew, or a proselyte² who believed in Jesus or both returned to Rome and helped establish the Church in Rome.

Another way we can know that the Roman church was Jewish and Gentile is based upon a statement from Paul to the Romans: "...I am speaking to those who know the law..." (ESV).³ A person who knew law would be a person familiar with the Law of Moses and the remainder of the OT. This person most likely would be a Jew, but could have been a proselyte.

We know that there were Jews and Gentiles because of the entire dialogue of Romans Eleven. In this chapter, Paul directly speaks to the Gentile Christians by saying, "Now I am speaking to you Gentiles." (ESV)⁴ From this, we know with certainty that the Roman Church consisted of both Jew and Gentile believers.

While believers accept that Paul is writing by Holy Spirit inspiration, it is still necessary to see the importance of the original Roman audience. While Paul is writing to the Church in Rome, Paul is writing a comprehensive theological dissertation resolving tension between the Jewish and the Gentile believers. While both the Jews and the Gentiles both believed that Jesus was the Christ there is a tremendous collision of religious tension.

The Collision of Faith and the Roman Church

Prior to Christianity, the Jews, for decades, looked for the Messiah, and the Jewish disciples in the Roman Church most certainly believed that Yeshua (Jesus) was the promised one from the Scriptures (the OT). But what is important to understand is that the Jews were simply not required to abandon their Jewish culture or to abandon following the precepts of the Scriptures in order to follow the Messiah.

This may seem unnatural to a modern Gentile believer, but this concept must truly be affirmed as true in order to process the teachings of the letter to the Romans. There is much to be said about this tension between Jewish believers and Gentile believers, but the Apostles lead the First Century Church to resolution regarding this dispute at the Jerusalem Council.

This dispute between Jewish believers and Gentile believers was from Pharisaic Believers in Yeshua who wanted the Gentiles to observe the same rules that they (the Pharisees and other Jews) observed, mainly circumcision and adherence to the Law of Moses.¹ The Jerusalem Council was convened to answer this dilemma about circumcision and keeping the Law of Moses,² and the Church and the Council gave a Holy Spirit approved answer;³ much to the joy of the Gentile believers.⁴ The Council proclaimed that circumcision and keeping the Law of Moses were not necessary for the salvation of Gentile believers.⁵

However, and most importantly, what seems to be neglected is that the Jerusalem Council's resolution neither removed circumcision nor removed observance of the Law of Moses for the Jews. Based upon the Council's decision, the Jews have complete Holy Spirit approval to do things according to the OT teachings; but Peter reasons that doing the Law cannot and does not give salvation.⁶ Paul also reasons that faith in Jesus gives salvation because salvation is separate and apart from the Law.⁷ Paul also made it strongly clear to the Jews that their faith upholds the Law of Moses.⁸

Since it seems unnatural to my modern Gentile faith and while I may have been informed that the Jews were required to forsake the OT and abstain from Biblical OT observances, such is not the case. Participation in and observance of the Law were perfectly natural and acceptable for the Jew as evidenced not only by the Jerusalem Council, but also by James demanding that Paul prove his zeal for the Law,⁹ Paul proved his zeal by engaging in a vow,¹⁰ and the Holy Spirit, through Luke, revealed that *thousands* of Jews believed Yeshua (Jesus) was the Messiah, all while being zealous for the Law of Moses.¹¹

The previous information was presented briefly and perhaps the reader, like me, has to reconsider, re-read and meditate about Acts Fifteen, Acts Twenty-One, and Romans. Nonetheless, it is vital to Paul's argumentation within Romans Eleven; because Paul is going to reveal how three parties (the unbelieving Israelites, the believing Israelites, and the believing Gentiles) fit into God's plan for the New Covenant.

Olive Branch Theology's Process of Biblical Teachings

As mentioned at the introduction, Olive Branch Theology is taken from Romans Eleven. As we have seen, there was First Century tension between the Jews and the Gentiles, and while nearly two thousand years have passed since the ascension of Jesus, in some aspects there seems to remain a tension between the Israelite and the Gentile believers.

By inspiration, Paul offered to the Church at Rome a theological explanation resolving the Israelite and Gentile tension. It basically states that while the Gentiles are welcomed

and brought into an existing religious system,¹ within this system it is not the Gentiles who are the primary provider of spiritual nourishment, but the Israelite believers in the Messiah.² For me, this brought a whole new perspective to the New Covenant.

It does not seem proper to sound bite Paul's letter, because his reasoning cannot be condensed into any less methodical thinking than what he presented. This is because Paul has so many interconnecting ideas, and his abundant use of nouns and pronouns make sense only when studied in context.

But in an attempt to have some kind of brevity, I would like to bring the reader's attention the major importance of realizing that, at a minimum, Romans Chapter Nine and Ten establish the context for Romans Eleven (see Appendix Outline of Romans 9-11). Typically, I quote a passage and then provide my comments, but for this section I will provide inline references, in hopes of drawing attention to what I believe Paul is communicating, afterwards I will give my observations.

I ask the reader to please confer with the "Note about My In-Line References", this note is located in the Endnotes. Furthermore, I quote Paul, at length, but seeing his presentation is vital for Olive Branch Theology, I encourage the reader to spend time in the following modified passage of Romans Eleven from the English Standard Version.

¹³Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry ¹⁴in order somehow to make my fellow Jews jealous, and thus save some of them. ¹⁵For if their rejection [of Jesus as Messiah] means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance [of Jesus as Messiah] mean but life from the dead?

¹⁶If the [Israelite] dough offered [Jesus] as firstfruits is holy, so is the whole [Israelite] lump [holy], and if the [Israelite] root is holy, so are the [Israelite] branches [holy]. ¹⁷But if some of the [Israelite] branches were broken off, and you [Gentiles], although a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among the others [the Israelite branches that believe in Jesus] and now share in the nourishing root of the [Israelite] olive tree, ¹⁸[you grafted in Gentiles] do not be arrogant toward the [Israelites believing in Jesus] branches. If you are [grafted in Gentiles], remember it is not you who support the [Israelite] root, but the [Israelite] root that supports you [grafted in Gentiles].

¹⁹Then you [grafted in Gentiles] will say, "[Israelite] Branches were broken off so that I [a Gentile] might be grafted in."

²⁰That is true. They [some of the Israelite branches-cf. 11.17] were broken off because of their unbelief, but you [grafted in Gentiles] stand fast through faith. So do not become proud, but stand in awe. ²¹For if God did not spare the natural [Israelite] branches, neither will he spare you [the grafted in wild olive shoot Gentile].

²²Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those [Israelite branches] who have fallen, but God's kindness to you [grafted in Gentiles], provided you [grafted in Gentiles] continue in his kindness. Otherwise you [grafted in Gentiles] too will be cut off. ²³And even they [the broken off Israelite branches], if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again.

²⁴For if you [grafted in Gentiles] were cut from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated [Israelite] olive tree, how much more will these [broken off Israelite branches], the natural [Israelite] branches, be grafted back into their own [Israelite] olive tree. ²⁵Lest you [grafted in Gentiles] be wise in your own conceits, I want you to understand this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. ²⁶And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written, "The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob"; ²⁷"and this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins."

²⁸As regards the gospel, they [the Israelite branches that were broken off] are enemies of God for your [grafted in Gentiles'] sake. But as regards election, they [all of the Israelites] are beloved for the sake of their forefathers [Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob]. ²⁹For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.

³⁰Just as you [grafted in Gentiles] were at one time disobedient to God but now have received mercy because of their [the broken off Israelite branches'] disobedience, ³¹so they [the broken off Israelite branches] too have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you [grafted in Gentiles] they [the broken off Israelite branches] also may now receive mercy. ³²For God has consigned all [every Israelite and every Gentile] to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all [both Israelites and Gentiles].

³³Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! ³⁴“For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?” ³⁵“Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?” ³⁶For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen. (ESV)⁴

Observation: Gentiles, May I Have Your Attention?

In this passage Paul is directly addressing the Gentiles¹ and wants the Gentiles to accept that there are some Israelites who have rejected Jesus but believing in him gives an Israelite resurrection.²

Observation: Gentiles, Israel Is Important!

Paul tells the Gentiles their faith in an Israelite Messiah is not possible without first having the Israelites;¹ this is upheld by Jesus when he told the woman at the well that salvation is from the Jews.² Paul also goes on to tell the Gentiles that just because some of the Israelites were cut off from the Israelite root³ does not mean that an Israelite system does not exist.⁴

While the following was difficult for me to accept, it nevertheless is what Paul made clear to the Roman Gentiles: the Israelites that believe in Jesus are the ones who supply spiritual life and nourishment to the grafted in Gentiles.⁵ While Paul states that Abraham existed 430 years before the law⁶ and technically Abraham is not an Israelite, but the grandfather of Israel,⁷ it is still true that without the Israelites, the Messiah could not be, and the mercy that the Gentiles received and the promises of the New Covenant could not have been. As such the Gentiles should not brag and boast, but be circumspect about the origins of the Messiah and God's relationship to Israel, both Jacob and his descendants.

Observation: But What about Us Gentiles?

Paul makes it clear that the Gentiles need to recognize that they are grafted into a pre-existing root because of the Israelite situation.¹ But Paul also tells the grafted in Gentiles not to become spiritually proud, instead the grafted in Gentiles need to be aware of God's willingness and power to prune branches,² which could include a grafted in Gentile.

Again, Paul makes it fairly clear that the Gentiles were not the God cultivated olive tree, but that God cultivated the Israelite olive tree.³ Paul is not hurling an insult toward the grafted in Gentiles and Paul is certainly not making Gentiles second-class disciples (it should be well known that Paul argued that there is no difference between the Jew and the Gentile⁴). But Paul is making it clear to grafted in Gentiles that their faith is placed in an Israelite Messiah, so the believing Gentiles should not be conceited, puffed up, braggadocios, or think themselves superior just because they are a part of God's people.⁵

But Paul wants the grafted in Gentiles to also know that there is a future for Israel and Israel's future depends on the believing Gentiles.⁶ Paul declares that there must be a "Gentile fullness"⁷ that comes into the New Covenant before Israel can have "life from the dead".⁸ Paul supports his argument by referring to the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah⁹ saying that part of God's covenant with Israel is that He will remove their sins.¹⁰

Observation: But What about the Israelites?

For me, I have the hardest time with this section and Paul's wording, because Paul's phraseology seems so harsh. But according to several translations, Paul's use of the Greek word *echthros*¹ is translated as the English words *hated*, or *enemy* and, as such, I remain in context with those translations of *echthros*.

Paul states that it appears that God considers Israel an enemy of the Good News,² but God cannot treat Israel as an enemy forever because of God's promises – God's words are irrevocable, permanently binding and unchangeable regarding Israel.³ But Paul argues that this status has really nothing to do with Israel, in particular, because it relates directly to God's promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.⁴

So, what are the grafted in Gentiles to do? Reveal God's mercy and grace and live life within the Messiah in such a way that the Israelites are motivated to a type of godly jealousy desiring to be part of the New Covenant.⁵

It seems spiritually proper to conclude that while the Gentile is not required to become fully Israelite, within the New Covenant, the Gentiles should interact blamelessly with fellow Israelite believers and those Israelite non-believers by becoming "a Jew unto the Jew."⁶ Part of doing such, would definitely have to include being aware of customs and dietary teachings, so that in all things no offense is given.⁷ Paul says this will work because in the presence of God, whether Israelite or Gentile, each is disobedient because each has sinned,⁸ but God will have mercy and grace for both the Israelite and Gentile.⁹

Observation: Praise God for His Majesty

Paul's thinking in Romans Eleven, in many ways, was contrary to my thinking. From fellow Christians I have received laudable advice, "Either the Bible is right or it is not." And since I believe that the Scriptures are the accurate standard by which I measure my spiritual thinking, then it becomes incumbent upon me to adjust my thinking to what Paul is describing in Romans Eleven, no matter the challenges.

Since I have begun to accept this, I too feel that God should be praised for the depth of His riches and His wisdom and His knowledge.¹ Truly God's judgments are unsearchable and His ways are inscrutable.² As such, no one is capable of counseling God because no one truly can fully know His mind.³ How can anyone give back to God anything as repayment?⁴ As such, everything comes from God; everything that exists is through God and all things are His.⁵ God receives glory forever!⁶

Concerns for Israel as a Nation

There was a time when I was certain that the Church replaced Israel, and just as much as I used to be convinced of that, I am now convinced that the Scriptures reveal that there is *something* for Israel as a people. This comes partly from Paul, but has support from Jesus and Peter.

Jesus and Israel

Just prior to Jesus' ascension his disciples asked him a question, "wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?"¹ This question seems overlooked, but is very important. The disciples are not making it hidden, they are not insinuating, they are not suggesting, they are genuinely asking, having full expectation of national restoration, "When will Israel be restored?"

For those disciples, Israel had already been broken apart centuries before their own lives. Israel was first broken when the Israelite Kingdom divided, it was further broken with the Assyrian Invasion, was then further broken with Babylonian Captivity and subsequent return; but those men recognized that the Maccabean Revolt and subsequent Roman Occupation did not truly restore Israel. Even though these Israelites believed that Jesus was the promised Messiah, they were still expecting God to do something with Israel. Their concern and question is genuine and so should be our investigation.

But it is not their question that should grab our attention; it is Jesus' reply. To those disciples who watched Jesus ascend into the clouds, Jesus said, "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power."² It is interesting that the Apostles, but specifically Peter, were given the keys to the Kingdom³ and the disciples were given the mysteries of the Kingdom;⁴ but Jesus plainly tells them they cannot know the mystery of Kingdom Restoration; yet, Jesus insinuates that God will do something. This ever so brief exchange between Jesus and his disciples about Kingdom Restoration⁵ sets the foundation for the Kingdom Theology (the future condition for the Israelite nation) of both Peter and Paul.

Peter and Israel

It seems, for me at least, that so much time is spent investigating Peter and what he taught about believing in Jesus that we sometimes miss little subtleties of his Israelite background. But it is no small issue when Peter is preaching on Solomon's porch¹ that he is addressing fellow Israelites. It is not a mystery that the Jews were and still are looking for the reestablishment of the Kingdom, and Peter's reference to such events should not elude our attention.

Consider this from Peter's speech:²

¹⁸But those things, which God before had shewed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled.

¹⁹Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; ²⁰And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: ²¹Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began."
(KJV)³

Peter believes and urges others to believe that the prophecy about Messianic suffering has been fulfilled,⁴ but that there are things that must be a restitution (restoration) of things, which at the time of Peter's address, had not yet come to pass. We know this because of the use of the word *until* which is used as a time marker, this means Event B (restoration as spoken by the prophets), cannot take place until Event A (heaven's reception of the Messiah) is finished. As evidenced by the Apostles' question,⁵ it seems for the Israelite, part of this restoration includes the physical restoration of the Kingdom of Israel.

Paul and Israel

Paul mentions Israel and her role in God's plan from Romans Nine through Eleven, but Paul makes a strong appeal that God has not discarded Israel in Chapter Eleven. We spent much time looking at Chapter Eleven, so I just want to reiterate only a small portion. It is this thought from Paul:

²⁵Lest you be wise in your own conceits, I want you to understand this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. ²⁶**And in this way all Israel will be saved**, as it is written, 'The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob'; ²⁷'and this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins.' " (ESV)¹

From this passage, we need to see that Paul is interpreting Israel's future in light of Jesus' response to the disciples in Acts 1.6-7. Paul conveys to the Gentiles at the Roman Church that there is a future for Israel and Israel's future depends upon the "fullness of the Gentiles". For full disclosure, I'm not certain exactly the extent of what Paul means or refers to when he speaks of Gentiles' fullness; but for me right now, understanding the Gentiles' fullness is a side detail. Let us not lose focus on the side detail, when the major issue is that God seems to have something in mind for Israel as a nation.

Today and Israel

It seems spiritually proper to conclude that since we believe Jesus, Peter and Paul to be Holy Spirit inspired, that it follows that we should believe them when it comes to Israel. Since it follows that we believe those men to be God ordained, then if they left information that refers to an uncertain and indeterminate time frame about Israel's future, then we should believe that God spoke through them and God has *something* in mind for Israel. In a general sense, this type of information is prophetic.

Addressing Concerns

Romans Eleven is a challenging section of Scripture and it has caused me to rethink my role as a Gentile in the New Covenant. But Paul's theme of the Gentiles being grafted in creates all kinds of questions. As I have discussed this grafting in theme with other Gentiles, it seems the discussion creates a mental block within the Gentile. While the Gentiles seem to properly understand Paul² and Peter³ when they revealed that Jesus has become a stumbling block to the Israelites, it seems odd to me that the Gentiles have allowed the OT to become their stumbling block.

Animal Sacrifice

When discussing this grafted in Olive Branch Theology, one of the immediate responses I routinely hear is: "Then are you saying that Gentiles are to offer animal sacrifice?"

First, why does it seem that this is the first objection? When I hear that question I am beginning to wonder: Do we Gentiles even understand Jesus and His fulfillment of the OT? But to directly answer the question about sacrifice, the answer is an emphatic “No.”

The Hebrew epistle (like Romans, the entire Hebrews epistle interconnects in its own context) makes it clear that there is no need for animal sacrifices because Jesus removed this need. Jesus is the perfect sacrifice¹ and the propitiation for humanity’s breaking of the Divine relationship, in other words our sin.² Since he became The Sacrifice, all other sacrifices are unnecessary.

OT Abrogation

Another objection I routinely hear when discussing this grafted in Olive Branch Theology is: The Old Law is nailed to the cross and has zero authority for the Church. To reply simply, the claim of the OT being one hundred percent abrogated is oversimplified and seems to completely misunderstand Paul’s discussion in Romans Eleven.

In Romans Eleven, Paul made it abundantly clear that there is a Holy Root, and it is the Holy Root that sustains the grafted in Gentile.¹ This Holy Root is described in the OT pages is, and as Paul referenced, the forefathers: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Israel);² and God’s Prophetic position toward Israel through Moses,³ David,⁴ Isaiah,⁵ and Jeremiah.⁶

In Romans Three, Paul makes it clear that the OT cannot give righteousness, righteousness is based on faith in Jesus⁷ and in Chapter Thirteen Paul clarifies that the OT finds its complete fullness when the disciple loves their fellow human.⁸ In essence, the OT teaches us how to love, which supports exactly Jesus’ teaching of the Golden Rule, (we should take special notice that the Golden Rule is based on the OT⁹).

This claim that the OT is abolished also seems to misunderstand how Paul tells the church how to use the OT. In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul described one of several ways the church is to utilize the OT.¹⁰ Paul concludes that section in Corinthians by saying “all these things happened unto them for examples: and they [the OT Scriptures] are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.”¹¹

Since Paul admonished the Corinthians to look to the OT for examples of what to abstain from in order to please God, then it seems proper to conclude that the church is allowed to look at the OT to learn what she can do in order to please God, particularly with worship and moral living. This seems to be one of the things that Paul is insinuating in Romans Fifteen, when he states, “whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.”¹² and seems sustained by Paul when he made the following statement to the Colossians: “Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath *days*: Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ.”¹³

Judaizing

One of the other major objections I routinely hear when discussing this grafted in Olive Branch Theology is that I am a Judaizing teacher. Again, such an immediate response has me now thinking: “Does my accuser even know what a Judaizer was doing?” The short answer is “There is no way that I can be a Judaizer.”

A Judaizer posited that *in order to be saved* the Gentile *had to be* circumcised *and* keep the Law of Moses¹ – I posit no such thing. The Gentile, just like the Israelite, is saved by God’s grace when the person has faith that Jesus is the atonement for sin.² My understanding of Paul from Romans Eleven in no way affirms Judaizing.

More Thoughts

There is more that could be said, but our discussion has become lengthy, so for more of my thoughts about the use of the OT, I refer the reader to my discussions of Dispensational Theology, and Covenant Theology.

Conclusion

Olive Branch Theology takes Paul’s teachings found in Romans Eleven and establishes a sound, but (at least to me) challenging perspective. I have been so accustomed to hearing that the Church is God’s New Israel, God’s Chosen, that reading Romans Eleven is difficult. But it seems that based on Paul’s extensive argument such may not be the case.

In his letter to the Romans, Paul’s sustains the argument that adherence to the Law of Moses is righteousness based on works¹ which is different than righteousness based on faith.² And whether Israelite or Gentile, being a part of the New Covenant is based on God’s grace through our faith in Jesus,³ and “not works lest any man should boast.”⁴

From Romans Eleven, it seems proper to conclude that Paul called the Gentiles a *wild olive tree*, where as he called the Jews a *cultivated olive tree*. While both the Jew and the Gentile are from an olive tree, it is the Gentile who was grafted into a root system not the Jew. This means that there will be some characteristics unique to the *wild olive branches* and seemingly contrary to the *cultivated olive tree*. This does not mean that the Gentiles have to become Israelites nor does it mean that the Israelites have to forsake their Israelite roots. But since the *wild olive branches* are grafted into the *cultivated olive tree*, the *wild olive branches*, at some point, should begin to reflect some of the characteristics of the new root system (this reminds me of Romans 2.29). However, what the Israelite believer and Gentile believer have in common is their belief that Jesus is God’s Promised Messiah.

This means that we, grafted in Gentiles, are sons and daughters through faith,⁵ which means that the grafted in Gentiles have permission to look to the worship of Israel to determine how we should worship in this New Covenant.⁶ This is because the Gentiles do not support the Israelite worship of God, the New Covenant Israelites support the grafted in Gentiles.⁷

Cessation Theology

What is Cessation Theology?

Cessation Theology (CeT) interprets that the Miracles, Signs and Wonders (MSW) evidenced in the NT were strictly for either the First Century Church or until the NT canon was finalized. This means that CeT asserts that since about the Second Century the church has not been the recipient of Miracles, Signs or Wonders.

Cessation Theology's Process of Biblical Teachings

CeT interprets the Gifts of the Spirit:¹ wisdom, knowledge, faith, gifts of healing, working of miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, kinds of tongues, and interpretations of tongues as having ceased being an active part of the church. This means that passages which suggest anointing the sick with oil and praying for them² was applicable to the First Century Pre-NT Canonized Church, but is not a part of the modern Church.

The primary passage for asserting CeT seems to be one of Paul's thoughts that he wrote to the Corinthians. In his discussion about love, Paul stated:

⁸Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. ⁹For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. ¹⁰But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. (KJV)³

In this passage CeT interprets Verse Ten as evidence that all MSW would no longer be a part of the NT Church. One way CeT does this is by interpreting "that which is perfect" as the completion of the NT Canon.

Succinctly stated, it seems the principle concern of CeT is that MSW were intended for the establishment of the Church, and either that when 1) the Apostles died and the ones who received the laying on of the apostles hands died, or when 2) the NT canon was completed, there became no need for MSW, thus affirming that with the completion of NT Canon everything became sufficient.

Testing Cessation Theology

As I have done with each theology that we are examining we spend some time testing the theology, we are going to do this primarily by considering some ideas about Paul's statement regarding "that which is perfect".

Love: That Which Is Perfect

By utilizing literary context, why could "that which is perfect" not be love? Love being that which is perfect seems consistent with the passage, which connects back the context of the "more excellent way"¹ of Chapter Twelve and Paul's admonition to the Corinthians to "follow after love"² in Chapter Fourteen. With this in mind, it seems possible that Paul is reasoning that love will remove the enviousness among believers who had different gifts and capabilities.

It is of interest that Paul stated to the Corinthians,

"brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you." (KJV)³

It seems that in the closing of the Second Letter, Paul is encouraging them to become perfect, part of perfection includes having love. When we consider that John stated that

perfect love casts out all fear,⁴ we can also conclude that perfect love casts out all envy, with both fully gone the believer becomes perfect.

Christ: That Which Is Perfect

Others have argued that Christ is “that which is perfect” and have presented detailed argumentation for it. Generally speaking, as I have heard it, if Jesus is “that which is perfect” then it is affirmed that MSW should exist and will exist until Jesus returns. But for CeT, it seems that the issue with Christ being “that which is perfect” is that Christ will not be back until the end of times, and CeT affirms that MSW have ceased being a part of the Church.

NT Canon: That Which Is Perfect

This section has the probability of getting me in some real trouble because of the nature of the critique. By my critique, I am in no way suggesting that the accepted NT Canon is lacking sufficiency, because it does not. What I am trying to offer is a critique of the NT Canon being “that which is perfect” and why it does not seem to be a reasonable spiritual answer to the cessation of MSW.

The problem that I see with CeT arguing the NT Canon being “that which is perfect” is two-fold: 1) English translations (which means that we are not addressing non-English translations), and 2) original languages. Here is what I mean. No matter how close English translations may be in expressing ideas, no two English translations are the same in expressing ideas found in the Greek. Which is one reason why ministers and Bible students have multiple English translations, in order to get different nuances (“flavors,” if the reader will permit) from the Greek. Also, no matter how many editions an English translation goes through, no two editions are the same; consider how many editions and corrections have been given just to the KJV.

As for original languages, let us work from the assumption that Greek is the original language of the NT (some argue for Hebrew/Aramaic, but for brevity of our discussion we are assuming Greek). While the Greek NT manuscripts correlate substantially, if memory serves, higher than ninety-five percent, this still leaves a discrepancy. Even if the discrepancy were only one-half of one-percent, it cannot be mathematically or scientifically perfect. Would such fractionary discrepancy make the NT Canon spiritually imperfect? I will reason, no. But suffice it to say, that anything less than one hundred percent perfection in physical existence is less than perfect.

This less than perfect-ness can be reasoned to scribal error and erosion of ink and papyrus over time; but the issue remains, if that which is perfect is perfection of physical text and continuation of NT Canon, then we have to admit that physical perfection of text does not exist. This in no way should remove the Church’s or Christian’s faith in God, Jesus, or eternity in Heaven, simply “that which is perfect” being the NT Canon is insufficient evidence to prove the cessation of MSW.

Epaphroditus: A NT Anomaly

In Philippians Paul mentions that a fellow Christian named Epaphroditus “was sick near

unto death”.¹ Based on Paul’s description, here is an instance that seems far greater in severity than Peter’s mother-in-law having a fever,² but neither Paul nor any one else seems to do anything miraculous for Epaphroditus.

What is interesting is that the NT records Jesus healing every sickness and every disease among the people;³ handkerchiefs (or aprons) were taken from Paul and people used them to be healed,⁴ and Paul even brought Eutychus back to life after Eutychus fell from a window,⁵ but neither Paul nor any one else seem to do anything miraculous for Epaphroditus. One feels compelled to ask: why? About the only conclusion I have is that the NT is revealing that not everyone received miraculous healing.

I am supposing here, but it seems proper to conclude that if everyone in the NT received some type of miraculous cure, then it would come to be expected that everyone would receive a miraculous cure. It seems that the NT provides instances like Epaphroditus to reveal that as much as MSW were available during the days of Jesus and Apostles, not everyone received miraculous healing.

Since it seems that Paul is insinuating that Epaphroditus was not miraculously healed, even though Epaphroditus lived during “the golden age of MSW,” then it seems to logically follow that if MSW existed in the modern church that not everyone would receive a miraculous healing. Therefore it seems proper to conclude that the absence of miraculous healing does not negate the possibility, or even probability, of a miraculous healing from having occurred, or occurring to someone else.

Thoughts about Prayer

It seems clear that the First Century Church believed in MSW, but that subsequent centuries do not necessarily believe MSW are possible. Since my Restoration Heritage beckons me to seek and understand the First Century Church, and since the First Century Church believed in MSW, it makes me ponder the possibility of MSW, which gives me pause for the next thought.

If MSW are no longer possible, this seems to indicate that God has chosen to not let all things be possible; if that is true then it seems proper to conclude that prayer is limited. But, you see, I don’t believe that and neither do most Christians I’ve met. When we ask God “to reach down and heal” or “give a guiding hand”, what are we doing in those prayers, if we are not asking for God to perform some type of “miracle”?

Whether or not we recognized that or not, we include those things in our prayers because we believe we should pray, because Jesus taught us to pray, because we believe that we should A.S.K. (Ask, Seek and Knock),¹ and because we believe that God truly rewards (even miraculously) those who diligently seek him.²

Thoughts about Earthly Hope

Irrespective of “dispensation” all things should be possible with God. Otherwise, if God has chosen not to do MSW to help modernity, but helped His people in the First Century

I now ask: why would God give earthly hope and eternal hope to the First Century, but only Eternal Hope to the modernity?

While eternity in heaven with God is glorious beyond imagination, it seems impossible for God to give physical and eternal hope to Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, the Children of Israel, and the First Century Church just to give strip away physical hope for the Modern church and leave only eternal hope to Modern Christians who must still exist in a physical world.

Since God authored Christianity through His Son, and Christianity is truly a better covenant built on better promises,¹ CeT seems inadequate. It seems proper to conclude that stripping away physical hope for those who live in a physical world seems antithetical to the well-established behavior of the God of Christianity.

Correlative Questions

It may seem almost heretical to ask this, since it has been argued the MSW were done to confirm the Gospel, then if CeT affirms that that MSW no longer exists because the NT canon exists, then does it not seem logically correlative to claim that belief in Jesus has somehow been reduced because the NT canon exists? Diminished belief in Jesus does not seem probable when all things are possible.

I feel compelled to ask: What is so inherently “wrong” with MSW? If MSW helped convince people in the First Century of the veracity of the Gospel, does it not stand as correlative that MSW would do the same today?

Are All Things Possible?

Four times in the Gospels, Jesus indicates that all things are possible with God – once in Matthew, three times in Mark.¹ Since it is assumed that Matthew was written for a Hebraic/Jewish audience, and as a nation Israel had experienced and witnessed God perform MSW, it seems proper to conclude that the Jewish people really would not have needed much more to convince them that “with God all things are possible.”²

But it is interesting that the other three “all things are possible” are written in the Gospel of Mark, which scholars believe to be written to a Roman Audience, which would make the Romans a Gentile Audience. It now becomes interesting because a Gentile might actually need more convincing that “all things really are possible” for the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Knowing this, it becomes tremendously significant that in the Gospel of Mark it is not possible for God to take away the cup of suffering from Jesus³ for if God removed Jesus’ suffering, God would have removed human atonement.

The other two instances in the Gospel of Mark of “all things being possible”. One of these is a father pleading, needing his son healed.⁴ The other “with God all things are possible” regards salvation⁵ (which is included in Matthew⁶); so this is a concept worth telling first to the Jew and then the Gentile, both completely affirm that for salvation all things are possible with God. But as for the miraculous healing for the man’s son, Jesus plainly said, “If you can believe, all things are possible to him that believes.”⁷ This seems

to indicate that in some instances belief is required. I emphasize *some instances* because there are NT passages that seem to indicate the recipient not requiring belief, as seen in Jesus healing Peter's mother-in-law;⁸ and when Jesus raised Jairus' daughter from the dead.⁹

As we should learn from the father, in requesting healing, belief is a powerful ally. According to Jesus, belief is a work¹⁰ and this is one reason why belief in Jesus is what saves.¹¹ But it is also belief that cured the woman who had a issue of blood for twelve years; is it any wonder that both Matthew and Mark reveal that her belief (her faith) healed her?¹²

Conclusion

It seems proper to conclude, irrespective of "dispensation," that with God all things are possible. If God so desires to perform MSW then why would I, as a believer, even ponder His lack of ability to perform MSW? So I guess, the question is: Does or does not every good and perfect gift come from above, and come down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning?¹

So let me conclude by saying that I am not certain that I am capable of addressing and/or answering all the questions that arise, if CeT is not the proper theological lens. The only thing that I am certain of is that I am no longer fully convinced that CeT is the proper theological lens; but my doubt of CeT should not be interpreted that I am fully convinced of Continuation Theology.

If Continuation Theology is more accurate, it simply means that events and questions have to be addressed as they arise, which is no different that the circumstances during the First Century, as seen when considering these words from the Apostles Paul and John:

¹³For such *are* false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. ¹⁴And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. ¹⁵Therefore *it is* no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works. (KJV)²

¹believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world (KJV)³

It seems proper to conclude that if MSW are still occurring, then God would still provide his children the ability "to test" whether or not God is the source of the MSW. We must remember that since God provided the First Century Church with the ability to determine source of a MSW, then it stands to spiritual reasoning that God would do the same for the modern Church.

Continuation Theology

What is Continuation Theology?

Continuation Theology (CT) interprets that the Miracles, Signs and Wonders (MSW) evidenced in the NT are for the church, irrespective of First Century or modernity. Within CT, just because the NT canon is compiled does not negate the ability of God to perform MSW. This means that CT asserts that since the foundation of the church and the entrance into the last days, the church has been the recipient of Miracles, Signs and/or Wonders.

Before We Continue

It seems proper to restate part of the conclusion found in Cessation Theology:

If Continuation Theology is more accurate, it simply means that events and questions have to be addressed as they arise, which is no different that the circumstances during the First Century when considering these words from Paul and John:

¹³For such *are* false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. ¹⁴And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. ¹⁵Therefore *it is* no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works. (KJV)¹

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In discussing CT, the previous is probably the biggest issue, at least for me. The reason seems to be “certainty.” With Cessation Theology there comes an amount of “certainty” – if God cannot, then He did not; and therefore it is a farce from the start. Consequently, false security becomes an unintended consequence of Cessation Theology. However, if Continuation Theology is true, then this “security” is lessened, but this should not frighten the modern church. The modern church simply must do what the First Century church was told to do: test and verify everything. If that was their spiritual reality, why should it not be the spiritual reality of the modern church?

There is a longstanding debate as to which theology is proper: Is it Cessation Theology or Continuation Theology? So, I see myself as another voice in the discussion, but certainly not the last. Sincere, honest, God-fearing, wanting-to-have-eternal-life, Bible students and Christians, from ages past to the present have argued vehemently for or against MSW, but it is my hope that I will offer some thoughts that reveal why it seems that Continuation Theology is more biblical.

Continuation Theology’s Process of Biblical Teachings

Continuation Theology (CT) interprets the Gifts of the Spirit¹ (wisdom, knowledge, faith, gifts of healing, working of miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, kinds of tongues, and interpretations of tongues) as continuing beyond the First Century, and are an active

part of the church. This means that passages which suggest anointing the sick with oil and praying for them² were practicable in the First Century Pre-NT Canonized Church, *and* are part of the modern Church.

While Cessation Theology seems to primarily rely on 1 Corinthians 13.8-10 as support for the ending of MSW, Continuation does not accept that reasoning. Continuation Theology reasons that since the “last days”³ are still here which means that the Modern Church is within the last days, and since Christ has not returned (as he said he would⁴), then MSW must still be part of God’s work within the church.

Testing Continuation Theology

So, how do we go about testing Continuation Theology? That is a great question, because we seem to have relied on logic and reason to test everything up to this point.

Since the ‘last days’ are still here (which means that the Modern Church is within the last days), and since Christ has not returned (as he said he would), then MSW should still be part of God’s work within the church.

Since this previous logic is sound, how do we go about testing CT? Perhaps this is best done by offering Scripture that informed the First Century Church how “to test” and validate the things they were seeing and experiencing.

False Prophets, False Christs

It seems proper to begin by examining some teachings from Jesus. The interesting thing, for me, at least, is that so many people quote the following passage when examining other believers and how they cannot possibly be good fruit. So, we need to apply this primarily to ourselves: are we good fruit?

¹⁵“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. ¹⁶You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? ¹⁷So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. ¹⁹Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰Thus you will recognize them by their fruits. (ESV)¹

In this statement Jesus is making it certain that there will be those prophets (being spokesmen, preachers, ministers, and one’s who foretell future events) who will definitely hide themselves within innocence. But what reveals their inner nature is the outcome of their labor, it will either be godly and righteous, or it will not.

So, in the aspect of CT, it seems imperative that attention is given to the outcome of labor. If the labor bears good fruit, it seems spiritually proper to conclude that the good fruit came from God, because he is the originator of all good things.²

In addition to those teachings, Jesus also addressed issues of false prophets during the last days. In part Jesus said, “many false prophets will arise and lead many astray” (ESV)³ and then he said:

²³Then if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or ‘There he is!’ do not believe it.

²⁴For false christs and false prophets *will arise and perform great signs and wonders*, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. (ESV)⁴

Jesus does not indicate that false prophets and their ability to perform MSW would ever cease existing. Biblical interpreters have given such intimations saying that MSW have stopped; but Jesus seems to be implying that the MSW will not stop because he indicated that the disciples (ancient or modern) should be alert because the false prophets will perform powerful MSW and that these false MSW would be powerful enough to lead believers astray. If these false non-God ordained MSW can exist, then it seems spiritually proper to conclude that true God ordained MSW would exist in order to offset the falsehoods.

A False Prophet

⁶When they [Barnabas and Saul, cf. Acts 13.2, 7] had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos, they came upon a certain magician, a Jewish false prophet named Bar-Jesus. ⁷He was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence, who summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. ⁸But Elymas the magician (for that is the meaning of his name) opposed them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. (ESV)¹

The whole point of looking at this verse is to see that Luke, through Holy Spirit inspiration, leaves an account of one who was considered a false prophet. This may seem like no big deal, but when we are looking at events in Acts Thirteen, we should recognize that these are events that occurred after Jesus' warnings about false prophets, and after Jesus' Ascension.

Two things should be taken from this passage. One, it seems proper to conclude that the first century church was empowered by the gifts of the Spirit, which helped them determine who was and was not false. Two, it also seems proper to conclude that since Jesus said false prophets would exist and since false prophets existed after Jesus' Ascension and during Paul's years (as evidenced by this Acts passage), then it seems spiritually probable that false prophets are a reality for the modern church.

False Brothers

It is interesting to me, that when Paul told the Corinthians of the dangers he faced in taking the Good News¹ that it falls within the same section of verses where Paul spoke of false Apostles.² But specifically, within this section, Paul mentioned that one of his dangers was false brothers.³ Whether or not these false brothers were at one time full followers of the Messiah seems unclear; but what is clear is that these men presented themselves to be followers of Jesus and presented some level of danger to Paul.

In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul did not specifically identify the characteristics of a false brother, just that they presented dangers. However, Paul does provide at least some type of description of these false brethren in Galatians:

false brothers secretly brought in—who slipped in to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might bring us into slavery (ESV)⁴

This verse in Galatians reveals, at least, one goal of the false brothers, but it does not reveal how they went about spying and enslaving the other followers of Jesus. All that can be surmised from this passage, since it sits within Galatians and Paul will admonish

and rebuke the Galatians for being “bewitched”⁵ is that the teachings of the false brothers persuaded some disciples away from the true Gospel.

What we really need to see from this passage is that if false brethren existed in the First Century Church then it seems spiritually proper to conclude that false brethren are a probable threat within the Modern Church. This simply seems to affirm that since gifts of the Spirit helped the First Century brethren discern the spirits,⁶ then those gifts of the Spirit would help the modern church do the same.

False Teachers

We have spent some time looking at passages from Jesus and Paul, but for our last passage we will look to Peter. Not only does Peter say that false teachers are a problem, the ESV shows it to be future tense. If the ESV verb tense is correct, it seems this passage should mean as much to the Modern Church as it did the First Century.

¹But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there *will be* false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. ²And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed. ³And in their greed they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep. (ESV)¹

As we can see from the passage false teachers could wreak havoc on the disciples, denying Jesus the Master, bringing blasphemy to the truth, and taking advantage of disciples. Since Peter does not seem to insinuate that the work of false teachers would ever subside or go away, then it seems proper to conclude that false work is not idle in the modern church and will not go away; then it seems to follow that the gifts of the Spirit would help identify these false teachers.

The Church Is Not Powerless against Falsehood

As we have discussed, Cessation Theology affirms that MSW ceased long ago, yet in my experience with Cessation Theology it still affirms the following spiritual truth:

Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. (ESV)¹

It seems contradictory for Cessation Theology to affirm that the gifts of the Spirit and MSW no longer exist, but to affirm that the adversary prowls around looking for someone to devour.

Here is the unintended affirmation of Cessation Theology: the First Century Church had more spiritual power than the current modern church; because the First Century church, while not having possession of the full NT, had not only MSW as testimony for the Gospel, but also the Holy Spirit gifts of interpretation and spiritual discernment to recognize and defend against falsehood. Cessation Theology’s unintended affirmation causes another unintended consequence in which Cessation Theology primarily empowers the human intellect leaving the modern church seemingly spiritually defenseless against spiritual falsehoods.

It seems proper to conclude that God would not establish a New Covenant built upon spiritual gifts and MSW to then turn around and remove those things and virtually leave his people spiritually powerless.

False Witnesses?

For this particular passage I want to use the KJV instead of another version primarily because of the way the KJV uses the word *false*. Here is the passage:

Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not. (KJV)¹

Here is how the ESV reads:

We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. (ESV)²

Both translations provide the same idea, but the KJV presents the passage in a way that seems better fit for our discussion about falsehood. With the ESV we can see that Paul was being characterized as *misrepresenting* God, which is what *false witnesses* do; but I find the phrase *false witnesses* more powerful.

What this passage tells us is that even when testifying to the truth of what God has done, does, and will do, there are those who will take the truth, slander it calling the truth teller a *false witness*. This is done in order to impugn the disciple's character hoping that this type of vilification will scare off the disciple and/or those who are listening. Since this passage reveals that this false labeling happened to Paul; then it seems proper to conclude that this passage implies that there will be others in the church who will be accused of being false, yet their testimony is true.

It is nothing new to castigate someone or something that is not fully understood, but if we are claiming to be true followers of Jesus, then we should be looking at the fruits of those labeled *false*. Jesus said the fruits reveal the person, not the label. So, if the fruits are good then it seems spiritually proper to conclude, whether an ancient disciple or modern, that God can send a *falsely-labeled* false prophet, such as seen with Paul.

Additionally, it seems proper to conclude that the gifts of the Spirit would help identify both the true and the false. The only real issue I see with that statement is, even though that statement is true, in many regards it seems that a false prophet or a false teacher depends on (I don't want to say perspective, even though that is true to a certain extent, so I'll use the following-) maturity of faith, awareness of spiritual truth and spiritual gifts. With that in mind, I refer to a thought from Paul:

we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. (ESV)³

The Church Empowered

The early church had its problems, just like the modern church has its problems; but irrespective of ancient or modern, perhaps there is no greater threat to the church than that of a wolf in sheep's clothing. As far as I know, Christians, since the foundation of the church, have been warned about those who appear innocent in their teachings, yet within

they are not. In our previous sections, we saw warnings against false prophets, saw there was a false prophet, and we saw that the early church had false brethren, along with false teachers. When considering the vast divisions within Christendom, it seems probable that these threats have not been truly assuaged.

Jehovah, being a beneficent God, did not establish the church without providing it with spiritual insight and spiritual intelligence. He did not leave the early church defenseless against the onslaught of falsehoods. God, through the Spirit, provided gifts from the Spirit, these gifts were for the benefit and strengthening of the entire church not just the individual disciple. Consider this from Paul:

¹Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed

⁷To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

⁸To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, ⁹to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, ¹⁰to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues.

¹¹All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills. (ESV)¹

What this passage reveals is that the Holy Spirit empowered the Christian and the Church to fight against falsehood so that the “common good” of the church would be protected and nurtured. Paul made it plainly obvious that he wanted the brethren to be informed about this situation. These manifestations (gifts) are from God through His Spirit to empower Christians to serve the Church and the world.

Three of the threats to the Christian and to the Church are: false prophets, false brethren, and false teachers. It seems a proper spiritual conclusion that the Spirit’s gift of being able to “distinguish between spirits” would help distinguish between: true prophets versus false prophets; true brethren opposed to false brethren; and true teachers from false teachers.

Personally, I have yet to meet any Christian who does not want to be correct in their understanding of God, Jesus and the Scriptures. But when I accept the fact that there are fractures and divisions in Christendom, it seems spiritually proper to conclude that false prophets, false brethren and false teachers are partially responsible.

Has Christendom gone astray? If so, where did the Christian and the Church go off track? As I have been seeking an answer, it seems that the debate between Cessation Theology and Continuation Theology has *some* role to play. The unintended affirmation of Cessation Theology is that the church now depends primarily on human intellect to determine spiritual intentions and truths. This means that the more one intellectually knows about the Bible, the more one can protect themselves from falsehood. While this certainly has *some* truth, sole reliance on human intellect seems antithetical (directly opposed) to God’s premise:

⁸For my thoughts *are* not your thoughts, neither *are* your ways my ways, saith the LORD. ⁹For *as* the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. (KJV)²

which comes from the same book that says: “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD.” (KJV)³

It seems to me that Continuation Theology affirms human intellect, but that *human intellect has its limitations*, therefore it is the gifts of the Spirit that guide the church into the truth, making up for these limitations. Even though humanity has been given the New Covenant, the human and the human mind are still in a position of having been created by God and are therefore limited and finite.

Cessation Theology’s affirmation and emphasis on intellect has a major weakness: if the strength of faith and faithfulness depends on human intellect, then: Which human’s intellect is to be trusted? What is to be done for those who do not have a strong intellect? What is to be done for those who cannot read and do not have a Bible to read? Continuation Theology’s affirmation accounts for these weaknesses because the Spirit is for the common good of the Church and the Christian, empowering where there is weakness.

Do Not Quench the Spirit

There really is another passage that came to mind while researching this topic, and it is a comment that Paul makes to the Thessalonians, “Do not quench the Spirit”. This passage is highly relevant to our discussion, so let’s consider part of its context:

¹⁴And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all. ¹⁵See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone. ¹⁶Rejoice always, ¹⁷pray without ceasing, ¹⁸give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. ¹⁹Do not quench the Spirit. ²⁰Do not despise prophecies, ²¹but test everything; hold fast what is good. ²²Abstain from every form of evil. (ESV)¹

Verse twenty-two is very short and depending on translation is only four of five words. Yet this verse sets within a significant passage, Paul, Silvanus and Timothy² were giving final comments to the Thessalonian Church urging them to do certain things. So, when Paul urges them to “not quench the Spirit” the statement is actually quite vague: To what degree? To what extent? In what way could the Thessalonians quench the Spirit? One way to quench the Spirit would seem to be for them to believe that the Spirit did not operate. If that is true for them, then it seems that holds true for the modern church.

Experiential Doubt

Another issue is experiential Christianity. I mention it and bring it up, because experiential Christianity seems highly subjective. One person accepts it and another does not. So, the question becomes: How does the subjective have an objective meaning? It seems that this is best addressed by the verses mentioned previously. Yet, even knowing this, I have come to be amazed that we, as Christians, would doubt the possibility of our God’s power. Here is what I mean.

If I attempted to express in words my testimony of subjectively perceived MSW, then I would be doubted, impugned and called a lunatic *by other Christians*. I am confident of this assessment for three reasons. One, I used to respond in the exact manner described,

believing that MSW could not exist and therefore did not occur. Second, because of the reactions I have received from some Christians when just discussing the *possibility* of MSW. Third, the outright denunciation I have heard coming from some Christians when they reveal how others could not have experienced a miracle, sign or wonder.

Here is what I mean by being impugned. I have heard and witnessed some Christians testify to the power of doctors, medicine, and luck. Becoming willing testifiers to the power of science and medicine, chance and time, but actively articulating why Jehovah, the very one they claim to have faith in, cannot and will not be their power.

Any more, such things make sense only when coming from those who do not believe in Jehovah; but coming from believers? Come on. So this does not hit too personal, I ask: as Christians, where is our Faith? Have we become practical atheists? Does or does not our God hold all power? Are or are not all things possible with our God?

Conclusion

Between my sections about Continuation Theology and Cessation Theology, I have offered many thoughts; I am hoping that very little was duplicated. So, I suggest that both articles be read as a unit. For me it all comes down to this one thought: Cessation Theology no longer stands up to the logic “with God all things are possible”. For example, I did not witness the miracle of Jesus’ resurrection, yet I believe that God did that miracle. Accordingly, just because I, personally, have not witnessed a MSW is not evidence that God cannot or does not perform them.

A Christian who has an intellectual defense for Faith is intellectually powerful, and perhaps will be able to convert some to trust that God was, is, and will be. But intellectual strength only goes so far. Intellectual faith can only deliver so much. Intellectual faith must become practicable faith. The thoughts must become action. The thoughts must become actuality.

Most certainly Faith comes by hearing,¹ but the Father nurtures his child’s faith for the child’s benefit. Consider a physical human child on the swimming pool’s edge – if the child does not believe that his father will catch them as they jump into the water, the child will not jump. The child could intellectually accept that his father would catch him and never leap from the pool’s edge. That leap takes faith; trusting that the Father will do as he has said.

At the end of the day, it seems spiritually proper to conclude that God through Christ cannot force his MSW upon anyone (as evidenced by Jesus being limited by the faith of others²). Doing so would violate his essence of allowing you and me the freedom of choosing to believe. We can choose to believe in him and his power, or we can choose to believe in him and not believe in his power. Remember the lesson of Jesus in Capernaum: Jesus was unable to do many powerful works because of their unbelief,³ not his.

My Conclusions

Before I Begin

I almost hate to even provide My Conclusions in a separate section. Yet, as the reader can obviously see, My Conclusions are in a separate section; but I argued with myself for a bit, because I really have this feeling that future readers will begin with My Conclusions, never having read any of my previous thoughts, and will send me some type of correspondence about why I am mistaken. Yet, we continue.

Theologians

While it can be successfully argued that all Bible readers are theologians to one degree or another, I am using the term *Theologians* to refer to those individuals who have dedicated themselves to a Theological Degree Program.

Theologians are tremendously helpful because they help develop mechanisms for the human intellect to process the Scriptures. Even though many Theologians have advanced studies and degrees, this does not mean that Theologians always agree; this is why there are areas of study like Cessation Theology and Continuation Theology. But it is interesting to make note that just because two Theologians believe in Covenant Theology does not automatically mean that they both agree on all the details of Covenant Theology.

There are two other items that non-theologians should also keep in mind. One, just because I am not fully recognized as a Theologian does not mean that my ideas and/or interpretations are any less or any more valid regarding theological discussions. Two, just because some of my readers are non-theologians does not mean that their Biblical interpretations are any less or any more valid than a Theologian's.

All believers are, in some way or another, students of the Scriptures and that makes each believer a theologian, even if they are weekend warrior theologians. As mentioned previously (see section: Theology: A Root of Argumentation), theology simply means one's thinkings (one's sayings) about God. When done considerately, mindfully, prayerfully, and spiritually, all believers can contribute to an ongoing dialogue about God and His Scriptures.

However, I would like to add a last thought about Theology and Theologians: those men and women who have dedicated their lives to the daily study of Scripture, generally speaking, have a much greater knowledge of biblical detail. Consider any professional occupation, the honest person in any full time occupation (e.g. engineering) should have far greater ability and skill than the hobbyist or "weekend warrior". This does not mean that the hobbyist or "weekend warrior" is incapable, but they, generally speaking, do not have the same skill set. This, in no way, makes make them inferior, simply skilled to a lesser degree.

Considerations

Readers should keep in mind that as I was discussing the various theologies, I did so based upon how I understand them. This means that there are aspects of each theology that I did not discuss or I may not have fully addressed. Those sections also reveal my understanding of these theologies (as studied since 2004, but composed as written

material during Winter 2010-2011), which means that at some point in the future my understanding may change and therefore My Conclusions may become modified or “outdated”.

Remember, I, too, am still a learner, as every quality minister and Bible student should be. As such, this may leave the reader with questions that they want answered, I respectfully request the reader to continue their own investigations in order to locate those answers.

So the big question becomes: Can we all understand the Bible the same? As much as I struggle with this and I want an answer of yes; I feel compelled to answer, no. We must recall that theology is simply the beginning method for the intellect to understand what God has revealed in the Scriptures. As we have seen from this excursion into the waters of theology, theology motivates interpretation; interpretation gives doctrine.

If one Bible interpreter works from Replacement and Cessation Theologies, and another Bible interpreter uses Olive Branch and Continuation Theologies, the two will argue the supremacy of their interpretation and, if cordial, they will be forced to agree to disagree; unless one Bible interpreter is willing to be convinced of the supremacy of another theology. Therefore, the reason why Bible interpreters argue is because they are arguing from different theological standards.

Consider as a parable, the Metric System (based on 10s) and the English Standard System (based on 12s). No matter how close 13mm socket is to a ½” socket, they are technically two different measurements coming from two different standards. Which one is correct? Technically the 13mm socket should be used on a 13mm bolt, and the ½” socket should be used on a ½” bolt; but experience has proven that people often interchange the two, believing they are the same.

Theology: The Reason Behind The Doctrine

While similar, Theologies, like the different Measuring System Standards, are different, and the differences are the reason(s) why people argue and debate. The theological standard used by the disciple and the church establishes doctrine. Theological differences and preferences seem to be espoused from Bible classes, commentaries, debates, and pulpits, but it seems rare that the theological positions themselves are evaluated. This is what I have attempted to do.

From all my studies, it appears that theology is the motivator for biblical interpretation; which then gives doctrine and tradition. It seems impracticable for the process to work in the reverse.

However, the following is possible. In order to support a biblical doctrine, the church and/or the disciple goes to the Bible, reads and interprets the Bible through a theological perspective (whether known or unknown; recognized or unrecognized) establishing doctrine; which may or may not be fully accurate when the theological perspective is more fully examined. This is why it is important to not just recognize theological

perspectives, but to understand what each specific theology promotes and how it promotes biblical doctrine.

Again, theology gives biblical interpretation; biblical interpretation gives doctrine; and doctrine is what individual disciples and (denominational, non-denominational, and inter-denominational) churches argue and debate. Theology gives churches practices and worship practices; and Theology drives definitions for which day to worship, holy day observances, and the definition of Christian; and vast are the areas affected by Theology.

Study Summary

As thoroughly stated, Theological differences are the motivating force behind many arguments and debates about biblical doctrine.

Cessation Theology affirms that miracles, signs and wonders have ended and are not part of the modern church; where Continuation Theology affirms that miracles, signs and wonders have not ended and are part of the modern church.

Dispensational Theology interprets the Bible through time periods where God manages (oversees) humanity. Covenant Theology interprets the Bible through the Biblical accounts referring to the ideas of God's Covenants (examples: Noah, Abraham, the Nation of Israel, and the New Covenant).

Replacement Theology posits that Jesus is a new lawgiver, therefore the NT replaces the OT, requiring the disciples to locate and identify God's commands, to which some have suggested there are now 1050 commands¹ verses the rabbinical enumeration of 613 for the OT.² Olive Branch Theology is closely interconnected with Covenant Theology, but Paul discusses Olive Branch Theology in Romans Eleven where he describes the Gentile Believers as having been grafted into a Holy Root System.

Covenant Theology and Olive Branch Theology do not interpret the OT as replaced but Messianic fulfilled. Covenant Theology refers to Jesus' statement:

¹⁷"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. ¹⁸For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. (ESV)³

as meaning what Jesus said. Jesus claimed that he came to fulfill not to abolish, and that since heaven and earth are still here, then the OT still has purpose.

Therefore Covenant Theology views OT commands, without animal sacrifices, as righteous instructions for the New Covenant, wherein a believer is justified by God's grace through Christ (as opposed to the exactitude of following commands) and that love fulfills the commands of the OT.⁴ This is why Paul says that "¹⁵...the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

¹⁶All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: ¹⁷That the man of God [and by extension, the church of God] may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works."⁵ This means that the OT Commands instruct the disciples how to love, how to live, and how to worship, in essence the OT reveals in detail what is pleasing to God.

Since Covenant Theology and Olive Branch Theology refer to the OT, and insinuate OT purpose, this means that God does not have “to repeat” commands in the NT that were found in the OT. This means that we, Gentiles, can and should refer to the OT for understanding what pleases God, “with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.”⁶

OT Conclusions

Jesus said “not one jot or one tittle”¹ would disappear until *all* things had been fulfilled, which included the Heaven and Earth passing away. Heaven and Earth have not passed away; consequently everything cannot be fulfilled, even if it is simply waiting for the Messiah’s return.

Simply stated, it seems in appropriate to conclude that the NT indicates or insinuates that it would *supplant and abrogate* the OT writings; instead the NT writings *complement and fully reveal* OT meaning. Even James, at the Jerusalem Council, stated that the Gentiles should learn from the Scriptures (the OT), “for Moses from generations of old hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath.”²

Sacrifices

Animal sacrifices are not needed in the New Covenant, because Jesus represents the fullness, the completion of animal sacrifices and offerings, making full atonement for sin. However, the NT does not say that disciples are no longer without offerings. New Covenant offerings include, at least, three things: the disciple’s life,¹ the fruit of the lips,² and the freewill offering from the fruit of labor.³

Distinctions

With the New Covenant, there is no longer a distinction between Jews and Gentiles,¹ that distinction has been torn down by the body of Messiah.²

It seems there is no longer a distinction between tribes, one tribe for priestly duties and the other tribes not being priests, because Peter reasons that all disciples are a “royal priesthood”.³

Moral Instructions

It would seem that the OT moral instructions are not abrogated by the NT. The Golden Rule¹ encapsulates the intention of every OT command, law, statute, and/or code. Jesus plainly states that “do unto others” “is the law and the prophets”² – the two cannot be separated. In essence, every line of the OT taught Israel “how to treat others”.

The OT is still quite valid in teaching the disciples of Jesus “how to treat others;” it does not seem proper to conclude that these lessons are diminished simply because Messianic prophecy is fulfilled.

Paul and the OT

Paul seems to be widely interpreted as “nailing the OT to the Cross”. Perhaps this is true

if one “nails to the cross” righteousness earned by attempting to observe every aspect of the Law, but it is simply unfounded to interpret Paul’s statement as “nailing to the Cross” OT influence.

Paul, throughout the NT, utilizes the OT to preach Jesus as the promised Messiah,¹ yet Paul just as easily uses the OT to prove doctrinal positions within the New Covenant.² This is certain because in the NT, the OT is referred to as Scriptures,³ Law,⁴ Law and Prophets,⁵ among others terminology (in my book *A Thesis on the CENI Hermeneutic*, I cover this concept at length, including an appendix).

Paul’s statement, “For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope”⁷ is a verse that has been drilled into my head. But what is important about this particular passage is that it is preconditioned by Paul saying, “For even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me.”⁸ For us, Paul’s thought concerning Jesus has two important items.

One, Jesus is used to prove Paul’s point which he made in the previous verse about Christ, “Let every one of us please *his* neighbour for *his* good to edification.”⁹ But the second item is that when Paul refers to Jesus, Paul supports Jesus’ actions by quoting the OT, “as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me”¹⁰ which is found in the Psalms. So, in essence, the Holy Spirit, through Paul, provides one example of *how to use* the OT in Romans 15.2-4.

Another great passage from Paul that becomes another example of *how to use* the OT is 1 Corinthians 10.1-14. Paul refers to several specific narratives found in the Books of Moses (Genesis – Deuteronomy). In order to teach the Corinthians important spiritual lessons, Paul seamlessly incorporated Law into New Testament writings, to show the “things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction”.

So Paul, in Romans, emphatically states that in the New Covenant love fulfills the OT.⁶ In short, and simply stated, Paul is *never* dismissive of the OT. He refers to it, quotes it, and utilizes it for New Covenant faith, life and worship.

The Gentile’s Responsibility to the OT

For the Gentile Christian, adherence and observance of the OT is not bound per the Jerusalem Council’s decision.¹ Yet, the Council did insinuate that Gentile Christians are to learn from the OT.² Which seems evident by the way Paul uses the OT in Romans and First Corinthians. Also based upon Paul’s statement to Timothy about the OT,³ Gentile Christians are permitted, in fact, encouraged to use the OT.

The Gentile Christians can use the OT as instructions for faith, life, and worship (sans animal sacrifice), doctrine, corrective ideas for faith, and instructions concerning the things that God considers righteous. This simply means that the Gentile Christian and Church are expected to utilize the OT.

Conclusion

After seven long arduous years of lengthy in-depth study, these are My Conclusions. My presentation, at the time, should not be construed as my final say, because, God willing, after more years of study, I may have additional thoughts; but as for now, these things reveal why we as churches are arguing and dividing.

For a moment, I would like to refer to a thought from the introduction:

In some ways, it gives us confidence and comfort to have rock solid infallible theology, but we are people, and as people we fail and fall short in our understandings. But it seems proper that theology should be consistent and coherent. Inconsistency and incoherency lead to misunderstandings; worse they can lead to hypocrisy. At the end of the day, and perhaps at the end of time, theology represents humanity's finite capabilities to grasp and understand the Infinite Creator, and therefore theology seems to take a back seat to faith. Yet. Yet...

As a conclusive statement after this long study, it seems intellectually and spiritually proper to conclude and posit that Theology *must* meet at least two qualifications: consistency and coherency.

In order for Theology to have the power of truth, then Theology:

- *Must* remain consistent with intended biblical meaning, and Theology *must* also have consistent church and disciple application.
- *Must* have coherency of meaning, and coherency of thought, even if that meaning and thought is non-western.

As one who grew up in the church of Christ, I did as instructed: read the Bible and seek the first Century Church. After doing those two things, and seeking reconciliation for doctrinal differences, My Conclusions find their significance in Theological perspectives that drive biblical interpretations. If the foundations that support the details are not first discussed and examined, discussions about details are inappropriate and unproductive.

I seek unity; I seek harmony, but incomplete theology is, well, incomplete. As a disciple who was taught, "speak where the Bible speaks, and be silent where it is silent" I remain silent no longer. Dispensational, Replacement, and Cessation Theologies seem inadequate for resolving certain biblical interpretation. Scriptures seem to lend far greater support to Covenant, Olive Branch, and Continuation Theologies, and using these Theologies has demonstrated a resolution of some biblical interpretation issues.

It becomes significant and spiritually important that Paul affirms that disciples should utilize the OT for their faith.¹ Yet, it is Paul who affirms that the OT does not justify, faith in Jesus as sin atonement is what fully justifies the sinner.²

It is important to grasp that what Paul tells Timothy about the OT certainly has application to the modern disciple:

¹⁵...the sacred writings which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶Every scripture inspired of God is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness. ¹⁷That the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work. (ASV)³

Simply stated, Paul does not limit the “sacred writings” to the New Testament writings. According to a Holy Spirit inspired Paul, the “sacred writings” include the Old Testament. As such, this means that the OT can teach, reprove, correct, and instruct how to worship, when to worship, acts of worship, and modes of worship, in addition to righteous instructions for daily living. This concept is certain because Paul, in this exact same passage, said Scriptures come straight from God, and God gave them so that the “man of God” (whether the individual disciple, or the church manifesting itself as the “body of Christ”) “may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work” which includes worship.

Initially, that went against everything I had ever been given, but Paul is either correct or he is not. And since I have been given the adage “the Scriptures are true, whether I like it or not” then Paul must be accurate, fully inspired, and honest about the NT’s intended use of the OT.

As I close, allow me to make a small application that is specific to determining worship practices. It can be stated rather simply: since my heritage taught me to reject man-made councils, synods and theologies, in order to do “Bible things in Bible ways” then Paul’s statement insinuates that any argument that draws its support from “church history” (according to the events and writings of the Second and Third centuries to the present) has little impact to no impact on church worship. In other words, based on this clarified understanding of 2 Timothy 3.16, any appeal to post-apostolic historical church authority simply cannot have the authoritative weight as the appeal to Scripture.

Addendum

A First Thought

This first thought, at one time, actually was A Final Thought found in “My Conclusions” but as I have had time away from the material, some time listening and reflecting, I want to present something. What follows, is provided verbatim and used to be my final thought in the last section of My Conclusions, from there I will provide my new Addendum, attempting to truly answer the question: Where do we go from here?

What Was A Final Thought Isn't

I have given my best efforts: first, to have integrity toward God's Word; second, to test the theologies; and third, to present my thoughts clearly and honestly. This investigation possibly and probably invites more questions, but this information is provided not to answer every question, but to provide a starting point for readers to do their own investigation, “test the spirits” and determine if the information is true. Using famous words, “don't take my word for it, investigate it yourself.”

So, where do we go from here? The next step is Biblical Interpretation and what it means to find contextual meaning in order to find modern application. Then I will give an in-depth application of Biblical Interpretation by looking at Communion (warning: surprises await!). And from there I will offer my thoughts about Musical Instruments in worship (warning: surprises await!).

God willing, perhaps I will come back and offer my thoughts on these issues (listed in no particular order):

- Greater insight into how to use the OT based on Romans 13.8-10, 15.2-4, 1 Corinthians 10.1-13; 2 Timothy 3.15-17, and other passages.
- How the early Christians reasoned that Jesus was the Messiah from the OT and how the early first century church would have had access only to the OT.
- How the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) resolves Covenant issues making Gentiles amenable to God in a unique way, where Jeremiah 31.31-34 and Romans 2.14-15 seem to have a role to play.
- Based on the Book of Acts, who is the First Century Church?
- That Paul and other Jews had zeal for the [OT] Law.
- But if the OT is not abolished, then what is a Gentile to do (observe Sabbath)? This is answered by the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) and Paul (Romans 2).
- Law, the NT's use of the word, law's multiple applications (Law of Moses, Oral Law, Law referring to all of the OT), and how Greek word *nomos* gets its meaning from the Hebrew word *torah*.
- Does Bible Interpretation really matter? Isn't God just love? The Universal of Love is just as important as the Particulars of how to love (Referring to the painting *School of Athens*, and applying 1 Corinthians 13).

Now for the rest of the Addendum

So Where Do We Go from Here?

That information represents what I thought was my final thought. But, as I have been reflecting, it really isn't. I, in a sense, don't want to deal with Bible Interpretation; I don't want to reveal the lessons learned; I don't want to do it. "Why?" You might ask. I have my reasons, but my reasons simply seem to be accepted by me. So, what am I to make of everything that I studied?

To sound a phrase, "much learning doth make thee mad"¹ resounds in my heart. But, I am certain that the learning has not driven me crazy, but the problems that I now see, which others have attempted to reconcile, I am wondering if they will be reconciled.

So with my learning I am wondering if something else must be at work. Something that *must* permit disciples to vary in their Biblical Interpretations, worship practices, and lives. It seems that something must either demand exactitude or permit latitude toward the multiplicity of Churches and Christian behavior.

Both the OT and the NT have too many passages that express, in various ways, "Be Holy because I am Holy."² Others are not to be holy because this author is holy, but Holy because the God we proclaim to serve is Holy. Yet, both this author and the reader can attest that fellow disciples, and our very own person fail to live up to the call "to be Holy." Whether that holiness is found in our daily lives, or holiness in our worship.

Does God demand? Does God command?

Does God lead? Does God love?

Does God forgive? Does God care?

To The Almighty, does it really matter how we live and worship?

My short answer to all the above questions is a resounding "YES!" For the sake of all that is good, it matters; everything matters. But how we show our love matters to Him just as much.

Exactitude or Latitude?

For all that the Bible teaches about exactitude, Jesus nails everything about exactitude down into a One-A and One-B corollary: One-A: Love Jehovah, your God, with everything; and One-B: Love your neighbor as yourself. Jesus statement is so important that it is found in Matthew,¹ Mark,² and Luke;³ however, it is important to realize that Jesus draws his One-A One-B corollary from Deuteronomy and Leviticus⁴ books known for their exactitude.

Yet, that One-A One-B corollary from Jesus must mean that God is concerned about exactitude *and* latitude. One's love for God implies a desire for exactitude; but one's love for God and humanity implies a desire for latitude – a desire to receive latitude from God that in turn gives latitude to fellow humans.

Consider that a command to exactitude of God's instructions is found when Samuel told Saul that obedience is better than sacrifice.⁵ But also note that latitude to God's instructions is found when Hosea said that mercy is better than sacrifice.⁶ This creates an interesting paradoxical situation. Which one is greater: exactitude, or latitude?

It is interesting, is it not, that even though Jesus is perfect and sinless before God, Jesus challenges the people to Hosea's message,⁷ directly referring to Hosea, not Samuel. It is this exactitude of latitude that is the hallmark of Paul's message of Grace and resounded by James saying that mercy triumphs over justice.⁸

But what does that mean for Biblical Interpretation? Personally, I seek excellence in Biblical interpretation – exactitude to learn God's original meaning; yet I seek excellence in latitude for human frailness.

Is There an Answer?

Here is something that I cannot change. Arguments have existed, do exist, and will continue to exist about the Scriptures. Arguments about the Scriptures existed before Jesus was born. Since Jesus, arguments existed about the Scriptures. And arguments about the Scriptures will exist long after I am dead. Arguments from “how to worship” to “who is going to heaven and hell” and arguments for just about everything else. So, what does it all mean? Is there an answer? If so, what is that answer? And if there is an answer, then will I and will you accept that answer?

The answer is not mine, but it is the answer found since Adam's Fall, Noah's Ark, Jesus' Ministry, and Paul's Letters. In English, the answer is called *grace* from the powerful NT Greek word *charis*¹ which is also the Septuagint's (the Greek OT) translation word for the Hebrew word *chen*.²

God has given his *chen*, his *charis*, his *grace* to everyone. God gave grace to Adam by helping him when he transgressed at Eden. God gave grace to Noah by telling him how to protect himself and his family. God gave grace to Abram by giving him great promises. God gave grace to Jacob over Esau. God gave grace to a rebellious Israelite nation, letting them return from Babylonian captivity. God gave grace to humanity by allowing only one man, Jesus, to die for all of humanity's transgressions. And peace eternal is received by God giving his grace.

Consider this as important. God told Moses, centuries before Jesus, and Paul reminds us in his letter to the Romans:

¹⁵For [God said] to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.” [referring to Exodus 33.19]

¹⁶So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy.

¹⁷For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, “For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show

my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.”

¹⁸So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills. (ESV) ³

Here is what I do know. Exactitude cannot triumph over latitude, because even the most exact in exactitude have failed (in other words: sinned). This means that the person seeking exactitude to the detriment of latitude (establishing themselves as capable of judging righteousness according to the law⁴); and the person encouraging latitude to the detriment of exactitude (sinning that grace may abound⁵) each have one thing in common, both have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.⁶

So let us apply God’s grace, his *charis*, his *chen* to Theology. Theology is fabulous, helpful, insightful, and, perhaps, one of the most powerful tools humanity has in their pursuit of God Almighty and Truth; but Theology is limited. Theology, and in turn Biblical Interpretation does not grant blessings or salvation; God, who authored the Bible, grants blessings and salvation.

It seems proper to conclude that one’s Theology could be so askew that God will not overlook it. But, it is just as proper to conclude that God, by his *chen*, his *charis*, his *grace* overlooks inconsistent and incoherent theological misunderstandings of the one whose maintains faith in Jehovah. This seems especially true when the individual has faith that Jesus is the Messiah, offered by God for the redemption of the world.

God’s *chen* created the world. God *charis* continued humanity through our fall. God’s *grace* brought humanity through the deluge into a new world. God’s *chen* redeemed Israel from Egypt. God’s *charis* kept him faithful through Israel’s incompetence at keeping their Covenant. God’s *grace* promised a redeemer. God’s *chen* gave Jesus as atonement and propitiation. God’s *charis* redeems. God’s *grace* overlooks. Grace and only grace overcomes sin.

Conclusion

Ministers and church leaders, alike, should be pursuing exactitude of understanding when studying God’s Word, but with appreciation that God gives latitude, and in return we demonstrate latitude especially toward those who call themselves Christians, but also to our fellow humans. This simply means that those who do something in Jesus name should not be prohibited from doing something in the name of Jesus, because they cannot do wonderful deeds in his name if they do not esteem the name of the Savior.¹

As of now, I am uncertain if I will write a manuscript about the things mentioned in the second section of my addendum: ***What Was A Final Thought Isn’t***. As of now, those things seem unnecessary. However, I simply find no better way to end my series on Theology than to use Paul’s comments from Romans Fourteen (my preference was to quote the entire chapter, but I abbreviated it to these verses):

¹As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions [about theology and doctrinal interpretation].

²One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. ³Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him.

⁴Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he

stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

⁵One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. ⁶The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. The one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God.

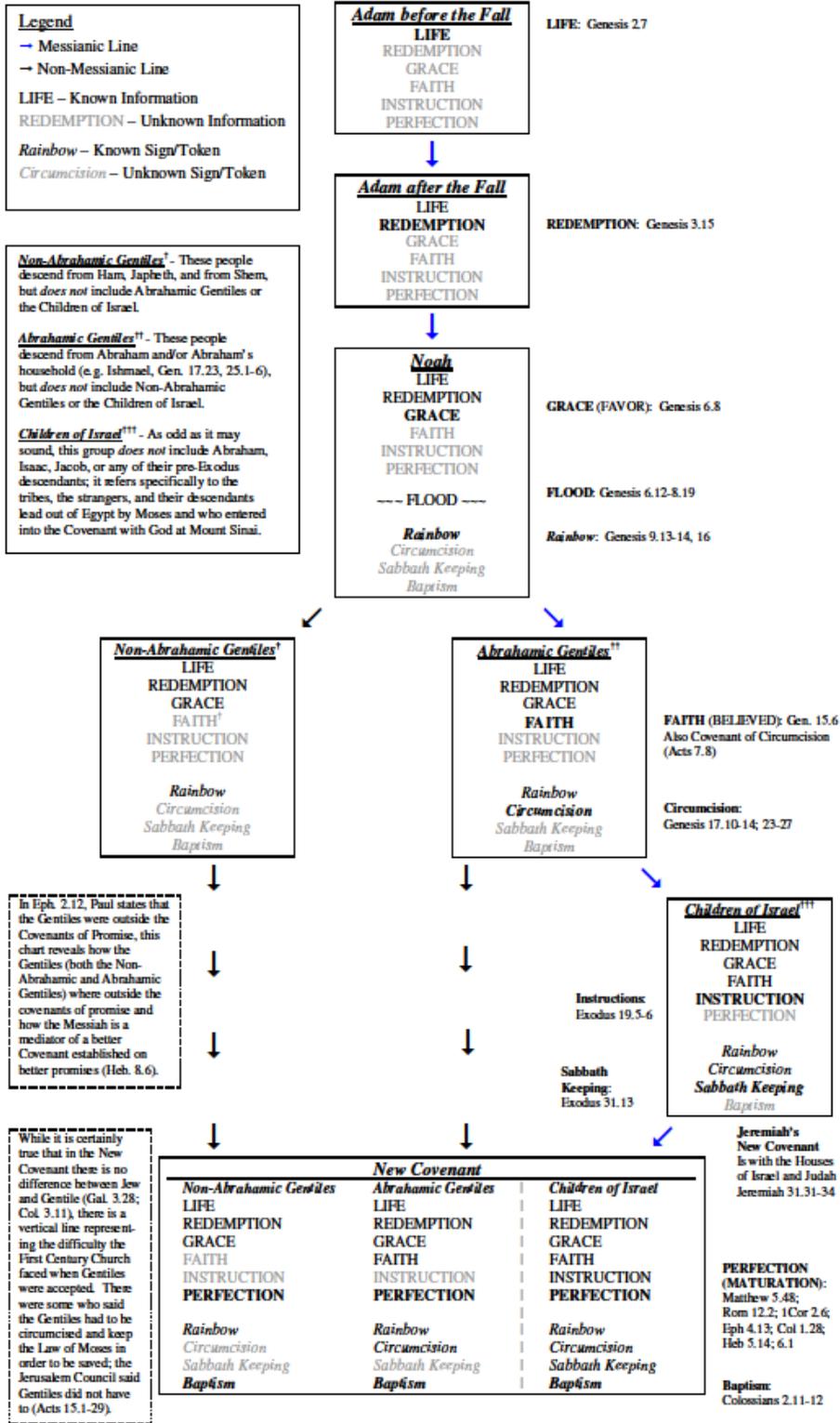
⁷For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. ⁸If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. ⁹For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.

¹⁰Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God; ¹¹for it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God."

¹²So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.

¹³Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother. (ESV)²

Covenant Flow Chart



Covenant Flow Chart, Version 3.11.02e, February 05, 2011, Raymond Harris

Appendix: Olive Branch Outline of Romans 9-11

This outline of Romans 9-11 is designed for study alongside Olive Branch Theology and with Paul's Epistle to the Romans.

- 9.1-3 Paul's willingness to be condemned for Israel
- 9.4-5 The Jews have everything (the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises).
- 9.6a God's word has not failed
- 9.6b-8 The children of the promise are counted as offspring. (Genesis 21.12)
- 9.9-13 Argument from lineage from Sarah: Isaac (Genesis 18.10-14), from Rebecca God chose Jacob over Esau (Genesis 25.23-26; Malachi 1.2-3)
- 9.14 Does lineage choice mean God is unjust? No.
- 9.15 Argument from God, "I will have mercy and compassion upon whom I choose." (Exodus 33.19)
- 9.16-18 Everything depends on God, as seen with Pharaoh. (Exodus 9.13-16)
- 9.19 Question: Then why does God still find fault, if a person cannot resist his will?
9.20-21 Answer: The potter forms the clay how he wants - vessels for honor and dishonor.
9.22-24 Answer: The potter forms vessels of mercy for his glory from Jews and Gentiles.
9.25-26 Supported by the Prophet Hosea (Hosea 2.23; 1.10)
9.27-29 Supported by the Prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 10.22-23 and Isaiah 1.9)
- 9.30a Then what is the conclusion?
9.30b While the Gentiles were not righteous they reached righteousness by faith.
9.31-32 Israel tried to achieve righteousness based on works not faith, but stumbled.
9.33 Supported by the Prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 8.14; 28.16)
- 10.1 Paul wants Israel saved.
- 10.2 Israel has zeal but lacks knowledgeable zeal.
10.3 Lacking knowledge that it is God who gives righteousness not human works.
10.4 Lacking knowledge that Messiah is the goal and fullness of the Law.
10.5-11 Lacking knowledge of the difference between righteousness based on Law (Leviticus 18.5) and righteousness based on faith. (Deuteronomy 30.12-14)
10.12 Lacking knowledge that there is no difference between Jew and Gentile.
10.13 Everyone who calls on The Name (*HaShem*), *Adonai*, the LORD, YHWH will be saved.
10.14 Calling on the LORD comes from preaching.
10.15 Preachers must be sent. (Isaiah 52.7)
10.16 Not every Israelite has obeyed the Gospel, supported by Isaiah (Isaiah 53.1)
10.17 Faith comes by hearing through the Messiah's word.
10.18 Israel has heard (Psalm 19.4)
10.19 Israel did not understand - confirmed by Moses (Deuteronomy 32.21)
10.20-21 Israel did not understand - supported by Isaiah (Isaiah 65.1-2)
- 11.1 Has God rejected Israel? No, as testified by Paul's lineage.
11.2-4 Has God rejected Israel? No, as testified by Elijah there is a remnant. (1 Kings 19.10, 14, 18)
11.5 For in the New Covenant there remains a grace chosen Israelite remnant.
11.6 Since the Israelite remnant is of grace, it cannot be by works.
11.7 Then what is the conclusion?
11.8a The non-remnant was given blindness
11.8b Testified by Moses (Deuteronomy 29.4)
11.8c Testified by Isaiah (Isaiah 29.10)
11.9-10 Testified by David (Psalm 69.22-23)
- 11.11a Does Israel's stumble mean Israel has fallen? No.
11.11b The Gentile's salvation is to make Israel jealous.
11.12a Israel's stumble gives riches to the world and the Gentiles
11.12b Israel's stumble gives riches back Israel, and even more to the Gentiles
- 11.13-14 Paul tells Gentile believers how to make some of Israel jealous.
11.15a Israel's rejection means the world's reconciliation.
11.15b Israel's acceptance will be life from the dead.
- 11.16 Holy is the dough offered as first fruits; Holy whether the whole, the root, or the branches.
(Israel is holy because it offered Jesus, the first fruits from the dead. This makes the whole of Israel, the root of Israel and the branches of Israel holy.)
11.17a Some of the Israelite branches were broken off.
11.17b The wild olive shoot (the believing Gentiles) were grafted in among believing Jews.
11.17c The believing Gentiles are nourished by the believing Jews.
11.18a The Gentiles are not to brag and boast against the Jews.
11.18b The Jewish root nourishes the Gentile branches; the Gentiles branches do not nourish the Jewish root.
11.19 But the Jewish branches were cut off so the Gentiles could be grafted in.
11.20a True. Some of the Jewish branches were cut off, but because of unbelief.
11.20b The Gentile branches stand because of faith.
11.20c Believing Gentiles do not become prideful; but stand in awe.

- 11.21 If God is willing to cut off unbelieving Jewish branches, then He can cut off believing Gentile branches.
- 11.22a Gentiles take note of God's character:
 - 11.22b Severity to those cut off
 - 11.22c Kindness to the Gentiles
 - As wild olive branches (cf. 11.24), the Gentiles risk being cut off unless they remain in God's kindness
- 11.23 Kindness to the cut off unbelieving Jewish branches
 - (As cut off branches, God can graft back in the unbelieving Jews, if they do not remain in their unbelief.)
 - 11.24a God grafted in the believing Gentiles (wild olive branches cut from a wild olive tree)
 - 11.24b God made an unnatural tree (wild olive branches into a cultivated olive tree)
 - 11.24c God can graft back in the cut off cultivated branches into the cultivated tree.
- 11.25a Grafted in wild olive branches (believing Gentiles) do not be conceited.
- 11.25b Understand the mystery if Israel's relationship to the Gentiles:
 - (A partial (not total) cutting off of the Jewish branches has taken place; The fullness of grafting in wild olive branches (believing Gentiles) must take place.)
 - 11.26-27 In this all of Israel will be saved, as supported by (Isaiah 59.20-21, 27.9)
 - 11.28a How it applies to the Gospel, the cut off cultivated Jewish branches:
 - 11.28a Are hated by God for the Gentiles' benefit*
 - 11.28b Are loved by God for Abraham, Isaac and Jacob's benefit.
 - 11.29 Because the gifts and God's calling cannot be revoked.
 - 11.30 The Gentiles, once disobedient, received mercy because of Israel's disobedience
 - 11.31 The portion of Israelite branches that were cut off have become disobedient in order to receive God's mercy
 - 11.32 God has revealed both Jewish and Gentile disobedience in order to reveal His mercy is for both Jew and Gentile.
 - 11.33-35 God is to be praised for His revelation of Himself because He is unsearchable.
 - 11.36 From God comes everything, through Him comes everything and everything returns to God.
- 12.1-16.20 Paul wants both Jewish and Gentile believers to present themselves holy and live sacrificial lives, and Paul provides extensive detailed guidance for doing such.

*I have the hardest time with this wording, but according to several translations, Paul's use of *echthros* (G2190) is translated as *hated*, or *enemy* and, as such, I remain in context with the translations of *echthros*.

February 16, 2011, Raymond Harris

Endnotes

Theology: Background

1. *theos*, Strong's number G2316; e-Sword Rick Meyers; version 8.0.6.
2. *logos*, Strong's number G3056; e-Sword Rick Meyers; version 8.0.6.
3. *theos* (and its variants) is translated into English as: god, gods, and God, among several others.
4. *logos* (and its variants) is translated into English as: word, words, and saying, among several others.
5. The message of the axiom is a laudable goal having the ideas originate with Jesus. John 17.17-23.

What is Dispensational Theology?

1. Dispensational Theology origins in the 1800s Protestant church. Jan. 2011. <Wikipedia.org <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dispensationalism>>.
2. "dispensation." *Dictionary.com Unabridged*. Random House, Inc. Jan. 2011. <Dictionary.com <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/dispensation>>.
3. "dispense." *Dictionary.com Unabridged*. Random House, Inc. Jan. 2011. <Dictionary.com <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/dispense>>.
4. "Dispensation in Paul's letters" 1 Corinthians 9.17; Ephesians 1.10, 3.2; Colossians 1.25, KJV.

Dispensational Theology's Process of Biblical Teachings

1. Three to Eight Dispensations. Jan. 2011. <Wikipedia.com <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dispensationalism#Dispensations>>.

Testing Amenability

1. Abraham was called by God. Genesis 12.1-3.
2. God entered into a Covenant with Abram. Genesis 15.1-21.
3. God required Abraham and his household males to wear a sign (circumcision) to prove their faithful covenant status. Genesis 17.1-27.

What is Covenant Theology?

1. God's covenant with Noah, his sons, the world and every descendant of Noah. Genesis 9.8-17.
2. God's covenant with Abraham, his sons, his household, and every descendant of Abraham. Genesis 15.1-21, 17.1-27.
3. God's covenant with the Children of Israel (the nation of Israel) and all the descendants of those families. Exodus 20-24.
4. God promised a New Covenant to the House of Israel and House of Judah, representing the two divisions of the Divided Kingdom. Jeremiah 31.31-34.
5. Christians believe this New Covenant is bought with the blood of Jesus. Matthew 26.26-28.

Covenant Theology's Process of Biblical Teachings

1. The English word *covenant* is a translation of the Greek word *diatheke*. Strong's Number G1242, as seen in Luke 1.72 KJV; e-Sword Rick Meyers; version 8.0.6.
2. *diatheke* is also translated as *testament*. Strong's Number G1242 as seen in Matthew 26.28 KJV; Hebrews 9.15-17 KJV; e-Sword Rick Meyers; version 8.0.6.
3. The Greek word *diatheke* is a translation of the Hebrew word *beriyth*. Strong's Number H1285; e-Sword Rick Meyers; version 8.0.6.
4. *beriyth* which is translated by the King James Version as *covenant*, *league*, *confederate*, and *confederacy*.
5. Part of the definition of the Hebrew word *beriyth* is that God *cuts* (Strong's) a covenant; e-Sword Rick Meyers; version 8.0.6.
6. Implied Covenant when God makes coats of skin for Adam and Eve. Genesis 3.21b.
7. Implied Covenant when Noah cuts his offerings upon the Altar. Genesis 8.20.
8. God responded to Noah's sacrifice with a Covenant. Genesis 8.21-9.17.

9. God performs an ancient covenant cutting ritual with Abram by having Abram prepare some animals and God, in a pillar of fire, walks through the cut pieces. Genesis 15.7-11, 15.17-18.
10. The Covenant at Sinai was ratified in blood by cutting and sacrificing of animals, then the Covenant bond was symbolically enforced by blood being sprinkled on God (the Altar) and the Israelites. Exodus 24.3-8.
11. The New Covenant is cut in blood through the blood of Jesus. Matthew 26.27-28.
12. Noah and his descendants did not have to give a human sign/token, but God gave a symbol, the sign for his faithfulness was the rainbow. Genesis 9.12-17.
13. Abraham and his male descendants were required to keep the symbol of circumcision. Genesis 17.9-14, 17.23-27.
14. The Children of Israel and their descendants were required to have the symbol of observing the Sabbath and keeping it holy. Exodus 31.13; cf. Exodus 20.8.
15. The New Covenant has each believer is to keep the symbol of baptism. Colossians 2.10-12; Romans 6.4, Ephesians 2.11-13, Hebrews 10.19, 12.24, 13.12, 13.20, 1 Peter 1.2, and 1 John 5.6.
16. One chooses to be born again by spirit and water being spiritually born into the New Covenant. John 3.3, 3.5-8.

Works and Covenant Theology

1. Israel is certainly exhorted to adhere to the Law. Exodus 15.26; Leviticus 18.5, 19.37; Deuteronomy 6.17.
2. Abraham was justified even before God provided the Law of Moses. Romans 4.1-12; cf. Galatians 3.15-17.
3. Blood and the shedding of it is what allowed Israel to be redeemed, as seen during the exodus with the Passover lamb. Exodus 13.15, cf. Exodus 12.1-13; Israel is a redeemed people-Deuteronomy 7.7-8; Israel redeemed by God's strength- Exodus 6.6; and the firstborn male must be redeemed – Exodus 34.20b.
4. Blood and the shedding of it is what allowed Israel to remain acceptable. Leviticus 4.1-5.19; Psalm 51.7-9.
5. The blood of bulls and goats was insufficient for the conscience. Hebrews 9.6-15.
6. Blood is what allowed Israel to be acceptable, this concept is carried over into the New Covenant. I John 1.7.
7. The New Covenant where the blood of Jesus cleanses from all sin, completely and perfectly cleansing the conscience. Hebrews 9.14, 10.1-2, 10.22.
8. The New Covenant has the blood of Jesus keep the person redeemed for the New Covenant. Galatians 3.13, 4.5; Titus 2.14; 1 Peter 1.18-21 KJV; 1 Corinthians 6.20, 7.23; 1 John 1.7.

Grace and Covenant Theology

1. New Covenant cut at Mt. Zion by scourging Jesus. Matthew 27.26b.
2. New Covenant completed at Mt. Golgotha with the crucifixion of Jesus. Matthew 27.33-50.
3. Noah found grace/favor in the eyes of God. Genesis 6.8.
4. “[I] will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy.” Exodus 33.19, KJV.
5. Jonah knew God would be gracious. Jonah 4.1-4.
6. God expects human faithfulness... as evidenced by the writings of Jesus' brother. James 2.14-26.
7. Faithfulness begins with a person's individual faith, their belief in God and Jesus. Romans 5.1-2; Ephesians 2.1-8.

Prophets and Covenant Theology

1. Jesus cannot be the last prophet of the “last days” because this would negate the teachings of Peter in Acts concerning prophets. Acts 2.14-18.
2. Jesus cannot be the last prophet of the “last days” because this would negate the evidence of prophets within the early church. Acts 11.27, 13.1, 15.32, 21.9; and Ephesians 4.11.

Jeremiah 31 and Covenant Theology

1. Jesus said that the cup represented “the blood of the new covenant”. Matthew 26.28.
2. The New Covenant was a fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy. Jeremiah 31.31-34.

3. Jeremiah prophesied that the New Covenant would be with the House of Israel and the House of Judah. Jeremiah 31.31.
4. The New Covenant with House of Israel and House of Judah simply affirms Paul's teaching that the Gospel went first to the Jew and then to the Gentile. Romans 1.16.

Amenability and Covenant Theology

1. The Gentile people of Nineveh did have a desire "to save" themselves and demonstrated repentance at Jonah's preaching. Jonah 3.5-10.

Dilemma and Covenant Theology

1. "[I] will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy." Exodus 33.19, KJV.
2. God "maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." Matthew 5.45, KJV.
3. Only inside the New Covenant will humanity find the complete and fullness of all blessings. Ephesians 1.3.
4. Only inside the New Covenant will humanity find complete confidence of eternal life. Romans 8.38-39.
5. Jesus said, "He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day." John 12.48, KJV.

A General Review of Covenant Theology

1. 42. Through Adam we were given physical life and a promise of a deliverer. Genesis 3.15.
2. 43. Through Noah... the new world was given a very general set of instructions. Genesis 9.1-17.
3. 44. Through Abraham a family was set apart in order to bring the Messiah, which flows through Isaac. Genesis 11.24-25.10.
4. 45. Jacob who fathered twelve sons who begat a nation from which flows the Messiah. Genesis 25.11 – Exodus 18.27; Genealogies: Genesis 29.31-30.24, 35.16-18; 46.8-27; among other OT passages; Matthew 1.1-17; Luke 3.23-38.
5. 46. The Israelites at Sinai cut in blood and agreed to a formal covenant. Exodus 24.
6. 47. The Law of Moses reveals what displeases God and what pleases God. Exodus 19.1 – Deuteronomy 34.12.
7. 48. Through the Messiah, the Divided Kingdom is reunited, and Gentiles are invited to fully participate in the fullness of God, where there is no longer a differentiation because all of humanity is brought into a Unifying Covenant. (Messianic Prophecy fulfilled through Jesus as revealed in the Gospels and expounded upon in the Epistles – e.g. Galatians 3.26-29; Ephesians 2.11-22; Colossians 3.11).
8. 49. The New Covenant no more negates the other covenants than the Israelite Covenant negated the Abrahamic Covenant. Galatians 3.15-18.
9. 50. The Noadic covenant. Genesis 9.8-17.
10. 51. The Noadic covenant is truly a forever covenant for perpetual generations. Genesis 9.12.
11. 52. The Noadic covenant is truly an everlasting covenant. Genesis 9.16.
12. 53. The Abrahamic covenant. Genesis 15.1-21, 17.1-22.
13. 54. The Abrahamic covenant is truly a forever covenant. Genesis 13.15.
14. 55. The Abrahamic covenant is an everlasting covenant. Genesis 17.7, 17.13, 17.19.
15. 56. The Israelite covenant is fulfilled, not abolished nor annulled by the New Covenant; we know this from Jesus. Matthew 5.17-19.
16. 57. The Israelite covenant is fulfilled, not abolished nor annulled by the New Covenant; we know this from Paul. Romans 11.1-36.

So Why Take the Good News?

1. The believer can have life and have it more abundantly. John 10.10.
2. One chooses to be "cut" into the New Covenant by being born again, spiritually by water and blood. John 3.5-7, Romans 6.1-4, Colossians 2.11-12.
3. "Inside" the New Covenant is assurance, knowledge of salvation, absolute knowledge that one will be safely delivered from the deluge of eternal hopelessness, providing that one remains faithful to the

New Covenant. Hebrews 10.26-31.

Conclusion

1. “*covenant*.” Found in the OT over 250 times, KJV word search; e-Sword Rick Meyers; version 8.0.6.
2. “*covenant*.” Found in the NT about 20 times, KJV word search; e-Sword Rick Meyers; version 8.0.6.
3. “*testament*.” Found in the NT about 14 times, KJV word search; e-Sword Rick Meyers; version 8.0.6.

What is Replacement Theology?

1. Core of Replacement Theology. Jan. 2011. <Wikipedia.org <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Supersessionism>>.
2. Replacement Theology a.k.a. Supersessionism. Jan. 2011. <Wikipedia.org <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Supersessionism>>.

Replacement Theology’s Process of Biblical Teachings

1. “Determine the ‘law of Christ’.” Galatians 6.2, NIV.

Replacement of the OT

1. “Abrogated.” Jan. 2011. <Wiktionary.org <http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/abrogate>>.
2. “Jesus statement of fulfilling OT.” Matthew 5.17, NIV.
3. “Establishment of the church.” Acts 2, NIV.
4. “Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross;” Colossians 2:14, KJV.
5. “²⁴Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster *to bring us* unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. ²⁵But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster. ²⁶For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. ²⁷For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” Galatians 3:24-27, KJV.

Matthew 5.17

1. Context of Matthew 5.17. Matthew 5.17-19, KJV.

Colossians 2.14

1. The Colossians should not permit someone to judge the Colossian church if the Colossian church wanted to observe holy days, new moons, or Sabbaths. Colossians 2.16.
2. “Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross” Colossians 2.14, KJV.
3. “having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross” Colossians 2.14, NIV
4. “by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.” Colossians 2.14, ESV.
5. “having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.” Colossians 2.14, NASB.
6. “Law (OT) being good, holy, just, and spiritual.” Romans 7.12, 7.14, 7.16, NIV.
7. The Law (OT) is not against believers, because it reveals what is displeasing to God, otherwise known as sin. Romans 7.7.
8. Paul claims that the Law *is not* sin. Romans 7.7.
9. “The Law is profitable for those who know how to use it properly.” 1 Timothy 1.8, NIV.

Galatians 3.24-27

1. “For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.” Romans 15.4.
2. “The Law is not against the promises of God.” Galatians 3.21, NIV.
3. “The Law [is not] against providing instructions in righteousness.” cf. 2 Timothy 3.16, NIV.
4. “Refresh their hearts and minds with righteousness by studying the things written aforetime.” cf. Romans 15.4, KJV.

5. "Paul's admonition to the Corinthians." 1 Corinthians 10.1-13, NIV.

Application of Testing

1. Golden Rule is a proverb. Matthew 7.12, KJV.
2. Jews who were zealous of the Law. Acts 21.20.
3. Paul himself walked orderly, keeping the Law. Acts 21.24.
4. Paul in Romans Thirteen. Romans 13.8-10, KJV.

Conclusion

1. "and *if there* be any other commandment"¹ Romans 13.8.

What is Olive Branch Theology?

1. Olive Branch is based on Paul's comments to the Roman Church. Romans 11.17-18, KJV.

Initial Thoughts

1. Quote Peter at length. 2 Peter 3.14-18, ESV.

The People of the Roman Church

1. Surmising how the Church of Rome was established. Acts 2.7-11, ESV.
2. "Proselyte." Even though this word *proselyte* occurs in the New Testament, this word occurs at the historical moment of Pentecost, an annual Jewish observance. While Acts Two reveals the beginning of what we know as the church, we must recall that those gathered at the Temple to hear Peter and the other Apostles on that Day of Pentecost were Hebrews/Jews, and Gentiles who had converted to Judaism. This Gentile convert to Judaism was called a proselyte. Addressing our specific issue, a proselyte (a Gentile convert to Judaism) could have been first converted to Judaism, then have heard Peter's message and then become a believer in Jesus. On a side note, but related to our overall theological discussion, Wikipedia mentions two types of proselytes (righteous proselyte, and gate proselyte), this information may have an interesting and significant influence on the Jerusalem Council's decision (Acts 15) whereby they did not require the Gentile believers to undergo circumcision or keep the Law of Moses in order to be saved. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Proselyte>
3. "...I am speaking to those who know the law...". Romans 7.1, ESV.
4. "Now I am speaking to you Gentiles." Romans 11.13, ESV.

The Collision of Faith and the Roman Church

1. Dispute about whether the Gentiles believers were required to be circumcised and observe the Law of Moses. Acts 15.1, 15.5.
2. The Jerusalem Council was convened to answer this dilemma about circumcision and keeping the Law of Moses. Acts 15.6.
3. The Church and the Council gave a Holy Spirit approved answer. Acts 15.28, cf. Acts 15.22.
4. The joy of the Gentile believers. Acts 15.31.
5. Circumcision and keeping the Law of Moses was not necessary for the salvation of Gentile believers. Acts 15.22-29.
6. Peter reasons that doing the Law cannot and does not give salvation. Acts 15.7-11, especially Acts 15.11.
7. Paul also reasons that faith in Jesus gives salvation because salvation is separate and apart from the Law. Romans 3.20-30.
8. Paul also reasoned to the Jews that their faith upholds the Law of Moses. Romans 3.31.
9. James demanded Paul prove his zeal for the Law. Acts 21.22-25, for James cf. Acts 21.18.
10. Paul proved his zeal by engaging in the vow requested by James. Acts 21.26-27.
11. *Thousands* of Jews believed Yeshua (Jesus) was the Messiah, all while being zealous for the Law of Moses. Acts 21.20-21.

Olive Branch Theology's Process of Biblical Teachings

1. The Gentiles are welcomed and brought into an existing religious system. Romans 11.17.

2. 15. The Israelite believers of Yeshua as the Messiah are the primary provider of spiritual nourishment. Romans 11.18.
3. Note about My In-Line References.
I spent some time reflecting on how to present Paul's fellow countrymen: should I use the terms "Jews" and "Jewish"? Or, should I use the term "Israelite"? Or, should I use the terms "Hebraic" and "Hebrew"? It seems that each term could be used to convey what I think Paul is intending. But sometimes the choice of terminology can be taken that the author is being insulting; my aim is to remain insult free. As such, I have chosen to use the term "Israelite" since Paul's overall context (Romans 9.1-11.36) is referring to God's plan for the nation of Israel; and the English Standard Version Bible (ESV) reveals that Paul uses the terminology: Israelites (Romans 9.4); Israelite (Romans 11.1); and Israel (Romans 9.6, 9.27, 9.31; 10.19, 10.21; 11.2, 11.7, 11.11, 11.25-26) far more than the terminology: Jews (Romans 9.24; 11.14).
4. Modified English Standard Version of Romans Eleven, [comments] and paragraphs are mine, comments are included to provide in-line clarification. Romans 11.13-36, ESV.

Observation: Gentiles, May I Have Your Attention?

1. Paul directly addresses the Gentiles. Romans 11.13.
2. Paul wants the Gentiles to accept that there are some Israelites who have rejected Jesus but believing in him gives an Israelite resurrection. Romans 11.15.

Observation: Gentiles, Israel Is Important!

1. Paul tells the Gentiles their faith in an Israelite Messiah is not possible without first having the Israelites. Romans 11.16.
2. Jesus told the woman at the well that salvation is from the Jews. John 4.22.
3. Paul tells the Gentiles that some of the Israelites were cut off from the Israelite root. Romans 11.17.
4. Paul tells the Gentiles that just because some of the Israelites were cut off from the Israelite root does not mean that an Israelite system does not exist. Romans 11.18.
5. The Israelites that believe in Jesus are the ones who supply spiritual life and nourishment to the grafted in Gentiles. Romans 11.18.
6. 23. Paul states that Abraham existed 430 years before the law. Galatians 3.17.
7. Technically Abraham is not an Israelite because Israelites are descended from Jacob; Abraham is not descended from Jacob, Jacob is descended from Abraham. However, God gave Jacob a new name (Genesis 32.28) and then God confirmed Jacob's new name as Israel (Genesis 35.10). Given the name Abram by his father Terah, Abraham was born (Genesis 11.26) before Israel; Abraham's promised son Isaac was through Sarah (Genesis 21.1-5); Isaac fathered Jacob (Genesis 25.19-26). Jacob was renamed Israel, thus Israel is Abraham's grandson.

Observation: But What about Us Gentiles?

1. Paul tells the Gentiles to recognize that they are grafted into a pre-existing root because of the Israelite situation. Romans 11.19-20.
2. Paul tells the Gentiles not to become spiritually proud, but be aware of God's willingness and power to prune branches. Romans 11.20b-23.
3. Paul tells the Gentiles that God cultivated the Israelite olive tree. Romans 11.24.
4. Paul argued there is no difference between the Jew and the Gentile. Romans 2.9-11; Galatians 3.26-28; Colossians 3.9-11.
5. Paul tells the Gentiles not to be conceited just because they are a part of God's people. Romans 11.25a.
6. Paul tells the Gentiles that there is a future for Israel and Israel's future depends on the believing Gentiles. Romans 11.25b.
7. Paul declares that there must be a "Gentile fullness". Romans 11.25b.
8. Paul declares that there must be a "Gentile fullness" that comes into the New Covenant before Israel can have "life from the dead". Romans 11.15b.
9. Paul supports his argument by referring to the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah. Isaiah 59.20-21, Jeremiah 31.33-34.
10. Paul says that God through his covenant with Israel, He will remove their sins. Romans 11.26-27.

Observation: But What about the Israelites?

1. “*echthros*” Strong’s Number G2190, e-Sword Rick Meyers; version 8.0.6.
2. Paul states that it appears that God considers Israel an enemy of the Good News. Romans 11.28a.
3. Paul states that God’s words are irrevocable, permanently binding and unchangeable regarding Israel. Romans 11.28b-29.
4. Paul argues that God’s unchangeable words regarding Israel relates directly to God’s promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Romans 11.28b.
5. Paul tells Gentiles to reveal God’s mercy and grace and live life within the Messiah in such a way that the Israelites are motivated to a type of godly jealousy desiring to be part of the New Covenant. Romans 11.30-31.
6. The grafted in Gentile would consider it is necessary to adapt Paul’s thinking and become a Jew unto the Jew. 1 Corinthians 9.19-22.
7. Being aware of customs and dietary teachings, so that in all things no offense is given. 1 Corinthians 10.31-33.
8. Whether Israelite or Gentile, each is disobedient because each has sinned. Romans 3.23.
9. God will have mercy and grace for both the Israelite and Gentile. Romans 11.32.

Observation: Praise God for His Majesty

1. God should be praised for the depth of His riches and His wisdom and His knowledge. Romans 11.33a.
2. Truly God’s judgments are unsearchable and His ways are inscrutable. Romans 11.33b.
3. No one is capable of counseling God because no one truly can fully know His mind. Romans 11.34.
4. How can anyone give back to God anything as repayment? Romans 11.35.
5. Everything comes from God; everything that exists is through God and all things are His. Romans 11.36a.
6. God receives glory forever! Romans 11.36b.

Jesus and Israel

1. Prior to Jesus’ ascension, his disciples asked him a question, “wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?” Acts 1.6 KJV.
2. Jesus said, “It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.” Acts 1.7 KJV.
3. The Apostles, specifically Peter, were given the keys to the Kingdom. Matthew 16.18.
4. The disciples were given the mysteries of the Kingdom. Matthew 13.10-11.
5. Dialogue between Jesus and his disciples about Kingdom Restoration. Acts 1.6-7.

Peter and Israel

1. Peter is preaching on Solomon’s porch. Acts 3.11.
2. Peter’s entire speech at Solomon’s porch. Acts 3.11-26.
3. The quote from Peter’s speech. Acts 3.18-21, KJV.
4. Peter believes and urges others to believe that the prophecy about Messianic suffering has been fulfilled. Acts 3.18.
5. The Apostles’ question was concerning the Kingdom of Israel. Acts 1.6-7.

Paul and Israel

1. Quote to reiterate Paul. Romans 11.25-27, ESV.

Addressing Concerns

1. Gentiles seem to properly understand Paul when he revealed that Jesus has become a stumbling block to the Israelites. Romans 9.32-33.
2. Gentiles seem to properly understand Peter when he revealed that Jesus has become a stumbling block to the Israelites. 1 Peter 2.6-8.

Animal Sacrifice

1. Jesus is the perfect sacrifice. Hebrews 5.9 KJV; Hebrews 9.11-12 KJV.
2. Jesus is the propitiation for humanity’s breaking of the Divine relationship. Romans 3.25 KJV; 1 John 2.2 KJV; 1 John 4.10 KJV.

OT Abrogation

1. Paul made it abundantly clear that there is a Holy Root, and it is the Holy Root that sustains the grafted in Gentile. Romans 11.16-18.
2. The Holy Root is described in the OT pages is, and as Paul referenced, the forefathers: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Israel). Romans 11.28.
3. The Holy Root as referenced by Paul concerning God's Prophetic position toward Israel through Moses, Romans 11.8 using Deuteronomy 29.4.
4. The Holy Root as referenced by Paul concerning God's Prophetic position toward Israel through David, Romans 11.9-10 using Psalm 69.22-23.
5. The Holy Root as referenced by Paul concerning God's Prophetic position toward Israel through Isaiah, Romans 11.26-27a using Isaiah 59.20-21.
6. The Holy Root as referenced by Paul concerning God's Prophetic position toward Israel through Jeremiah, Romans 11.27 using Jeremiah 31.33-34.
7. Paul makes it clear that the OT cannot give righteousness, righteousness is based on faith in Jesus. Romans 3.21-31.
8. Paul clarifies that the OT finds its complete fullness when the disciple loves their fellow human. Romans 13.8-10.
9. The Golden Rule is based on the OT. Matthew 7.12.
10. Paul described one of several ways the church is to utilize the OT. 1 Corinthians 10.1-13.
11. "All these things happened unto them for examples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come." 1 Corinthians 10.11 KJV.
12. "whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope." Romans 15.4.
13. "Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ." Colossians 2.16-17 KJV.

Judaizing

1. A Judaizer posited that *in order to be saved* the Gentile *had to be* circumcised *and* keep the Law of Moses. Acts 15.1, 15.5.
2. The Gentile, just like the Israelite, is saved by God's grace when the person has faith that Jesus is the atonement for sin. Romans 5.1-2, Romans 5.11 KJV; Ephesians 2.8-9.

Conclusion

1. Paul's sustains the argument that adherence to the Law of Moses is righteousness by on works. Romans 10.5.
2. Paul's sustains the argument that adherence to the Law of Moses is righteousness by on works which is different than righteousness based on faith. Romans 10.6.
3. Being a part of the New Covenant is based on God's grace through our faith in Jesus. Ephesians 2.6-8.
4. Being a part of the New Covenant is based on God's grace through our faith in Jesus and "not works lest any man should boast." Ephesians 2.9.
5. Grafted in Gentiles are sons and daughters through faith. Galatians 3.26.
6. Grafted in Gentiles have permission to look to the worship of Israel to determine how we should worship in this New Covenant. Romans 15.4.
7. The New Covenant Israelites support the grafted in Gentiles. Romans 11.16-18.

Cessation Theology's Process of Biblical Teachings

1. Gifts of the Spirit. 1 Corinthians 12.4-10.
2. "Anointing the sick will oil and praying for them." James 5.14-15.
3. Primary passage asserting CeT. 1 Corinthians 13.8-10, KJV.

Love: That Which Is Perfect

1. "More excellent way." 1 Corinthians 12.31.
2. "Follow after love." 1 Corinthians 14.1.

3. Paul's statement to the Corinthians. 2 Corinthians 13.11, KJV.
4. "Perfect love casts out all fear." 1 John 4.18.

Epaphroditus: A NT Anomaly

1. Epaphroditus was sick near unto death. Philippians 2.25-27.
2. Peter's mother-in-law having a fever. Matthew 8.14-15.
3. Jesus healing every sickness and every disease among the people. Matthew 9.35.
4. Handkerchiefs (or aprons) were taken from Paul and people used them to be healed. Acts 19.11-12.
5. Paul brought Eutychus back to life. Acts 20.9-12.

Thoughts about Prayer

1. Ask, Seek and Knock. Matthew 7.7-8.
2. God rewards those who diligently seek him. Hebrews 11.6.

Thoughts about Earthly Hope

1. Covenant built on better promises. Hebrews 8.6.

Are All Things Possible?

1. Four times in gospels with God all things are possible. Matthew 19.26; Mark 9.23, 10.27, 14.36.
2. "With God all things are possible". Matthew 19.26.
3. It is not possible for God to take away the cup of suffering from Jesus. Mark 14.36.
4. All things being possible for a father needing his son healed. Mark 9.23.
5. With God all things are possible for salvation. Mark 10.27.
6. All things are possible with God for salvation. Matthew 19.26.
7. "If you can believe, all things are possible to him that believes." Mark 9.23.
8. Jesus healing Peter's mother-in-law. Matthew 8.14-15.
9. Jesus raising Jairus' daughter from the dead. Mark 5.22-24, 35-42.
10. Belief is a work. John 6.28-29.
11. Belief in Jesus is what saves. John 11.25-26.
12. Woman with issue of blood. Matthew 9.18-22; Mark 5.24-34.

Conclusion

1. Good gift come from God. James 1.17.
2. Paul talking about false and deceitful people. 2 Corinthians 11.13-15, KJV.
3. John saying to test every spirit. 1 John 4.1, KJV.

Before We Continue

1. Paul talking about false and deceitful people. 2 Corinthians 11.13-15, KJV.
2. John saying to test every spirit. 1 John 4.1, KJV.

Continuation Theology's Process of Biblical Teachings

1. Gifts of the Spirit. 1 Corinthians 12.4-10.
2. Anointing the sick with oil and praying for them. James 5.14-15.
3. Last days. Acts 2.17; 2 Timothy 3.1; Hebrews 1.2; 2 Peter 3.3-4 KJV.
4. Christ yet to return, as he said he would. John 14.4, 14.28.

False Prophets, False Christs

1. Recognize false prophets by their fruits. Matthew 7.15-20, ESV.
2. God is the originator of all good things. James 1.16-17.
3. Jesus said, "many false prophets will arise and lead many astray". Matthew 24.11, ESV.
4. Jesus statement about false christs and false prophets. Matthew 24.23-24, ESV.

A False Prophet

1. A false prophet in Acts. Acts 13.6-8, ESV.

False Brothers

1. Paul told the Corinthians of the dangers he faced in taking the Good News. 2 Corinthians 11.21-28.
2. Paul's telling the Corinthians of the dangers that he faced in taking the Good News falls within the same section of verses where Paul spoke of false Apostles. 2 Corinthians 11.1-13.
3. Paul mentioned that one of his dangers was false brothers. 2 Corinthians 11.26.
4. Paul's description of false brethren in Galatians. Galatians 2.4, ESV.
5. Paul will admonish and rebuke the Galatians for being "bewitched". Galatians 3.1.
6. It seems to be spiritually proper to affirm that gifts of the Spirit could have helped those First Century brethren discern the spirits. 1 Corinthians 12.10.

False Teachers

1. Peter's comment about false teachers. 2 Peter 2.1-3, ESV.

The Church Is Not Powerless against Falsehood

1. "Your adversary the devil..." 1 Peter 5.8, ESV.

False Witnesses?

1. 1 Corinthians 15.15, KJV.
2. 1 Corinthians 15.15, ESV.
3. Thought from Paul. 1 Corinthians 2.13, ESV.

The Church Empowered

1. Gifts of the Spirit. 1 Corinthians 12.1, 12.7-11, ESV.
2. God's Promise. Isaiah 55.8-9, KJV.
3. "Let us reason together". Isaiah 1.18, KJV.

Do Not Quench the Spirit

1. Context of "do not quench the spirit". 1 Thessalonians 5.14-22, ESV.
2. Final comments to the Thessalonian Church were given by Paul, Silvanus and Timothy. 1 Thessalonians 1.1.

My Conclusions

1. Faith comes by hearing. Romans 10.17.
2. God through Christ cannot force his MSW upon anyone (as evidenced by Jesus being limited by the faith of others). Matthew 13.53-58.
3. Jesus was unable to do many powerful works because of their unbelief. Matthew 13.54-58, cf. Matthew 13.58.

Study Summary

1. 1050 NT Commands. Mar. 2011. < Shalach Ministries <http://shalach.org/BibleSearch/NTCommandments.htm>>.
2. 613 OT Commands. Mar. 2011. <Wikipedia.org http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/613_Mitzvot>.
3. Jesus statement in Matthew Five. Matthew 5.17-18, ESV.
4. Love fulfills the commands of the OT. Romans 13.8-10.
5. Paul's statement to timothy means by literary context, that Paul is specifically referring to the OT. 2 Timothy 3.15-17.
6. God, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. James 1.17 KJV.

OT Conclusions

1. Jesus said "not one jot or one tittle" would disappear until *all* things had been fulfilled. Matthew 5.18.
2. James stated the Gentiles should learn from the OT. Acts 15.21, cf. Acts 15.13 to know it is James.

Sacrifices

1. New Covenant offerings include: the disciple's life. Romans 12.1-2.
2. New Covenant offerings include: the fruit of the lips. Hebrews 13.15.

3. New Covenant offerings include: the freewill offering from the fruit of labor. 1 Corinthians 16.1-2.

Distinctions

1. In the New Covenant no distinction between Jews and Gentiles. Galatians 3.28; Colossians 3.11.
2. Jew and Gentile distinction was torn down by the body of Messiah. Ephesians 2.13-22.
3. Peter reasons that all disciples are a “royal priesthood”. 1 Peter 2.9-10.

Moral Instructions

1. The Golden Rule. Matthew 7.12.
2. Jesus plainly states that “do unto others” “is the law and the prophets”. Matthew 7.12.

Paul and the OT

1. Paul used the OT to preach Jesus. Acts 13.13-41, Acts 17.1-3.
2. Paul used the OT to prove doctrinal positions. Galatians 3.16-22, Galatians 4.21-31.
3. Scriptures. Jesus-Matthew 21.42; Paul-Romans 15.4.
4. Law. Jesus-Matthew 12.5; Paul-Galatians 4.21.
5. Law and Prophets. Jesus-Matthew 22.40; Paul-Acts 24.14.
6. Paul says love is the fulfillment of the OT. Romans 13.8-10.
7. “For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope”. Romans 15.4.
8. “For even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me.” Romans 15.3.
9. “Let every one of us please *his* neighbour for *his* good to edification.” Romans 15.2.
10. “as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me.” Romans 15.3 quoting Psalm 69.9.

The Gentile’s Responsibility to the OT

1. The Jerusalem Council’s decision. Acts 15.1-29.
2. Gentile Christians are to learn from the OT. Acts 15.21.
3. Paul’s statement to Timothy about the OT. 2 Timothy 3.15-17.

Conclusion

1. Disciples should utilize the OT for their faith, previously discussed about Romans 13.8-10, 15.2-4, 1 Corinthians 10.1-13, 2 Timothy 3.15-17.
2. Paul who affirms that the OT does not justify, faith in Jesus as sin atonement is what fully justifies the sinner. Romans 3.20-26.
3. Paul tells Timothy the application of the OT for the disciple. 2 Timothy 3.15-17, ASV

Addendum

So Where Do We Go from Here?

1. “Much learning doth make thee mad.” Acts 26.24 KJV.
2. “Be Holy because I am Holy.” Leviticus 11.45; Ephesians 1.4 KJV.

Exactitude or Latitude?

1. Love your neighbor as yourself. Matthew 22.36-40 KJV.
2. Love your neighbor as yourself. Mark 12.28-31 KJV.
3. Love your neighbor as yourself. Luke 10.25-28 KJV.
4. Jesus draws his One-A One-B corollary from Deuteronomy 6.4-5 and Leviticus 19.18.
5. Samuel told Saul that obedience is better than sacrifice. 1 Samuel 15.22 KJV.
6. Hosea said that mercy is better than sacrifice. Hosea 6.6 KJV.
7. Jesus challenges the people to Hosea’s message. Matthew 9.13, 12.7 KJV.
8. James saying that mercy triumphs over justice. James 2.13 ESV.

Is There an Answer?

1. “charis.” Strong’s Number G5485; e-Sword Rick Meyers; version 8.0.6.

2. “chen.” Strong’s Number H2580; e-Sword Rick Meyers; version 8.0.6.
3. Paul’s statement about mercy and compassion in his letter to the Romans. Romans 9.15-18, ESV.
4. Establishing themselves as capable of judging righteousness according to the law. James 2.1-4.
5. Sinning that grace may abound. Romans 6.1.
6. Both have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Romans 3.22-23.

Conclusion

1. They cannot do wonderful deeds in his name if they do not esteem the name of the Savior. Mark 9.38-40.
2. Abbreviated quote of Romans Fourteen. Romans 14.1-13, ESV.

Further Research

Located at faithandconviction.org specifically within the Theology web series are RESEARCH LINKS. Those links neither affirm nor deny my perspective; they are, however, provided so that readers can continue their study drawing their own conclusions.