

CONFUSING THE CHURCH AS THE KINGDOM OF GOD:
CLARITY COMES BY LITERAL INTERPRETATION
AND CONSISTENT APPLICATION OF PAUL'S OIKONOMEIA

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Of the Requirements of
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Any system, *proposing as optional*, knowledge of propositional truth, is *self-destructive*.
It is unable to support its own tenets. This is the eventual end of *unrepented* PD.

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CONFUSING THE CHURCH AS THE KINGDOM OF GOD:

*CLARITY¹ COMES BY LITERAL INTERPRETATION
AND CONSISTENT APPLICATION OF PAUL'S OIKONOMEIA²*

Introduction: *Distinctives Clarify What Other Systems Confuse*

Examples are legion to demonstrate the confusion Bible students encounter without a correct, consistent, and complete orientation to Scripture's meaning. This necessarily points to *useful, unique, and plain, normal, literal, grammatical-historical hermeneutic*. Ryrie explains how right-division *distinctives* serve to end confusion. Ladd, a covenant dispensationalist,

“...cannot agree with the...idea of the Jewish character of Matthew's gospel, but he nowhere explains, for instance, how he can interpret in any normal way our Lord's words of commission to the Twelve recorded in Matthew 10:5-10. Anyone who attempts to interpret plainly this commission, which forbade the disciples to go to the Gentiles, and the commission that commands the same group to go to the Gentiles (Matt 28:19-20) either (1) gives up in confusion or (2) resorts to spiritualizing one of the passages or (3) recognizes a dispensational distinctive.³

Another example regards Amos 9:11-15 and Obadiah 17-21 and *NKJV* commentary.

“God promises to *reinstate* the Davidic line, to *renew* the land, and to *restore* the people.” “The closing verses [of Obadiah] give hope to God's people that they will *possess* not only their own

¹ *Relief* is needed from Amill-, Covenant, Dominion, Messianic Jewish, Messianic Israel, New Apostolic, Postmill-, Preterist, Reconstruction, Regressive (dba, Progressive or PD), Supersession, Theonomist, etc. *confusion*.

² Luke 16:2-4; 1 Cor 9:17; Eph 1:10, 3:2; Col 1:25; 1 Tim 1:4. Scripture establishes that man is charged to obey directives as *stewards, overseers, administrators or managers* during ages or dispensations. Demonstrated in seven ages are: man's responsibility; failure to meet that responsibility; and consequent judgment for that failure.

³ Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1966), 20, emphasis added. Ryrie cites G. E. Ladd as unable to agree with the Jewish nature of Matthew on page 126 of Ladd's 1956 work, *Blessed Hope*.

Land, but *also* that of Edom and Philistia.”⁴ A non-traditional reading of the passages and notes leads to *fait accompli* fulfillment of prophecy now —along with *unjustified global criticism of Israel*. Correct dispensational reading of these texts positions them *as yet future* fulfillment of *four covenants*. National Israel will be restored and will head the nations; Christ will reign on David’s throne in Israel’s Land. All the while, Christ’s heavenly body is, and will be, *partakers*.

Five Cited Prophetic Errors Sourced To *Abandoned* Literal Hermeneutic

Can we sum up the breadth and depth of *potentiated* confusion regarding *things to come*? (See Isa 45:11; John 16:13; Rom 8:38; 1Cor 3:22; Col 2:17; and Heb 9:11, 10:1, 11:20). In particular, what characterizes *progressive* (PD) error? Traditionalist (TD) Brian Moulton states,

What I discovered about PD early on in my dissertation study was that there are at least *five areas* where they have *strayed from TD*: they **1. *redefine*** the literal throne of David, they **2. *do not believe*** that Jesus legitimately offered the kingdom when He came the first time, they **3. *redefine*** theologically the term *mystery*, they **4. *offer*** the complementary hermeneutic which is more *akin to amillennial* thinking, and they **5. *include*** the eternal state in *with* the millennial dispensation.⁵

Dissecting these areas deduces five prophetic distortions of prophecy suffered at PD’s hand:

1. Christ’s *future, physical, reign in Jerusalem, on His throne, suffers preemption now*
2. Israel, *claimed not offered the kingdom, loses it all—granting church right of assumption*
3. Since church *birth and translation devolve indistinctively, we have no specific identity*
4. Amillennialism, allusion, and allegory *forward hermeneutic error via morphed distortion*
5. Eternity —‘*squeezed*’ by time, or else *one millennia ‘s-t-r-e-t-c-h-e-d’ beyond time, either reduces for the lost their eternal despair, or else interminably suspends Rev 20:3 casting*

⁴ Kenneth D. Boa, “Amos and Obadiah Introductions and Outlines” in *The Open Bible, Expanded Edition, NKJV* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1985), 903, 912, emphasis added.

⁵ Brian Moulton, “The Kingdom” in an online response to a student post on Southern California Seminary Forum Discussion 2, Theology 508 (ON-FA13), November 19, 2013, emphasis added. (Dr. Moulton is my teacher.)

Are believers left no recourse but to seek *earthly, militant, activist dominion*? But that is reserved, by covenant, for future theocratic fulfillment. Carnal, unauthorized behavior that attempts to conquer in the flesh is *self-spotting*. Wearing *spots* is warned to bring loss of reward at the *Bema* (Eph 5:27, 1 Tim 6:14, 2 Pet 3:14). Rather, the Galatians 2:20 spiritual life is separated from the snares and cares of the world —having us obey Paul’s 2 Tim 2:4b admonition to instead, “please the one who enlists us as *soldiers*” (NASB) in Christ’s *spiritual war*. The spoils of this war are the souls of men —not booty falsely gained in pre-emptive strikes.

Not Spotted By The World —*Spirit Controls Our Life, Movement, and Being*⁶

A frequent claim among those who profess Christian faith says we are called to “build the kingdom of God.” According to this confused understanding, “kingdom” means the *church* and “build” means to *recruit* converts as *disciples* in this kingdom. But none of this is legitimate conceptualization that answers, “*Who is the church?*” Rather, first, the church is not the kingdom (in any of its forms).⁷ Second, the church does not build her own house, the temple (1 Cor 3:16-17, 6:19; 2 Cor 6:16; Eph 2:21) —Christ Jesus alone builds (multiples) His church (Matt 16:18). Third, born again by the Spirit, we are in Christ —not followers of Him —as if He is a great human teacher.⁸ Our life in Christ entirely functions by the work of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

⁶ Acts 17: 28a, “...in Him we live, and move, and have our being.” How could this describe a kingdom?

⁷ Perhaps the most confusing among eschatological terms is *kingdom*. But to be fair, we must acknowledge many are not *motivationally* wrong to use the term as much as they are *uninformed* regarding its accurate meanings according to the *whole counsel of God*. Five distinctions of the kingdom must be understood to be correctly applied.

⁸ Disciple, pupil, student, apprentice is a deficient, inaccurate identity for members of the eternally glorified body of Christ. More accurately, *being in Christ* identifies us as: *members of His spiritual body; needful sheep; new creations in one new man; stones in His building and crown; branches of His vine; priests in His heavenly kingdom; bond slaves; brethren, partakers of His grace gospel; saints; sons of God; and His future translated, chaste bride!*

Biblical Distinctives Define The Church

Therefore, if the foregoing does not describe the church, what does? The Appendix is an annotated reading and summary of Ephesians 2:4-3:10—Dispensationalist Paul’s extended explanation of our spiritual being in Christ. If it is agreed the Scripture summary describes pertinent parameters and particulars of Christ’s body, then *any other data and interpretation* that does not conform to the model is necessarily inaccurate and unbiblical. And this is my premise.

A wide range of false teachings are weighed and found wanting in their inability to provide useful *system disciplines* that describe God’s entire plan for the ages. And this failing directly and negatively impacts our understanding of who we are as the body Christ. But this error spans a wider range of teachings than just those that were proposed in 1986.⁹ Many errors *confuse* rather than *clarify* what otherwise is effectively codified and communicated over at least the last two hundred years of traditional dispensational teaching¹⁰—not just this focus on PD.

⁹ A last century example of *counterintuitive* definition of the church was introduced at the 1986 study group of the ETS, held in Atlanta. Later, published works attempted to *normalize* these positions: Robert L. Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993); Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* (Wheaton, Victor, 1993). This research serves as partial rebuttal to those positions.

¹⁰ It is not uncommon to incorrectly assume accurate knowledge of the church extends back 2,000 years; that first Paul, then early church fathers, followed by Augustine, Calvin, and Luther, through modern church teachers have all effectively explained who this body is—in last days context. Rather, we find that ecclesiology, study of the church, also requires study of “things to come.” Accurate church identity depends on distinguishing Israel as defined in Abraham’s physical seed (studied by Israelology). Panoramic view of the divine plan for the ages has not been exhaustively shown; committed to print, and made widely available—especially for laymen—until fairly recent times. (The printed page has been available only half a millennia; world travel and communication (the means to share ideas) has flourished only in the last century; and advanced recording, editing, and retrieval (ability to mass disseminate ideas) has not been available except in our life time.) Ryrie reminds that errant Covenant Theology, systematized by the German Cocceius in 1648, surfaced less than forty years before the 1687 work by the Frenchman Poiret that codified teaching on the history of the ages. (Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1965), 71, 181 and *Dispensationalism* (1966), 65, 186. Further, it is meaningless to claim dispensationalism sources to a young Scottish girl, J.N. Darby alone or to early DTS scholars. It is accurate to state wide and popular understanding of dispensations has increased with availability of mass-distributed devotions, church Sunday schools, and regional conferences. To TD’s credit, these venues and methods are exactly what the Bible directs as primary for study of God’s truth—even before secondary opportunity afforded by seminary study.

Christ's Body —Distinct Among Three People Groups

It is puzzling, if not unsettling, to consider doctrine that actually claims Christ's body is an *extension* of the Old Testament people of God taken out of Ur by Abram. This means *we are not now distinct* from unsaved Jews and unsaved Gentiles! *What?* This confusion only prompts further questions, including, "Where do we *begin* and *end* as the church?" "Do we have *one* foot on *terra firma* and the *other* in heaven?" "Do we have identity *in* and allegiance to "our father Abraham?" "Will we suffer tribulation wrath during Jacob's Trouble or does Scripture assure *we are not appointed to wrath*?" Questions are interminable if doctrine confuses rather than clarifies the separate identities, by age, for *both chosen peoples* of God —and these two also distinct from *lost* sons of Abraham and *lost* sons of Cain. God's people groups are Israel (unconverted Jews), the church (converted Gentiles *and* Jews during the current dispensation), and lost Gentiles.

Confusion Caused By Incorrect Understanding Of Divine Plan For The Ages

An example of confusion, Messianic Judaism (MJ) —and its spinoff —Messianic Israel (MI) —envision *premature* kingdom *redemption* and *restoration* for cultural Israel —choosing to identify Jeremiah 31's New Covenant (NC) as *in effect now* rather than accept that the NC kingdom is not yet present —except in its *mystery* form. Correct understanding of *one new man* (Jew and Gentile together in Christ's body) effectively *severs any ecclesial need to identify our faith and worship by culture*. Premature fulfillment of the NC by most evangelicals and nearly all Messianics *reflects the largely Gentile error expressed in the *inaugurated kingdom**. Marvin Wilson is miscredited as systematizing this *pre-maturity* —based on teaching that we are called to *restore* first century faith and practice. Largely supported by *Goyim*, these movements —when taken to extremes —claim restored Hebraic interpretation of Scripture has the mainly

Gentile church *subsumed* in Messianic Torah observance —while also characterizing as “arrogant” Gentiles who do not acknowledge messianic faith and practice is legitimate first century *restoration of the church*. Veiled suspicion of TD’s *systematized theology* parallels PD’s persistence that *complementary fluidity* must correct claimed dispensational *rigidity*. Wilson’s concluding summary typifies (MJ) criticism of *the very rails needed to keep prophecy on track!*

Sound biblical exegesis insists that a text first be heard in its *original* setting. *Finely tuned systematic categories* of Christian thought have too often been *imposed deductively upon* the Old Testament, thus obscuring its original meaning.¹¹ In Jewish thinking ... “[it is] not system but [rather] commentary [that] is the legitimate form through which truth is approached. Because Christians have been overly anxious to systematize Jewish thought, they have left themselves open to misinterpreting the text.¹²

Rather, much commentary observes no bounds and runs prophecy off the rails! We are better off to let *hedge-protected, received tradition*, be our conductor. This tradition operates by: progressive revelation (minus any allusion to Preunderstanding), single meaning for a text, and the literal hermeneutic. This ensures our *preferred theology* does not embrace error that obscures Paul’s teaching of the *one new man*. Students are assured 2 Tim 2:15 *correct handling of Scripture* calls for consistent application of the literal, plain meaning of God’s Word. System-disciplined interpretation of *eight covenants* and *seven dispensations* allows necessary *unlearning of incorrect belief*. Therefore, concluding my study of interpretive systems —*for me* —certain *rules* are needed to understand history as the *outworking* of God’s *covenants*. The following list is not conclusive. It best serves to clarify what was previously unclear to me and also expand my systematic grasp of theological areas I’ve not previously investigated.

¹¹ “Original meaning” cuts both ways. Scores of debates are unresolved regarding *what Bible authors meant*.

¹² Marvin R. Wilson, *Our Father Abraham: Jewish Roots of the Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 330, emphasis added. Question: must we employ *inductive reasoning* at the cost of *deduced truth*?

Twelve Rules Of The Road That Arrive At Correct Interpretation of Scripture

- “...essentials of all prophecy fall under three major categories: the Land, the Messiah, and the End.”¹³ Essentially, *Eretz Yisrael* is not an allegory; assertions of messianic presence *now* qualify as certifiable; and mere *allusion* to eternity erodes its *finality*.
- Christ’s Body does not *cause* His *parousia*. Ratcheting up evangelism does not advance the prophetic calendar even though Messianics urge Jews to make *aliyah* —having them call out, “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord” —believing this will *hasten* Christ’s return. Rather, it is our witness of and for their Messiah that is our duty to Jews.
- Covenants function interdependently with dispensations. Neither operates alone. In the computer analogy —dispensations are the *operating system* enabling covenant software to function. Covenant is the promise that is fulfilled; dispensation is the mechanism by which the God of the covenant manages, keeps, and fulfills His covenant promises.
- Correcting erroneous interpretation of Scripture is accomplished by use of accurate grammar, word meaning, and syntax. Literal hermeneutic is central to correct exegesis. Theological argument is *secondary* to correct handling of the source language. Literal hermeneutic does use typology, illustration, genre, non-inter-testamental apocrypha and figure of speech; Hence, *allegory is shown to be contrary to the teaching of Scripture.*¹⁴
- *Doxological primacy* does not compete with secondary *Christological priority*. Dispensational theology’s doxological orientation honors both *soteriological* and *eschatological* perspectives that contribute to meeting doxological *purpose*. Therefore, *Heilsgeschichte* does not satisfy the best description of a biblical philosophy of history.
- *Analogy of antecedent scripture* allows there is legitimate reference from a text *back* to a prior source; but older texts do not refer *forward* to as-of-yet unwritten Scripture. (Observing this alone amends ineffective Bible study and Sunday School curriculum.)
- False signs and wonders are not the purview of Pneumatological doctrine alone. That prophetic *sign gifts* are ceased is necessary to have consistent, correct eschatology.

¹³ Zola Levitt, “Prophecy: Thus Saith the Lord” in *Old Testament Home Study Course* (Dallas: Zola Levitt Ministries, 1995), III-5.

¹⁴ *Passim* throughout his work, Pentecost’s “X is shown to be contrary to the teaching of Scripture” is *classic*.

- Specifying the *particular kingdom form* is incumbent in correct application of it. Universal/perpetual; moral; mystery; and mediatorial kingdoms are all distinguished.
- Any system, *proposing as optional*, knowledge of propositional truth, is *self-destructive* since it is unable to support its own tenets. This is the eventual end of *unrepented* PD.
- Baker's proposed "Covenantal Dispensationalism" describes a progressive downward spiral that cannot *append* what is already *complete* in TD. This hybrid is oxymoronic.¹⁵
- Focus on Galatians to correct *nomionists* is often futile. Focus on the Book of Hebrews brings greater success. Galatians orients back to law; Hebrews orients forward to our eternal reward. To approach benefit appeals more than avoiding potential suffered loss.
- Intractable tension between contradicting prophetic systems is best bridged by default to classic Pauline orientation with "...it's *vertical*, heavenly" perspective. The traditionalist perspective (Darby, Scofield, Chaffer) is "*horizontal*, seeking to *maintain...economies of the Word, without* fully centering in Paul's Church Epistles." Progressives advocate for development, "...but no amount of ...development will compensate for progression *away from* Paul, et al." Rather, PD "...is on a crash-course *incline*, sliding down to Israel's earthly level, into the *legal realm* of Israel's Synoptics, Sermon, and Kingdom."¹⁶

Conclusion

The best remedy for all of this is simply to *glory only in* the cross of Christ (1 Cor 1:30-31). It is clear that contortionists¹⁷ over centuries try to *add to* or *take away* from the *simplicity* of this glory. But Christ's *completed work is cradled in greater glory.* The Father's glory is not fully revealed until He has drawn time to its close, fulfilling every *jot* and *tittle* of prophecy.

Corrie ten Boom *lived what distinguished Jew from Gentile, Jew from the church. She had no illusions of inauguration.* Rather, her message was, "the best is yet to come." God's glory is not satisfied until every promise to the Jew is fulfilled. Redemption drawing near *cannot be hurried.*

¹⁵ This study resolves my prior concern regarding several authors writing on the theme, "Four or Five Views of X". But *truth is the single view.* Testing a *reflected image* reveals whether the view represents that single truth.

¹⁶ Miles J. Stanford, "Dispensationalism's Missing Link," <http://www.withchrist.org/MJS/missing.html>, 1, accessed 6/28/07, emphasis added. This monograph is no longer available on line.

¹⁷ Contortion: the act of twisting or deforming the *shape* of something, Google definition.

Appendix

(Read the Selected, Bold, Annotated Scripture and Commentary)

“And *the Lord* was adding to their number day by day *those who were being saved*” (Acts 2:47, NASB)

“**But God**, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, **made us alive together with Christ** (by grace you have been saved), and **raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show** the surpassing riches of **His grace** in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them. Therefore remember that **formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh**, who are called "Uncircumcision" by the so-called "Circumcision," *which is* performed in the flesh by human hands-- *remember* that you **were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.** For **He Himself** is our peace, **who made both groups into one** and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, *which is* the Law of commandments *contained* in ordinances, so that **in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross**, by it having put to death the enmity. **AND HE CAME AND PREACHED PEACE TO YOU WHO WERE FAR AWAY, AND PEACE TO THOSE WHO WERE NEAR; for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father.** So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but **you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household**, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner *stone*, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is **growing into a holy temple in the Lord**, in whom you also **are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.** **For this reason I, Paul**, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles-- if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace which was given to me for you; that **by revelation there was made known to me the mystery**, as I wrote before in brief. By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into **the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known** to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; *to be specific*, **that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel**, of which I was made a minister, according to the gift of God's grace which was given to me according to the working of His power. **To me**, the very least of all saints, **this grace was given**, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, and **to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for**

ages has been hidden in God who created all things; **so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places** (Eph 2:3-3:10, NASB).

Paul's Ephesians passage reveals truth that refutes much false teaching about the church:

It is the purpose and the glory of God to reveal *one new man* in the spiritually-birthed individual Jew and individual Gentile. They are the church. With citizenship in heaven, the physical church is on the earth for the duration of the dispensation of the church. *One new man* was neither known nor manifest during prior ages, because God, the Son, had not yet died for the *one new man*. There was no church prior to the Holy Spirit breathing life into the initial 3,000, according to Acts 2. Christ's death, burial, and resurrection provide the only basis for the spiritual birth and eternal life of this *body that will be complete, translated to heaven, and consummated as the Bride of Christ* according to 1 Thess 4:13-18 and 1 Cor 15:51-52.

Recorded in Acts 9, Christ Jesus, the risen Lord, simultaneously converted and commissioned Paul with responsibility to reveal the *dispensation of this mystery* of the spiritual people of God in order that all rule and authority in heaven know the wisdom of the one true God. By power and wisdom a way was made where previously there had been no way for man to be reconciled to God. According to Matthew 16:18, God builds His *spiritual* temple; no power prevails against it. Christ's church is not subject to His wrath or condemning judgment. His body is not a kingdom; nor does *one new man* operate by any power or might of the flesh. This spiritual temple does not replace, negate, or change the program on earth for the lost Jew, the lost Gentile, and the rest of creation that will enter the millennium after the tribulation. God's plan includes Christ's future, one thousand year kingdom reign on earth, during which a physical, rebuilt temple will be the center of worship of Moshiach ben David who is this same Moshiach ben Joseph. This King Jesus will return with His glorified, rewarded bride. From Jerusalem, on David's throne, Christ Jesus will then fulfill long awaited covenant promises made to Abraham and David as Israel will again be the head, and not the tail of the nations. Further doctrine of the church is taught in John 17:22-26; Gal 2:20; Eph 3:9-10; Col 1:27. The Bible does not reveal a blended identity of the church with cultural Israel. Any appropriation by the church of Israel's covenants, her terrestrial rights, and her earthly glory contradicts revelation.

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Underline indicates recommended teacher **Bold indicates incorrect teaching**
(Any can be read without confusion **if** the reader handles Scripture according to 2 Tim 2:15)

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