

Les and Sermons :: The Fallibility of the Early Church Fathers: Why Christians Should Look to the Bible Alone

The Fallibility of the Early Church Fathers: Why Christians Should Look to the Bible Alone.... - posted by proudpapa, on

by Jason Engwer

"I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears....and remember the words of the Lord Jesus" -- the apostle Paul (Acts 20:29-31, 35)

When we hear names such as Polycarp, Irenaeus, and Augustine, we usually respond with some reverence. These are early church leaders who lived either at the time of the apostles or within a few centuries of the apostles. Religions such as Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy base many of their doctrines, at least in part, on what these men wrote. Surely we can learn from these early church fathers, and some of them were right on most issues, but they were not infallible.

Many of them taught salvation through faith alone, sola scriptura, that Mary had sinned during her life, and other doctrines that Roman Catholics and the Eastern Orthodox would reject today. The church father Origen taught that the Holy Spirit was a created being, that Satan and the demons will all eventually be saved, and other false doctrines. Yet, he was one of the most influential of the early church fathers. By the fourth century, when church fathers like Jerome and Augustine became prominent, much of professing Christianity had become so corrupt as to enter into unholy alliances with Constantine and the Roman Empire, and Arianism, a heresy that denied Christ's deity, became a majority viewpoint for a while. The early church fathers who are exalted so often today were fallible. The post-apostolic early church was not doctrinally pure. Those who attempt to portray it otherwise are revising history.

We can learn from the early church fathers, from both their successes and their failures. They can bring up arguments that we haven't thought of before. They can draw our attention to portions of scripture to which we hadn't paid much attention before. Irenaeus wrote some valuable material against the heresy of Gnosticism. Athanasius wrote some valuable material supporting such important doctrines as the deity of Christ, the Trinity, and sola scriptura. Many other church fathers wrote valuable material on these and other subjects as well. At the same time, though, the church fathers often made mistakes, and taught false doctrines. How, then, do we know what to believe and what doctrines to follow?

Paul and Peter answered that question in Biblical passages such as Acts 20:28-35 and 2 Peter 1:13-15. In Acts 20, Paul knew that he was seeing the Ephesians for the last time. He warned them that false teachers would try to influence them after his departure. How did Paul want the Ephesians to avoid being deceived by these false teachers? Were the Ephesians to just do whatever some "apostolic successor" would tell them to do? No, they were to remember Paul's words (Acts 20:31), as well as the words of Jesus Himself (Acts 20:35). And we see a similar situation in 2 Peter 1:13-15. Peter knew that he was soon going to die. What did he do, so that people would remember after his death what he had taught? Did he tell them to just follow a "successor", or to believe whatever a hierarchy of men in a particular city (Rome, Alexandria, Antioch, etc.) would tell them? No, he wrote his teachings down (2 Peter 1:13-15, 3:1-2). So how do we today remember what the apostles taught? Do we turn to a group of men in Rome? To a seeming "consensus" among modern church leaders? To thousands of pages of church father writings, church council declarations, and proclamations from church leaders of the last two thousand years? No, we turn to the teachings of the apostles themselves, the New Testament. That doesn't mean that we can't learn anything from other sources, but rather that these other sources are not as authoritative as the New Testament, and are not binding to the Christian, nor are they an acceptable foundation upon which to build doctrine.

If people were to decide what to believe by examining the "traditions" of the early church, what would they believe about whether Mary was a perpetual virgin? The church father Tertullian denied that she was a perpetual virgin. The church father Jerome argued that she was, and attempted to explain away the references to Jesus' "brothers and sisters" in the New Testament by assuming that they were actually cousins. The church father Epiphanius, while agreeing with Jerome that Mary was a perpetual virgin, tried to explain away the "brothers and sisters" mentioned in scripture by assuming that they were children of Joseph from a former marriage. So, for those who want to establish doctrine based on post-apostolic "tradition", which view of Mary is to be accepted? When three different church fathers give three different views, which one is to be followed? If the scriptures speak for themselves, the obvious conclusion is that while Mary was a virgin until Christ's birth, she had other children later. The New Testament writers were familiar with the Greek terms

for "cousin" and "relative". They used them. When referring to Jesus' "brothers and sisters", though, they used terms with a primary meaning of shared parentage. Since people who want to believe that Mary was a perpetual virgin cannot find evidence for that belief in the New Testament, they try to find evidence in material written long after Mary and the apostles had died. So the New Testament evidence against Mary being a perpetual virgin is overlooked, as is the testimony of men like Tertullian, who didn't support the doctrine. People who want to believe that Mary was a perpetual virgin search through the writings of the church fathers until they find something they agree with, then they read that doctrine back into the New Testament, even if the New Testament actually doesn't support it. This is how Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy go about supporting many of their doctrines.

Another example of how important it is to follow the scriptures first and foremost, as opposed to following the early church fathers, is the issue of baptismal regeneration, the teaching that baptism is a requirement for salvation. The scriptures are overwhelmingly in opposition to baptismal regeneration. Every scripture passage cited by those who argue that baptism is a requirement for salvation has a reasonable alternate interpretation that reconciles it with the larger number of passages that are in opposition to that doctrine (see [Rebutting Baptismal Regeneration](#)). Yet, most of the early church fathers taught baptismal regeneration. (Contrary to popular conception, not everybody in the post-apostolic early church did, however. The earliest church father, and possibly the only one who wrote during the first century, is Clement of Rome. In the only material we have from him, his letter to the Corinthians, he explicitly teaches salvation through faith alone (1), and he says nothing about baptism being a requirement for salvation. Though people often make generalizations about how "everybody" in the early church believed in baptismal regeneration, the truth is that not everybody did.) One of the church fathers who taught that baptism is a requirement for salvation was Tertullian. An examination of his treatise *On Baptism* reveals just how unscriptural and weak were the arguments of those church fathers who did advocate baptismal regeneration.

Near the beginning of *On Baptism*, Tertullian writes:

"are born in water, nor have we safety in any other way than by permanently abiding in water; so that most monstrous creature, who had no right to teach even sound doctrine, knew full well how to kill the little fishes, by taking them away from the water!"

As clever and memorable as Tertullian's analogy may be, Christians are not born in the water of ceremonial baptism. When Jesus referred to being "born of water" in John 3:5, he was speaking to Nicodemus, a Jewish teacher of the scriptures, who probably would have associated the water reference with repentance and spiritual cleansing (Psalm 51:2, Isaiah 1:16, John 7:37-38, Ephesians 5:26, etc.), not the ceremony of water baptism. If this isn't obvious from John 3:5 and its immediate context, then it is from what Jesus goes on to say. In verses 15, 16, and 18 of John 3, Jesus mentions faith as the means of salvation, and says nothing of water baptism. When John explains why he was writing his gospel (John 20:31), he tells us, "these have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name". How do we have life? By believing. As much as advocates of baptismal regeneration may want to add more requirements to that verse, John only mentions "believing" as the means to salvation.

Not only is Tertullian mistaken about John 3:5, but he's also mistaken when he claims that Christians are safe only in the water. The truth is that they're safe in Christ's blood (Romans 5:9, 1 Peter 1:18-19, Revelation 1:5), and nowhere else.

Tertullian goes on to say, later on in this treatise:

"Here, then, those miscreants provoke questions. And so they say, 'Baptism is not necessary for them to whom faith is sufficient; for withal, Abraham pleased God by a sacrament of no water, but of faith.' But in all cases it is the later things which have a conclusive force, and the subsequent which prevail over the antecedent. Grant that, in days gone by, there was salvation by means of bare faith, before the passion and resurrection of the Lord. But now that faith has been enlarged, and is become a faith which believes in His nativity, passion, and resurrection, there has been an amplification added...For the law of baptizing has been imposed"

No, Tertullian, Christians are not under any "law of baptizing" or any other law of works (Galatians 3:15-25). We're under the law of grace and liberty (Galatians 5:1, James 2:12). The sting of eternal death has been removed from sin for those who believe in Jesus Christ. We still suffer consequences from sin, such as loss of rewards (1 Corinthians 3:11-15), but the consequences, once we've trusted Christ, are no longer eternal death. In other words, once we become a Christian, all things are lawful for us, but not all things are profitable (1 Corinthians 6:12). Paul didn't criticize the Galatians because they were trying to maintain salvation through the wrong type of ritual (circumcision rather than baptism). He criticized them for thinking that they could maintain salvation through any ritual, through any work of the flesh (Galatians 3:3).

Tertullian argues against the people of his day who believe in salvation through faith alone, apart from baptism, by claiming that Abraham was an exception to the rule. He acknowledges that Abraham was saved through faith alone, apart from baptism or any other work, but he dismisses Abraham as an exception to a new rule. However, we read in Romans 4:

"For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be heir of the world was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith. For if those who are of the Law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise is nullified; for the Law brings about wrath, but where there is no law, neither is there violation. For this reason it is by faith, that it might be in accordance with grace, in order that the promise may be certain to all the descendants, not only to those who are of the Law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all" (Romans 4:13-16).

On the issue of salvation, Abraham is not an exception to the rule. He is the rule. Everybody is saved through faith alone. Abraham was saved that way, and so are all of Abraham's children, since he is "the father of us all" (Romans 4:16). Tertullian makes a miserable mistake when he attempts to dismiss Abraham's example rather than learning from it. There is no new "law of baptizing" whereby people are now saved. People always have been and always will be saved through faith alone. There's only one gospel (Mark 1:15, Galatians 1:8-9), and it will never change (Romans 2:16). Salvation is a free gift of God's grace, accepted through faith alone, based upon Christ's perfect work. Tertullian suggests that the means of salvation changed after Jesus' resurrection, yet it was after His resurrection that Romans 4 and so many other passages that teach salvation through faith alone were written. In Acts 10:44-48, people receive the Holy Spirit, the seal of salvation (Ephesians 1:13-14), before being baptized. Peter confirms in Acts 15:9 that they had been "cleansed through faith", not baptism, and he goes on to say that everybody is saved in the same way (Acts 15:11). That was after Jesus' resurrection as well.

While Tertullian claims that the ceremony of water baptism is a means to salvation, he also writes:

"We have indeed, likewise, a second font, (itself withal one with the former,) of blood ... This is the baptism which both stands in lieu of the fontal bathing when that has not been received, and restores it when lost"

So he adds martyrdom, a "baptism of blood", as another means of salvation, and he suggests that the effects of water baptism can be lost. Even worse, he goes on to write:

"They who are about to enter baptism ought to pray with repeated prayers, fasts, and bendings of the knee, and vigils all the night through, and with the confession of all by gone sins"

Tertullian has now suggested six different works that a person should do before being saved, and he's suggested that salvation can even be lost after these works are done, and that salvation can be restored by means of martyrdom. Nowhere in any of the writings of the apostles do we find what Tertullian is teaching. To the contrary, Paul writes:

"But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness, just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works...having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him" (Romans 4:5-6, 5:9).

Paul describes the person who is saved as somebody who is "ungodly" and "does not work" (Romans 4:5). Tertullian describes the person who is saved as somebody who "pray with repeated prayers, fasts, and bendings of the knee, and vigils all the night through, and with the confession of all by gone sins", then is baptized. Paul says nothing of a baptism of martyrdom, and he assures the Roman Christians of their future in Heaven based on their faith (Romans 5:9). Tertullian, on the other hand, teaches a baptism of martyrdom, and suggests that even after a person does all of the works he's listed, that person still may not get to Heaven.

About 150 years after Paul wrote his epistle to the Romans, we find one of the most influential of all of the "church fathers" contradicting in numerous ways what Paul had written. It wasn't long after Tertullian's time that the church father Origen would teach that the Holy Spirit was a created being, among other heresies. Much of professing Christianity would soon make unholy alliances with Constantine and the Roman Empire, Arianism would become popular, and men like Augustine would contribute to the popularization of false doctrines such as Purgatory. Yet, religions like Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy would have us look to these post-apostolic church fathers for sound doctrine. The truth is that we are much better off today studying the Divinely inspired words of the apostles and their approved associates (the New Testament) than we are relying on the church fathers to shed light on what the apostles "really meant." As James White explains:

"Though it may seem surprising to some, in many aspects the Christian scholar of today is closer to the original writings of the Apostles than people who lived as little as two centuries later. Why is this true? First, we have ready access to not only the entire Bible but to many of the secular writings of the day that give us important historical, cultural, or linguistic information. We have the Bible available to us in the original tongues (the vast majority of the early Church Fathers, for example, were not able to read both Hebrew and Greek, and many in the Western Church could not read either one!) as well as many excellent translations. We also have access to a vast amount of writing from earlier generations. We can read the works of men like Spurgeon or Warfield or Hodge or Machen and glean insights from these great men of God that were not available in years past. While a person living in the sixth century might have been chronologically closer to the time of Paul, he would not have had nearly as much opportunity to study the writings of Paul as we have today. We can include in our studies the historical backgrounds of the cities to which Paul was writing; we can read his letters in their original Greek. Today we can sit at a computer and with the click of the mouse have it list all the aorist passive participle s in the letter to the Romans (there are 18)! These advantages allow us to be far more biblical in our teaching and doctrine." (The Roman Catholic Controversy, Bethany House, 1996)

The scriptures are sufficient for leading us to salvation, making us adequate, and equipping us for every good work (2 Timothy 3:15-17). The reason why some religions want to go beyond the scriptures is because they cannot find support for their false doctrines in the only material we have today that can actually be traced back to the apostles (the New Testament). They let the "traditions" of the church fathers, or at least the particular church fathers they approve of, determine how they interpret the scriptures and which portions of the scriptures they'll actually obey. What Jesus said of the Pharisees is true of these religions today:

"Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, 'This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far away from Me. But in vain do they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.' Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men ... You nicely set aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition ... thus invalidating the word of God by your tradition which you have handed down" (Mark 7:6-9, 13).

"Although these books were called forth apparently by special and accidental occasions, and were primarily addressed to particular circles of readers and adapted to particular circumstances, yet, as they present the eternal and unchangeable truth in living forms, they suit all circumstances and conditions. Tracts for the times, they are tracts for all times; intended for Jews and Greeks of the first century, they have the same interest for Englishmen and Americans of the nineteenth century. They are to this day not only the sole reliable and pure fountain of primitive Christianity, but also the infallible rule of Christian faith and practice. From this fountain the church has drunk the water of life for more than fifty generations, and will drink it till the end of time ... Theological systems come and go, and draw from that treasury their larger or smaller additions to the stock of our knowledge of the truth; but they can never equal that infallible word of God, which abideth forever. 'Our little systems have their day, they have their day and cease to be: they are but broken lights of Thee, and Thou, O God, art more than they.' The New Testament evinces its universal design in its very style, which alone distinguishes it from all the literary productions of earlier and later times. It has a Greek body, a Hebrew soul, and a Christian spirit which rules both. The language is the Hellenistic idiom; that is, the Macedonian Greek as spoken by the Jews of the dispersion in the time of Christ; uniting, in a regenerated Christian form, the two great antagonistic nationalities and religions of the ancient world. The most beautiful language of heathendom and the venerable language of the Hebrews are here combined, and baptized with the spirit of Christianity, and made the picture of silver for the golden apple of the eternal truth of the gospel. The style of the Bible in general is singularly adapted to men of every class and grade of culture, affording the child the simple nourishment for its religious wants, and the profoundest thinker inexhaustible matter of study. The Bible is not simply a popular book, but a book of all nations, and for all societies, classes, and conditions of men. It is more than a book, it is an institution which rules the Christian world ... We now descend from the primitive apostolic church to the Graeco-Roman; from the scene of creation to the work of preservation; from the fountain of divine revelation to the stream of human development; from the inspirations of the apostles and prophets to the productions of enlightened but fallible teachers. The hand of God has drawn a bold line of demarcation between the century of miracles and the succeeding ages, to show, by the abrupt transition and the striking contrast, the difference between the work of God and the work of man, and to impress us the more deeply with the supernatural origin of Christianity and the incomparable value of the New Testament....Not one compares for a moment in depth and spiritual fullness with a St. Paul or St. John; and the whole patristic literature, with all its incalculable value, must ever remain very far below the New Testament. The single epistle to the Romans or the Gospel of John is worth more than all commentaries, doctrinal, polemic, and ascetic treatises of the Greek and Latin fathers, schoolmen, and reformers ... If we compare these documents with the canonical Scriptures of the New Testament, it is evident at once that they fall far below in original force, depth, and fullness of spirit, and afford in this a strong indirect proof of the inspiration of the apostles ... For by the wise ordering of the Ruler of history, there is an impassable gulf between the inspiration of the apostles and the illumination of the succeeding age, between

the standard authority of holy Scripture and the derived validity of the teaching of the church. 'The Bible' - to adopt an illustration of a distinguished writer -- 'is not like a city of modern Europe, which subsides through suburban gardens and groves and mansions into the open country around, but like an Eastern city in the desert, from which the traveler passes by a single step into a barren waste.' The very poverty of these post-apostolic writings renders homage to the inexhaustible richness of the apostolic books which, like the person of Christ, are divine as well as human in their origin, character, and effect ...The Bible is a book of holy men, but just as much a book of God, who made those men witnesses of truth and sure teachers of the way of salvation." (Philip Schaff, from his History of the Christian Church)

Clement (flourished c.80-101 A.D.):

"And so we, having been called through His will in Christ Jesus, are not justified through ourselves or through our own wisdom or understanding or piety or works which we wrought in holiness of heart, but through faith, whereby Almighty God justified all men that have been from the beginning; to whom be the glory for ever and ever."

Re: The Fallibility of the Early Church Fathers: Why Christians Should Look to the Bi, on: 2017/2/15 17:04

Hi PP,

I did not read the article but I definitely agree with the title. The problem with building upon the early church fathers would be possibly to be building error upon error and before you know it one could be very far away from the truth, this is undoubtedly what happened to the catholics.....bro Frank

Re: - posted by proudpapa, on: 2017/2/15 17:12

Hi Brother Frank,

I agree.

Also I relize the artical was long but I posted it because I felt it was well balanced.

Re: - posted by proudpapa, on: 2017/2/15 17:24

It is so long that most will not read it all but I thought this part was very well written and Balanced so I want to highlight it :

We can learn from the early church fathers, from both their successes and their failures. They can bring up arguments that we haven't thought of before. They can draw our attention to portions of scripture to which we hadn't paid much attention before. Irenaeus wrote some valuable material against the heresy of Gnosticism. Athanasius wrote some valuable material supporting such important doctrines as the deity of Christ, the Trinity, and sola scriptura. Many other church fathers wrote valuable material on these and other subjects as well. At the same time, though, the church fathers often made mistakes, and taught false doctrines. How, then, do we know what to believe and what doctrines to follow?

Paul and Peter answered that question in Biblical passages such as Acts 20:28-35 and 2 Peter 1:13-15. In Acts 20, Paul knew that he was seeing the Ephesians for the last time. He warned them that false teachers would try to influence them after his departure. How did Paul want the Ephesians to avoid being deceived by these false teachers? Were the Ephesians to just do whatever some "apostolic successor" would tell them to do? No, they were to remember Paul's words (Acts 20:31), as well as the words of Jesus Himself (Acts 20:35). And we see a similar situation in 2 Peter 1:13-15. Peter knew that he was soon going to die. What did he do, so that people would remember after his death what he had taught? Did he tell them to just follow a "successor", or to believe whatever a hierarchy of men in a particular city (Rome, Alexandria, Antioch, etc.) would tell them? No, he wrote his teachings down (2 Peter 1:13-15, 3:1-2). So how do we today remember what the apostles taught? Do we turn to a group of men in Rome? To a seeming "consensus" among modern church leaders? To thousands of pages of church father writings, church council declarations, and proclamations from church leaders of the last two thousand years? No, we turn to the teachings of the apostles themselves, the New Testament. That doesn't mean that we can't learn anything from other sources, but rather that these other sources are not as authoritative as the New Testament, and are not binding to the Christian, nor are they an acceptable foundation upon which to build doctrine

Re: , on: 2017/2/15 17:37

PP writes.....

"What did he do, so that people would remember after his death what he had taught? Did he tell them to just follow a "successor", or to believe whatever a hierarchy of men in a particular city (Rome, Alexandria, Antioch, etc.) would tell them? No, he wrote his teachings down (2 Peter 1:13-15, 3:1-2). So how do we today remember what the apostles taught? Do we turn to a group of men in Rome? To a seeming "consensus" among modern church leaders? To thousands of pages of church father writings, church council declarations, and proclamations from church leaders of the last two thousand years? No, we turn to the teachings of the apostles themselves, the New Testament. That doesn't mean that we can't learn anything from other sources, but rather that these other sources are not as authoritative as the New Testament, and are not binding to the Christian, nor are they an acceptable foundation upon which to build doctrine

PP, I could not agree more.....bro Frank

Re: , on: 2017/2/15 19:40

///No, we turn to the teachings of the apostles themselves, the New Testament. That doesn't mean that we can't learn anything from other sources, but rather that these other sources are not as authoritative as the New Testament, and are not binding to the Christian, nor are they an acceptable foundation upon which to build doctrine.///

Not to detract from the discussion. But does this mean that the New Testament and it alone is binding on the believer.

I have just finished listening to the Old Testament in my Bible listening program. So the Old Testament is informative. It certainly has principles and truth that one can glean from the Old Testament. But it seems that the words of Jesus and his Apostles are that which instructs us in the Holy Spirit.

But again these are simply thoughts I am fleshing out. But I do agree the New Testament is authoritative over at the church fathers in the believer's life. Put it this way it is what the persecuted church uses. I think if it works for them and it will I certainly work for me.

Bro Blaine

Re: The Fallibility of the Early Church Fathers: Why Christians Should Look to the Bi - posted by Elibeth, on: 2017/2/15

Dear Papa,
Please bear with me as I speak,as The Lord has taught me.
I cannot emphasize enough the / our GREAT NEED,and to others out there,whom The Lord may be drawing unto Himself,.. To let NO writer muddy/confuse the brain,..

But to allow the Greatest teacher,..who began this work in us,..to teach us through His Word with His Spirit,(first),...then we will know the truth,and can rightly divide it,...or we can 'bear it in mind' until He teaches it,..(cannot take it as truth) until we can see it through The Spiritual eyes.

I also was thinking on Abraham's 'faith'.
This is what I see in the Faith of Abraham,..
God spoke to Abraham,..Abraham believed / knew it was God speaking to him,..and he obeyed,..no matter how hard the command.

I do humbly submit this,...
Lovingly,

elizabeth

Re: - posted by Heydave (), on: 2017/2/16 7:29

PP, I read the whole article and it was very good.

bearmaster, There is much truth in the saying, the 'New' (testament) is in the 'Old' concealed and the 'Old' is in the New revealed. We understand that the New Testament reveals how we interpret the 'Old' in light of the 'New covenant'. 'All scripture', including the Old and New, is the inspired word of God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction and instructing in righteousness.

To consider the Old Testament just as informative with principles would be a grave error.

Not sure what you mean by the NT being 'binding'. The NT is not a covenant of law. It depends on which teachings, not all statements are meant to be interpreted as fixed rules, even though some try to make them so.

Re: The Fallibility of the Early Church Fathers: Why Christians Should Look to the Bi - posted by savannah, on: 2017/2/16 7:29

The Calf-Path

by Sam Walter Foss (1858-1911)

One day, through the primeval wood,
A calf walked home, as good calves should;
But made a trail all bent askew,
A crooked trail, as all calves do.

Since then three hundred years have fled,
And, I infer, the calf is dead.
But still he left behind his trail,
And thereby hangs my moral tale.

The trail was taken up next day
By a lone dog that passed that way;
And then a wise bellwether sheep
Pursued the trail o'er vale and steep,
And drew the flock behind him, too,
As good bellwethers always do.

And from that day, o'er hill and glade,
Through those old woods a path was made,
And many men wound in and out,
And dodged and turned and bent about,
And uttered words of righteous wrath
Because 'twas such a crooked path;

But still they followed 'do not laugh'
The first migrations of that calf,
And through this winding wood-way stalked
Because he wobbled when he walked.

This forest path became a lane,
That bent, and turned, and turned again.
This crooked lane became a road,
Where many a poor horse with his load
Toiled on beneath the burning sun,
And traveled some three miles in one.

And thus a century and a half
They trod the footsteps of that calf.
The years passed on in swift fleet.
The road became a village street,
And this, before men were aware,
A city's crowded thoroughfare.

And soon the central street was this
Of a renowned metropolis;
And men two centuries and a half
Trod in the footsteps of that calf.

Each day a hundred thousand rout
Followed that zigzag calf about,
And o'er his crooked journey went
The traffic of a continent.

A hundred thousand men were led
By one calf near three centuries dead.
They follow still his crooked way,
And lose one hundred years a day,
For thus such reverence is lent
To well-established precedent.

A moral lesson this might teach
Were I ordained and called to preach;
For men are prone to go it blind
Along the calf-paths of the mind,
And work away from sun to sun
To do what other men have done.

They follow in the beaten track,
And out and in, and forth and back,
And still their devious course pursue,
To keep the path that others do.

They keep the path a sacred groove,
Along which all their lives they move;
But how the wise old wood-gods laugh,
Who saw the first primeval calf!

Ah, many things this tale might teach
But I am not ordained to preach.

Re: HeyDave , on: 2017/2/16 8:18

Brother I got some thoughts on the subject of the New Testament. But I believe they should be carried over in a different thread.

I do not want to detract from PP's thoughts. I am in agreement with the article that would say that New Testament is the final authority over the teachings of man. And that would be the church fathers.

Not saying that the church fathers would not provide valuable information. But as you said all scripture is inspired by God. That is breathed out. I do not see that in the writings of the church fathers or the apocrypha for that matter.

As usual these are my thoughts.

Bro Blaine

Re: teachings - posted by savannah, on: 2017/2/16 8:22

Heydave asks,

"Not sure what you mean by the NT being 'binding'. The NT is not a covenant of law. It depends on which teachings, not all statements are meant to be interpreted as fixed rules, even though some try to make them so"

Jesus answers,

Matthew 28:18-20

Then Jesus came up and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Luke 6:46 And why do you call me Adoni and yet you do not do what I say? 47 Everyone coming to me and hearing my divrei Torah and putting them into practice, I will show you to whom he is likened. 48 He is likened to the man building a bais who dug and went down deep and laid a yesod upon the av sela (bedrock). And a flood having come, the river struck against that bais, and the flood was not strong enough to shake it, because its binnuy was firm. 49 Now the one having heard), and not having put them into practice, is like a man having built a bais (house) upon the ground without a yesod (foundation), which the river struck against, and ofen ort (immediately) the bais collapsed, and gadol (great) was t he churban of that bais.

Re: - posted by Heydave (), on: 2017/2/16 9:39

Hi Savannah,

I agree with the scriptures you posted that we are to obey the clear commands of Jesus, which He summarised as Love God with all your heart and Love your neighbour as yourself.

That said, it is not in trying to keep every command as an outward law, but in obedience of the heart by the Spirit. But that's another topic I think.

The point I was making was different, not everything written in the NT is a law to keep. e.g "cut of your right hand", "pluck out your eye", "Sell everything you have and give it away", etc... I just thought it was a strange way to look at the NT as 'binding'. I see it as liberating!

Re: - posted by docs (), on: 2017/2/16 9:46

Quoting,

"How we read Daniel and Revelation is first an issue of whether we can trust what Luther called, the priesthood of every believer, or whether we can only safely follow the tradition of interpretation that has come down to us through many of the church's theological heroes, such as the famed magisterial Reformers, Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli, and their vast theological progeny, as also the popes and bishops of the church of Rome. For the larger part, all have been Augustinian in their interpretation of the Daniel and the Apocalypse. This is why amillennialism has dominated most of Protestant and nearly all Roman Catholic eschatology. It is well known that St. Augustine of Hippo is the father of the a-millennial interpretation of the thousand years (i.e., that the church is the kingdom of God on earth and the millennium is symbolic of the church age)."

"Augustinian denial of a future millennium is not the only system of interpretation that denies the literal interpretation of the many prophecies that depict the post-tribulational salvation of a surviving remnant of the Jewish people and the restoration of the nation as a distinctly Jewish nation (Dan 2:44). Simply put, if there is no millennium, there can be no literal fulfillment of the vast amount of prophecy that depicts a glorious future for benighted and beleaguered Israel after the unequalled tribulation at the coming day of the Lord, which the New Testament equates with the time of Christ's return."

(From article "The Day of the Lord" - Reggie Kelly)

Re: - posted by proudpapa, on: 2017/2/16 9:58

RE : /// From article "The Day of the Lord" - Reggie Kelly///

Does Reggie Kelly also point out that pre-nicene's understanding of the millennium did not include the restoration of Israel of the flesh ?

Justin Martyr dialogue with trypho points out that there were Christians in his day that also did not believe in a of a future millennium.

Re: - posted by sermonindex (), on: 2017/2/16 10:02

Quote:
-----Athanasius wrote some valuable material supporting such important doctrines as the deity of Christ, the Trinity, and sola scriptura. Many other church fathers wrote valuable material on these and other subjects as well. At the same time, though, the church fathers often made mistakes, and taught false doctrines. How, then, do we know what to believe and what doctrines to follow?

I agree with the writer that in no time in Church history do we ever see perfection in the Church. One only has to read the New Testament to see false teachers, false apostles, false gospels, moral failures in the church, pastors separating a way from others and having their own church (which was considered wrong), and many other problems. So to think that the early Church Fathers (Church history between AD 100-300) would be better is a strange concept.

But what we do see is the majority kept to the faith and were in unity. Just like in the New Testament. Documents such as the Apostles Creed and Nicene Creed were just one form of that unity on the foundational elements our faith rest upon. I remember after being born-again in my bedroom by myself, attending a presbyterian church and we would repeat verbally together the Apostles creed out-loud during a communion service that happened quarterly in the Church. So in reformed Churches practices and traditions of the Church from the first 300 years are still practiced.

Quote:
-----As clever and memorable as Tertullian's analogy may be, Christians are not born in the water of ceremonial baptism.

The writer Jason Engwer (who seems like he is a reformed doctrinal student who debates catholics), goes on to say that Baptism was held wrong by the early Church, meaning AD 100-300. I personally believe to treat Water Baptism as merely as a symbol with no effectual means is wrong and imbalanced. Looking at the Lords Supper there is also clear warnings in Scripture to hold to the practice worthily. If it were only a symbol this would not make sense. Water Baptism is a command from Jesus Christ and should be taken seriously, done solemnly and considered part of our salvation. If one searches all the terms of baptism in the New Testament it is clear the word salvation is tied to it:

1 Peter 3:21 New International Version (NIV)

21 and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you alsoâ€”not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ,

The symbol speaks of the greater meaning behind it. You cannot take away the symbol from the meaning or the meaning from the symbol.

Quote:
-----"What did he do, so that people would remember after his death what he had taught? Did he tell them to just follow a "successor", or to believe whatever a hierarchy of men in a particular city (Rome, Alexandria, Antioch, etc.) would tell them? No, he wrote his teachings down (2 Peter 1:13-15, 3:1-2). So how do we today remember what the apostles taught? Do we turn to a group of men in Rome? To a seeming "consensus" among modern church leaders? To thousands of pages of church father writings, church council declarations, and proclamations from church leaders of the last two thousand years? No, we turn to the teachings of the apostles themselves, the New Testament. That doesn't mean that we can't learn anything from other sources, but rather that these other sources are not as authoritative as the New Testament, and are not binding to the Christian, nor are they an acceptable foundation upon which to build doctrine

His quote seems good to read but it is hard to apply to the original Apostles, meaning that the Catholic system did not start in the current form till well after 500 AD. The split from the Orthodox Church did not finally happen till AD 1110 where the modern Roman Catholic Church that exists today began to form more towards what it is today.

It is clear that there were main Apostles that were considered leaders even above the other Apostles such as James, Cephas (Peter) and John:

Galatians 2:9 New International Version (NIV)

9 James, Cephas and John, those esteemed as pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me. They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the circumcised.

Paul recognized them as the leaders and humbly went to them, but also wrote that his calling was from God and even if men would deviate he would not (Galatians 2:6) That does not mean he was anti-leadership, anti-hierarchical.

And if we study the New Testament it becomes clear that James and Peter were considered the leaders of the Church. And when they were martyred John might have assumed that role. Whether we like it or not, Jerusalem, then Antioch and then Rome were the main head quarters of the Church were the largest assemblies were with leaders, apostles, prophets etc.

To turn and declare everything wrong or dubious in Church history including councils where original creeds were and the very canon of Scripture was formed seems like an over-reaction against what is the modern Catholic Church.

Quote:
-----Not to detract from the discussion. But does this mean that the New Testament and it alone is binding on the believer.

I personally believe that the Scriptures are of great importance and the Lord has preserved them to our day. But our binding is to the very person of Jesus Christ and His body (the Church). We are part of the family of God, kingdom of God, so we cannot separate ourselves from the great cloud of witnesses that have existed throughout 2000 years of Church history.

To think that we have the best doctrines, thinking and church in history in North America in AD 2000 can be wrong thinking. As though we have all church history to learn from I see many evangelicals leaving many of the core traditions and beliefs that saints have held to since the beginning of the Church. With over 40,000 denominations with all different ideas

we must look to history in some way to understand what can be held to.

I believe to start with at the very least Church practices in the 1st and 2nd century are good to follow and the creed: Apostles, or Nicene Creed show us the very importance of the incarnation of Christ and Trinity of God and other important beliefs that are being questioned by many in our day.

Re: - posted by proudpapa, on: 2017/2/16 10:14

Quote:
-----Water Baptism is a command from Jesus Christ and should be taken seriously, done solemnly and considered part of our salvation. If one searches all the terms of baptism in the New Testament it is clear the word salvation is tied to it.

So what do you do with George Fox whom totally denounced Water Baptism ?

Say he was not fully saved ?

or not Saved at all ?

add : "George" for clarity

Re: NT as binding - posted by savannah, on: 2017/2/16 10:39

There's no ambiguity in Jesus' words which I quoted in my previous post.

What you quoted Dave, is not binding in a literally physical sense, nevertheless Jesus' words even there are binding. It is, as all Jesus' words are, binding upon the heart, as Jesus said, My words are spirit and life. The heart, which represents the man, always was, and is, what the Father and Son and Spirit were ultimately addressing.

Jesus revealed the Father to us, because He is The Word made flesh. I don't think anyone here on SI would say that there was any disagreement whatsoever in the Trinity of persons. I think all would agree that Father, Son, and Spirit are One, and in perfect unity.

bind; binding;

To bring (any one) under definite legal obligations; esp. under the obligation of a bond or covenant.

Fig.: To oblige, restrain, or hold, by authority, law, duty, promise, vow, affection, or other moral tie; as, to bind the conscience; to bind by kindness; bound by affection.

Noah Webster 1828

So...just what words of Jesus are not binding in The New COVENANT?

Re: - posted by proudpapa, on: 2017/2/16 10:41

Bro Greg

John 3:5

Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

You are of the belief that "born of water" in this context is referring to water baptism ?

Re: We are Bound to a Person and Governed by His Word, on: 2017/2/16 11:14

I will admit to say that the New Testament is binding upon us as believers is a poor choice of words. It's far better to say that we are bound to a Person. And his name is Jesus. Â For consider the gracious invitation of Jesus in Matthew 11 28-30,

.....Come to me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and my burden is light....
...

Here we see the gracious invitation of Jesus to come and be yoked to him for rest. But notice he says " learn from me".

By instruction and example Jesus is the final Authority in our life. Â As Savanna quoted in the final words of Jesus, "All Authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth". Â

Also in the Mount of transfiguration quoted in Matthews account,

....."This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased, listen to Him.....Mat. 17:5

Please notice that Moses and Elijah had departed from walking with Christ. The only person who remained was Jesus. The father did not say listen to Moses or listen to Elijah. He said listen to My Son.

As such it is Jesus that has final authority in the believer's life. Â By implication his words in the words of his apostles are that which governs the New Covenant believer. And those words are contained in the New Testament. Â

Perhaps it is better to say that we are bound to Jesus. And we are governed by His words and those of his apostles.

These are simply my thoughts.

Bro BlaineÂ

Re: Supplemental , on: 2017/2/16 11:17

By implication Jesus is the final authority over Moses, Elijah, and the church fathers. By implication Jesus is the final authority over any teaching of man.

Again my thoughts.

Bro Blaine

Re: - posted by Heydave (), on: 2017/2/16 13:37

Blaine,

Yes brother, this sounds better. I like this that you wrote, Sorry if I misunderstood your intent!

Re: Dave , on: 2017/2/16 14:15

No problem Dave. Thanks for calling this to my attention. It reminded me that we are bound to a person. And his name is Jesus.

Bro Blaine

- posted by proudpapa, on: 2017/2/16 20:44

"I cannot, as George Fox did, give up baptism and the Lord's Supper, but I would infinitely sooner do it, counting it the smaller mistake of the two than perpetrate and assist in perpetrating the uplifting of baptism and the Lord's Supper out of their proper place." - CH Spurgeon

Re: - posted by drifter (), on: 2017/2/16 20:47

So, if two people were lost in the desert, one was a christian and the other wasn't, and they were about to die, and the unbeliever repents of his sins and receives Jesus, and he says "Uh oh, there's no water around here, I can't get baptized", and he dies, does he go to hell? (the answer should be obvious)

Drifter - posted by proudpapa, on: 2017/2/16 20:57

John 3:5

Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

If "born of water" is referring to Water Baptism as what many such as Tertullian taught than what would you conclude ?

Re: , on: 2017/2/16 21:00

Uhhh. What about the thief on the cross? I don't think he was in any position to be baptized. :-)

Bro Blaine

Re: - posted by proudpapa, on: 2017/2/16 21:05

Tertullian and others, made an exception for martyr's

But that exception is not found in the John 3 verse, that they taught was speaking of water Baptism.

clarity

Re: Drifter - posted by drifter (), on: 2017/2/16 21:45

"If "born of water" is referring to Water Baptism as what many such as Tertullian taught than what would you conclude ?"

If Tertullian is right he would be roasting right now (in hell).

I believe baptism is an outward sign of obedience to God's will, nothing more.

Re: - posted by drifter (), on: 2017/2/16 21:45

"Uhhh. What about the thief on the cross? I don't think he was in any position to be baptized."

Exactly.

Re: Drifter - posted by StirltUp (), on: 2017/2/17 3:58

My view on rebirth and baptism

"John 3:5

Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."

I may be wrong, as I often am :) however, from the context of Jesus speaking of being "born again", meaning a second time, it just makes sense to me that being born of "water" may refer to the natural birth process and being born again to the spiritual process.

"Whatever is from flesh is flesh and from spirit is spirit"

So, yes, baptism may have nothing to do with receiving the gift of Eternal Life which is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.....however.....

Baptism is very important (I'm pretty sure most of us were baptized in obedience to the scripture and we would never discourage a new believer from being baptized, but rather we would encourage them) as far as "being saved" from this world is concerned. Baptism is a testimony to men and angels (and devils) that I have gone through the river of death and separation from this world system and have been raised up to walk in a New Life under the authority of a New King and influence of a New Kingdom (Watchman Nee has an excellent teaching regarding baptism and its importance)

So also with the sacrament of the Lord's table. We may not be partaking of the actual blood and body of Christ (a la Catholic doctrine) however we are commanded to do so often and to remember Christ's death for us and at the same time examine our understanding of His death for us as well as what it means as far as our being part of His spiritual body and our standing in relation to Him and our brothers.

My experience is that every time I partake of the Lord's table correctly and in faith I experience a fresh burst of Life and a nointing and leave feeling rejuvenated and blessed.

Both baptism and the Lord's table has much to do with the new life and way and our part of the body, the church.

Blessings,

Re: proudpapa - posted by docs (), on: 2017/2/17 9:36

/Does Reggie Kelly also point out that pre-nicene's understanding of the millennium did not include the restoration of Israel of the flesh?

What exactly do you mean by that question, especially the phrase "restoration of Israel after the flesh?" Can you state in more detail what you mean when you state they did not believe Israel after the flesh would be restored?

Thank you.

Justin Martyr - "We Christians are the now the true Israelitic race."

Obviously, Brother Justin had stopped reading his Bible ALONE and was forming his teaching from somewhere else. Because of Gentile ascendancy in the early church it was not uncommon after the first century for the church to refer to itself as the 12 tribes of Israel. Problem was, it just didn't come from the Bible ALONE.

Re: - posted by twayneb (), on: 2017/2/17 10:05

Two observations I would like to make.

First, I don't think it is so much that the New Testament is "binding" but the writings of the Antenicene fathers is not. It is that the New Testament is inspired and the writings of the fathers is not necessarily so. What the Holy Spirit directly inspired is infallible. What the early fathers wrote, though perhaps very useful, is not infallible.

Second, I agree with the statement that you cannot divorce the symbol from the reality, nor the reality from the symbol. But that statement does not mean that both the symbol and the reality have the same effect. I am not saved by being physically immersed in water baptism. I am saved by believing on the work of Jesus Christ, repenting of my old ways (dying), and being regenerated by His Holy Spirit. Yet there is a spiritual identification with the work of the cross and the resurrection in my life that takes place as I follow Christ in obedience in water baptism that has a profound effect upon my spiritual life. So, water baptism is not essential to salvation, but to be regenerated and then refuse to partake of the symbol of the glorious work that has been done in your life seems to me a bit odd in perhaps incongruous with what has just happened in your life.

Re: - posted by proudpapa, on: 2017/2/17 10:17

RE: /// Obviously, Brother Justin had stopped reading his Bible ALONE and was forming his teaching from somewhere else.///

I Believe Brother Justins understanding is consistant with what everyone with the exception of an ambiguous quote from Ishodad of Merv taught concerning the Subject for over the first 1,000 years of recorded Church history.

Tertullian as well as Augustine taught that Esau represented "Israel of the flesh" and that Jacob represented "The Church"

ADD :

Dialogue Of Justin Philosopher And Martyr With Trypho - Justin Martyr
add : https://www.sermonindex.net/modules/bible_books/?view=book&book=36

An Answer To The Jews - Tertullian
https://www.sermonindex.net/modules/bible_books/?view=book&book=60

Re: - posted by docs (), on: 2017/2/17 10:32

/Tertullian as well as Augustine taught that Esau represented "Israel of the flesh" and that Jacob represented "The Church"/

Do their famous names automatically make them correct? Augustine also taught that all married sex outside of the purpose of procreation was sinful. Besides, there is not one instance in the entire New Testament where the word Israel or Israelite is used to describe the church. If Jacob represents the Church we won't find it backed up by the New Testament.

Re: - posted by proudpapa, on: 2017/2/17 10:35

RE : /// Do their famous names automatically make them correct?///

Case in point
Of the subject of this thread.

If they were wrong on this subject then there is no reason to believe that they were correct on any subject !

add : (I am not insinuating that they were wrong about everything just making a point that they are not authoritative on anything.)

Re: , on: 2017/2/17 10:40

When did the early church fathers appear on the scene in church history? Was it shortly after the 1st century?

Brother Blaine

Re: - posted by drifter (), on: 2017/2/17 11:10

"Justin Martyr - "We Christians are the now the true Israelitic race.""

"This is what the Lord says: 'Only if the heavens above can be measured and the foundations of the earth below be searched out will I reject all the descendants of Israel because of all they have done,' declares the Lord. Jeremiah 31: 37

"And so all Israel shall be saved" Romans 11:26
(And the whole 11th chapter of Romans)
And many, many other verses.

Justin Martyr was dead wrong.

Re: , on: 2017/2/17 11:29

Brothers just curious. When the church fathers come on the scene? When did the church start looking to the church fathers in place of the Bible?

Bro Blaine

Re: What saith the Scriptures - posted by savannah, on: 2017/2/17 11:58

Orthodox Jewish Bible -

Gal. 6

15 For neither bris milah is anything, nor fehlt (the lacking) of bris milah, but a Bri'a Chadasha (New Creation). 16 And as many as stay in line with the Derech HaYashar (Straight Way) of these divrei torah, Shalom Hashem and Chesed Hashem be upon them, and upon the Yisroel of Hashem).

17 For the rest, let no one give me any more tzoros; for I bear in my basar the chabburot haJoshua (wounds, stripes of Joshua YESHAYEH 53:5).

18 Achim B'Moshiach, the Chen v'Chesed Hashem of Rebbe, Melech HaMoshiach Joshua Adoneinu be with your neshama. Omein.)

Galatians 6:15,16

For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; instead, a new creation.

And as many as those who will walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.

Re: New Testament use of the word Israel and Israelite(s) - posted by docs (), on: 2017/2/18 6:46

New Testament Usage of the word Israel and Israelite(s)

We will turn to the word Israel or Israelite(s) as used in the New Testament. There are seventy-seven passages where these words occur in the New Testament. In nine cases these are direct quotations of Old Testament Scripture verses, and in every instance the meaning in the New Testament is precisely the same as the Old. There are sixty-eight passages beyond that which are not quotations from the Old Testament, but in all these cases the use in the New Testament agrees with that of the Old.

There remain, therefore, only two passages in the New Testament where Israel is used in a special sense. As with the word Jew, this special New Testament usage of Israel does not extend but restricts the application of the word.

The first such restricted use is found in Romans 9:6-9, where Paul explains that even though Israel did not in many instances receive or obey the word of God, this does not mean that the word of God had no effect:

“For they are not all Israel who are of Israel, nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, in Isaac shall your seed be called.” That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed. For this is the word of promise: “at this time I will come and Sarah shall have a son.”

Paul explains here that to be descended from Israel “that is, from Jacob” is not sufficient. To qualify for God's promised blessing, a person must also demonstrate the same faith that characterized Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, otherwise, he or she is not really entitled to the name Israel.

It should be emphasized once again that Paul is not extending the use of the word Israel to include all believers,

irrespective of national origin. On the contrary, he is restricting its use to include only those descendants of Israel who are in the faith of the Messiah. It is an error to suggest that in this passage Paul uses the word Israel to describe all believers.

In other places in Romans 9, Paul uses Israel in the normal sense of all who are descended from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. In verses 3-5, for instance, he says:

'For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen.

Here Paul identifies as Israelites those who have actually rejected the Messiah. Nevertheless he calls them his countrymen. "I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for," he writes. In other words, Paul wished he could take their place of unbelief and rejection by God. Paul is obviously using the name Israel or Israelites here to describe all those descended from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, whether they are believers or unbelievers. This is the normal use throughout the New Testament.

The Israel of God

The other passage in which Paul uses Israel in a restricted sense is Galatian 6:15-16:

For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation. And as many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and the Israel of God.

Paul is talking about two kinds of people. On the one hand are those who, without a background in circumcision or Judaism, have experienced the new birth and are walking in the new creation. On the other hand, are Israelites by natural descent who have remained in the faith that was the mark of their ancestors and through that have faith have embraced Jesus as Messiah, thus entering into the new covenant. Paul calls this group of people "the Israel of God." What really matters, Paul is saying is not some religious rite but a creative act of God in the heart generated by the new covenant.

It is interesting, however, that the New International Version, one of the most widely used modern versions, departs from normal translation principles at this point. Verse 16 in that version reads: "Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule, even to the Israel of God" (italics added). Even has been substituted for the normal and. Meaning what? That those who walk according to this rule are "the Israel of God," whether they are Jews or Gentiles.

This substitution is based not on linguistic grounds but on theological grounds. The Greek word is *kai*. You would have to search the New Testament to find places where that word is legitimately translated "even" - probably fewer than one in five hundred occurrences. Overwhelmingly, *kai* is translated "and." What prompted the translators to change and to even on this occasion? Apparently the old tradition that all believers are the "Israel of God." This thinking has so influenced Christians that they will change the plain meaning of a text to fit in line with their theology!

This is not an attack on the NIV translators, who on the whole have produced an excellent version. It serves merely to illustrate the extent to which this "spiritual Israel" theory has penetrated the thinking of the church, producing attitudes and forms of thought which have no solid basis in the Scriptures.

There is an important reason why Paul makes a distinction in Galatians 6:15-16 between believers from Gentile and Jewish backgrounds. Gentiles, on the other hand, had become Christians by a single supernatural transformation that had taken place in their hearts. They had no previous background knowledge of the one true God. For Jews, on the other hand, their faith in the Messiah was the culmination of a historical process that was initiated at the exodus from Egypt and then developed over many centuries through the ministry of God-appointed rulers, prophets and priests.

The spiritual condition of the Gentile world at the time of the writing of the New Testament could be compared to a field that had been left in its natural wild condition, never having been cultivated. A Gentile's conversion to Christ represented a direct intervention of God in one whose heart had not been prepared by a Jewish heritage.

The Jewish people, on the other hand, were a field that had been carefully cultivated over many centuries. For this reason, during the period of His ministry that was confined to Israel, Jesus said to His disciples: "I have sent you to reap that for which you have not labored; others have labored, and you have entered their labors" (John 4:38). The disciples were re-

eaping in a field that had been cultivated over many centuries by a long succession of God's servants.

The terminology that Paul uses in Galatians 6:15-16 brings out the distinction between the backgrounds of Gentile and Jewish believers. For both there was a personal encounter with the Messiah which transformed their lives. For Gentiles this was a intervention of God, without any historical process of preparation. But for Jews the encounter was the culmination of a historical process that had been going on for many centuries. It was appropriate, therefore, to describe them not just as Israel, but as the Israel of God. Their faith in the Messiah represented the fulfillment of the purpose for which God had brought Israel into being.

It must be emphasized, however, that these verses in Galatians do not by any means represent the normal use of Israel in the New Testament.

Re: Who is Israel? - posted by docs (), on: 2017/2/18 9:02

Who Is Israel?

Almost limitless misunderstanding, ignorance and distortion have pervaded the church for many centuries concerning the identity of Israel. This seems extraordinary because the statements of the Bible regarding Israel are so clear. Nevertheless, the minds of multitudes of Christians seem to be clouded in regard to the application of the name Israel.

The origin of the confusion regarding Israel may be traced back to the early church fathers, who developed a doctrine that the church had replaced Israel in the purposes of God and was to be known as the "new Israel." This kind of teaching was promulgated by about 150 A.D. By Justin Martyr and was later adopted and amplified by such celebrated figures as Irenaeus, Origen and Augustine. More and more, the Old Testament was interpreted in an "allegorical" way, which no longer did justice to the plain meaning of many texts.

Significantly, at about the same period the doctrine of the church as a whole was becoming progressively corrupted from the purity and simplicity of the apostolic revelation contained in the New Testament. The eventual outcome of this process was the church of the Dark Ages, which was, for the most part, spiritually, morally and doctrinally corrupt.

From about 400 A.D., Israel has regularly been used by Bible teachers, commentators and even translators as a synonym for the church. For example, a certain edition of the King James Version has the following headings at the top of the pages in latter chapters of Isaiah:

Chapter 43 opens with the words, "But now thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not...." But the heading at the top of the page reads, "God comforteth the church with His promises" (italics added).

Again, chapter 44 of Isaiah opens with the words, "Yet now hear, O Jacob my servant; and Israel, whom I have chosen...." But the heading at the top of the page reads, "The church comforted" (italics added).

Headings such as these, inserted in the text, produces an effect that is subliminal "that is, below the threshold of conscious awareness. Nevertheless, their cumulative impact over the centuries is beyond our power to calculate. Many generations of Christians have unconsciously assumed that the headings are part of the original text. But they are not! Supplied by editors many centuries later, they misrepresent what Isaiah is actually saying, applying to the church words that are specifically addressed by name to Israel.

Essential truth is usually simple. And the truth is, Israel is Israel, and the church is the church.

To recover the truth about the identity of Israel it is necessary to go back to the actual text of the New Testament and see how the apostles used the term Israel. This is the only legitimate basis for a scripturally accurate use of this term. Ever since the canon of Scripture was closed, no subsequent writer or preacher has been authorized to change the usage established by the apostolic writers of the New Testament. Any writer or preacher who introduces a different application of the term Israel foreits the right to claim scriptural authority for what he or she has to say about Israel.

There are seventy-seven instances in the New Testament (NASB) where the word Israel or Israelite occur. After examining them all, one can rightfully conclude that the apostles never used the word Israel to describe the church.

Nor does the phrase the new Israel occur anywhere in the New Testament. Preachers and teachers who use that phrase should take care to define their use of it. They should also state it is not found in the Bible.

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Re: the way it's always been - posted by savannah, on: 2017/2/18 9:25

Worship - by true worshippers

In spirit and in truth

Galatians 4

22For it has been written that Abraham had two sons, one of the slave woman and one of the free. 23But indeed, the one of the slave woman has been born according to flesh, but the one of the free, through the promise, 24which things are allegorized, for these are two covenants: one indeed from Mount Sinai, begetting unto slavery, which is Hagar. 25Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. 26But the Jerusalem above is free, who is our mother. 27For it has been written:

©Rejoice O barren woman,
the one not bearing;
break forth and call aloud,
the one not travailing;
because many more are the children of the desolate woman
than of her having the husband.©

28Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. 29But just as at that time the one having been born according to flesh was persecuting the one born according to Spirit, so also it is now.

30But what does the Scripture say? ©Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman will never inherit along with the son of the free.© 31So then, brothers, we are not children of the slave woman, but of the free.