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Pronomian Paradigm:
A Pro-Torah, Christocentric Method of Theology and Apologetics

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by
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The undersigned certify that they have read and recommend to the Doctoral Degree Committee of Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University for acceptance, a Dissertation entitled *Pronomian Paradigm: A Pro-Torah, Christocentric Method of Theology and Apologetics*, presented by Gregory Scott McKenzie in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor in Philosophy in Theology and Apologetics

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation sets out to demonstrate the continued validity of the Torah for all believers today. As such, this dissertation attempts to show that discontinuity of the Mosaic Covenant is scripturally, theologically, and philosophically untenable. The thesis of this dissertation is that Pronomianism is the paradigm that most cohesively melds theology and apologetics, through its interpretation of Paul's words and deeds at the second Jerusalem council, which unveils the Torah's centrality in New Testament theology, and that Pronomian moral apologetics reveal the Law of God as the only foundation for objective, biblical morality, and the guide to righteous living. This conclusion is developed first via an exhaustive examination of Acts 21. Once the scriptural case is made, the argument shifts to the moral philosophical case for continuity, which is based on the well-known Euthyphro's Dilemma. Lastly, the Pronomian paradigm is examined by its instances in church history and is applied as an example to demonstrate its ability to answer difficult, perennial questions in Christian theology. For future study, the Pronomian paradigm should be developed in more social, economic, and political terms to compare it to theological concepts like Theonomy and demonstrate how Pronomianism differs in its approach to social integration in an increasingly fractured, multipolar, and digital reality.

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Table of Contents

Abstract	iii
Copyright	iv

Acknowledgements.....	v
Chapter 1	9
Research Methodology: Qualitative, Abductive, and Cybernetic	14
Theological Methodology: The Four Pillars.....	15
Apologetic Methodology	18
Aims and the Objective.....	19
Literature Review.....	20
The Law, and the People of God: A Priori of the Reformed Evangelical, the Dispensational Evangelical, the Catholic, the Messianic, and the Jew	20
The Theological Battle Ground: An Excursus.....	20
Limitations and Delimitations.....	32
Ethical Considerations	34
Chapter 2.....	35
Acts 21 in Exhaustive Detail and the Hermeneutical Key.....	35
Aut Paulos aut Malus Homo	35
James’s Fact-Finding Mission, the Context, a Very Serious Charge, and the Birth of a Theological Conundrum	37
Apostasy: An Excursus	38
Galatians and how it Connects to Acts 21 – The Source of the Trial.....	41
Sacrifices after the Resurrection: The Theological Conundrum.....	50
The Transitory Theory of Acts 21	51
Paradigms Driving Transitory Theology	57
No Transition on The Road to Emmaus: Early and Eyewitness Testimony in Luke 24	59
No Transition in the Great Commission	61
No Transition in the book of James (Ya’acob).....	63
No Transition in the Jerusalem Councils: Acts 15 and Acts 21	63
The Transitory Theory, Gentile Inclusion, the Reason for Acts 15 - Circumcision.....	68
Acts 15, Acts 21 The Jew/Gentile Divide: Different Orthopraxy?.....	86
Dogma and the Written Rules of the Law in Acts 15	89
No Transition in the Resurrection Account: Seeing The Forest Through the Trees and The Problem of Early Church History	93
No Transition in Acts 20:7-12 nor 1 Cor. 16:1-3.....	102
No Transition in Colossians 2.....	106
The Conciliatory Theory of Acts 21	117
Where is it Written that it is Unlawful to Eat with Gentiles?	121
The Dividing Wall – An Excursus.....	123

Peter’s Backsliding and Paul’s Rebuke in Galatians	125
The Failure of the Idea of “Unclean Gentile Territory” in the Conciliatory Theory	125
But What About “All Things to All Men?”	127
What Does This Do to the Conciliatory Theory as Commonly Understood?	137
Other Objections:	140
Sacrifices, The Land, Moot Laws (Ought Implies Can) and Paul’s Ritual Adiaphora	140
The Moral, Civil, Ceremonial Distinction: Paul’s Emphasis on Moral Commandments	140
The Moral Emphasis in Paul and Torah Realism	143
Applying the Paradigm: (Hebrews 8:8-9; 9:15, Colossians 2, and 2 Corinthians 2:13-14;):.....	153
2 Cor 2:13-14: Seeking Moses, Finding Messiah.....	163
Labels: Old Covenant and New Covenant.....	163
Chapter 3	172
In the Wake of Euthyphro’s False Dilemma.....	172
The Euthyphro Dilemma.....	175
The False Dilemma.....	176
The Philosophical God and the God the Bible (A is A): Marrying Theology and Apologetics	177
Is There Objective Moral Truth? Immorality and Sin are Synonyms (A is A)	181
Sin and Immorality Are Synonyms: Possible Interpretive and Perception Errors Regarding the Standard of Human Behavior.....	184
Guilt Perception: Epistemological Castles Made of Sand	186
The Interpretative Error: Presuppositional Epistemology	187
The Inference of Cultural Moral Relativism and Epochal Relativism	189
Is the Law of God Objective and Relative Simultaneously?	190
The Nightmares.....	191
Objective Moral Truth (Restraint and Sanctifying): Natural Law and Revealed Law Come from the Same Source.....	203
The Word of Adonai, The Hand of Moses: Writing Preexisting Morality and Pleasant Commands	207
Progressive Revelation is Not a Content Change	213
Christ as Teleology for Abolition	215
Adonai is the Immutable Standard: The Standard is Christ.....	216
Adonai and Euthyphro	217
Chapter 4.....	219
Conclusion	219
Bibliography	222

Chapter 1

Paradigms are the lenses of life.¹ They are constructs of thought and method that color the world in which we live and the realm of ideas. For example, if one wears red lenses, everyone and everything in the room will be red-tinted.² Likewise, through the use of polarized lenses, what was hidden by reflected glare becomes visible, and the wearer becomes able to see clearly into water. Paradigms influence investigation and data interpretation and allow for clear (or muddied) thinking on just about every topic known to man. Theology and apologetics are no different, and radically divergent points and counterpoints have been developed in order to explain philosophical principles, Scripture, history, tradition, and personal experience.

It is often said within Christian circles that one should have a “biblical worldview,” which is a paradigm that professes that the Bible is the source by which to conduct oneself in the world, the final word on what is good or evil. More accurately, however, the *manuscript evidence* is the final authority on these matters. The Bible, as typically known, consists of various translations derived from various translational methods that rely on and weigh varying sources differently, which makes the Biblical translations technically not the *final* authority because the translations are derivative. This is not said to rehash arguments about biblical reliability or the bigger issue of whether or not the *autographs* are inerrant, for those topics would be far outside the scope of this dissertation. What will be said here, is that I assume that the work done on historical reliability is *sufficient* enough to place the manuscript evidence as

¹ It was science historian Thomas Kuhn who gave “paradigm” its contemporary meaning, which typically refers to a set of practices or models of scientific discipline that define the methods, the research questions, and interpretation of the problem being researched. Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 3rd ed. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996).; Krister Stendahl, “The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West,” *Harvard Theological Review* 56.3 (July 1963), 214.

² Tim Hegg, “My Big Fat Greek Mindset,” Part 1, *Torah Resource* (2006). <https://tr-pdf.s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/articles/my-big-fat-greek-mindset-combined.pdf> (Accessed Jan 3, 2023).

the *final* authority in the absence of the autographs, but that the Bible as it is commonly found, must be read carefully to find perhaps unwarranted linguistic assumptions, textual additions, obfuscation primarily from language incompatibility, and always with the historical context as front and center. Secondly, the historical veracity, primarily Habermas's "minimum facts" of the resurrection point to confirmation that all things written in the Tanakh are in fact the Word of God because Christ rose from the dead.³ Thirdly, assuming both the manuscript evidence and the historical veracity of the resurrection, one should read the manuscripts via hermeneutic realism and with a great appreciation and deference to the literary form and to the worldview encountered in the text and with knowledge of the historical and Hebraic context.⁴ Lastly, given the genre and historical Hebraic context, one can find that there is true meaning in the text, but as moral literary agents, it is required that the words written are given the opportunity to have their perlocutionary effect in changing us in the way it was intended.⁵ With all this, even though we do not have perfect infallible evidence, we do have sufficient evidence, or what Vanhoozer calls, "adequate interpretation" to render sound judgments, interpret the text, and follow in the Messiah's footsteps.⁶

³ One of Habermas's historical "minimum facts" is that the majority of scholars agree that a historical change in the worship day from the Sabbath to Sunday did take place. This dissertation will show that although the historical narrative does show the majority taking this view, it does not follow that the majority is correct. Historical narrative is exactly that: what happened in history. History as method is concerned with what happened, not with what *ought* to happen. For example, the historical narrative shows that the Israelites made the golden calf, not to indicate that they *should* have, but simply that they did. In other words, history is descriptive, not prescriptive.

⁴ Tom Holland, *The Contours of Pauline Theology: A Radical New Survey of the Influences on Paul's Biblical Writings* (Scotland: Mentor, 2010), 15, 51-54.; Richard Longenecker, *The Christology of Jewish Christianity* (Vancouver: Regent College, 1970), 24.; Matthew Black, *An Aramaic Approach to the Gospels and Acts* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967).; Elliott C. Maloney, *Semitic Interference in Marcan Syntax* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1981), 5.; David Hill, *Greek Words and Hebrew Meaning: Studies in the Semantics of Soteriological Terms* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 14, 19-20.

⁵ Jacques Ellul, *The Ethics of Freedom*, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976), 163.

⁶ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?: The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 139 See Gary R. Habermas, *The Risen Jesus & Future*

The notion of a “biblical worldview,” is quite complex given the complexities of biblical interpretation.⁷ The art, science, and faith of interpretation is subject to four general areas of methodology that have come to be known as the “Wesleyan Quadrilateral.”⁸ Contained *within* the four primary methodologies are things like theological, ecclesiastical, philosophical, epistemological, cosmological, anthropological, scientific, political, and historical paradigms (even fads and zeitgeists) that weight evidence and disregard evidence differently among the various sections of the quadrilateral.⁹ Through these various paradigms, the Bible, humanity, society, and history are interpreted, theologies developed, and denominations birthed (or divorced). Furthermore, it is through these paradigms that the people of God orient their lives, interpret the Bible and historical events, determine how to pray, worship, work, give, and establish what *they think they believe*. Further complicating the matter is that persons are not *tabula rasa*, but they are all sinners. Therefore, all methods and evidences are, by necessity, fallible, prone to error and distortion of the text (particularly in texts that require physical and

Hope (United Kingdom: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003), 8.; John D. Morrison, *Has God Said?: Scripture, the Word of God, and the Crisis of Theological Authority* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2006), location 5151 Kindle.; C.B. McCullagh, *Justifying Historical Descriptions* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 4.; Craig L. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the New Testament: Countering the Challenges to Evangelical Christian Beliefs* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2016).

⁷ Most people, including even some theologians, sincerely think they know what the Bible says, but are ignorant of what is actually written and in what contexts they were written. Primarily the Hebraic worldview and the covenantal structure that determines soteriological status as well as other theological conclusions. For example, the deep proliferation of syncretistic practices like yoga, even within Evangelical circles, is indicative of either biblical ignorance or wanton disregard for the instructions in the name of Christian “liberty.” The real question here is what liberty actually is and how it is defined. Is “liberty” inherently antinomian, as demonstrated in much of the Christian literature, or is it something else? Harry Allotey, “Christian Liberty,” D.Min Dissertation (Lynchburg, VA: Liberty University, 2021).; Christopher Michael Berg, “Purging the New Age: A Theological Analysis of the Use of New Age Practices by the Church,” Ph.D. Dissertation (Lynchburg, VA: Liberty University, 2021).

⁸ Scripture, Reason, Experience, Tradition. See Don Thorsen, *The Wesleyan Quadrilateral: Scripture, Tradition, Reason, Experience as a Model of Evangelical Theology* (Lexington: Emeth, 2005).

⁹ A cogent overview of the various methods of theology and modes of revelation that have been attempted in both Catholic, Protestant (evangelical and liberal), and Neo-liberal theology is Cardinal Avery Dulles, *Models of Revelation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1992).

concrete personal change).¹⁰ However, the lack of concrete and certain theological epistemology in the Digital Age need not lead to a total lack of knowledge; rather, it should be the genesis of better methods of interpretation that are more abductive, wherein one seeks out the simplest and most likely conclusion from the available data.¹¹ As Vanhoozer says, we can have fallible knowledge, but that is certainly not the same thing as the sea of uncertainty and subjectivism that postmodernism leaves in its wake.¹² This newfound respect for hermeneutical suspicion should open the door for new inquiry and theological testing, especially since, in my view, the current and historical answers to what are fundamental biblical questions have become in the view of this author to be insufficient, as there are other ways to interpret the possibly antinomian texts that maintain originalist intent and Christ's primacy, but reach fundamentally different conclusions. The case at hand, Torah continuity. To that end, this dissertation seeks to challenge and test the post-Torah lenses that have colored the history of Christian theology for about 1500-1800 years.¹³ These post-Torah lenses seem to have been cemented on the face of theologians of all stripes, and the fundamental question of the place the Torah has in the life of individuals and the *ekklesia* has not been sufficiently vetted in light of growing historical linguistic knowledge, advances in Pauline and ecclesiastical history, advances in moral apologetics, and against basic

¹⁰ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?: The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 428.

¹¹ David Baggett and Jerry L. Walls, *God and Cosmos: Moral Truth and Human Meaning* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016), 15, 77. Simplest is not the same as complex. For the simplest solution may be quite complex.

¹² Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, 300.

¹³ Post-Torah, as defined by Tim Hegg, refers to the era of the believing communities (churches) in which the primary matrix of "faith and practice" is entirely without connection to the Torah. Hegg compares the term Post-Torah to Postmodernism in that, in the postmodern era, life is seemingly lived without concrete truth. Tim Hegg, "All Things to All Men: Paul and the Torah in 1 Cor. 9:19-23, *Torah Resource*. <https://tr-pdf.s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/articles/all-things-to-all-men.pdf> (Date Accessed July 23, 2023).

logic, even though the ocean current of tradition and theology has settled the issue in the minds and conscience of many. The post-Torah paradigm is used to interpret the Apostolic writings and make application in the vast majority of scholarship and commentary. In some cases even infecting translation and interpretation of the Bible with words that support this implicit and explicit antinomian *a priori*.¹⁴ This dissertation is one that is re-raising old questions that challenge the prevailing paradigm by showing the viability of a Pronomian/Pro-Torah paradigm in both theology and apologetics.¹⁵ The prevalent theologies of contemporary Christianity cannot remain consistent, cohesive, comprehensive, or comely when they attempt to answer questions about the “difficult-to-understand” words *and* deeds of Paul.¹⁶ Put another way, these theologies fail the abductive test of theological method and biblical interpretation. The thesis of this dissertation is that Pronomianism is the paradigm that most cohesively melds theology and apologetics, through its interpretation of Paul’s words and deeds at the second Jerusalem council, which unveils the Torah’s centrality in New Testament theology, and that Pronomian moral

¹⁴ There are several examples of interpretative bias that have been carried over into English translations based on interpretive decisions. Several of which will be touched on during this dissertation. One such example is the use of the word *apostasia* that will be thoroughly examined here and occurs in Acts 21. Another issue explored in this dissertation is translational bias from Jerome’s Vulgate, primarily in Hebrews 8:8-9 and not abiding by the lexicon previously established in the Vulgate in Jer. 31. A more notorious example include the KJV’s anachronistic use of the word “Easter” in Acts 12:4 when the Greek *πάσχα* is used which is an obvious reference to the Passover. Of particular importance to this dissertation is Paul’s nuanced use of *νόμος* and why this word does not always refer to the Mosaic Law. Texts such as Gal. 2:16 where most translations attempt to set up a mutually exclusive antithesis with a novel use of the English word “but” for the Greek *ἐὰν μὴ*, when the other 51 times it is used in the NT, it is translated as “except” or “unless.” This is often done as many interpreters think that to use the more common “unless or except” is to undermine Paul’s whole argument in Galatians. See Thomas R. Schreiner, *Galatians*, Ed. Clinton E. Arnold (Grand Rapids: MI: Zondervan, 2010), 162. However, if read in the lens of a nuanced use of *nomos* by Paul, no such mutual exclusivity need to be read into the text. See, Cha, *Misinterpreting Galatians*, 108-110. Other interpretive *assumptions* also include worldview framing such as understanding Hebraic paradigms and how these influence the biblical authors use of the Greek language. See Wilson, *Our Father Abraham*; J.A.L Lee, *A Lexical Study of the Septuagint Version of the Pentateuch*, Society (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983), 11-12.

¹⁵ Here, I use the words “Pronomian” and “Pro-Torah” as synonyms and will be used interchangeably throughout this dissertation.

¹⁶ 2 Pet. 3:16.

apologetics reveal the Law of God as the only foundation for objective, biblical morality, and the guide to righteous living.

Methodology

Research Methodology: Qualitative, Abductive, and Cybernetic

This dissertation falls squarely within a qualitative paradigm, as it seeks to develop a paradigmatic interpretive lens by which one reads and obeys the gospel.¹⁷ Via the synthesis of scriptural data, theology, moral philosophy, history, tradition, and other relevant sources, this Pro-Torah paradigm will attempt to provide evidences that are more comprehensive, cohesive, consistent, and comely than the major interpretive outcomes of contemporary Christianity. In this regard, this qualitative paradigm uses abduction as a better source of epistemic knowledge by inference to the best explanation of scriptural, theological, philosophical, ecclesiastical, historical, and experiential data given. Licona describes this type of abductive methodology and its ability to show the likelihood of a hypothesis to be true. For Licona, as well as the present author, a hypothesis is more likely to be true when it has better explanatory scope, explanatory power, greater plausibility, is less ad hoc, and provides illumination to other problems.¹⁸ I typically use the words comprehensive, cohesive, consistent, and comely as the markers of a truly explanatory hypothesis.

Furthermore, and lastly, considering the vast amount of inputs and their feedback onto theology and apologetics, and that the goal of this dissertation is the establishment of a hermeneutical key, it seems only fitting that this qualitative theology be described as

¹⁷ 2 Thess. 1:8.

¹⁸ Michael R. Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010), 108-110.

cybernetic.¹⁹ Like a captain steering a ship, both the water and the rudder are determining the movement and direction of the ship. In short, both theology and apologetics are systems oriented toward certain goals, and knowing whether or not one is achieving the goal requires a feedback loop which necessarily affects the one practicing theology and apologetics, resulting in either small course corrections or even full repentance.²⁰ As observers of and participators with the works and Word of God, it is actually impossible for us to perform scientifically objective study on this topic.²¹ For, in the process of practicing theology and apologetics, we are changed by the mere observation of the Word. As to the goal of theology and apologetics, shouldn't it be geared toward the goal of scripture, that being Christ and knowledge of Him? Therefore, if this Christological cybernetic approach, insofar that theology and apologetics have a goal of human regulation toward the goal, that being Christ, then the scriptures are the control mechanism which guide the human and the systems of steering (theology and apologetics) toward that human teleology.

Theological Methodology: The Four Pillars

In the above introduction, I mentioned the “Wesleyan Quadrilateral.” It is by these four principles that this Pronomian paradigm is developed: scripture, reason, tradition, and

¹⁹ Norbert Wiener, *Cybernetics: Or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine*, 2nd ed. (New Orleans, LA: Quid Pro Books, 2013).

²⁰ This is Vanhoozer's perlocutionary effect of the text. As one gains understanding, one acts in accordance, and the more one acts, the more he understands. Faith leads to reading, reading to understanding, understanding to faith. A implies B, B implies C, C implies A. Although this is an epistemological circle, all reasoning is ultimately based upon axioms, which are by nature based in metaphysics and therefore non-provable. This dissertation makes no attempts to prove the unprovable. In any case, circularity ultimately must end in some transcendental argument leading to God as the basis of human epistemology and language. See John M. Frame, *Apologetics to the Glory of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1994).; Carl F.H. Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority: God Who Speaks and Shows*, vol. III, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1999), 387.; C.S. Lewis, *Miracles* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2001), 33-36.

²¹ Heinz von Foerster, “Ethics and Second-Order Cybernetics,” in Heinz von Foerster *Understanding Understanding: Essays on Cybernetics and Cognition* (New York, NY: Springer, 2003), 287-289.

experience. A primary contention within this dissertation is that scripture and reason must be co-equal laborers. There is no such thing as understanding the scriptures without reason, and reason unregulated by the scriptures is likewise bound to fail. Given their inherent symbiosis within the human system and their necessary prominence in theological and apologetic enterprises, they are the two parts of methodology that are herein emphasized.

That is not to say that tradition and personal experience are relegated as second-class denizens in this dissertation's method.²² They are actually quite important and serve more like fascia, connective tissue, that helps bind the bigger systems together. To that end, the primary use of experience is that understanding is highly personally contextual and that an individual's sanctification takes place along a continuum toward a certain goal for *that* individual. As a person grows, their understanding of the faith *will* change. Experience can also lead to a disintegration of faith, if incorrectly interpreted. This is the proverbial bad apple ruining the whole bunch. Association with bad apples tends to infect the soul and behavior of others. C.S. Lewis makes a prime example of good (and bad) company and how they are forces which are used in the growing or shrinking of faith.²³ I recognize that experience, trauma, and individual history serve as the primary contextual lens for most people and, quite frankly, is the foundation of personal wisdom. Secondly, as far as experiential theological method is concerned, I assume that divine discourse does take place in the events of life, and God can and does speak to people *outside* of the Scriptures, but the message conveyed will never contradict actual written

²² Although tradition and experience can never be removed, nor can one step outside of them, what I am attempting to show is that Tradition and Experience have to be judged by two higher standards. A primary point of argumentation in this dissertation is that both Jewish tradition and Christian tradition, whether stemming from the 2nd Century, Roman Catholicism, and Reformed have suffered serious doctrinal missteps as a result of tradition.

²³ C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2001), 49-52.; 1 Cor. 15:33.

Scripture.²⁴ Whether it is like C.S. Lewis’s “northernness” or “sehnsucht” or Plantinga’s reformed epistemology, the fact remains that it is possible for individuals to experience significant words of God through personal things like dreams or transcendent moments in time.²⁵

Tradition is also vitally important, in both positive and negative approaches. As a positive instance, as will be shown in this dissertation, if one can determine which traditions (*paradosis*) and teachings (*dogmata*) were followed by Paul, Jacob (James), Peter, and John, then perhaps one could determine what true orthopraxy and orthodoxy should be followed.²⁶ Richard Bauckham once said, “The earliest Christology is the best Christology.”²⁷ It seems that this maxim is likewise useful here: as in, the earliest orthopraxy is the best orthopraxy. Tradition, as far as method is concerned, can also be used negatively, in that, if any interpretive tradition fails the abductive test then it should be modified or abandoned. As such, this dissertation, primarily in the literature review, details the various traditions, but does not seek to totally dismantle them by a verse-by-verse proof, reviewing *all* possible objections in a systematic elenctic manner. Rather, this dissertation will focus primarily on investigating Acts 21 and testing theology via Euthyphro’s Dilemma thus showing the potential superiority of the Pronomian Paradigm.

²⁴ Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim that God Speaks* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 1-18.

²⁵ Robert Sloan Lee, “As if Swallowing Light Itself: C.S. Lewis’s Argument from Desire, Part I,” in eds. David Baggett, Gary R. Habermas, and Jerry L. Walls, *C.S. Lewis as Philosopher: Truth, Goodness, and Beauty*, 2nd ed. (Lynchburg, VA: Liberty University, 2017), 317.

²⁶ 2 Thess. 2:15; Acts 16:4. It will be fleshed out in this dissertation, but for now suffice it to say that much of the Apostolic writings, at least to my understanding, point toward how, or by what traditions, believers in Christ should walk. Given Paul’s background as a Pharisee, it’s impossible to overstate the importance of and enforcement of essential (Acts 15:28 - *epanagkes*) dogmatic rulings and traditions, which are of the utmost importance during this time in 1st century Judaism. See Jacob Neusner, *The Rabbinic Traditions Concerning the Pharisees Before 70*. Vol 3. (Leiden: Brill, 1971), 305.

²⁷ Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and other Studies on the New Testament’s Christology of Divine Identity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 128-130, 195-210.

Apologetic Methodology

This dissertation assumes an apologetic methodology of Reformed epistemology, a properly basic ability for man to perceive not only God but righteous morality, through what has become known as the *sensus divinitatis*.²⁸ Although this dissertation relies heavily on evidential methods, it also recognizes the awakening of desire, a change in orthopathy, and comeliness as fundamental in its theology. The work of God in an individual, it seems, begins with some form of orthopathic change that orients the person toward the Most High. In short, because theology and apologetics are geared toward individual and community teleology, to be conformed to the image of Christ, the inclusion of desire, awe, and attractiveness, among other perlocutionary events *within* the individual, mandate this type of method.²⁹ I think that Reformed epistemology is the honest recognition that epistemology typically begins with a measure of chutzpah, emotion, and faith, rather than overwhelming evidence.³⁰ This is particularly relevant in philosophical portion of this dissertation which claims that the Torah, was known by man, in nascent forms before the actual writing of the Torah, and was even known to Gentiles to certain degrees.³¹ Thus, the old and overused Anselmian phrase, “Faith seeking understanding” is still, nonetheless, appropriate. Not that evidence plays no part, such as in a strong and unchastened fideism, but rather realizing the following: that induction only goes so far, that the curses of

²⁸ Alvin Plantinga, *God and Other Minds: A Study in the Rational Justification of Belief in God*, 2nd ed. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990) and *Warrant and Proper Function* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1993), and *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2000).

²⁹ Clifford Williams, *Existential Reasons for Belief in God: A Defense of Desires & Emotions for Faith* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2020), 17-60.

³⁰ Kelly James Clark, “Reformed Epistemology Apologetics,” in ed. Steven B. Cowan, *Five Views on Apologetics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 266-284.

³¹ Rom. 1:32.

Eden, Babel, and Ebal corrupt all areas of human epistemological endeavor, and that “evidence,” tainted and interpreted as it is, rarely is the means by which minds and hearts are truly changed.³²

Aims and the Objective

The primary objective of this dissertation is to develop a Pronomian theological and reinforcing apologetic paradigm. To that end, there are two avenues of approach to reach this objective. The first is via scriptural analysis of Acts 21 and its related texts of Acts 15, Acts 10 and 11, and 1 Cor. 9. As reason and scripture are co-equal laborers in human understanding, this section of scriptural analysis includes, at its beginning, a logical outline of Paul’s actions in Acts 21, in which the author makes the case that Paul is either telling the truth, or that he is a bad man, either liar or insane, thus *aut Paulos aut malus homo*.³³

The second avenue is via philosophical reflection about Scripture’s connection to moral apologetics, specifically applying Euthyphro’s dilemma to the Law of God. Here, the case is made that full continuity of the Law of God is required by both moral reasoning and consistent Christology and that when Euthyphro’s dilemma is solved as a false dilemma, the Law of God is revealed as a necessary, direct, and eternal reflection of Christ, who is the Law of God made flesh.³⁴ In other words, any theological abolition of the Law means that Christ denies himself.

³² Gen 3; Gen 8; Deut. 27:26.;

³³ C.S. Lewis originated this form of argumentation as an apologetic for the Christ’s divinity. Either Jesus is God, or he is a bad man (*aut Deus aut malus homo*). In this dissertation, I apply a similar methodology to the actions of Paul and James in Acts 21.

³⁴ Richard Longenecker, *The Christology of Early Jewish Christianity* (Vancouver: Regent College, 2001), 39-41.

Literature Review

Given the complexity and methodology of this dissertation, the pertinent literature has both significant depth and breadth. As is common in qualitative dissertations and particularly in Digital Age theology, the amount of material that could be digested and considered is essentially infinite, and ever growing. There is no way to analyze it all. However, there are seminal texts, and general ideas which one can explore, and there is no shortage of theological inquiry to the fundamental question of how much of the Bible is actually relevant and applicable to believers *today*.

The Law, and the People of God: *A Priori* of the Reformed Evangelical, the Dispensational Evangelical, the Catholic, the Messianic, and the Jew

Entering into the debates on continuity vs. discontinuity of the Law and the so-called Law vs. grace divide is to enter into perennial and often intractable disagreements in Christian theology. The continuity arguments, outside of Christology, are perhaps some of the earliest theological disagreements recorded in Church history, and engaging these arguments are like stepping into the octagon to spar with a myriad of theological heavy hitters who take positions on the various sides, ranging from full-continuity to full-antinomianism.

The Theological Battle Ground: An Excursus

The following consists of what I consider to be the best representation of the various positions and is not meant to be fully exhaustive. Because no general theological position is a monolith, those that fall into a general school of thought on the topic at hand may yet disagree with what is widely held as the quintessential representation of the position. As such, these are broad descriptions on the Law's requirements and how Scripture actually presents the data.

Historically, the conclusions fall into six categories:

- 1) Contradictions in Paul's writing about the Law,
- 2) Developmental and transitory theology and understanding, regarding Paul, and the Apostles
- 3) The Law's total invalidity for the believer today,
- 4) The Law's validity in various degrees for the believer today (e.g., moral vs. civil and ceremonial),
- 5) The Law's total validity for the Jews, while only the Noachide Laws, or some type of other covenant applies to Gentiles, this is commonly any form of dual covenant theology.³⁵
- 6) The Law's total validity in all times and eras to all peoples.

Based on the broad categories above, accordingly, one finds E.P. Sanders, who sees contradictions in Paul's writings.³⁶ Sanders, however, along with Heikki Räisänen, also fall into a group of theologians who also advance the Transitory Theory on Paul, which generally holds that Paul's view on the Law, and thus their theology developed over time.³⁷ Among the preeminent theologians who view the Law as no longer binding in any case to believers are F.F. Bruce and Albert Schweitzer.³⁸ In the next group there are those who find the law still binding, though in various degrees of requirement and with qualifications, often making distinctions

³⁵ There are several forms of dual covenant theology. From Jewish theology that in some cases gives only the Noachide Laws to the Gentiles, while they hold the Covenants of Promise. Dispensational theology shows various forms of this thinking. Some early dispensational thought gives the New Covenant only to the physical people of Israel, based on Jer. 31, while the dispensation of the Church is not technically in the New Covenant, but in another Covenant exclusive to them. In both cases, the Torah is exclusively to the Jews, while the Gentiles are not given or are not bound by them.

³⁶ E.P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1977); *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1977).

³⁷ Heikki Räisänen, *Paul and the Law* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1983) and W.D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism*, 4th ed., (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1980), and *Jewish and Pauline Studies* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1980).

³⁸ F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1973).; Albert Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, trans. W. Montgomery (New York, NY: Holt, 1931), 179.

between moral, civil, and ceremonial laws and following in the line of Calvin.³⁹ Among these are C.E.B Cranfield, whose commentary on Romans is probably one of the best ever written, and the prominent Walter C. Kaiser Jr.⁴⁰ These authors are primarily focused on the obligatory moral components, but their separation into ceremonial and civil laws means that those portions of the Torah neither deserve nor demand existential or concrete obedience from believers today. Similarly, R.C. Sproul makes a philosophical and hermeneutical case in which he distinguishes between principal matters and matters of custom in order to parse out his understanding of moral components versus customary requirements found in the Torah.⁴¹ For an overview of the general positions above (excepting the full continuity position, which is expounded upon here in this dissertation), see Brice L. Martin's *Christ and the Law in Paul*, which serves as one of the best expositions of the various positions ever written and goes into far greater detail than the information presented in this short section.⁴²

Associated with the positions above are the major theological systems, and their attendant theological positions, with which this dissertation interacts. The first is Protestant Dispensationalism, which typically falls along the lines of F.F. Bruce with total discontinuity. Prominent theologians here are Ryrie, Fruchtenbaum, Walvoord, and House, among many others.⁴³

³⁹ John Calvin, *Institutes* Book II, Ch VIII.

⁴⁰ C.E.B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*. Vol 1, Vol 2. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975).; Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Recovering the Unity of the Bible: One Continuous Story, Plan, and Purpose* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 151-163.

⁴¹ See R.C. Sproul, "Principle vs. Custom: Knowing Scripture with R.C. Sproul," Ligonier Ministries, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TvbnR-MlvdY> (July 6, 2022), (Date Accessed September 25, 2022).

⁴² Brice L. Martin, *Christ and the Law in Paul* (Leiden: Brill, 1989), 21-68.

⁴³ Charles Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1965) and his revised progressive version *Dispensationalism* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 2007), Arnold Fruchtenbaum, *Israelology: The Missing Link in Systematic Theology* (San Antonio, TX: Ariel Ministries, 1989), H. Wayne House, ed., *Israel: The Land and the People, An*

On the other hand, Protestant Reformed theonomy typically falls into the category of Calvin and Cranfield, in that while there are universal moral laws from Moses that continue, the civil and ceremonial laws are abolished. The most popular and well-known theonomist is Greg Bahnsen.⁴⁴ However, even within theonomist circles, there are disagreements on what the moral laws are (e.g., Rushdoony who includes Lev. 11 and the food purity laws as part of the moral law).⁴⁵ There has also been a new thrust of Reformed thinking, coming in the form of “Christian Nationalism” that questions the moral carryover and obligation to follow them today. They claim that perhaps the moral regulations were more cultural and, using the language of Sproul, that they are not principial moral standards.⁴⁶ This view takes a more philosophical stance on morality that grounds moral standards in God, but not necessarily in the Torah (Theistic Natural Law). These Reformed theologians are explicit holders of replacement theology and its associated assumptions and its either post-millennial or amillennial eschatology, that transfers the promises once given to the physical nation of Israel to the Church today.⁴⁷

The position laid out in this dissertation could be called Christian Pronomianism, but it also goes by other names such as One-Torah Messianic Judaism, Jewish Christianity, or

Evangelical Affirmation of God's Promises (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1998).; C.I. Scofield, *Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth* (New Jersey: Loizeaux Brothers, 1896), 12.; John F. Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1959).

⁴⁴ Greg L. Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1984).

⁴⁵ Rousas John Rushdoony, *Leviticus*, vol.3 of *Commentaries on the Pentateuch* (Vallecito, CA: Ross House Books, 2005), 107-126.

⁴⁶ Stephen Wolfe, *The Case For Christian Nationalism* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2023), 266.

⁴⁷ This dissertation will not attempt to show that Replacement Theology is in error, but will show a version of Enlargement Theology through the inclusion of the Gentiles into the Covenants of the Promise. The promises to Israel still remain, and Gentiles are graciously ingrafted into those existing covenantal structures. See Alex Jacob, *The Case for Enlargement Theology*, 2nd ed. (United Kingdom: Glory to Glory Publications, 2011).; Jason A. Staples, *Paul and the Resurrection of Israel: Jews, Former Gentiles, Israelites* (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2024).

Apostolic Judaism, and its position is that the Law of God is fully applicable to believers today.⁴⁸ The primary difference between One-Torah Messianic Judaism and Pronomian Christianity is that of worship orthopraxy and the acceptance of various traditions.⁴⁹ The Messianic synagogue keeps some of the features of Orthodox Jewish synagogues and the profitable traditions in worship and catechism. One-Torah theology stands in contrast to the other Messianic positions within the UMJC & MJAA, which in, some cases, uphold a form of bilateral ecclesiology (wherein Jews and Gentiles have different orthopraxy).⁵⁰ Pronomian Christians, on the other hand, keep Evangelical worship practices and the ecclesiastical organization of the various Christian denominations (Reformed, Methodist, Baptist, etc.), but do not follow some of the more traditional synagogue practices. In short, they look more like traditional Sunday worship, but follow the biblical calendar, observe the feast days, and the Sabbath. Both One-Torah Messianic Congregations and Pronomian theologies uphold the Torah, but there is significant disagreement on practice and tradition.

In addition to these Torah observant-groups there is what has been called the Hebraic Roots movement.⁵¹ Although the Hebraic Roots movement has similar views on continuity to Messianic Judaism/Christian Pronomianism, the movement differs in many distinct ways, some

⁴⁸ Tim Hegg, *The Letter Writer: Paul's Background and Torah Perspective*, 2nd edition, (Tacoma, WA: Torah Resource, 2008) and *Ten Persistent Questions: Why We Keep Torah* (Tacoma WA: Torah Resource, 2013).; "Historic Christianity and Apostolic Judaism: The Core Difference," (2003), *Torah Resource* <https://tr-pdf.s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/articles/historic-christianity-and-apostolic-judaism-the-core-difference.pdf> (Accessed July 26, 2023). David Wilber, *When Faith Works: Living Out the Law of Liberty According to James* (Amazon, 2019) and *Remember the Sabbath: What the New Testament Says About Sabbath Observance for Christians* (Pronomian Publishing, 2022).; Ray A. Pritz, *Nazarene Jewish Christianity* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University Press, 2006).

⁴⁹ Messianic Judaism weighs tradition as a stronger component of theological methodology.

⁵⁰ Mark Kinzer, *Post-Missionary Messianic Judaism: Redefining Christian Engagement with the Jewish People* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2005), 151-180.; Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations (UMJC); Messianic Jewish Alliance of America (MJAA).

⁵¹ <https://www.hebraicrootsnetwork.com/hrn-family/?v=7516fd43adaa#> (Date accessed October 3, 2022).

of which are significant issues. For instance, there are some issues in Christology seemingly coming close to the beliefs of the Ebionites or skirting Docetism. In bibliology, some sects of the Hebraic Roots reject Paul's writings or focus on the apocrypha and pseudepigraphic writings as reliable and foundational scripture.⁵² Other, more minor issues come from ecclesiology (i.e., who is Israel?) and the resultant eschatology (i.e., Two House Theory and its striking similarities to Herbert W. Armstrong and the Worldwide Church of God).⁵³ The Hebraic Roots has some popular teachers including Bill Cloud, Hollisa Alewine, and Daniel Botkin. The primary thrust of its outreach is typically on YouTube, and web-based personalities include Zachary Bauer and Adam Fink, among several others.⁵⁴ In my opinion, the creators at 119 Ministries and their "Pauline Paradox" series is worth serious consideration and its popular-level presentation has broad appeal.⁵⁵ Many theologians in this group, however, espouse a distinct distrust of authority, both in theological and magisterial realms, and the general thrust might be best represented by Alexander Hislop.⁵⁶

This dissertation also briefly interacts with Jewish Orthodoxy and their belief in the Noachide Laws for Gentile converts, but primarily with the historical understanding of

⁵² Like all theological movements, the quality of teachers and teachings span the spectrum. I want to make it clear that there are some really good teachers within the Hebrew Roots movement, but there has yet to be a solid attempt at reigning in and checking the theological methods of the group as a whole, which, as shown above, has led to error.

⁵³ Herbert W. Armstrong, *The United States and Britain in Prophecy* (Worldwide Church of God, 1980).

⁵⁴ Zachary Bauer, www.new2torah.com and <https://www.youtube.com/c/ZacharyBauerNew2Torah> (Date accessed, October 3, 2022); Adam Fink, www.parableofthevineyard.com & <https://www.youtube.com/c/ParableoftheVineyard> (Date accessed October 3, 2022).

⁵⁵ 119 Ministries, "The Pauline Paradox" Video Series 1-8, <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLo5QtZ1bPyYbLdyw2AnVKX9tm-b2YJFhQ> (Accessed July 26, 2023).

⁵⁶ Alexander Hislop, *Two Babylons*, 2nd American Ed, (New Jersey: Loizeaux Brothers, 1959).

soteriology within the various sects of 1st century Judaism.⁵⁷ For audiences not familiar with the Noachide Laws, these are a set of seven commandments within today's rabbinic Judaism that the Gentiles must follow in order to have a place in the eschatological kingdom.⁵⁸ In fact, it is not that uncommon to find biblical scholars who think that the commands contained in Acts 15 are partially derived from these Noachide Laws which were contained in earlier oral tradition. Although the Noachide laws were not actually codified until much later, around the time of the 4th century, it is thought that the commands found in Acts 15 were the halacha that were demanded of resident aliens and sojourners in 1st Century Judaism.⁵⁹ That being said, the historical narrative seems to indicate that the Noachide laws were developed well after the destruction of the temple, as one of the methods that the sages used to deal with theological and halachic issues during severe persecution in the post-destruction era. The historical evidence seems to point to a change in soteriological thought from Pharisaical Judaism and the requirements for full cultural and racial conversion in the form of a proselyte circumcision for gentile inclusion in the eschatological kingdom to post 70AD Noachide Laws.⁶⁰ As time went on, however, the doctrine was strengthened and connected all the way back to Noah and Adam,

⁵⁷ Mark Nanos, *The Mystery of Romans* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1996).; Mark Nanos and Magnus Zetterholm, eds., *Paul within Judaism: Restoring the First Century Context to the Apostle* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2015).; The history of how Gentiles were included into the covenants of God is not new and predated the Sect of the Way and the greater Jesus movement of 1st Century Judaism. See Terence L. Donaldson, *Judaism and the Gentiles: Jewish Patterns of Universalism (to 135 CE)*, (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007); Christine E. Hayes, *Gentile Impurities and Jewish Identities: Intermarriage and Conversion from the Bible to the Talmud* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2002).

⁵⁸ Mishnah Torah, *Hilchot Melachim* 8.11.

⁵⁹ David Novak, *The Image of the Non-Jew in Judaism: The Idea of Noachide Law*, 2nd ed., Ed. Mathew Larrone (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011), 11-35.

⁶⁰ Ryan D. Collman, "(Un)Making a Theological Mountain Out of a Cardiologist's Mohel: Heart-Circumcision in Paul's Epistles," *JJMJS* 10 (2023), 89-105.

as a preexistent form of natural law before Moses received the written Torah at Sinai.⁶¹

Connected with this position of the preexistent Noachide laws is the prevalent position within Rabbinic Judaism that believes the Torah is the sole possession of the people of Israel and that it belongs to them alone. To that end, it seems that the Noachide laws could, in fact, be a historical reaction to that of the supersessionism coming out of the 3rd and 4th Century Catholic Church which transferred (replaced) the Jews as the inheritors of the covenant promises.⁶²

Lastly is Roman Catholicism. Unlike the largely protestant or Jewish sources above, the Romists add significant tradition by the authority of councils and papal edicts to their position of the Law and its discontinuity. The foremost and seminal work is from Samuele Bacchiocchi.⁶³ Bacchiocchi deals frankly and openly with Romists' syncretism of pagan days, sun worship, holidays (including the addition of Christmas, which the Reformers and Puritans rejected). His discourse details both Church history, Christianity's spread through pagan Europe, and Papal/council authority as causes for the orthopraxical change away from the *moedim* and Sabbath.⁶⁴ An extremely relevant quote which is representative of the Romists' discontinuity of the Sabbath and the Law comes from Rev. Peter Geiermann, in reference to the "third commandment," (as the RCC changed the 10 Commandments).

"Which is the Sabbath day?" "Saturday is the Sabbath day."... "By what authority did the Church substitute Sunday for Saturday?"

⁶¹ Tim Hegg, "Do the Seven Go to Heaven?: An Investigation into the History of the Noachide Laws." Washington, DC, 2006.

⁶² It is quite important to keep in mind that the early church and the unbelieving Judaisms were interacting with and responding to each other. As antisemitism grew, there was naturally a response from those within Judaism. As Jews created more doctrines and as more off shoots of Christianity were created, there were naturally Christian responses.

⁶³ Samuele Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday: A Historical Investigation of the Rise of Sunday Observation in Early Christianity* (Rome: The Pontifical Gregorian University Press, 1977).

⁶⁴ William Croft Dickinson, ed., *John Knox's History of the Reformation in Scotland*, vol. 1 (New York: Philosophical Library, 1950), 91.

“The Church substituted Sunday for Saturday, by the plenitude of that divine power which Jesus Christ bestowed upon her.”⁶⁵

(i.e., Epistemic authority is based solely in the tradition of the council of Laodicea, AD 336, and the authority of the Pope, not the Scriptures). I believe that neither, councils, synods, nor papal bulls are infallible and that all findings contained therein must be weighed like a book written by any other human author, even if one agrees with the findings, many of which may prove beneficial for understanding. Any appeal to council or synod as *truly* binding for believers suffers irreparably from the informal fallacies of *argumentum ad populum* and a cognitive bias of *argumentum ad verecundiam*. This type of thinking also undercuts the entire edifice of the Protestant Reformation.⁶⁶ This does not necessarily mean that *all* conclusions of the councils are incorrect. Simply, the appeal to their authority as *concretely* binding, whether in doctrine or morals is fallacious. I heartily disagree with the Council of Laodicea (AD 336) in regard to the Law and the Sabbath, as well as the antisemitism of a significant portion of the Alexandrian school in early Church history, which ultimately led up to the antisemitic writings of Luther. In short, anyone can disagree with the councils and traditions in the same way that they may dispute the arguments of, say, William Lane Craig or Herman Dooyeweerd.⁶⁷ They are all merely men.

As evidenced by the excursus above, the sheer number of differing views, which Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. accurately describes as, “a veritable Babel of voices and positions,” is an ongoing,

⁶⁵ Peter Geiermann, *Convert's Catechism of Catholic Doctrine*, 12th ed., (St. Louis, MO: B. Herder, 1937), 50-51. <https://curate.nd.edu/downloads/und:bv73bz63h5c> (Date accessed October 3, 2022).

⁶⁶ Tim Hegg, “It is Often Said: Two Thousand Years of Christianity Cannot be Wrong!,” *Torah Resource*. <https://tr-pdf.s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/articles/it-is-often-said-2000-years-of-christianity-cannot-be-wrong.pdf> (Date Accessed July 24, 2023).

⁶⁷ See for example the antisemitism in *The Epistle of Barnabas* 4.6; Justin Martyr *Dialog with Trypho.*; Origen, *Against Celsus* 4.22.; Eric Metaxas, *Martin Luther: The Man Who Rediscovered God and Changed the World* (New York, NY: Viking, 2017), 416-420.

and permanent sticking point in Christian theology.⁶⁸ The reason for the heated debate is that a step to the left or the right sends resultant ripples which have ramifications across all theological categories.⁶⁹ Moreover, any changes in this realm of theology may necessitate potentially seismic shifts in individual and collective orthopraxy, may monumentally impact communities and families, and may fundamentally alter one's beliefs regarding objective moral truth, the nature of God Himself, hermeneutics, societal interaction, and the very edifice of one's faith. As already stated by Vanhoozer, texts that require *physical change* are often the most contentious!⁷⁰

While these potential outcomes are problematic, the real battles are in the *paradigms*. Digital Age Christian theology is fairly littered with intractable and unresolvable presuppositions. For instance, if one sets out to interpret Paul through the lens of a Greek mindset, the hermeneutical outcome will be surprisingly different than when interpreting with a Hebraic mindset.⁷¹ This can be seen in the differences between Bultmann who places Paul within a distinctly Greek paradigm or more recently those like Nanos, Holland, or Thiessen who put Paul within a robust Jewish paradigm.⁷²

Furthermore, it has become fairly well established that the Greek of the Apostolic writings was not really koine (common), but rather is a construction of Hebraic thought and

⁶⁸ Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., "The Law as God's Gracious Guidance for the Promotion of Holiness," in Stanley N. Gundry, ed., *Five Views on Law and Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), 180.

⁶⁹ Cybernetics is unavoidable in the theological endeavor.

⁷⁰ Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, 428.

⁷¹ This is a fundamental exercise in hermeneutic *a priori*. Was Paul of a Greek or Hebraic in his mindset? One could look at Augustine or Rudolph Bultmann (Greek Paul) vs. E.P. Sanders, N.T. Wright, or Tom Holland (Hebraic Paul) as representatives of both positions. See Tom Holland, *The Contours of Pauline Theology: A Radical New Survey of the Influences on Paul's Biblical Writings* (Scotland: Mentor, 2010), 15, 51-54.; Richard Longenecker, *The Christology of Jewish Christianity* (Vancouver: Regent College, 1970), 24.; Matthew Black, *An Aramaic Approach to the Gospels and Acts* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967).

⁷² Matthew Thiessen, *A Jewish Paul: The Messiah's Herald to the Gentiles* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2023).

should be rightfully called Hebraic or Jewish Greek.⁷³ As a consequence, this dissertation attempts to adhere to a contextually accurate and historically appropriate Hebraic starting point, maintaining an originalist and literal-grammatical hermeneutic and the results herein are a result of that *a priori*.

Another example is that of the monist vs. dualist paradigms.⁷⁴ Presuppositions such as these so thoroughly color the Christian's reading and understanding of Scripture, that it becomes a nearly impossible task to tease out one's own *a priori* from *sola scriptura*. In any case, much of the scope of neo-Platonic, and even gnostic influence in Christian theology disparages the physicality of the Law as somehow lesser and favors either allegorical or "spiritual" interpretations, thus abandoning the physical aspects altogether. In these one can still claim "sola scriptura" but the associated interpretive lenses are obvious. But therein lies the rub, *sola scriptura* has no real meaning unless one has hermeneutical or historically based *a priori*. With that, the vicious circle appears. Without Scripture and historical context, we have nothing, and without Reason we have no means by which we can glean from Scripture or the historical context.⁷⁵ Thus, the term *sola scriptura* is something of a misnomer and is really a protestant

⁷³ Elliott C. Maloney, *Semitic Interference in Marcan Syntax* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1981), 5. Maloney cites Isidore of Pelasium, *Epistle* 4.28, in J.P Minge, *Patrologia Greca*, who demonstrates that the "Greek" in the Apostolic Writings was despised by people who spoke "common" Greek.; See also, David Hill, *Greek Words and Hebrew Meaning: Studies in the Semantics of Soteriological Terms* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 14, 19-20. Hill makes the case that the Hebraic influence of the Apostolic writings should typically be derived from the Septuagint. The Septuagint and the Apostolic writings are Greek, but the syntax and thought forms expressed are uniquely Hebraic and should be interpreted as such.

⁷⁴ John Morrison, "Two Puzzles about Thought and Identity in Spinoza" in *Spinoza's Ethics: A Critical Guide*, ed. Yitzhak Y. Melamed (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 56-81.; John W. Cooper, *Body, Soul and Life Everlasting: Biblical Anthropology and the Monism-Dualism Debate* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000).

⁷⁵ In short, the battles are in the *a priori*, for like the Law and the Prophets, theologies hang on just a few over-arching principles (Mt. 22:40).

clarion call against papal infallibility as opposed to a truly doctrinal position of the Bible's perspicacity without external referents, whether of history, linguistics, or anthropology.

Again, this is why Reason, Scripture, Tradition, and Experience are coequal laborers.⁷⁶ They are inseparable, interacting dynamically, and the believer's understanding is ever-growing, albeit imperfectly. In essence, one's own theology and understanding can only ever be fallible and provisional. In fact, Evangelical and Protestant theologies demand individual provisional understanding (*semper reformanda, semper reformata*). If sanctification is a logical category, then we *should* be growing in understanding, rejecting old and incorrect notions, realizing the full truth, and becoming more like our perfect Father.⁷⁷ Furthermore, given that people are granted their measures of faith and various gifts, it follows that they may believe and act differently from one another and their old selves.⁷⁸ Now, that does not mean that things so subjective that one must accept Derrida's *différance* and the endless array of language signposts; rather, reality is better described by C.S. Lewis, who writes that, when someone becomes a Christian, he embarks on a *process* of his soul being transformed.⁷⁹ That being said, it seems that human theological endeavor is one that grows and is refined in community. If the Christian is never exposed to various theological stances, say, of Reformed Soteriology or the continuity of

⁷⁶ Although all four sources of theological method enjoy a coequal status, Scripture and Reason stand as the arbiters of truth. As Carl Henry says, "...in the whole canon of Scripture which objectively communicates in propositional-verbal form the content and meaning of all God's revelation." Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority* (Waco, TX: Word, 1976), 87. Thus, both Scripture and the means by which we can interpret it (Reason) are the two primary sources of theological knowledge.

⁷⁷ Mt. 5:48. E.g., Cybernetic theology.

⁷⁸ Rom. 12:3; Rom 12:6; 1 Cor 12:1-31.

⁷⁹ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 14.; C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York, NY: Harper One, 2001), 207-217. Again, this is the cybernetic approach at work, and the process can be positive or negative, resulting in either reinforcement or disintegration. The mere existence of the Church is not proof of its correctness, and the plethora of denominational expression could be a sign of mass disintegration.

the Law of God, then they might never grow by truly wrestling with the biblical texts. Here we can be like Jacob, wrestling with God. It seems that many Christians (and their favorite theologians) simply employ hermeneutical heuristics, committing confirmation bias, to support their pet positions. Many laypersons merely rely on the anchoring bias and false consensus bias. For instance, when one comes to faith, the tradition that they enter into or grow up in becomes the prevailing (and therefore “correct”) paradigm. If at some point in the walk of life, they become disenchanted with said tradition, they may abandon it and move on to another tradition, or worse, abandon the entire faith. Whatever the case may be, for good or for ill, the interaction between faith, reason, experience, and traditions have led to a plethora of theological results, including this dissertation.

Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations

The only substantial limitations in this qualitative endeavor are the author’s finitude and sin’s noetic effects. By God’s grace may my shortcomings be lessened, my message thorough and compelling, the ears of the hearer be open, and the eyes of the reader clear.

Delimitations and Some Assumptions

A dissertation of this type requires specific boundaries in regard to its goals. In developing the Pronomian paradigm, I will neither rehash all the relevant points in the continuity vs. discontinuity and Reformed vs. Dispensational debates, nor attempt a verse-by-verse exegesis of every possible verse that might be used to disprove the thesis. Although this may appear to be a sign of weakness, interacting with all possible textual objections it is not the goal of this

dissertation. That work has been done before, and I wish to stand on those shoulders, particularly in certain strands of the burgeoning Messianic, Torah-observant, and Pronomian communities. As it relates to possible objections from all manner of verses, I simply refer to the various scholarly and popular-level articles that have been reviewed above, not to mention the scriptural and philosophical attempt contained herein. Like all areas of theology, some of these areas rely on previously established *a priori* and are subject to intense scrutiny by the various schools; these debates typically are intractable and will continue until Shiloh comes. Rather, this dissertation is to introduce Pronomianism to the greater academic community with philosophical, logical, and hermeneutical weight, rather than with debating established and entrenched theological paradigms. Thus, the goal is to establish a paradigm of theology and apologetics and, with it, a seat at the theological table. Although the idea of continuity, how Adonai has revealed Himself in time and the various theologies this idea has spurred is not new, the approach herein sheds new light for consideration.⁸⁰

Should the continuity position prove valid, the knock-on effects in personal theological practice could be significant, as already stated. To that end, personal worship practice and even church community orthopraxy is omitted from this study. Currently, there exists a certain discord between Messianic Judaism and Pronomian Christian communities, which centers on a disagreement in orthopraxy and tradition. Accusations from the Messianic community include that of implicit supersessionism, while Pronomian Christians accuse the Messianic community of Rabbinicism. This dissertation will not take a position on the growing pains between the

⁸⁰ Richard E. Averbeck, *The Old Testament Law for the Life of the Church: Reading the Torah in the Light of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2022), 258-262.; Daniel I. Block, *The Gospel According to Moses: Theological and Ethical Reflections on the Book of Deuteronomy* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2012), 135.; An excellent detailing of not only progressive revelation through time and ways in which (dis)continuity is found within the Scriptures and via theological understanding of revelation can be found in Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2003).

Messianic community and those in Torah-observant Christianity who worship without the traditions of the Messianic synagogue.⁸¹

Ethical Considerations

The primary ethical consideration for this dissertation is that the author deals forthrightly, truthfully, and faithfully with the biblical text. Secondly, it is incumbent that I graciously, without misrepresentation or willful distortion, interact with the authors, experts, theologians, and philosophers who have come before.

⁸¹ In full disclosure, I attend and am a member of a Messianic synagogue. As will be shown in the dissertation, there seems to be a great deal of evidence backing tradition (*paradosis*) and teaching (*dogmata*) that were enforceable in the earliest Church and, as such, might lend credence to more traditional practice. The crux of the dissertation however is geared toward the actual written Torah and not necessarily *how* those commands are worked out, which comes via tradition (Mt. 23:2; Acts 21:21).

Chapter 2

Acts 21 in Exhaustive Detail and the Hermeneutical Key

Aut Paulos aut Malus Homo⁸²

C.S. Lewis pioneered an argument for the authenticity of the claim that Christ is the Son of God. The crux of his dilemma is that either Jesus was telling the truth or that he was a madman or even the devil himself.⁸³ In Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, Prof. Diggory Kirke helps Peter and Susan determine that their sister Lucy is neither a lunatic nor a liar by bluntly asking them a series of questions regarding Lucy's record of behavior, especially in comparison to their brother Edmond's. They come to the only logical conclusion, which is that Lucy was in fact telling the truth.⁸⁴ This argument has become known as *aut Deus aut malus homo* (either God or a bad man). Despite this argument's seeming imprecision and oversimplicity, it holds water and deserves its storied success as one of Lewis's most popular apologetic arguments for the divinity of Jesus (Yeshua).

It was the simplicity of this argument and its relationship to bibliology that spurred the idea that it might be applied as a hermeneutical logic test to the writings and actions of the apostles, most notably John, James, Paul, and Peter (the apostolic pillars for both Jerusalem councils – Acts 15 and 21). Not that any of these men were perfect or divine; in fact, it was because of Peter's violation of his own direct instruction from the Lord (Acts 10 and 11) that he

⁸² A different and more popular level version of this argument can be found on my website. Gregory S. McKenzie, "Acts 21 – The Hermeneutical Key: Either a Good Paul, a Madman, or a Liar!" <https://thepronomian.com/pronomian-hermeneutics/acts21-liar-madman-truth> (Date accessed October 23, 2022).

⁸³ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2001), 53.; "Christian Apologetics," in *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 101.; "What Are We to Make of Jesus Christ?" in *God in the Dock*, 167-168.; "Rejoinder to Dr. Pittenger," in *God in the Dock*, 196.; See also G.K. Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1926), 191-210.

⁸⁴ C.S. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2000), 47-51.

stands condemned by Paul (Gal 2:11-12).⁸⁵ Given that the instructions handed down by the Apostles in Acts 15 and 21 are doctrinally binding and inspired Scripture, it stands to reason that the Apostles can also be tested by Lewis's dilemma. Were the Apostles lying (or insane) or were they truthful? It is a basic logical hermeneutics test.

The main text at hand is Acts 21:21-24.

²¹and they have been told about you, that you are teaching all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children nor walk according to the customs. ²²What, then, is *to be done*? They will certainly hear that you have come. ²³Therefore do this that we tell you. We have four men who are under a vow; ²⁴take them and purify yourself along with them, and pay their expenses so that they may shave their heads; and all will know that there is nothing to the things which they have been told about you, but that you yourself also walk orderly, keeping the Law. ⁸⁶

What seems to have escaped real scrutiny is the actual logic of this text. There are only two options for what Paul was preaching in the diaspora: either Paul was preaching the forsaking of Moses, or Paul was not preaching the forsaking of Moses. Interestingly, Paul's words are not recorded by Luke in this exchange with James. However, what is recorded is the insistence that Paul *is not* preaching the forsaking of Moses to the Jews in the diaspora, which is shown by James's imperative to partake in what is probably a Nazirite vow to show that Paul "walks

⁸⁵ Simon Peter, despite being directly told by Adonai that he should not declare man as unclean, reverts to an obviously false oral law (*dogma*) that prohibits Jews from eating with Gentiles. In short, Peter was being hypocritical to true doctrine (confirmed in Gal. 2) because of pressure from a group of rabbinic authorities and their unwarranted *dogma* and the obvious dividing wall that it placed between Jew and Greek that seemingly precipitated Peter's hypocrisy and apostasy from the true doctrine. A further explanation of Acts 10-11 and the "dividing wall" between Jew and Greek will follow below in the section about the "Conciliatory Theory."

⁸⁶ "*to be done*?" is italicized in the NASB 95 and indicates that the *ἐστὶν* is "implied" and not in the original Greek. But I believe that James's original question stands on its own, "What then is!?" As will become clear, it seems that James is rather surprised by the news that he and Peter have heard about Paul's preaching. It seems to be a question as to Paul's real actions in the diaspora. James is simply asking Paul if these accusations are true. The KJV simply states, "What is it therefore?" Which is speaking directly to the charge of apostasy instead of what Paul and James should do.

orderly, keeping the Law.”⁸⁷ Given this fact, there are only three conclusions at which the reader can arrive in order to interpret this text:

- 1) Paul is telling the truth.
- 2) Paul is lying to James.
- 3) Paul is a madman.

Therefore, *aut Paulos aut malus homo*. Either Paul is a truthful man, or he is a bad man and ought to be abandoned as a false apostle.

James’s Fact-Finding Mission, the Context, a Very Serious Charge, and the Birth of a Theological Conundrum

Before continuing, as is the case with all hermeneutical efforts, a basic contextual grammatical overview is in order, especially given the seriousness of the charges against Paul in the logical analysis of Acts 21. From the total context of Acts 21, it is clear that both Jews and Gentiles were coming to faith in Messiah in some rather large numbers. James says in v. 20 that “many thousands” among the Jews located in Jerusalem have believed. The word that is translated “many thousands,” *myriads*, is at a minimum ten thousand and up to “an innumerable host.” Perhaps even a translation of ten thousand times ten thousands is appropriate. The typical understanding regarding the Jews of the 1st century, according to the writings of the early Church fathers (especially of the Alexandrian school), is that the Jews *en masse* and a practical totality rejected Messiah. Nevertheless, the events of Acts 2, which occur at the time of Shavuot (Pentecost), and this very account by James seem to indicate otherwise. The success of the early *ekklesia* is due to these many thousands of Jews, who believe in the Messiah and are “zealous for the Law.” It is not a question that most Jewish people in Jerusalem rejected the Messiah and that

⁸⁷ See Numbers 6 for the requirements of the Nazirite vow: purification, refraining from grapes and wine, sacrifices, and shaving of hair.

the major thrust of Judaism today holds to the rejection of Jesus, but population estimates for Jerusalem at about 70AD indicate between 80,000-400,000 people and could indicate a significant number of believers, per capita, in Jerusalem at the time of Acts 21.⁸⁸

Luke writes that it was reported to James that Paul had been telling the Jews who were among the Gentiles not to circumcise their children and to “forsake Moses.” However, the Greek actually indicates something much stronger than merely forsaking the person of Moses. In fact, Paul is being accused of apostasy (*apostasian*), which is the Greek word that is translated “forsake.” This is a very serious charge indeed! Paul is being accused of no less than apostasy.

Apostasy: An Excursus

A subtle but important distinction is in order: the difference between forsaking and apostatizing. Firstly, *apostasian* means only one thing in the Greek text: to abandon the one true religion. *Egkatalaipo* and *katalaipo*, on the other hand, both mean “forsaking.” However, this type of forsaking seems to be used in reference to relationships between people (Mt. 27:46; Mk. 15:34; Acts 2:27, 31; 2 Cor. 4:9; 2 Tim. 4:10; Heb. 13:5). There is however an important connection made by Peter in 2 Peter 2:15 (*katalaipo*) that connects this type of relational forsaking of the “right path” with a deeper doctrinal and divine forsaking of the Commandment of God, which is found a few verses later in 2 Peter 2:21 (*hypostrepho*).⁸⁹ This is quite similar to Jeremiah’s usage in Jer. 2:19, which the LXX interprets “apostasies” from *apostasia* and

⁸⁸ David H. Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary* (Clarksville, MD: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1996), 301.; Ariel and D’vorah Berkowitz, *Torah Rediscovered*, 5th ed. (Shoreshim Publishing, Inc., 2012), 109.

⁸⁹ Verse.15: “Forsaking (*katalaipo*) the right way, they have gone astray, having followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness.” Verse. 21: “For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness than having known it, to turn away (*hypostrepho*) from the holy commandment handed on to them.

“forsake” from *kataleipo*.⁹⁰ Thus, a spiritual and doctrinal “forsaking” (i.e., apostasy) is found more precisely in words like *apostasian*, *hypostrepho*, *apostrepho* (Hos. 14:4 LXX), and *parapipto*.⁹¹ These words are more indicative of orthodoxy, orthopraxy, orthopathy, and one’s state of belief and how they live that belief out.⁹² Therefore, when one commits apostasy, they forsake (*kataleipo*) their relationship with the Most High and the community of believers and are liable for a certificate of divorce, a word which just so happens to share the same root as apostasy (see *apostasion*)! Of course, this notion of divorce is directly applicable to the bride of Christ; much of the covenantal language of the New Covenant is cast in marital terminology (e.g., Jer. 31:31-33 which says, “although I was a husband to them”). Apostasy, for all intents and purposes *is* adultery and could be cause for a certificate of divorce (*apostasion*).⁹³ Therefore, *apostasia* and *kataleipo* are not synonyms, but rather, personal forsaking is what happens between people as result of apostasy (i.e., being “cut off from your people”).⁹⁴ Therefore, it is important that Luke used *apostasia* in Acts 21 because, if the charge of apostasy was true, then

⁹⁰ “Your own wickedness will correct you, and your apostasies (*apostasia*) will reprove you; Know therefore and see that it is evil and bitter for you to forsake (*kataleipo*) the LORD your God, and the dread of Me is not in you,” declares the Lord GOD of hosts.”

⁹¹ Heb. 6:6; Ez. 14:13; 15:8.

⁹² Actions speak louder than words. Deeds are the fruits of belief.

⁹³ There is an argument that claims that Adonai divorced Israel because they broke the Covenant. This argument uses Deut. 24:1-4 in an attempt to show that, in connection with texts like Jer. 3 and Heb. 9, that God has to die and become a new man in order for him to remarry his people. That somehow in Christ’s hypostatic union and via the resurrection, his historically new ontology as truly man and truly God makes him a new man and thus is allowed to marry the wayward bride. This argument is insufficient because, although Israel was unfaithful to the covenant (Jer. 31; Ex. 32), the law in the Torah about divorce is quite specific. Deut. 24:1-4 details that original husband cannot remarry the wife only if she had married another man who also divorced her. Since Israel did not marry another man, although she did show unfaithfulness, playing the harlot, she is never shown as marrying another. On this note, even at the height of Israel’s harlotry, there was always a faithful remnant who did not bend the knee and worship other gods. Secondly, Christ’s death is more indicative of atonement for sin as opposed to a legal loop-hole that allows him to remarry his people after a divorce. In fact, Christ’s death is the very sacrifice needed to overcome these intentional acts of apostasy. This will be covered below in the section demonstrating the Pronomian Paradigm in Heb. 8-9.

⁹⁴ see Mt. 18:15-20; 1 Cor. 5:5

the result would have been a personal forsaking of Paul (*kataleipo*). In much the same way, the act of *apostasia* (violating and leaving the rules of the marriage covenant) leads to *apostasion* (divorce) and *kataleipo* (personal forsaking) from the Most High.

Furthermore, the word *apostasia* is used but twice in the Apostolic writings: here, in Acts 21, and in 2 Thess. 2:3, which is in reference to the man of lawlessness and the great *apostasy*. In 2 Thess. 2, interestingly enough, *apostasia* is, in English Bibles, directly translated as “apostasy” instead of “forsake” like it is in Acts 21. Although there is a school of thought that considers the great apostasy to be the “rapture,” the context of lawlessness (the man of lawlessness) and those who follow that path (the apostates) renders this view quite unlikely. Nowhere in Scripture is the word *apostasia* used in the context of current believers, it is always of those who have abandoned the faith. That being said, certainly, the translators should have rendered the translation of James’s discourse in Acts 21 as “apostasy from Moses.” This is a more direct and accurate description. However, that translation would clearly indicate that adherence to the Law of Moses and at least some of the “customs” were part and parcel with the one true religion, over thirty years after the resurrection! Perhaps interpretative bias is at play due to theological antinomian commitments, or maybe there is confusion between *kataleipo* and *apostasia* as synonyms? Either way, the charge of apostasy is much more significant than simply turning away from Moses as a person, which is what the word ‘forsake’ (and its more typical source of *kataleipo*) would indicate. However, one’s interpretation of what the one true religion is, here in Acts 21, could bring to bear dramatic interpretive ramifications on 2 Thess. 2:3: what Law is the man of lawlessness breaking, and what doctrinal aspects of the one true faith do the people need to break in order to cause a great apostasy? It seems, based on James’ and Paul’s interaction that the Law spoken of is none other than that written by the hand of Moses, lived out and interpreted by

Christ, and then lived out and taught by the Apostles. Thus, leaving the commandments given by Moses is the most likely definition of apostasy, and the means by which one leaves covenant with God. The refusal of abiding in the commandments (*practicing* lawlessness) is the single greatest marker of an apostate.

The Monumental Importance of Acts 21

Acts 21 may be one of the most important historical texts in the Bible, yet it is the source of much confusion, being the genesis of several theories on how to interpret the text, the most prevalent of which are the contradictory Paul theory (not to mention a contradictory James, Peter, and John), the conciliatory theory, and the transitory theory. Standing apart from these theories is what I have termed the continuous theory and is defended herein.⁹⁵

Galatians and how it Connects to Acts 21 – The Source of the Trial

While Galatians is frequently used as evidence of Torah abolition by the majority of commentators, what is quite interesting is that within the Book of Galatians, Paul writes that Peter, James, and John added nothing to his gospel when he visited them in Jerusalem.⁹⁶ The historical setting of the Book of Galatians, being written about thirty years after the resurrection, places it among the earliest and most important of Paul's letters (remember that the earliest orthopraxy is the best orthopraxy). It is my contention that in over thirty years' time the doctrine would have been sufficiently worked out between James, John, Peter, and Paul, and the believers under their instruction *would not* be zealous for the Law, if the purpose of Christ, as supposedly taught by these very same apostles was to partially (or completely) abolish the Law of Moses.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ The contradictory Paul is covered in this section (i.e., him being a liar). The transitory, conciliatory, and continuous theories will be handled in the next section.

⁹⁶ Gal. 2:6.

⁹⁷ What has escaped most interpreters is that Gentiles were not privy to the Law of Moses and so had no knowledge of being under anything written by Moses. Instead, Gentiles were alone and without God in the world.

But then why are there *myriads* of believers who are zealous for the Law? Have not the Jewish and Gentile believers under the Apostles instruction not understood their newfound freedom from Moses? Surely after thirty years and after the writing of Galatians, this would not be the case.

Furthermore, and logically speaking, considering the widely recognized timeline, if Paul's message of Mosaic discontinuity to James, Peter, and John was approved as evidenced by Gal. 2, then why would James question Paul about his message of apostasy from Moses a few years later here in Acts 21?⁹⁸ Based on the timing of Paul's travel to the Galatians, there would have been no question that Paul was teaching the cessation and abolition of Moses because that message was approved by council before the writing of Galatians. If Paul's Gospel message was already approved, then the prominent question that presents itself is why the charade of Acts 21?

Thus, the message of Torah abrogation would have only really been *relevant to the Jews*. See Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 376.

⁹⁸ Although the timing of Paul's visit and letter to the Galatians has been subjected to much debate as to whether it happened before the First Jerusalem council or after the First Jerusalem council, I typically favor a dating before the first Jerusalem council, and most certainly before the second Jerusalem council found in Acts 21. It will be touched on later in the dissertation, but it seems the main thrust of Paul and the Council of Acts 15 is most likely, surrounding the *proselyte circumcision* of the incoming gentile believers as a requirement for *salvation*. It will be explained more thoroughly below, but the Rabbinic literature as well as some manuscripts from Qumran correspond to Acts 15:1 in that there was a requirement to become Jewish (by circumcision) in order partake in the eschatological kingdom, the resurrection, and the world to come. It seems that instances of Paul's discourse could actually be referring to Gentile proselytes who were seeking to impose by coercion proselyte circumcision for salvation. For this see Michele Murray, *Playing a Jewish Game: Gentile Christian Judaizing in the First and Second Centuries CE*, SCJUD 13 (Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2004), 35-36.; Matthew Thiessen, *Paul and the Gentile Problem* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016), 95.; Runar M. Thorsteinsson, *Paul's Interlocutor in Romans 2: Function and Identity in the Context of Ancient Epistolography* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 2003). Unfortunately, a verse-by-verse explanation of Galatians is outside the scope of this dissertation. Since this dissertation is focused on creating a Pro-Torah/Pronomian *a priori* based on Acts 21, I can only direct the reader to others who have already done that work. See Todd A. Wilson, *The Curse of the Law and the Crisis in Galatia* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2018).; Tim Hegg, *Paul's Epistle to the Galatians* (Tacoma, WA: Torah Resource, 2010).; J.K. McKee, *Galatians: For the Practical Messianic* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2012).; M.I. Cha, *Misunderstanding Galatians: An Exegetical, Originalist Commentary*, (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2021).; Eric Tokajer, *Galatians in Context* (Pensacola, FL: MDN, 2019). D.G. Dunn, *Epistle to the Galatians*, ed. Henry Chadwick (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1993).

To recap, historical analysis shows that the events of the second Jerusalem council (Acts 21) take place *after* the writing of the epistles to the Galatians and even most likely 1 Thess. and Romans, which are the very books most interpreters use to show Mosaic abolition.⁹⁹ So again, why the charade of the second Jerusalem council? Perhaps a blunt answer is that the Apostles must lie to keep the peace in Jerusalem. Well, that makes them all liars, at worst, or doctrinally contradictory, at best. Perhaps, like Bultmann indicates, they are in the *process* of making up a new Greek religion and have yet to cast off the old vestiges of Jewish thought.¹⁰⁰ Thus, their theology is moving or transitory.¹⁰¹ Or perhaps they are simply being “all things to all men,” which is the typical interpretation within evangelical thought.¹⁰² The crux of this evangelical interpretation uses 1 Cor. 9:19-23 in connection with the popular interpretation of Peter’s vision in Acts 10 and 11 to interpret Paul’s actions in Acts 21. Thus, Paul, in Acts 21 is simply being conciliatory to the Jews while actually truly teaching Mosaic abolition. But perhaps more cynically, the apostles are doctrinal chameleons, considering the extreme variance in orthopraxy between Jew and Greek, of which there is supposed to be no separation.¹⁰³ Surely, there is a solution to these “hard to understand” things Paul has been saying in the Diaspora.

⁹⁹ A well accepted historical timeline would be 1) Peter’s vision in Acts 10-11. 2) Paul’s actions and writing in Galatians, 1 Thess., and James’s Epistle 3) The first Jerusalem council (Acts 15) and Romans. 4) 2nd Jerusalem Council (Acts 21).

¹⁰⁰ Rudolph Bultmann, *Primitive Christianity in its Contemporary Setting* (New York, NY: Meridian Books, 1956).

¹⁰¹ Merrill C. Tenney, *New Testament Survey Revised, Revised by Walter M. Dunnitt* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985), 246-255

¹⁰² A quote from the translator’s notes in the NET Bible epitomizes this theory. In regard to the word “purify” *hagnizo* in Acts 21:24 the note says, “That is undergo ritual cleansing. Paul’s cleansing would be necessary because of his travels in “unclean” Gentile territory. This act would represent a *conciliatory* gesture. Paul would have supported a law-free mission to the Gentiles as an option, but this gesture would represent an attempt to be sensitive to the Jews (1 Cor. 9:15-22).” See Acts 21:24, note “ae,” *NET Bible*, 2nd ed. (Biblical Studies Press, 2017), 2109. Italics added for emphasis.

¹⁰³ Rom. 10:12.

The options that have been birthed out of these interpretations are:

- 1) **Liars:** Paul, James, and Peter are liars and cannot be trusted.
- 2) **Mentally Disordered:** They are liars, but because of mental disorders. So, although they are guilty, they can be excused on medical grounds.
- 3) **Truth Tellers:** Paul is truthful. James, Peter, John, and Paul are practicing the one true religion and walk orderly, keeping the Law of Moses. If Paul is a truth teller, there are three interpretations.

3a) **Transitory:** Paul, along with James, Peter, and John, is creating a new religion, and the vestiges of Jewish practice have yet to be cast off. Thus, they are not contradictory, but evolving, and perhaps evolving with God as Process Theology claims. The book of Acts is evidence of the growing pains spurred by the Holy Spirit.

3b) **Appeasement/Conciliation/Compromise:** Paul, James, and Peter know that the Law of Moses has been partially or fully abolished but continue to walk in the Mosaic and Rabbinic traditions when they need to, whether to keep the peace, for prudential self-interest, or for the sake of the gospel.¹⁰⁴ Therefore, it is not contradictory to be “all things to all men” and also maintain that there is no separation between the natural sons of Abraham (Jews) and the adopted sons (Gentiles). This is the typical view of Evangelical and Reformed Christianity.¹⁰⁵

3c) **Continuous:** The Law of God as written by Moses and the profitable traditions (paradosis/dogmata) are fully applicable and enforceable by the Apostles to both Jews and Gentiles.¹⁰⁶ This is the view defended here and

¹⁰⁴ Of course, the five lashings and ultimate imprisonment that Paul received indicate that perhaps self-interest is not his end, but rather the conciliatory actions are more like evasive actions for the preservation (i.e., self-interest) of the earliest believers.

¹⁰⁵ John B. Polhill, *Acts*, vol. 26, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 1992), 449-450.

¹⁰⁶ Acts 16:4; 2 Thess, 2:15. Examples abound in the gospel accounts of Christ following rabbinic *halakhot* that are not explicitly commanded by the Word of God given by the hand of Moses, which although codified later (2nd, 3rd, 4th centuries CE) have obvious connections to that of 1st century Judaism. Mt. 9:14-15 (Cp. b. *Sukkah* 25b.; t. *Berchot* 2.10). Mt. 10:24 (b. *Berachot* 58b.; *Sifra* §251.2). Mt. 12:5 (Cp. b. *Shabbat* 132b.). Mt. 15:1 (Cf. m. *Chagigah* 2.5; b. *Shabbat* 13b-14a; y. *Shabbat* 1.3d; b. *Yoma* 87a). Mt. 15:36 (The Torah only speaks to blessing God after a meal). Mt. 22:40 (cp. m. *Chagigah* 1.8; b. *Berachot* 63a). Mt. 23:16,17 (cf. m. *Nedarim* 1.3,4; b. *Temurah* 32a-33b); Mt. 23:23 (cp. m. *Maasarot* 1.1; b. *Yoma* 83b; b. *Nidah* 5a; b. *Rosh HaShanah* 12a; b. *Shabbat* 68a.); Mt. 24:20 (cf. b. *Erubin* 4.5; Acts 1:12, Jer. 17:19-22); Mt. 26:20 (Cf. m. *Pasachim* 10:1); Mt. 27:6 (b. *Aboda Zera* 17a); Lk. 6:9 (Cp. m. *Shabbat* 22.5); Lk. 11:44 (m. *Oholot* 16.1,2); Jn. 7:51 (Mid. Rab. *Exodus* 23.1). See Tim Hegg, *Paul's Epistle to the Galatians* (Tacoma, WA: Torah Resource, 2010), 18-19 for a fuller explanation of each instance.

is prevalent in certain strands of Messianic Judaism and Pronomian Christianity.

Aut Paulos aut Malus Homo: In Context

As stated above, there are only two options for Paul's actions in the Diaspora. Either he is preaching apostasy from the Law of Moses, or he is not preaching apostasy from the Law of God.¹⁰⁷ James' words indicate that Paul *is not* preaching apostasy, saying, "all will know that there is nothing to the things which they have been told about you, but that you yourself also walk orderly, keeping the Law."¹⁰⁸ So, with relative ease, one can determine that Paul *is not* preaching apostasy from Moses.

Given these words by James, there are only three options for the interpreter of the text.

- 1) Paul is lying to James.
- 2) Paul is lying to James because Paul is insane.
- 3) Paul is telling the truth; he is not preaching apostasy from Moses.

Did Paul Lie to James?

Could it be possible that Paul lied to James? Surely, all men are fallible and can succumb to peer pressure like Peter did (Gal. 2). However, nowhere in the Bible do the other Apostles demonstrate that Paul made such an error. In fact, the context of Acts 21 is the trial ensuring that Paul did not lie to the others. Should Paul be lying, he makes the lie so convincing as to

¹⁰⁷ Like Christ does in Mk. 7:10-13, the Words of Moses and the Word of God are interchangeable terms. "For **Moses** said, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and 'He who speaks evil of father or mother, is to be put to death'; but you say, 'If a man says to his father or his mother, whatever I have that would help you is Corban (that is to say, given to God),' you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or his mother; thus violating the **word of God** by your tradition which you have handed down; and you do many things such as that." In other words, Moses simply wrote down the Word of God. They are synonymous.

¹⁰⁸ Acts 21:24. As for a possible distinction in orthopraxy for the Gentiles contained in v. 25, that will be dealt with in a later section, as the reference is to the first Jerusalem council (Acts 15).

participate in one of the most sacred ceremonies available to non-Levites and one specifically designed to show one's commitment to the Most High. If Paul did lie to James, the consequences would, of course, be dire for the status of most of the New Testament. Since the context and timing of Acts 21 comes after Paul's writings of Galatians, 1 Thess., and Romans, Paul's insistence of walking according to Moses would render all those epistles as doctrinally suspect because the thrust of those epistles *seems* to be antinomian but what Paul indicates to James presently is precisely the opposite. In other words, Paul preached and wrote about apostatizing from Moses in those early texts, but then indicated to James that he did not. In short, the Pauline corpus (at least Galatians, 1 Thess., and Romans) ought to be abandoned if Paul is a liar. Furthermore, should Paul have lied, then Peter's words would be false in 2 Pet. 3:16. This, for all intents and purposes, makes Paul a false apostle and the books of Peter, James, and John suspect.

However, since James, John, and Peter indicate that Paul *did not* lie to them, this option is not likely. For, multiple sources (primarily from Luke, who was traveling with Paul, but also from James, Peter, and John) indicate that Paul never lied to them and that he remained trustworthy and faithful until the end.¹⁰⁹ In fact, it was Paul who even corrected Peter's hypocrisy after the first Jerusalem council (Gal. 2). Furthermore, the very context of Acts 21 is James' fact-finding mission to determine if Paul was lying about the gospel he was preaching. Remember, Galatians records that "they added nothing to me." Therefore, one can conclude that Acts 21 is James' attempt to find out if Paul's gospel had in fact changed. Given all this and the verdict given by this impromptu trial, it seems safe to assume that Paul did not lie to James in Acts 21.

¹⁰⁹ Given the multiplicity of affirming epistles, it is quite unlikely that Paul was rejected by James, Peter, or John or that he was a liar.

Additionally, given Paul’s polemic against the “false brethren” in Galatians and that Acts 21 most certainly occurs after the writing of Galatians, it seems that neither Paul nor James would have referred to these zealous persons as *believers* if they were the “false brethren.”¹¹⁰ Since the “false brethren” were already identified at the First Jerusalem Council and by Paul in Galatians, it is unlikely that these many thousands of *believers* here in Acts 21 were associated with either the Gentile Judaizers or the Party of the Circumcision.¹¹¹ Even with their zeal for the Torah and their adherence to the customs, it is quite unlikely that Paul and James would give heed to their charges if they were considered to be “false brethren.”¹¹² If Paul had performed a

¹¹⁰ Acts 21:20; Gal. 2:4.

¹¹¹ Although the term Judaizer has had a few different meanings, it is typically defined as those either of Jewish descent or Gentiles who having gone through proselyte circumcision who mandated both circumcision for inclusion into the covenants *and* full obedience to the Law of Moses. See Paul W. Barnett, *Jesus and the Logic of History*, New Studies in Biblical Theology, vol. 3, ed. D.A. Carson (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1997), 125-126. I use the term “Gentile Judaizers” to make a distinction between the Gentiles who accepted proselyte circumcision from the original agitators who demanded circumcision, probably Pharisaical Jews. Although this identification need not be monolithic, as it seems Paul is also addressing Gentiles who became members of the Party of the Circumcision for any number of reasons, either through their concern about the prosecution that would ensue either from Rome or from unbelieving Jews. See A.J. Goddard and S.A. Cummins, “Ill or Ill-Treated? Conflict and Persecution as the Context of Paul’s Original Ministry in Galatia (Galatians 4:12-20),” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 52 (1993), 93-126.; Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, Word Biblical Commentary 41, ed. Bruce M. Metzger (Dallas, TX: Word, 1990), 291. Dunn, likewise, underscores how when those Gentiles in Galatia undertook proselyte circumcision for *salvation* they were putting themselves under the whole bondage of Pharisaical oral law as Judaizing Gentiles. D.G. Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, Black’s New Testament Commentary, ed. Henry Chadwick (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 226. Hegg also underscores that Judaizing is more indicative of Gentile acceptance of Circumcision as the foundation of covenant inclusion and the starting point of grace, *The Letter Writer*, 106. What I wish to show is that “Judaizing” is more indicative of the *motive for circumcision* and that Torah observance as obedience *is not* necessarily part of that definition.

¹¹² The charges against Paul are 1) teaching Apostasy from Moses, 2) teaching not to circumcise children, 3) teaching others not to walk according to the customs. All three of these points will be discussed throughout this dissertation. However, point three does require nuance and seems to be the source of the confusion for most modern interpretations. As will be shown in the Transitory and Conciliatory sections below, there seems to be significant departure in what it means to walk according to custom and tradition. The crux of the argument is that the believers in Messiah walk according to the customs (*ethos*), traditions (*paradosis*), teachings (*dogma*) of Christ (*ennomos Christos*), instead of the oral traditions which originated around the time of the Maccabees and were then developed primarily by the Pharisees. What Christ and the Apostles are preaching is the removal of the traditions that go against the written Law of Moses (e.g. proselyte circumcision, and other traditions of men that nullify the word of God – Mk. 7; Eph. 2:14) that demanded walking according to the customs (i.e. “works” of the Law) to be viewed as righteous. To that end the historical context seems to be a nuanced position of *nomos* that was started by the Messiah himself in Mt. 23:2-3 and mimicked by Paul, up to the point of lashings. That is, not all the customs were being disregarded, rather, only those that were against the standard of the Law and how Christ interpreted it.

sacred ceremony to appease the “false brethren,” it would have lent credence to their doctrines and made Paul a doctrinal liar.¹¹³ Rather, it seems that these *believers* are, for all intents and purposes, accepted by James and Paul as legitimate and aligned with their teaching. This begs the question: why the uproar? The believers had heard something which went against what they thought to be true. So, was Paul lying to them? What then is? Well, Paul walked orderly keeping the Law.

Is Paul a Madman?

So then, Paul did not lie to James. But perhaps, and what no one seems to have considered, Paul could have been insane. Perhaps much of the confusion about Paul stems from the fact that his mental faculties were in such disorder that he could in fact say two mutually exclusive things (apostasy from Moses and upholding the Law of Moses) and think that he was in his right mind. Paul’s mental disorder could also explain his conversion experience, as well and his insistence of his office as an Apostle of Christ. Paul simply imagined Christ’s appearance to him, and his blindness on the road to Damascus was caused by psychosis, and deceived the apostles in Jerusalem. It so happens that medically unexplained vision loss or non-organic visual loss (NOVL) is well-established and is thought to be caused by psychological causes.¹¹⁴ Paul’s reclusion to Arabia is merely the result of delusions of grandeur or mental decay caused by *pharmakeia* or possible schizophrenia. This could also explain Paul’s vocabulary using words like “my gospel” and his insistence of being the Apostles to the Gentiles. He simply thought that he was a religious leader, and the founder of the new allegorical Greek religion (e.g., Bultmann

¹¹³ Acts 15:1; 2 Cor. 11:13, 26; Gal. 2:4; Phil. 3:2; 2 Thess 2:11.

¹¹⁴ Raj Persaud, M.D. and Peter Bruggen, M.D. Psychology Today “Can you Lose Your Eyesight for Psychological Reasons,” *Psychology Today*, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/slightly-blightly/201508/can-you-lose-your-eyesight-psychological-reasons> (Aug 17, 2015).

and the transitory theory, but caused by insanity). When confronted about his apostasy by James here in Acts 21, Paul indeed could insist both positions, as he did not preach apostasy, but rather *his* religion and *his* gospel included both abolition and upholding as doctrine. In a sense, Paul is lying to James but only because of mental disorder and the doctrinal disarray caused by his illness. His contradictory/transitory doctrines would have been similar to that of Eastern pantheistic religions, where the disciples have to chase the thoughts of the shaman, like birds fluttering in the wind, affirming opposites (good/evil and sin/righteousness) as one. As the founder of a new religion, however, and the only one given the special revelation (i.e., something akin to Joseph Smith), he alone held the secrets to how this mystery of the gospel could be solved, the simultaneous obedience and apostasy from Moses being Paul's own deluded creation.

If Paul had a mental illness that was the cause of his doctrinal confusion (whether it be the contradictory, transitory, or even the conciliatory theories), one could in fact forgive Paul. He did not choose his mental illness, but the result is that we ought not use him for doctrine, and his writings ought to be read similarly to those of Nietzsche at the end of his life; Paul's writings were merely the mad mutterings of a psychotic Jewish rabbi. Therein lies the rub. Paul's writings do not appear to be the work of a madman. In fact, they are far from it. For example, the use of irony in the book of Galatians indicates a sound and robust mind.¹¹⁵ Furthermore, Romans, in appears to be one of the finer pieces of doctrinal and philosophical thought in the entire canon, with its extrapolation of the Abrahamic Covenant, the Mosaic Covenant, the New Covenant, Gentile inclusion into those covenants, and the work of Christ for both Jew and Greek. When contrasted with Nietzsche's last writings, in which we have a veritable madman, Paul's cogency and coherence (his doctrinal consistency) is surely the mark of a sane, sober, moral, and prudent

¹¹⁵ Mark Nanos, *The Irony of Galatians* (Portland, OR: Fortress, 2002), 127.

person, who trained professionally under Gamaliel, and, most importantly, was trusted by Luke, James, Peter, and John.

Paul the Truth Teller

The conclusion we must therefore come to is that since Paul is not a liar and that he is not a madman, the most logical and supported position is that Paul is telling the truth! This means that he is not preaching or writing about apostasy from Moses, but that he walks orderly, keeping the Law, just as James indicates. In order to concretely demonstrate Paul's doctrinal orthodoxy to all present in Jerusalem, he is directed by James to perform sacrificial and ceremonial laws, which are, in all likelihood, the Nazirite Vow of Numbers 6, in order to show this orderliness and his perseverance in the gospel approved by James, Peter, and John.¹¹⁶

Sacrifices after the Resurrection: The Theological Conundrum

One of the most paradigmatic confirming evidences comes from the fact that, even after over thirty years, James was overseeing men who were sacrificing at the Temple and ordered Paul to do the same *to confirm* his gospel message and to show that he walked orderly, keeping the Law.¹¹⁷ Considering that over thirty years had passed since the resurrection and if the sacrificial system was no longer doctrine for these early Apostles and believers, then that doctrine would have been practiced and preached, but one sees here the very opposite. Therefore, from a historical perspective, the very *earliest* doctrine of the Apostles in Jerusalem was faith in the Messiah and orderly walking, according to the requirements of the Torah, including the ceremonial components.¹¹⁸ If those commandments were no longer required or had been

¹¹⁶ Rev. 14:12.

¹¹⁷ One even sees that Peter and others were in the Temple continuously praising God (Lk. 24:53).

¹¹⁸ Richard Bauckham makes the case that "the earliest Christology is the best Christology." Surely this axiom could be applied here. If the earliest orthodoxy includes following the commandments of Moses, then perhaps

abrogated in some way through Christ, the message of abrogation would have been proclaimed and *applied equally to both Jew and Gentile*, “Christ freed us from the bondage of Moses!¹¹⁹ Go tell it on the mountain! We are free!” However, this does not correspond with the information presented in Acts 21. In short, what the impromptu trial gave the Apostles was the golden opportunity to cement forever the understanding of Mosaic discontinuity, *especially the sacrificial requirements*, but, of course, they did not. Rather, James insists that Paul perform Mosaic sacrifices, even in light of the Messiah, to show *doctrinal purity*. Even though a forthright Acts 21 and its context makes Mosaic continuity appear as a straightforward conclusion, the actual theological result has been the birthing of various theories which attempt to support an antinomian position and explain why Paul, James, Peter, and John would perform Mosaic requirements after the resurrection and after Paul’s message to the Galatians. The real question then becomes this: is the Apostle’s interpretation of Christ and Moses transitory, conciliatory, or continuous?

The Transitory Theory of Acts 21

The transitory interpretation of Acts 21 rests on the assumption that Paul was telling the truth in Acts 21 (i.e., walking orderly, keeping the Law), but Paul was in the process of developing a new religion because of Christ.¹²⁰ Thus, doctrinal “truth” was *changing* during this period and the book of Acts is evidence of the growing pains between those situated in

it is the best orthodoxy! Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and other Studies on the New Testament’s Christology of Divine Identity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 128-130, 195-210.

¹¹⁹ Again, it seems that Mosaic abolition would really only be relevant to Jewish audiences. See Footnote 97.

¹²⁰ Oscar Cullmann, *The Earliest Christian Confessions*, trans. J.K.S. Reid, eds. Gary Habermas and Benjamin Charles Shaw (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2018), 28.

Jerusalem, with its inherent cultural and now Mosaic baggage, and the burgeoning Law-free faith of the Gentiles. Transitory theology believes that in some form or fashion, there is an *evolution* in religious and doctrinal understanding showing why the Apostles perform now “unnecessary” Mosaic requirements. This accounts for the reason behind why the Apostles insist that a Nazirite vow be performed (Acts 21:21), tell the gentiles to learn the Law of Moses every Sabbath (Acts 15:21), participate in Temple services (Acts 2), and prescribe circumcision for Timothy, but not Titus (Acts 16). With the Apostles’ new understanding, they discovered that the Laws of Moses were not really required, after all, thus explaining why the church today does not follow the same pattern of the Apostles in the Book of Acts.¹²¹ Paul, being the foremost and most evolved of his apostolic contemporaries, is of course the most antinomian, as both the Johannine epistles and James’s epistle still cling to Moses as central in understanding.¹²² This position posits that the *transition* to Greek Christianity was in some form a revolutionary understanding with Paul who stood in tension with the earliest Jewish believers in Jerusalem. This tension was ongoing and that true doctrine was not fully settled until much later, perhaps not until centuries later with the full codification of intellectual belief found in the creedal statements and declarations of the councils.¹²³ Consequently, the real thrust of the transitory theory is best described as a way to

¹²¹ Inherent in this position is a weak view of inspiration of scripture and viewing “progressive revelation” means including new content as opposed to clarification of pre-existing content. So, in this view, there is no challenge that the Holy Spirit could have inspired both Moses and the Apostles (and all the prophets in between) to write contradictory things. For evolution is not contradiction, the whole bible is in fact a transitory and evolutionary and all the writers are writing “truth” from their perspective. In short, the transitory theory is the preferred theory of post-modern theology should it reference the Bible at all.

¹²² Daniel Marguerat, *Paul in Acts and Paul in His Letters* (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 46-47.; Karl L. Oakes, *From Torah to Paul: The Prehistory of the Catholic Church* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2016), 87-97.

¹²³ Bultmann is the foremost popular proponent of this theory, but the supersessionist ideas stretch back much farther. Bultmann’s theological inventions include the development of the Christ character superimposed onto existing Greek mythology and that the earliest Church was in the process of Christianizing pagan belief and platonic philosophy (see Bultmann, *Primitive Christianity in its Contemporary Setting* [New York, NY: Meridian Books, 1956]). However, one need not go as far as Bultmann in his theology in order to hold similar *assumptions*. Inherent

intellectually synthesize supposedly contradictory doctrine and orthopraxy along an evolutionary, existential, and ecclesiastical timeline, therefore explaining how Paul could be telling the truth by following the Mosaic Law but also abrogating the Law, and/or developing a new religion(s), and most importantly why the Church does not imitate this early behavior of the Apostles.¹²⁴

in this position is the emphasis on “authentic” intellectual and verbal affirmations of faith and dualist “scientific” anthropology. Creeds-over-deeds could be a broad way of describing the development and self-identity of Christians who hold to the transitory theory. For the transitory theory, early statements such as the Apostles Creed, and later, the Nicene and Athanasian creeds, were when the transition to Christian doctrine finally takes place. These Church creeds represent the only real way of delineation between those who are of the church and those who are not. However, insistence upon creeds is ultimately an expression of Neoplatonic idealism that most certainly influenced this theology *a priori* as evidenced by its insistence on a transition from a lesser “physical” Law to a Spirit-led grace (see Tenney, *New Testament Survey Revised*, 246-255). Although it is unlikely that the early leaders of the Church believed that any creed would save a person, they would certainly agree that affirming theological axioms of a creed is not the same thing as truly being saved or being in covenant with the Most High. However, the actual manifestation and application of creeds, as far as the historical church-social-political dynamic among the *hoi polloi* and lesser leaders are concerned, was that creedal coercion and mere intellectual belief is ever present in Church history. This type of coercion was often violent and murderous as evident by the Spanish Inquisition, the Crusades, and the purges of Catholics, anabaptists, and Jews by the Magisterial Reformers. The bloody history of Christianity is part and parcel with this creedal identification. One is either in (politically) or they are not. This is not to say that confession is unimportant (Rom 10:9), or that creeds are not present in the earliest Pauline writing (far from it, as the pre-Pauline creeds are easily identifiable in Paul’s own writing [see Cullmann, *The Earliest Christian Confessions*]), but the separation between the creed and a life lived in confirmation of, and obedience to, the Covenants of the Promise is the primary distinction at hand; the distinction is what one says they believe versus what one does. In other words, concrete and authentic *action* are true markers of what one actually believes (e.g., Mt. 7:16, 20; Jn. 14:15; 1 Jn. 2:4; Eph. 4:1). The blood spilt by Christians on the basis of creeds alone is a log in the eye that could even be indicative of a lack of the indwelling of the Spirit (May Adonai be the Judge here). Whatever the case, in the Greek view, authentic *confession* was required for joining a community, but in a Hebraic view, adopting specific ways of living and *behavior* were the key for association within the community. At the same time however, it must be emphasized that it is not the behavioral pattern that is the basis of salvation, rather, in order to maintain fellowship with others and in covenant with the Most High, an ensuing behavior pattern would be maintained. This subtle but important distinction, consequently, becomes key for understanding the ruling in Acts 15 which I will touch upon later. For wholesale acceptance of platonic hermeneutics see C.H. Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching and its Developments* (Edinburgh: Hodder and Stoughton, 1967), 45. For evidence of the creedal statements see, Vernon H. Neufeld, *The Earliest Christian Confessions* (Leiden: Brill, 1963); Max Wilcox, *The Semitisms of Acts* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1965); Oscar Cullmann, *The Earliest Christian Confessions*, eds. Gary Habermas and Benjamin Charles Shaw. Trans. J.K.S. Reid (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2018); D.F. Wright, “Creeds, Confessional Forms” in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1997), 259-60.; Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, 3 vols. (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1931), 1.16.; Michael L. Brown, *Our Hands are Stained with Blood: The Tragic Story of the Church and the Jewish People* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image Publishers, 2019), 125-148.

¹²⁴ Considering the proliferation of Christian denominations and traditions that have sprouted, the transitory theory seems to fall along the lines of Lindbeck’s ecumenical post-Liberal approach. In that, as the transition(s) occurred, the obvious result would be divisions which need synthesizing. See George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009).

At first glance, it could be easy to accept this view, based on a very common Christian experience, which is why the transitory theory has a bit of attractiveness and *prima facie* correspondence to the real world. This experience is that of growing in understanding of truth. Is not sanctification the process of growing in wisdom, knowledge, and righteousness? Are not the multiplicity of denominations the results of this process? This position is given further credence when one considers that the Apostles were eyewitnesses to the life of the Messiah and what he taught and still struggled at times to understand his teachings and needed further explanation after the resurrection. So, in this regard, the transitory theory already carries a bit of strength. Of course, growing in understanding of *preexisting* truth or *reorienting* back toward truth is not quite the same thing as truth evolving and doctrine being transitory and fluid. This is not to say that the reorientation cannot not be radical as to have the appearance of climatic fulfillment. Therefore, whatever weight the transitory theory carries is tainted by its inherent moral, doctrinal, and theological subjectivity. So, despite the similarity to “transitioning” belief in an individual experience, the transitory interpretation inherently assumes a bibliology that is evolutionary, doctrinally relative, and based purely in human existentialism.

The transitory theory typically takes its inspiration from theological naturalism and stems from that of naturalistic existential demythologization of hermeneutics via Bultmann, Heidegger, Schleiermacher, and others. In essence, what these theologians proposed was that everything said about God in the Bible came from prescientific and primitive peoples.¹²⁵ Today’s people are much more sophisticated and have a “scientific worldview,” and, since the time of Kant and

¹²⁵ Obviously the narratives of God either creating or intervening in the world are false in light of evolutionary “facts” (paradigmatic lenses). In fact, some like Barbara King even claim that our religious tendencies toward beneficence and spirituality are directly from our supposed primate ancestors. Barbara J. King, *Evolving God: A Provocative View on the Origins of Religion* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2017).

Newton, one can no longer scientifically think that God actually enters the world to interact with his creatures. All that is myth and rather sentimental.¹²⁶ Rather, true faith today has transitioned to a more authentic and naturalistic existentialism, as God is closed off from direct interaction in a form of deistic naturalism. In essence, by ridding hermeneutics of myth, the transcendental God, who is radically, wholly other, could meet and transform people now through the Church's kerygma of God that acts upon an individual, thus transforming them.¹²⁷ The Bible, however, as evidenced by its contradictions (primarily here in Acts 21) and prescientific mythology, is rendered a purely human construct, devoid of the actual word of God, and it only *becomes* the kerygmatic word of God in the individual.¹²⁸ This internal revelation thus leads to new "authentic" moral and spiritual transformation. In short, this version of the transitory theory is based on cosmological, epistemological, and existential assumptions that lead to naturalistic, autonomistic, experiential theology. Through this reasoning, one can see how Paul and James could have various understandings and that they could contradict one another but still be true because they were being *authentic* to the "Word" they interpreted initially. Pauline theology is simply his self-understanding, as the Apostle to the Gentiles, in the same fashion that James's theology is his understanding derived from his cultural context in Jerusalem. The transitory theory therefore posits that the changing doctrine found primarily in Paul is the authentic self-discovery of doctrine developed over time by the Apostles and the Book of Acts is the supposed

¹²⁶ C.S. Lewis, *Voyage of the Dawn Treader* (New York, NY: Harper, 1994), 16. The very supposedly sophisticated Eustace uses the term "sentimental" to describe the quaint notions of his cousins Lucy and Edmond, who believe in Aslan and Narnia.

¹²⁷ John Morrison, *Has God Said?*, Loc. 1164 (Kindle).

¹²⁸ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics I/1*. trans. G. Thompson (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1936), 123-124. Although I believe Barth would reject the Panentheistic views of Process theology, Barth's Bibliology and emphasis on authenticity and the written word *becoming* the true word of God in us, by the Spirit is indicative of transitional theologians and is probably strongly influenced by his Reformed Supersessionism and the allegorical hermeneutics of Augustine.

self-discovery *process* by the collective. As in, the transitory position views the modern expression of the church, beginning with the Apostles as the development from mustard seed to full grown tree. Therefore, the doctrine should not be viewed as contradictory, but as evolutionary, and correctly revolutionary by its casting off the chains of Mosaic tyranny.

The scientific and dualist theological methods of transitory theology also birthed the idea of the evolving God of Process Theology.¹²⁹ Scripture had to evolve because “God” was evolving and interacting with his creation in more advanced ways to persuade his creation. Since “God” was evolving and expressing this evolution, and since humans were also evolving in their own thoughts about “God,” these interactions of divine and human freewill were then written down, and those new writings became the scripture of the NT. Thus, contradiction is not contradiction, rather it is growth and maturity and human refinement about God and the way God works in the world, having been evolved by the interaction and modifying, as it were, his revelation to men.¹³⁰ In these transitory theories of theology, human understanding of “God” was always in transition because “God” was transitioning in methodology of human persuasion, beginning with the mysterious Canaanite storm god El, numinous as he was, who then became

¹²⁹ Process Theology is the result of the Process philosophical paradigm that was championed by Alfred Whitehead and then turned into theology by Charles Hartshorne and John Cobb. As the case may be, this theo-philosophical paradigm necessitates that God changes as the self-deterministic creatures interact with one another. “God” cannot coerce anything to happen, rather “God” attempts to influence desired outcomes according to “his” values. Furthermore, this theology proclaims that “God” contains the universe, but is not necessarily identical with it (pantheism). Although the world and “God’s” methods of persuasion may change, this theo-philosophical worldview claims objective morality is found only in “God,” and even though “God” changes, the moral rules somehow remain the same, which I believe exposes this theology to the venom of Euthyphro’s dilemma, which will be examined in the next chapter. Like many of the materialistic paradigms, the process theologians have issues with an omnipotent God allowing evil and they also view the creation narrative in Genesis as false in light of evolutionary theory. See Alfred Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*, eds. David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne, (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1978).; Charles Hartshorne, *Divine Relativity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1982).; John B. Cobb and David Ray Griffin, *Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1976).

¹³⁰ One could say, this is an unbounded and autonomous form of theological cybernetics.

the dominate God of the biblical narrative and the victor over the other gods of the Ancient Near East.¹³¹ El transitions to a more covenantal God, El Shaddai and El Elyon (The God of Abraham Isaac, and Jacob), to transition again into Adonai,¹³² the God of Moses and the Prophets, who is morphed into a more refined Greco-Roman pagan construct, taking the form of Jesus Christ by the time of the 1st Century. The changes in doctrine stem from “God” changing, due to the interaction with his creation and his creation interacting with him.¹³³ I would like to pose the real epistemological question of, how will “God” transition in the future, and how would we know? Perhaps the hypermodern usage of the prefix *trans-* is already pointing the way to the future evolving “God.”¹³⁴ In any case, the transitory theory seems to accept the basic tenants of Marcionism in which Christ vanquishes the God of the Old Testament through self-evolution.¹³⁵

Paradigms Driving Transitory Theology

To recap, one finds that the two primary theological constructs that give credence to the transitory theory are necessarily founded upon theological, cosmological, and epistemological paradigms that have serious flaws. In the demythologization of Bultmann, one find naturalistic and deistic *a priori* that mandate the use of experiential, allegorical, and dialectic theological

¹³¹ For example, there has been many attempts to show how the Hebrews simply stole or borrowed features from the ANE and adopted them for themselves. A prime example being that of Ps. 29 and its affinity toward the theological concepts in Ugaritic literature. O. Palmer Robertson, *The Flow of the Psalms: Discovering Their Structure and Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 2015), 7740-7754 (Kindle). For a more thorough explanation on why there is no such transition see John N. Oswalt, *The Bible Among the Myths* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009).

¹³² Adonai is used in this dissertation as a replacement for the Tetragrammaton out of respect and reverence to the Holy Name.

¹³³ Process Theology is in effect a very robust dispensationalism that is caused by changes in God’s methods of persuasion, because God is also learning in the process to best lure the desire of his creatures.

¹³⁴ LGBIQ Theology. See Mark A. Yarhouse, *Understanding Gender Dysphoria: Navigating Transgender Issues in a Changing Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2015).

¹³⁵ In a very real sense, the Transitory Theory must accept Marcionism as foundational in their theology. Primarily that the religion of the Yahwists is founded upon a God who is evil and defective in some way. That Christ is the son of the true God, and that the God of the Jews was different than the God manifested in Jesus Christ.

methods, rendering much of its doctrine and truth claims as subjective. This is due to their *a priori* rejection that God physically interacts with the world and the belief that the Bible, as it stands, is not the word of God, but are words about God, who is wholly other and utterly incomprehensible.¹³⁶ On the other hand, Process Theology rejects the naturalistic deism of Bultmann in favor of a growing and learning “God,” who is changeable based on the understanding and freewill actions of the creation. This is the way Process Theology explains their version of dispensations and radically different modes of interaction between God and man, moving from the numinous and violent “God” of the Old Testament to the loving, gracious, and tolerant “God” of the New Testament.¹³⁷ Furthermore, this transition to the good God of the New Testament affirms Marcionism as truth. As “God” learned more about his free creatures he transitioned his doctrine to accommodate them and persuade them toward divinity. Although this dissertation is not necessarily concerned with showing these paradigms as false, what should be readily apparent is that they have significant issues in developing cohesive, comprehensive, consistent, and comely explanations of the data, primarily in the fact that God speaks and does, that he can enter into the world, and most of all, that miracles are possible.¹³⁸ Thus, the foundational *a priori* of transitory theology is severely lacking and way outside of orthodoxy, being rooted and grounded in either panentheism or naturalism. The transitory theory could, therefore, be rejected *a priori*, merely on philosophical grounds.

¹³⁶ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics I/2*. Eds. G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1970), 29.

¹³⁷ Erich Zenger, *A God of Vengeance?: Understanding the Psalms of Divine Wrath*, trans. Linda M. Maloney (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994).

¹³⁸ Craig S. Keener, *Miracles: The Credibility of the New Testament Accounts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), kindle.

Hermeneutical Weakness of the Transitory Theory: No Transition Indicated in Early Historical Biblical Data

Aside from the faults of naturalistic and evolutionary *a priori* of the transitory theory, there appear to be actual hermeneutical and historical faults, as well. If serious historical analysis and *early* testimony are the keys to understanding the faith, then the transitory theory would have started with the earliest believers and eyewitnesses of Christ's teachings, not later with Paul, and most certainly before the replacement theologies of the Church fathers.¹³⁹ Evidence that is earlier and has multiple attestation is considered the gold standard when examining facts about the past. Therefore, if it can be shown that no transition took place before Paul, it is unlikely that a transition actually occurred at all. Considering what we know already about the trial of Paul in Acts 21, is there evidence of transition before the Pauline epistles? In short, the later the supposed transition occurs, the less historically grounded the epistemic foundations of the transition become. Even though a transition could have occurred, early sources with multiple attestations provide a window into the earliest thought and practice. If one can see what the earliest witnesses to Christ's life believed, said, and most importantly did, one can decipher the best orthodoxy and orthopraxy, and discern whether or not a transition occurred with *them*. If a transition did not occur with the earliest believers, then the transition was merely a theological creation of later generations.

No Transition on The Road to Emmaus: Early and Eyewitness Testimony in Luke 24

Firstly, Cleopas (Lk. 24:18) and Simon (Lk. 24:34) received Christ's instructions and explanation of the Law and the Prophets on the road to Emmaus (Lk 24:27) and then told of the

¹³⁹ It is no surprise here as the Transitory theologians reject the historicity of many of the NT texts, thus these facts are ruled out *a priori*. According to many of the transitory theologians, they assume the writing of many of NT texts come much later and suffer from significant historical reliability issues.

experience and teaching to other eleven (Lk. 24:33).¹⁴⁰ In this case, Christ simply explained (Lk. 24:32) how the Law and Prophets pointed to him and his resurrection. Therefore, instead of teaching abolition, Christ was showing that the words of Moses and the Prophets were always Christocentric and that the Promise of all the covenants had come.¹⁴¹ Here, it becomes clear that fulfillment of the Law is not synonymous with abrogation of it. For, if one simply takes Christ at his word, as a basic truth and a hermeneutical *starting point*, Christ in Mt. 5:17-20 confirms non-abolition.¹⁴² Christ explained to Simon and Cleopas that he himself was always in the Tanakh, and that the contents therein point to him.¹⁴³ Far from being viewed in terms of abolition, the discourse is more indicative of Christ showing how to use the Torah as apologetic evidence, which ensures the Tanakh's ever-increasing importance.¹⁴⁴ In essence, Christ is showing how, by the scriptures of the Tanakh, that the Messiah of Israel had come. This likewise confirms that the Tanakh is the Word of God, for its promises (particularly those to Abraham) have come to pass, and the prophesies yet fulfilled will come to pass. With all this in mind, if Christ did teach Mosaic abolition, or a transition away from Moses on the road to Emmaus, then surely the Apostles would have been informed right from the very beginning, and that message would have been preached. This fact alone would thus negate even the possibility of Acts 15 or Acts 21 from

¹⁴⁰ I take the Simon spoken of here to be Simon the Zealot as opposed to Simon Peter, who is usually referenced as "Peter" and was seemingly in Jerusalem in this passage (Lk. 24:12).

¹⁴¹ Eph. 2:12. This text is often interpreted "covenants of promise" but the Greek *diathekon* (Covenants) is plural and *epangelias* (promise) is singular. I think that a better interpretation would be "Covenants of The Promise." Meaning all the covenants point to a singular promise, that being Christ.

¹⁴² David Stern makes a point that "abolish" the Torah is a first century idiom which is meant to be pointing to proper interpretation not cancellation. What the idiom is more indicative of is Christ came to teach every bit of it bring with the teaching the Torah's intended meaning. Rubin, *The Complete Jewish Study Bible*, 1390-1391.

¹⁴³ This seems to give credibility to the interpretation of Rom. 10:4 in that Christ was the goal of the Torah.

¹⁴⁴ It could even be said that proper continued observance of it would be a constant reminder of Christ and acts of worship unto him (for he *is* the Word of God).

happening, for the transition *would have already taken place*, and there would be no question as to the continuity of Moses. But, as the case may be, the Tanakh must be used for apologetic reasons, showing the truth of Messiah, not to mention for correction, reproof, and training in righteousness, thus necessitating their continuity.¹⁴⁵

No Transition in the Great Commission

Secondly, the well-known “Great Commission” records an interesting requirement. It is common to quote the first part of the commission. “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit...”¹⁴⁶ But it’s the second part of the commission that does not receive much attention. It says, “...teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Now what is interesting about this is that Christ is commanding that all the nations observe *his* commands and what he commanded the Apostles. I suggest that “his commands” he must surely mean God’s commands, since he is Adonai in the flesh, and He and the Father are one. Otherwise, one denies his divinity, falling into Docetism, Arianism, or the Ebionite missteps.

The real question is this: what are these commands, and how did the disciples and Apostles know? Mt. 5:17-20 seems clear on the matter. Is it sensible for Christ to say that he did not come to abolish the Law or the Prophets, but that he came to abolish them by fulfilling them? That is nonsense and the epitome of a violation of the Law of Contradiction ($A=-A$). It seems that Christ preempts the confusion that his life, death, and resurrection might cause. Christ literally gives the command and a warning, “*Do not think* that I have come to abolish the Law or

¹⁴⁵ 2 Tim. 3:16.; G.K. Chesterton, “Enemies of Property” in *G.K. Chesterton Collected Works: Family, Society, Politics*, vols. IV (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1987), 64.

¹⁴⁶ Mt. 28:19.

the Prophets... Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven..."¹⁴⁷ That being said, there is an even better example, where Christ seemingly demands the following of Moses. In Matthew 23, Christ gives a command, while exposing the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. Christ says, "The scribes and Pharisees have seated themselves in the *chair of Moses; therefore all that they tell you, do and observe*, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say things and do not do them."¹⁴⁸ It seems that Christ commands the following of Moses *and* the profitable laws and customs (halacha) of the scribes and Pharisees.¹⁴⁹ Now, since one of Christ's commands was to hear and obey Moses, in Mt. 23, and the Great Commission requires following Christ's commands, then the conclusion of believing in the risen Messiah and following his commandments would necessitate listening to and conforming oneself to the Law of Moses, as lived out and interpreted by Christ himself and as taught by the Apostles.¹⁵⁰ This is the potential implication of the command found in the Great Commission.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁷ Mt. 5:17-19. There is much debate as to whether or not Mt. 5:18 is equating "all being accomplished" to the death and resurrection, a notion which fundamentally hangs on Christ's words, "it is finished" in Jn, 19:30. However, the fact that heaven and earth still exist is clear enough to assume that all "being accomplished" must refer to an eschatological state, as opposed to Christ's death and resurrection. Not to mention that the author of Hebrews says in 2:8, "But now we do not yet see all things subjected to him." Therefore, all has not been accomplished.

¹⁴⁸ Mt. 23:2-3. *Italics added for emphasis.* It seems this passage would include not only the Law of Moses but also various profitable halachic rulings and ways of keeping the commandments. The focus of Christ in this passage highlights the hypocritical nature of *some* of the traditions and the burden placed on people by additional commands not found in the Law of God. In other words, while the Pharisees preach Moses, they do not follow Moses with their actions, thus violating the Law of God.

¹⁴⁹ Obvious exceptions include those traditions which replace and nullify the Law of God. If, at any time, a tradition of man makes an unbearable yoke or supplants the focus of Messiah, it is an idol and ought to be disregarded. See Mk. 7:7-8; Mt. 5:20. Noel S Rabbinowitz, "Matthew 23:2-4: Does Jesus Recognize the Authority of the Pharisees and Does He Endorse Their Halakah?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 46.3 (2003), 444-447.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 446. "...Matthew presents 'Christian Judaism' as the only legitimate form of Judaism.."

¹⁵¹ Rom. 3:31; 8:7; 1 Jn. 2:3; Heb. 10:28; Rev. 14:12.

No Transition in the book of James (Ya'acob)

There is some debate as to which epistle was actually the first to be written. There are three choices, 1st Thessalonians, Galatians, or James. Many biblical scholars think that James penned the very first epistle, given that he was converted *before* Paul (1 Cor. 15:7), and that Paul spent at least three years in Arabia and Damascus before meeting Peter and James (Gal. 1:17-19).¹⁵² It was during this time, and before the first Jerusalem council, that James became the leader of the sect of The Way in Jerusalem. Given this timeline, and that James confirms Paul's ministry in Galatians, it is likely that James's epistle was penned slightly before Paul's first epistle (whether Galatians or 1 Thess.).¹⁵³ Therefore, the Book of James, and its overt pro-Law message demonstrates that one of the earliest epistles neither commands nor anticipates a transition away from Moses.¹⁵⁴ Furthermore, as the leader in Jerusalem, it is James himself who confronts Paul in Acts 21, trying to find out if he has committed apostasy from Moses in his teaching and whether Paul had strayed from the gospel message that had been approved.

No Transition in the Jerusalem Councils: Acts 15 and Acts 21

Even though the primary focus of this dissertation is Acts 21, one can only fully understand Acts 21 and whether or not there is a transition away from Moses is through analyzing Acts 15, as well.

¹⁵² Craig L. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the New Testament: Countering the Challenges to Evangelical Christian Beliefs* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2016), 464.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ The "perfect Law of Liberty" is a very strong allusion pointing to the two most profound Torah Psalms (Ps. 19:7; 40:6-7; 119:45). See also *Aristeas* 31; and 1 QS 10:6, 8, 11 that describe the Torah as perfect giving freedom. Given the early timing of James, when he says, "If anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer..." in 1:23-24, contextually and historically speaking, what "word" would he be talking about? It seems like the only plausible answer is the historically existing Word of God, that being the Tanakh.

Therefore it is my judgment that we do not trouble those who are turning to God from among the Gentiles, but that we write to them that they abstain from things contaminated by idols and from fornication and from what is strangled and from blood. For Moses from ancient generations has in every city those who preach him, since he is read in the synagogues every Sabbath.¹⁵⁵

If the Law of Moses was being transitioned away from, then why would the Apostles have the Gentile converts hear the Law every Sabbath? For James and Paul ought to have sheltered the Gentiles from the Law rather than expose them to it since it was being transitioned away from, especially while Paul built a new religion for the Gentiles, as the transitory theory posits.

That, however, begs the question, do either Acts 15 or Acts 21 mandate a transition away from Mosaic orthopraxy for the believers in Messiah? To answer that, it is important that a proper historical contextual understanding of Acts 15 and Acts 21 be established so that one can see the complex interaction between 1st Century Judaisms and their soteriological beliefs, how believing Gentiles would be accepted into the community after they leave their pagan temple context, and why the Apostles focus on faith, as opposed to circumcision, in their dogma. If neither Acts 15 nor Acts 21 show a transition, then the transitory theory becomes seriously imperiled.

Acts 21 and Acts 15: The Core Issue of Circumcision, 1st Century Soteriology, Jewish Ethnicity, and the World To Come

Referring back to the Great Commission, one should recall that the very emphasis of Christ is that all the believing ones from among the nations undergo a mikveh (baptism) for the identifying marker of association. This stands in contrast to prevalent theological thought in Judaism at the time of Christ. In 1st Century Judaism, according to *oral law*, proselytes were

¹⁵⁵ Acts 15: 19-21.

required to make a sacrifice, be circumcised, and be immersed in a mikveh. After the destruction of the temple, it is recorded that money equivalent to the sacrifice was required for conversion to Judaism.¹⁵⁶ By doing these actions, the gentile by birth could become ethnically Jewish by religious ceremony. For many in the first century, in order to be assured participation in the world to come, one not only had to practice Judaism, but one also needed to be Jewish, for only the Jews were graciously granted salvation and the covenant promises. It was the act of becoming Jewish, by circumcision, that marked entrance into the Covenants, and thus granted salvation to the Gentile.¹⁵⁷ What Christ and the Apostles underscore is that salvation is based first on faith, and that the baptism was the outward expression of that faith. Again, the primary disagreement of the time is how one enters into the covenant. This relative ease of Gentile inclusion demonstrated by Christ and the Apostles is not totally unprecedented however, as Hillel also bucked the anti-Gentile trends in 1st Century Judaism. On the whole, the position of Christ marks a significant departure from rabbinic tradition which required not only a mikveh, but also physical circumcision and sacrifices.¹⁵⁸

The Sin Nature and Soteriology of the 1st Century: An Excursus

In order to understand the historical context, a brief understanding of the human condition is required. The doctrine of original sin, or, more aptly, a pervasively depraved human nature, inherited through Adam, is seemingly already understood and accepted by rabbinic

¹⁵⁶ b. *Yevamot* 47a; M. *Sanhedrin* 10:1.; b. *Sanhedrin* 90a.; b. *B'rachot* 5a.; 4Q521.

¹⁵⁷ James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, Vol. 2 (Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1985), 792. See *Epic of Theodotus*.

¹⁵⁸ Tim Hegg, *Paul the Letter Writer*, 86. See Hillel in b. *Shabbat* 17b.; b. *Shabbat* 31a.

authorities.¹⁵⁹ In the first century, there were rabbis and sages who tended to agree with Paul on the human sin nature (e.g., no one can keep the Law perfectly because humans are born with the propensity for sinning and ultimately will sin.)¹⁶⁰ Therefore, it seems, that it was already understood that salvation was granted by grace. The actual disagreement at hand was the *starting point* of that grace and how it was granted to the individual. The Apostles consider faith to be the initiator of grace to the individual, while the Party of the Circumcision believe that circumcision was the starting point of grace. The belief among the latter was that since Israel chose to accept the Torah, God chose the people of Israel for salvation, and as a result, anyone born into Israel was *automatically* granted a place in the world to come.¹⁶¹ This grace, of course, was confirmed

¹⁵⁹ Original sin is a much-debated topic that can range from the extremes of infant damnation to versions of the doctrine that show no effect on the human. In Christian theology, much like soteriological and eschatological debates the effect of original sin seems to be split between the Reformed and Evangelical and other traditions. There is additional commentary from with believing and unbelieving Judaism as well. In the Reformed tradition, their acceptance of Total Depravity places them, typically within the sphere of Augustinian thought and in some cases infant damnation. See Augustine, *City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson (New York: NY: Penguin Classics, 2003), 501. There is also a more moderated view that does not directly connect the sin of Adam to us, but that a morally corrupt (totally depraved nature) is imbued simply for being a human. On this view there is original sin, but the guilt of Adam's sin is not transferred to us. See *Scots Confession* 3 (1560); *Belgic Confession* 15 (1561); *Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion* 9 (1563). This view seems to be more in accord what Zwingli thought. See Huldrych Zwingli, "Declaration of Huldreich Zwingli Regarding Original Sin, Addressed to Urbanus Rhesus, August 15, 1526," in *On Providence and Other Essays*, ed. Samuel Macauley Jackson (Durham NC: Labyrinth, 1983), 1-32.; In the more evangelical and Wesleyan traditions, which affirm "total depravity," but in a sense that it is more like a disease as opposed to a more reformed view of complete "total" depravity. See Joel B. Green, "A Wesleyan View" in *Original Sin and the Fall: Five Views*, eds. J.B. Stump and Chad Meister (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2020). See Also Wesley's treatise on the topic, *The Doctrine of Original Sin: According to Scripture, Reason, and Experience* in *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 12, *Doctrinal and Controversial Treatises I*, ed. Randy L. Maddox (Nashville: TN: Abingdon, 2012), 117-481. The Jewish views, much like the Christian views are heavily dependent on anthropological *a priori* regarding freedom of the will. To that end, both Philo and Josephus detail the various traditions that arose within the Judaisms of the 1st Century and the Talmud is evidence of the diversity of thought on the matter. In any case the trend in Judaism seems to be that there is no real concept of original sin *guilt* per se, but rather, that sin is individual and that all men have some form of disposition toward evil, which was evident even in Adam. David Konstan, *The Church Fathers and the Rabbis: The Transformation of Sin* (London: Bloomsbury Academic), 156-158. See Josephus, *Antiquities*, 13.5.9. For a distinction between intentional sin and unintentional sin see Philo, *On the Posterity of Cain* 10-11. <https://www.earlyjewishwritings.com/text/philo/book8.html> (Date accessed April 8, 2024). On the "evil inclination" see *Pirkei Avot* 4:1.; 2 Esdras 7:118-128.

¹⁶⁰ *Sanhedrin* 101a. "Indeed, there is not a righteous man on earth who continually does good and who never sins." (Ecc.7:20; Rom. 3:10-11)

¹⁶¹ Tim Hegg, *The Letter Writer*, 91. See *Mekilta de-Rabbi Ishmael* Exodus 20; *Midrash Rabbah* Exodus 20; b. *Avodah Zarah* 2b.

on the eighth day of one's life, via circumcision. One could, theoretically, be cut off from the people (lose salvation), however, those chosen into the Jewish community, would generally be saved purely because of their *ethnic heritage*.¹⁶² Therefore, even those who believed that circumcision granted Jewish ethnic status, and thus salvation, did not believe that salvation was attained by complete obedience to the works of the Law. For even in Jewish anthropology, the evil inclination of humanity renders all prone to sin. Contrary to typical contemporary Christian interpretation, the major sects of Judaism held that obedience to Torah was *not* the grounding of salvation, rather, it was by the grace of God that one had Jewish status and circumcision which were a guarantee of access to the eschatological kingdom. The Torah as such are the righteous ordinances graciously given so that one can abide within the grace already given.

This belief is best illustrated by the Exodus narrative, where grace and redemption are provided to Israel as the starting point. Israel is miraculously (graciously) delivered from bondage in Egypt. After the mercy and grace given to Israel, they are then led to Sinai, where the rules of the covenant are given. In short, everyone can see that redemption and grace precede the Law, therefore the Law is not the basis of salvation, but the method of abiding in the covenant.¹⁶³

¹⁶² b. *Sanhedrin* 90a.; Thomas D. Lancaster, *The Holy Epistle to the Galatians*, (Marshfield, MO: FFOZ, 2011), 18-19; Shaye J.D. Cohen, "Crossing the Boundary and Becoming a Jew," *Harvard Theological Review* 82.1(1989), 27.

¹⁶³ Since apostasy is a logical category even in the Tanakh, in some form or fashion we are in a state of conditionality. In other words, saved people cannot continually be *practicing* sin, and there was always some form of expected personal (internal) piety that was indicative of a true covenant member. See Collman, "(Un)Making a Theological Mountain Out of a Cardiologistical Mohel: Heart-Circumcision in Paul's Epistles," *JMJS* 10 (2023), 91. The view in mind is that one should be striving for covenant *faithfulness*, not in some form of pedantic perfectionism, but rather practicing intentional faith. In other words, one cannot practice sin and expect to be justified. See 1 Jn. 2:3-4; Heb. 6:6; Rev.2:1-29; 12:17; 14:12; 22:14.

Another example is found in the creation narrative where Adam is graciously placed in the Garden, then he is given the rules to remain in the garden.¹⁶⁴

Therefore, since it was already commonly understood in 1st Century Judaism, that grace was already granted to the Jewish people, the Sages also had to account for how Gentiles could enter into the Covenant promises, if they could at all. According to Montegiore and Loewe, the heathen Gentiles, are rightly called enemies of God, given their entrenchment in idolatry and all manners of wickedness and are cut off from the covenants of God and without hope in the world.¹⁶⁵ The *theological* conclusion of the Rabbis is that Gentiles, in order to achieve righteous standing before God they would have to be circumcised according to the Law to become Jewish for Jewish status was the foundation of salvation.¹⁶⁶ This circumcision would mark the entrance into the covenant, and then this Jewish proselyte status would then be maintained by continued observance of the commandments.¹⁶⁷

The Transitory Theory, Gentile Inclusion, the Reason for Acts 15 - Circumcision

The fact that even the Jews of the first century understood (albeit incorrectly by ethnicity) salvation by grace demonstrates that the biblical truth of grace did not transition after the

¹⁶⁴ Gen. 2:8, 15-17. The narrative indicates that Adam was made, *then placed* in the garden. In other words, he was, by grace created and placed into the garden, then the Lord expected obedience.

¹⁶⁵ C.G. Montegiore and H.M.J Loewe, eds., *A Rabbinic Anthology* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 556-579.; Eph. 2:12. Here it seems that Paul actually does agree with a portion of the Party of the Circumcision's argument, that is that the Gentiles were indeed excluded from Israel and the promises of the Covenants, and thus without hope.

¹⁶⁶ b. Yevamot 47a.

¹⁶⁷ Obtaining the Jewish righteous status, however, does not necessarily mean that there was not disagreements about actual societal status after Gentile conversion, with some Rabbis giving full status to Gentiles, while others treating the Gentile proselytes as hardly better than slaves. In many cases it seems that unlike modern religion an outsider could not simply convert to Judaism and that genealogical impurity was irreparable in the Gentiles. Matthew Thiessen, *Contesting Conversion* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011), 148.; C.G. Montegiore and H.M.J Loewe, eds., *A Rabbinic Anthology*, 570.; m. *Horayot* 3:8; m. *Bikkurim* 1:4. This concept will be important below when discussing the "dividing wall" in the section on the Conciliatory Theory.

resurrection. For, the transitory theory and the conciliatory theory both posit a change from the Law to that of grace. As evidenced above, no such transition takes place, for grace was already understood, albeit misapplied.¹⁶⁸ Therefore, Christ's instructions for the Gentiles to undergo a ritual bath symbolizing their faith and the forgiveness of their sins, as opposed to proselyte circumcision, is of the utmost importance. For, the mikveh of Christ is demonstrating a *reorientation* toward existing biblical and anthropological truth, as opposed to what the transitory theory claims as a transition away from the Law.¹⁶⁹ In other words, Christ and Paul are correcting faulty theological conclusions about soteriology *within* Judaism, not radically changing the concept of grace, for grace always was. The Jewish sect of "The Way," contra the primary belief in the first century, or for particular Gentiles who became circumcised via the proselyte ceremony, determined that faith is the entrance requirement to the Covenants, and one confirms and accepts that grace and via faith, baptism, and abiding in the commands of God.

To that end, the opening verses of Acts 15 lay a very clear picture as to why the Jerusalem council was needed.

Some men came down from Judea and *began* teaching the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." And when Paul and Barnabas had

¹⁶⁸ M. *Sanhedrin* 10:1.; b. *Sanhedrin* 90a.; b. *B'rachot* 5a.; 4Q521. It should also be noted here, too, that much of the Pharisaical and Essene literature contains strong references to the resurrection of the body, but only those who were Jews or proselytes would be resurrected. If the *Mishna* is at least partially indicative of prevailing thought in the 1st Century, it shows that the sages already understood that perfect obedience to the Torah was not the cause of eschatological salvation. The *Mishna* underscores the sins and unrighteousness of the people of Israel, but that, despite those sins, the people of Israel were nonetheless granted gracious acceptance into the kingdom. Therefore, historically speaking, in Pharisaical Judaism, there could have already been a tradition of being saved by grace, not by works. The fault, however, seems that this grace was exclusionary and only directed toward Israel, hence the need for Gentiles to become Jewish through proselytization.

¹⁶⁹ The anthropological truth being that Gentiles cannot become Jews, but Gentiles can follow the Law through faith. For the Law was not given to Jews, rather the Law was given to a mixed multitude of *Israelites* and Gentiles. Jewishness and Judaism is a by-product of identity with the Tribe of Judah and the Southern Kingdom after the return from exile in the 6th century BCE. In the same way a one cannot change the sex they were born with; in the same way one cannot change the ethnicity one was born into. One can change how they believe and how they act.

great dissension and debate with them, *the brethren* determined that Paul and Barnabas and some other of them should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders concerning this issue.¹⁷⁰

The issue and context of Acts 15 is whether or not someone who was not a Jew and not circumcised could be saved. As shown above, based on 1st Century *theological* understanding, anyone wanting to be saved would have to become Jewish through some form of proselyte ceremony. In fact, since the time of the Maccabees, it seems that circumcision was the life-or-death marker of covenant inclusion. In other words, it was the only sure way one could know a full dedication to the God of Israel. The requirement for correct circumcision was so ingrained that even if one wanted to switch sects of Judaism, say from a Sadducee to an Essene, they would undergo a new ceremony to conform to the halacha of the sect being joined. What is quite interesting is that in the written Torah of Moses, as opposed to the prevailing customs, one will search in vain to find any reference to a proselyte ceremony for non-Jews to become Jewish, nor for a requirement of circumcision to be guaranteed a place in the resurrection. Yet, at the same time, God commands, in the written Torah, that all males be circumcised as a sign of the Abrahamic covenant and commands circumcision to participate in the Passover. This no doubt is the source of the confusion among the Judaisms of the first century and why Paul and Barnabas's understanding of the timing of circumcision becomes so important for correct interpretation of the circumcision command for Gentiles.

The question that presented itself to the Apostles was whether or not the status of the flesh guaranteed salvation. Paul, Barnabas, James, and Peter agreed that salvation is granted by faith, not due to the status of the flesh nor Jewish ethnicity. The reason they come to this conclusion is that, according to the Torah, Abraham believed first, and the command of

¹⁷⁰ Acts 15:1. Italics original in NASB 95. Underlined for emphasis.

circumcision came *after* his being declared righteous and his being saved by grace, through faith.¹⁷¹ The text in Genesis 15 shows, and Paul reiterates in Rom. 4:10, that the promise and Abraham's faith were *before* his circumcision. Why? So that Abraham could be the father of both the circumcision (the physical lineage of Abraham) and the uncircumcision (Gentiles – who by faith are adopted as sons of Abraham). Thus, all nations and ethnicities, not just the Jews, could be blessed through Abraham. For, if all people are required to become Jewish, as the prevailing first century belief was, then only one nation actually gets blessed, which is an apparent violation of the promise of God given to Abraham.¹⁷² Again, this fundamental doctrine marked the main distinction between the new Jewish sect of “The Way” and the other sects of Judaism and the Judaizing Gentiles, at the time.¹⁷³ One could even say this was an internal doctrinal battle *within* Judaism, or perhaps a struggle for who controlled the meaning of what Judaism was. The battle it seems is between the evolutionary Judaism and traditions that were developed since the Maccabean era and the Messianic definition of the Covenants. As the case may be, the Judaism and laws of the Pharisees were derivative of the Maccabean understanding from 160s BC and other ancient forms of Judaism which were developed after Ezra/Nehemiah in the 600s BC, whereas the Messianic understanding is much more ancient than any of these, stemming all the way back to Moses and Abraham.¹⁷⁴ If the battle is for proper practice of

¹⁷¹ Gen. 15:6; Heb. 11:8,9,17; Rom 4:10.

¹⁷² This is also a serious obstacle to Two-House theology common in the Hebrew Roots. This theology claims Gentile believers are actually members of the Lost 10 tribes of the Northern Kingdom. As such, this theology claims that they are members of Ephraim. The problem presents itself similarly. That is, if the nations are technically Ephraim, then only one nation gets blessed and that is Israel instead of Israel and all the nations of the Earth.

¹⁷³ A common interpretation derived from supersessionist hermeneutics would call Judaizers as Gentile who would perform any commandment of the Torah. However, Judaizing should only be viewed as those Gentiles who took the yoke of circumcision for one of two reasons. 1) To ensure salvation. 2) To become Jewish to ensure salvation.

¹⁷⁴ The earliest orthopraxy is the best orthopraxy.

Judaism then it is certainly not a transition to a new religion as the transitory theory posits. Rather it is a return to a preexisting Covenant. To use an anachronistic word from the Reformation, this seems to be an ancient form of *ad fontes*!¹⁷⁵ Ultimately, this doctrine of Christ and the Apostles was not a transitory avenue to a new belief, but rather a *reorientation* toward *preexisting* and perpetual truth based on the Abrahamic Covenant, the earliest faith. The Apostles did not reinvent or transition to a new soteriology, in light of Christ, but show that faith was always the basis of the existing and irrevocable Covenants.¹⁷⁶ In other words, Christ and the Apostles are calling for return to the faith of Abraham, for he is the father of us all.¹⁷⁷

In this regard it seems that Paul and Barnabas, along with the others of the council, held and maintained a strict legal interpretation of circumcision. Here it is quite important to understand what the Law says about circumcision. Circumcision was given to Abraham and *to all within his house*. In Gen. 17 it is written that all males born to Abraham, all servants *purchased with money*, and all the children of servants shall be circumcised. Legally speaking, this instance of mandatory childhood circumcision applied only to those born within the house of Abraham and those of Abraham's house who were purchased with money. Thus, circumcision applies only to babies who are eight days old and anyone purchased with money. Furthermore, the Torah details that Abram was called a Hebrew *before* his circumcision.¹⁷⁸ Therefore, it was not his circumcision that altered his ethnicity.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁵ Carter Lindberg, *The European Reformations*, 2nd ed. (United Kingdom: Blackwell Publishing, 2010), 56.; G.R. Evans, *The Roots of the Reformation: Tradition, Emergence, and Rupture*, 2nd ed., (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 145-166.

¹⁷⁶ Heb. 11.

¹⁷⁷ Jn. 8:39.

¹⁷⁸ Gen. 14:13.

¹⁷⁹ The identification as a Hebrew continues all the way through the time of the Apostles. Acts 6:1 is particularly interesting in that it recognizes a socio-religious distinction between native Hebrews and Hellenistic

The second requirement for circumcision comes from Exodus 12 and is applicable for both direct descendants from Israel and Gentiles when it comes to *observation of the Passover*. Exodus 12:42 indicates that the Passover is a day set apart for Adonai that commemorates the redemption of Israel from the land of Egypt. Automatically one can rule out that this observation and its requirements have any soteriological value whatsoever. Exodus 12:43-44 repeat the Abrahamic commands, and then verses 48-49 detail a new requirement for strangers and sojourners, should *they choose* to celebrate the Passover. It states that they must be circumcised.¹⁸⁰ This command is also repeated in Num. 9:14. Although the LXX translates the Hebrew *ger* as *proselytos*, the context seems to show that, whatever this type of proselyte meant, it was not the same as the proselyte ceremony of the 1st Century as the word definitely was under refinement within Judaism.¹⁸¹ For, the context of Exodus 12 indicates that these people had not been circumcised yet, but they decided that they wanted to observe this Holy Day. If they were proselytes according to the traditions of the 1st Century, there would be no need for the

Jews. While there is some debate as to whether these Hellenistic Jews were Gentiles who adopted Judaism or actually irreligious Jews who had not been circumcised and had adopted a Greek culture through assimilation, the latter seems to have a bit more support, as there were numerous communities of irreligious Jews around the Decapolis and the Nabatean areas east of the Jordan River. See Craig Keener, *Galatians: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019), 95-96. What is important to delineate however are the distinctions between being a Hebrew, belonging to the tribe of Judah, and practicing the religion of Judaism. One can be a Hebrew (from the lineage of Abraham), one can be a Jew (ethnically), and one can practice Judaism which is the religion of those from Judah (written and oral tradition) developed primarily after Judah returned from captivity. Although there is definitely some commonality between being from Judah and being a Hebrew, being a Hebrew (from Abraham) and being an Israelite (from Jacob) is a much more ancient tradition and has direct connection to the covenantal promises and the reception of the Torah. It is to this ancient identity that Gentiles become ingrafted (*Politeia of Israel* – Eph. 2:11-12; Rom. 11).

¹⁸⁰ A circumcision mandated by the Word of Adonai is certainly in a different category than a law made by a mere man which demands the following of oral tradition in order to have social and epistemic proof of salvation and covenant inclusion. In other words, only God can demand circumcision from individuals like he did with Abraham and with the son of Moses (Ex. 4:25).

¹⁸¹ Kuhn notes that the final development of “proselyte” as a technical term to denote the Gentile who becomes a *full Jew by circumcision* irrespective of his national or social position did not take place in the Palestinian Judaism but in the Judaism of the Graeco-Roman diaspora.” (Italics for emphasis). Kuhn, “προσήλυτος” in *TDNT*, 6:730.

injunction of circumcision, for that would have already been taken care of in the proselyte ceremony. At the end of the day however, what the Torah specifically requires for circumcision is not for *soteriological purposes* but for Gentiles who wanted to observe the rites of Passover. For the sons of Abraham, circumcision was the sign of the Covenant by which the promised seed would come. Though, since the time of the Maccabees, this sign simply became a social identifier and a delineation between those defiled by idols and the people of Adonai.¹⁸² With this physical circumcision, there ought to have been a direct association with an internal state (circumcision of the heart) which marked true faith in the promises and gospel spoken to Abraham.¹⁸³ As for Gentiles, should they desire to undergo a circumcision to observe Passover and draw nearer to God by observing and celebrating the historical confirmation of the prophesy given to Abraham, they have, for all intents and purposes, *already* put their trust into the God of Israel.¹⁸⁴ Considering the severe social cost that a Gentile would incur with this circumcision, it seems that only those who truly and willingly wanted to would pursue these commands. It is imperative to know that both Greek and Roman societies viewed the Jewish rite of proselyte circumcision as an overt and unrepealable repudiation of the gods and thus almost all aspects of civil society. With that being said, what one should notice right away is that the circumcision is done on one's own volition and there is no forced circumcision that is associated with the command.¹⁸⁵ The whole notion of *forced* circumcision *for salvation* is precisely the issue

¹⁸² Craig S. Keener, *Galatians: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019), 84.

¹⁸³ Gal. 3:8.; Gen. 18:18; 26:4.; Deut. 10:16; 30:6; Lev. 26:41; Jer. 4:4; 9:25-26; Ez. 44:7, 9.

¹⁸⁴ "...for a man looks at the outward appearance, but Adonai looks into the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7). There is no way to know for sure whether an individual man has actually put his trust and faith into the God of Israel or not. Absolution is with God alone, but, considering the circumstances and the *voluntary* nature of following the commandments of the Passover, circumcision seems to be an indication of the motivation of the individual.

¹⁸⁵ The command in Exodus requires the whole house be circumcised, so in one aspect there is parental coercion over the males of the house. In this regard, the head of the house has made the decision for the whole

presented in Acts 15:1 and in Gal. 2:3; 6:12. Given that there is no commandment in the Torah for forced *adult* circumcision. Legally speaking, biblical *adult* circumcision is for those who are foreigners who have joined themselves to Abraham and who want to walk in the *commandment of Passover*.¹⁸⁶ This stands in opposition to any oral law for circumcision that is used for ethnicity change or for any soteriological inclusion.¹⁸⁷

Therefore, it would be decidedly against the Law for Gentiles to participate in a proselyte ceremony for salvation because the circumcision would not have been done at the right time or for the right reasons.¹⁸⁸ Furthermore, since adult Gentile believers are not purchased with money but with blood, they do not fit the criteria for circumcision, even though they are adopted into the family of Abraham.¹⁸⁹ Given that Gentile inclusion into the family of Abraham is by the blood of Christ not by the exchange of money, the requirement for ethnic conversion for salvation is moot.¹⁹⁰ What is more, those laws for ethnic conversion are based in man-made laws. Therefore,

family, as the moral authority. Secondly, the Passover observation is a family event, thus necessitating all males of that house be circumcised.

¹⁸⁶ In addition to this it seems that the Passover commands (with its sacrificial accoutrement) can only be truly *fulfilled* in the location where God has placed his Name, whether in Jerusalem or wherever the Tabernacle was during the Exodus journey. This does not mean, however, that one cannot *observe* the Passover in the diaspora. Here I am making a distinction between observance of the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and actually fulfilling the law regarding Passover. The case can be made that *observance* of the day while being too far away from the Temple or too poor to make the journey is different than fully walking in the command (i.e., Deut. 12:21). Given that the sacrifice could only be performed in Jerusalem or at the Temple, there is a sense in which the requirement for circumcision might only be fully applicable if a male and his family wanted to fulfill the requirements which depend on a Temple or Mishkan structure at a particular location (that being in the Land). Daniel's actions during the Babylonian exile illustrate the attitude. Daniel observed the sacrifice times by praying three times daily toward Jerusalem. Here he *observed* the required sacrifice times even though he was not actually able to *fulfill* the sacrifice. Likewise, Polycarp and Polycrates *observed* 14 Nisan, without the sacrificial service.

¹⁸⁷ Mark Nanos, "Paul's Non-Jews Do Not Become 'Jews,' But Do they Become 'Jewish'?: Reading Romans 2:25-29 Within Judaism, Alongside Josephus," JJMJS 1 (2014), 51.

¹⁸⁸ Thiessen, *The Gentile Problem*, 67-68; 78-82.

¹⁸⁹ Acts 20:28.; Eph. 2:15.; Gal. 3:8.

¹⁹⁰ Caleb remained and was always referred to as a Kenizzite (thus keeping his ethnicity), even though he settled among the tribe of Judah and became a chief nobleman of Judah. He was a descendant of an Edomite and

a proselyte ceremony based in Pharisaical law is certainly not the same thing as a Law created by the master of the Universe and the law that Paul and Barnabas, along with the First Jerusalem council are intent on following.¹⁹¹

Having demonstrated the legal grounds for circumcision by which the First Jerusalem Council would be interpreting, it is possible to discuss the Transitory Theory regarding circumcision. Although the majority of commentators follow a hermeneutic that God has “redefined” or transitioned away from a physical circumcision requirement to a cardiological circumcision through faith and baptism, which is based primarily on their (mis)understanding of Galatians and supersessionist *a priori* stemming back to some of the early apologists such as Irenaeus and Origen, there is a growing body of evidence that no such transition has taken place.¹⁹² For one thing, circumcision of the heart has a long history in ancient Hebraic and Jewish thought. When the idea of heart circumcision is presented in the literature, its use does not seem to be a polemic against physical circumcision.¹⁹³ Rather, within faithful Judaism, it seems that there was always an expectation of hidden personal piety and faith in the coming Messiah, which was supposed to be the marker of a what a true covenant member was. This type of piety was taught by Christ and is not new within Judaism.¹⁹⁴ To that end, Hebrews 11

was most likely circumcised either before Israel left Egypt or when Joshua had everyone circumcised before the Passover. See Josh. 6.

¹⁹¹ Acts 15:21 “Moses is preached...”

¹⁹² N.T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2013), 920-921.; Collman, “(Un)Making a Theological Mountain Out of a Cardiological Mohel: Heart-Circumcision in Paul’s Epistles,” *JJMJS* 10 (2023), 91.

¹⁹³ Deut. 10:16; 30:6; Lev. 26:41; Jer. 4:4; 9:25-26; Ez. 44:7, 9. In the Qumran scrolls and other writings the theme of circumcision of the heart is found 1QPHab 11.13; 4Q434 Frag. 1, 1.4; Jub. 1:23; Odes of Solomon 11.1-3; Philo, *Spec.* 1.304-5; QG 3.46; cf. 1QS 5.5). For a greater enumeration of these and for whom I am grateful for illuminating these sources see, Collman, “(Un)Making a Theological Mountain Out of a Cardiological Mohel: Heart-Circumcision in Paul’s Epistles,” *JJMJS* 10 (2023), 101.

¹⁹⁴ Matt. 6:1-24.

demonstrates that Abraham, Moses and others had this faith and demonstrated this internal piety by faith. By the first century, however, it seems that many of the truly pious champions of the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants had lost their way and had developed a religion of laws contained in ordinances that stood counter to the commands of God.¹⁹⁵ Given this cultural context, Christ had come to accurately interpret the Covenants and bring correction and repentance to everyone.¹⁹⁶ Accordingly, the Apostles were the ones tasked with teaching what the Messiah taught regarding Gentile inclusion into the Covenants of the Promise.¹⁹⁷

Given the soteriological understanding of 1st Century Pharisaical Judaism, interpreters are required to make a distinction between the commandments of God for circumcision and the commandments of men that required circumcision. This is the very scenario that has confronted the First Jerusalem Council and Paul at Galatia. Now if there is a distinction between the Law of God and the law of Men, and the Scriptural data inclines me to think there is, this brings up the curious case study and distinction between Titus and Timothy and what Paul could have meant in 1 Cor. 7:19-20. If Galatians was written before the First Jerusalem Council, this would mean that Paul thought that it was good for Timothy to be circumcised, even after Paul's supposedly anti-circumcision message to the Gentiles.¹⁹⁸ (Timothy would have been considered a Gentile,

¹⁹⁵ Mark 7:1-13.; Among those who were indeed righteous and seeking the kingdom are Mary and Joseph (Mt. 1:19), John the Immerser, and Nathanael (Jn. 1:47) D.G. Dunn, *Epistle to the Galatians*, ed. Henry Chadwick (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1993), 136; N.T. Wright, *Justification: God's Plan and Paul's Vision* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 146.

¹⁹⁶ Mt. 5:17-19; Eph. 2:14-15.; Knox Chamblin, "Law of Moses and the Law of Christ," in *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship Between the Old and New Testaments*, ed. John S. Feinberg, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1988), 191.

¹⁹⁷ Mt. 28:19; Acts 13:47.

¹⁹⁸ Moises Silva, *Interpreting Galatians*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2001), 131-132.; J.B. Lightfoot, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians* (Andover, MA: Warren Draper, 1870), 58-61. http://www.classicchristianlibrary.org/library/lightfoot_jb/Lightfoot-Gal.pdf (Accessed April 2, 2024).

for all the Jews knew his father was a Greek.)¹⁹⁹ Although some Christian commentators attempt to say that Timothy was a Jew given the status of his Jewish mother, this is decidedly anachronistic, for at this time in Jewish history, it was only the patristic lineage that was counted towards one's Jewish status.²⁰⁰ What is more, the Tanakh typically presents heritage in patristic format. To that end, the addition of maternal lineage was a response to persecution, death, and a crisis of Jewish identity after the destruction of the Temple and most likely around the 2nd Century.²⁰¹ Given that Timothy's father was a Greek, and everyone knew, makes the circumcision that much more scandalous, both to Jews of the day, and to modern interpreters. However, even if Galatians was written after the First Jerusalem Council, we have Paul circumcising what would be a Gentile male, thus adding a supposedly unnecessary burden or an unbearable yoke.²⁰² In both cases, the circumcision of Timothy is a theological issue for Pauline interpretation. Given this obvious issue after the First Jerusalem Council, some commentators like Tenney, resort to transitory explanations for this supposed lapse in Paul's judgment.²⁰³ They make the case that Paul's doctrine was still developing, and Paul simply succumbed to his old Pharisaical "works of the law" in relationship to Timothy, but then came to his senses with Titus.²⁰⁴ As for Titus all we actually know from Galatians 2:3 that he was not *compelled* to

¹⁹⁹ Acts 16:3; 15:10.

²⁰⁰ Shaye J.D. Cohen, "Was Timothy Jewish? Acts 16:1-3," *JBL* 105, no. 2 (1986), 251-268.

²⁰¹ Shaye J.D. Cohen, "The Origins of the Matrilineal Principle in Rabbinic Law," *AJS Review* 10, no.1 (Spring 1985), 19-53.

²⁰² The notion of the impossible yoke will be explained in the next section.

²⁰³ Merrill C. Tenney, *New Testament Survey Revised*, Revised by Walter M. Dunnitt (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985), 246-255.

²⁰⁴ There is another potential argument of Pauline adiaphora, which will be addressed later in this dissertation.

circumcision.²⁰⁵ This means that Titus was not forced to undergo proselyte conversion based on the theological and Jewish legal understanding of the day.²⁰⁶ What the text does not say is that Paul is denying the continued existence of the Laws regarding circumcision found in the written Torah of God.²⁰⁷ Furthermore, Paul is not denying that Titus might want to undergo circumcision at a later date to fully observe a Passover, having been taught what the Law said regarding it.²⁰⁸ If this is the case, then a potential explanation for Timothy's circumcision was that he was mature enough in the faith, having heard the Law of Moses every Sabbath (Acts 15:21), and that he was under no compulsion to perform *proselyte* ceremonial circumcision.²⁰⁹ What we can conclude with this line of reasoning is that, if all that matters is keeping the commandments of God (1 Cor. 7:19), Paul cannot be speaking against the commandments regarding circumcision, but rather is speaking against any notion that positional justification and covenant membership could be earned or merited by circumcision via Jewish oral religion.²¹⁰ To that end, those holding to the transitory understanding regarding the circumcision of Timothy and Titus typically use 1 Cor. 7:19-20 as proof that any Gentile circumcision is in some way Judaizing, but the scriptural evidence makes no mention of Timothy becoming ethnically Jewish, and most certainly not being circumcised for salvific purposes.

²⁰⁵ See also Gal. 6:12.

²⁰⁶ Hegg, *Galatians*, 61-63; Cha, *Misunderstanding Galatians*, 84.

²⁰⁷ *Shabbat* 31a.

²⁰⁸ Acts 15:21; 1 Cor. 11:2; 2 Thess. 2:15.

²⁰⁹ Based on Galatians, compulsion seems to be the only difference between Timothy and Titus. (Gal. 2;3; 6:12.)

²¹⁰ Cha, *Misunderstanding Galatians*, 83-84.

Given what has been covered so far, it must be emphasized here that “Judaizing” can only really be defined as those Gentiles who have taken the yoke of *proselyte circumcision and Pharisaical oral law* upon themselves. These same Gentiles were the ones coercing other Gentiles and teaching that they could not be saved unless they underwent proselyte circumcision.²¹¹ Based on this understanding, the best way to interpret 1 Cor. 7:18-20 is that Gentiles are not to undergo a *proselyte circumcision* because that is against the Law. The key verse is verse 19. “Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping/guarding the commandments of God.”²¹² This stands to interpret verse 18, that says “Is any man called being circumcised? Let him not become uncircumcised. Is any called in uncircumcision? Let him not be circumcised.” If circumcision is nothing, but the guarding and complying with the commands of God is what Paul wants to emphasize, then Paul’s use of “circumcision” seems to be shorthand for proselyte circumcision (ethnic conversion) and not the commands of God regarding circumcision. The phrase, *each one must remain in the way they were called* in verse 20, therefore can be understood as referring to their *ethnic status*.²¹³ Gentiles cannot become native Jews and Jews should definitely not perform epispasm to regrow their foreskin, thus becoming “Gentiles” for social convenience in the Greek-dominated areas. Each one is to remain

²¹¹ Acts 15:1.

²¹² *Teresis* has a notion of a prison guard. In its other two uses in the NT it is used in connection with the Apostles being arrested (Acts 4:3; 5:18). Here Paul is emphasizing a radical adherence to the Commandments of God, keeping them under lock and key, the way a faithful guard would watch those in his custody. Some interpretations add an additional phrase to this verse adding “but *what matters* is keeping the commandments of God.”

²¹³ Like Caleb, one must remain in the way they were called (no proselyte circumcision, no cultural or forced epispasm). If Jewish persecution and economic participation was in view with Paul’s writing, then like the time of the Maccabees there was significant cultural pressure to be uncircumcised for economic and social participation. This was eventually magnified after 70AD and most certainly by the persecution of Hadrian. Robert G. Hall, “Epispasm: Circumcision in Reverse,” *Bible Review* (Aug. 1992), 52-57. <https://www.cirp.org/library/restoration/hall1/> (Accessed January 4, 2023).

what they are, for there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, but all that matters is following the commandments of God. Here Paul is keeping a stringent interpretation of the Torah. As covered earlier Gentile circumcision in Exodus 12 does not confer a new ethnicity to the foreigner, rather, the foreigner remains a foreigner, and one of the nations. As it is written, there is one law for the foreigner and the native born, if the *foreigner* want to observe the Passover.²¹⁴

The text of Exodus 12 does not specify *when* this circumcision was to take place. All that the Torah specifies is that the circumcision is to be complete before the Passover ceremony. Therefore, Timothy could have performed the circumcision at any time during the year because he set it in his heart to perform the Passover during the next year. Under the direction and supervision of Paul, Timothy, having been sanctified by the word of God, being free from compulsion, and wanting to do it for the right reasons, is circumcised as a Gentile. What is more is that this is done after the First Jerusalem Council and probably after the writing of Galatians.

Assuming a premillennial eschatologically, the continuity of circumcision is of particular interest for Gentiles and seems to parallel the circumcision of both foreigners and native born in Joshua 6. Ez. 44:9 says, “Thus says the Lord GOD: No foreigner, uncircumcised in heart and flesh, of all the foreigners who are among the people of Israel, shall enter my sanctuary.” The command of Adonai is very clear here. Any foreigner among the people of Israel will be circumcised *to enter the sanctuary*. To preclude a mere allegorical interpretation, the text requires both physical and spiritual circumcision! Who is the one that can judge the heart? Adonai. The text is quite specific, too: only those approaching and entering the sanctuary are to

²¹⁴ Perhaps Paul could also make a point that for all intents and purposes, the Laws regarding circumcision, although completely relevant and current, are practically moot for many of the Gentiles in Corinth. How likely is it that these Gentiles, or even Jews living in Corinth, are actually going to make the journey to Israel to fulfill the Passover or any feast? Since Gentiles can participate in essentially everything but Passover, and the Passover ceremonies can only be *fulfilled* while in the land, in the context of Corinth, circumcision really does not mean too much, as a practical matter. Corinth was over 700 nautical miles and 1,826 miles (2,940 km) by land to Jerusalem. Thus, they would only be *observing* the Passover.

be circumcised. This person still retains their ethnic status as a “foreigner” but is commanded by Adonai to be physically circumcised and to show internal faithfulness to the covenants in order to approach. What should be becoming clear is that Adonai alone, via his word, is able to mandate circumcision and when it should be performed.

Therefore, instead of showing an evolutionary and transitory track in Pauline understanding of circumcision, what is actually presented in the Scriptures is a strict adherence to what the Law commands and how that stood in contrast to the prevailing view of 1st Century Pharisaical Judaism and the “Judaism” of the Gentile Judaizers. The case study of the First Jerusalem Council, the circumcision of Timothy, the (possibly) delayed circumcision of Titus, and the eschatological existence of Ezekiel’s Temple, all demonstrate that Paul and the other Apostles were not developing new doctrine or guessing at what the Holy Spirit wanted, rather, they were following what the word of God says exactly, one might say to the letter and to the Spirit. Their interaction with the Party of the Circumcision, paganism, and other Jewish oral laws is a battle for correct and lawful doctrine based only on the word of God, which stands in stark contrast to the word of man.

But Isn’t the Torah An Impossible Burden?: Do Peter’s Words in Acts 15 Show Transition?

Having shown that no transition has taken place and that the primary disagreement at hand was the *starting point* of the acceptance of grace, a common historical interpretation of Acts 15 by the those holding to the transitory and conciliatory theories is that the Mosaic Law was an impossible burden to bear. What this means is that a transition was needed because the Law was *designed* to be too hard.²¹⁵ This interpretation comes from Peter’s words in Acts 15:10-

²¹⁵ It seems illogical to simultaneously say that during the dispensation of the Law, salvation was granted by works of the Law and also that the Law was too hard to do. The results of this type of double minded thinking is that no one was actually saved during the dispensation of the Law, for it was too hard. The same position typically

11. What Peter’s words seem to be saying is that that the *written* Torah of God was a yoke that “neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear.” The problem with this interpretation, as shown above, is that the historical and contextually accurate view is that salvation was already viewed as graciously granted to Israel as a people, and that *perfect* observation of the Torah was not the basis of eschatological salvation. Secondly, the text in Acts 15 has no mention of salvation by total perfect observation of the Law of God. Rather, the whole context in Acts 15 is about a *single facet* of the written Law (circumcision) and associated tradition (proselyte ceremony). In short, no one in the biblical text is actually discussing salvation by *perfect* and complete works of the Torah. In fact, the whole notion for the Jews, as Stendahl observes, is that “the Law did not require a static or pedantic perfectionism but supposed a covenant relationship in which there was room for forgiveness and repentance.”²¹⁶ Given this context and the actual covenantal relationship being spoken of, the main contention being discussed in Acts 15 is of a coerced circumcision taught by those holding to Pharisaical oral law.²¹⁷

Therefore, if it was generally assumed among 1st Century Judaisms that perfect observation of the Law *was not* required for salvation (as that salvation was already graciously granted), then what yoke is Peter talking about? For Moses, who was inspired by the Holy Spirit to write the words of the Torah, clearly indicates that the Law *is not too difficult* and that it is

also holds that the Law of Christ is actually harder than the Law of Moses because of the supposedly added spiritual commands of not even thinking lustfully, while at the same time saying that the Law of Christ is easy and light. On both sides, the Law is too hard when both the Law of God and the Law of Christ are within reach and not too difficult. This position, besides being self-defeating, certainly opens up the charge of God being a cosmic sadist, which will be covered in the next chapter on Euthyphro’s Dilemma.

²¹⁶ Krister Stendahl, “The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West,” *Harvard Theological Review* 56.3 (July 1963), 201. Quote originally found in M.I. Cha, *Misunderstanding Galatians*, 6.

²¹⁷ Avi ben Mordechai, *Galatians: A Torah Based Commentary in First-Century Hebraic Context* (Haifa: Millennium 7000 Communications, 2005), 173.

within reach.²¹⁸ Shall I apply C.S. Lewis’s method to Moses as done to Paul? *Aut Moses, aut malus homo*. Surely, Moses is not lying, here!²¹⁹ This notion of the Law not being too difficult through Christ is reinforced by Paul by quoting Moses’s insistence that the Law is not too difficult in Deut. 30:11, 14.²²⁰ Most importantly, Christ is Adonai in the flesh, and he told us his yoke was “easy and light.”²²¹ Therefore, since Adonai gave the Torah, it must likewise be easy and light, which is simply confirmation of what Moses already wrote. Lastly, and philosophically speaking, if God made a yoke too difficult for humanity in general, or the Jews in particular, that simply makes him a cosmic sadist and an evil God.²²² So, it seems on several accounts that the burden Peter is speaking of is not the corpus of Moses but something else.²²³

Halacha and Dogmata: The Doctrines and Traditions of Men

If the Law of God is not the heavy and impossible yoke, then Peter must be referring to another type of yoke that is not in the written Torah and is found only in theology. What Peter’s words indicate in Acts 15:9-11 is that the Jews and the Gentiles share the same faith and that there is no separation between the Jew and the Greek. Both of these groups are cleansed by their faith, and by implication, not circumcision, and more importantly any “works” of the Law. The

²¹⁸ Duet 30:11. This ease of keeping the Law, of course, assumes faith first and a circumcised heart (Deut. 10:16; Deut. 30:6; Jer. 4:4; Heb. 11:23-29). In a New Covenant context, if one had the Spirit who wrote the Law on the heart, it would actually be easier to keep the Law with the Holy Spirit indwelling within the person. In other words, if Moses said it was not too difficult, it would be even easier to Peter and all those after the initiation of the New Covenant.

²¹⁹ If Moses were to be lying, then the Holy Spirit who inspired him is also lying. This of course, is devastating to biblical doctrine.

²²⁰ Rom. 10:8.

²²¹ Mt. 11:30.

²²² See the section in this dissertation called “In the Wake of Euthyphro’s False Dilemma.”

²²³ As noted above, earning *salvation* by Torah is indeed an impossible burden because all have sinned and are under the curse of sin and death. But the Torah itself is not an impossible burden if pursued correctly.

admission by Peter is that not that Law of God is an impossible yoke, but that for the purposes of salvation it is impotent, especially if one is relying on man-made laws to be made righteous. It is quite possible that Peter could also be speaking of works-based salvation here, based on halachic rules. Should Peter have Paul's words in Galatians in mind, if one tries to use circumcision and Law as a means of salvation, one will have to live totally and perfectly by the Law to achieve salvation. Which is indeed a burden which no one can bear, for all have sinned and are under the curse of the Law. However, considering that most of Judaism thought perfect Torah observance was not the basis of salvation, this does not seem likely. Given the context of Gentiles coming into the community, it seems the burden that was impossible to bear is dogmatic barriers, which for all intents and purposes does ultimately lead us to the Paul's conclusion discussed presently.²²⁴ For if the dogma mandates that one must perform a work of circumcision for salvation, the whole work of the Law must be performed for salvation. The nuance is that it started with a dogmatic barrier for covenant inclusion. If salvation is based on works of the Law, then it is a heavy yoke that is unbearable, but if the Law is practiced within grace already given it is in fact easy and light. Therefore, the yoke that Peter must be speaking of is the *dogma* of proselyte salvation by circumcision, the rules and regulations that the various sects of Judaism have placed on the shoulders of converts. This is precisely what Christ said to the Pharisees and the Torah scholars in Mt. 23:4. "They time up heavy burdens and lay on men's shoulders, but they themselves are unwilling to move them with so much as a finger." Again, here we see the Apostles *reorientating* to *preexisting* and eternal truth and rejecting the halacha of 1st Century Judaism which had become the unbearable yoke of requiring a work for the Gentiles to be

²²⁴ Rob Vanhoff, "Circumcision in the Second Temple Period," Part 3, *Torah Resource* (2012), 2. <https://tr-pdf.s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/articles/circumcision-in-the-second-temple-period.pdf> (Accessed December 31, 2023).

saved.²²⁵ Christ also said to the Pharisees that even their halacha, some of which violated the Law of God was actually making “sons of Gehenna.”²²⁶ If the Pharisees were teaching that if a conversion to Judaism through circumcision saved them, and they had no real faith in the God of Israel, their discipleship under these Pharisees would most certainly turn them into a son of Gehenna. For a student is not above his teacher.²²⁷

Therefore, what this passage indicates is that there is no transition away from the Law. Rather, in Acts 15, the Apostles confirm that Moses is preached every Sabbath (Acts 15:21), and that they are reorienting toward preexisting truth and away from faulty teaching.²²⁸

Acts 15, Acts 21 The Jew/Gentile Divide: Different Orthopraxy?

At the First Jerusalem Council, one finds four commands that the Apostles demand new Gentile converts follow. The typical interpretation of these are that the Gentile converts only had to follow these rules, but not the Law of Moses. Connected with this train of thought is found in the Second Jerusalem Council in Acts 21. This is because within the context of Acts 21, one sees

²²⁵ Reorientation can be seen as a form of “transition,” by either rejecting or synthesizing new information as it is presented in one’s life as is the case in personal sanctification and psychological personality growth. But as the case is for the word of God and God himself, reorientation becomes quite problematic theologically speaking. For God is not like a human that he should change his mind! Theologically speaking reorientation is a tendency of man, not of God nor of his word. Thus, truth is not transitory. Again, the mere existence of theological understanding is not indicative of its correctness. See Arnold von Gennep, *Rites of Passage* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1960).; Jean Piaget and Bärbel Inhelder, *The Psychology of the Child* (Basic Books, 1969).; Walter Brueggemann, *From Whom No Secrets are Hid: Introducing the Psalms*, ed. Brent A. Strawn (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), 154.

²²⁶ Mt. 23:15. There should be no doubt that if a convert to Judaism thought that their circumcision saved them and they had no real faith in the God of Israel, their discipleship under these Pharisees would most certainly be a son of Gehenna. For a student is not above his teacher (Mt. 10:24).

²²⁷ Mt. 10:24.

²²⁸ Rabinowitz, “Mt. 23:2-4,” 446. “...Matthew presents ‘Christian’ Judaism as the only legitimate form of Judaism.”

that there is a unique feature in verse 21 that explicitly says “Jews” and in verse 25 that says “Gentiles.”

And when they heard it they began glorifying God; and they said to him, ‘You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed, and they are all zealous for the Law; and they have been told about you, that you are teaching all the **Jews** who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs.... But concerning the **Gentiles** who have believed, we wrote, having decided that they should abstain from meat sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from fornication.’²²⁹

James, in Acts 21 is appealing to what was already written and decided at the First Jerusalem Council.²³⁰ From the text, it appears that there is a distinct difference between what is required for Jews and Gentiles. The Jews it seems can continue keeping the law, while the Gentile converts simply have the four requirements found in Acts 15. This separation, even though there is supposedly no separation between Jew and Greek, is usually explained by the conciliatory theory (i.e., being all things to all men), which will be explained in the next section. This section, however, is focused on the ruling issued at the First Jerusalem Council, which will show no *transition* in biblical doctrine.

Like all biblical passages, context is key. It is generally accepted that the synagogues of the first century were mixed congregations, and it seems that Paul’s epistles often address multiple audiences, which indicate a mixed multitude of congregants from various backgrounds.²³¹ One could find within a synagogue believing Jews, believing Gentiles, and

²²⁹ Acts 21: 20-21, 25.

²³⁰ Acts 15:19-21, 29.

²³¹ Mark Nanos, *The Mystery of Romans*, 76-84.; see also, A.J.M. Wedderburn, *The Reason for Romans* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1991). Paul is often talking to unbelieving Jews, believing Jews, and new Gentile converts in his epistles. This will become clear in the next section discussing “all things to all men.” In fact, it is

unbelieving Jews. We know this is the case from the first sentence in Acts 15 which shows that within this particular synagogue there were Gentiles and Jews. Some of those Jews or even proselyte Gentiles began teaching that circumcision was required for salvation, with which the Apostles obviously disagree. The ruling in Acts 15 starts in verse 19, wherein it is written that James, Paul, Peter, and John agree to four dogmatic rulings for the Gentiles.²³² Next, one must understand what is being discussed in Acts 15. These can be distilled into a few points:

- 1) There was a disagreement on whether or not circumcision was *required for salvation*.
 - a. Keep in mind the historical context of 1st Century Judaism. It was vital to understand that there were different sects of Judaism at the time (Pharisee, Sadducee, Essene, and now also the sect of the Nazarenes. Paul himself identifies as both a Pharisee and the leader of the Nazarenes (Acts 24:5; 26:5; 28:22; Phil. 3:5). As has been stated several times already, a common (mis)understanding in 1st Century Judaism was that circumcision, and following other halakha was required for salvation and participation in the eschatological kingdom of God. Those who held this position had come to be known as the “Party of the Circumcision” here in Acts 15 and are probably the main antagonists of Paul (particularly in Galatians).
 - b. More specifically, the Party of the Circumcision thought that one had to become Jewish in order to partake in the Covenants of the Promise. Thus, a conversion ceremony of circumcision was needed to ensure that new Gentiles made a total break from their idolatrous ways. It needs to be reemphasized that this ceremony cannot be found in the written Torah. It was a ceremony derived from *theology* and oral tradition, which was later codified in the Mishna and Talmud.

often very important to understand who Paul is talking to, as making a mistake in a pronoun can radically alter one's interpretation.

²³² Acts 16:4 (*dogmata*). There is significant manuscript diversity and variants surrounding the First Jerusalem Council and the rulings. Tim Hegg says, “The textual variants in each of these texts (Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25) are quite involved. The majority of scholars receive the reading that yield 1) things sacrificed to idols, 2) blood, 3) things strangled, and 4) fornication. One text (P⁴⁵) has only two: 1) things sacrificed to idols and 2) thing strangled. Still other texts (D and various Western texts) have four, but leave out ‘things strangled’ and add the Negative Golden Rule, ‘Do not do unto others...,’ which is first attributed to Hillel (b. *shabbat* 31a; cf. *Avot de Natan* ii.26; cp. *Didache* i.2). The positive form is also found in Jewish literature, *Mishneh Torah* ii. *Hilchot Abel* xiv.I. It seems apparent that the reason D and the Western texts have the list they do is to remove any sense of ritual requirements. By removing the ‘things strangled’ the abstaining from ‘blood’ can be interpreted as ‘murder.’ Thus ‘idolatry, murder and fornication’ are all moral, not ritual issues. On the other hand, the short list of P⁴⁵ is not easily explained, unless idolatry is the main issue and the additional ‘things strangled’ is more or less epexegetical. This would yield the meaning, ‘things sacrificed to idols’, that is, ‘things strangled.’” Hegg, *The Letter Writer*, 249.

- 2) The Apostles, interpreting the Abrahamic covenant, determine that the Party of the Circumcision is mistaken because Abraham was justified by faith *before* his circumcision (Rom. 4:11-12; Heb. 11:8-19).
- 3) The Apostles rule that the Gentiles do not need to become Jewish by circumcision in order to participate in salvation and the eschatological kingdom. Salvation is based not on ethnicity, nor the status of one's foreskin. Salvation was granted in the same way it was granted to Abraham, by grace, through faith.
- 4) But, in order for the Jews to be satisfied that the new Gentile converts would not be bringing syncretic practices from the pagan temples and their unclean cultural practices, initial rules (Grk. *dogmata*) needed to be set in place for the Gentiles (Acts 16:4).²³³

Again, it is important to keep the historical context in mind with the myriad of rules that the sages and rabbis had put on top of the people (the heavy burdens that Peter disparages in this same text).²³⁴ So, Luke is recording a confluence of interrelated topics that are present in 1st Century Judaism. This is why it is vitally important to know the context, which is about the salvific effectiveness of circumcision and the means of Gentile inclusion, not the entire corpus of the Mosaic Law (nor the corpus of the Rabbinic halacha), as is commonly interpreted.

Dogma and the Written Rules of the Law in Acts 15

Verse 19 begins the detailing of the new dogma issued from the Apostles.

- 1) Abstain from things sacrificed to idols.
- 2) Abstain from blood (most likely the ingesting of blood from the pagan sacrifice).

²³³ Again, it is the adoption of behavior that marks inclusion into the community, as opposed to intellectual assent and creedal affirmation.

²³⁴ See also Mt. 11:30.

- 3) Abstain from things strangled.
- 4) Abstain from fornication.
- 5) Be in synagogue to hear Moses preached (v.21).²³⁵

What one should immediately notice from the ruling is that the rules come from the Mosaic Law or are practical rules (dogma) for following specific Torah commands.

- 1) Abstain from things sacrificed to idols. This command is not specifically found in the Torah. This is a dogmatic ruling which follows the *spirit of the letter*. As the eating of meats sacrificed to idols is participation in pagan worship and a violation of the first and second commandments, the Shema (Deut. 6:4-9), and the command to not learn the ways of the nations (Deut. 18:9), by worshiping God with pagan syncretism. Paul describes this as the table of demons (1 Cor. 10:21). It should be noted, however, that this sacrificial meat stands in contrast to that which *might* be sold in the marketplace.

During this historical period, the marketplace in Greek-dominated areas, was often within the temple precinct, but the meats contained therein are not necessarily a result of pagan temple slaughtering. Paul says that market meats are okay if one *does not know its status and if one's conscience allows*. Furthermore, if one knows or has been informed that said meat was sacrificed to idols, Paul says "do not eat" (1 Cor. 10:28). Paul, in 1 Cor. 10, refuses to add additional dogma, which would place a greater burden, but simply follows James's ruling to the letter in Acts 15.²³⁶ Ultimately, although one

²³⁵ This is not explicitly mentioned in 15:29 where James summarizes the essential dogma, nor is it repeated in Acts 21. However, it is explicitly said in Act 15:29, and the context would make hearing the Law a given because the Gentiles would obviously be in a synagogue where Moses would naturally be heard. I have chosen to make this fifth command of the First Jerusalem Council visible. Thus, the first four commands are required to even be in association with the people of the synagogue. Wilber, *Remember the Sabbath*, 122.; Ariel and D'vorah Berkowitz, *Torah Rediscovered*, 70-71.

²³⁶ The text of 1 Cor. 10 is often taken by the majority of commentators as speaking of unclean meats that have become okay to eat. But given the context, this is very unlikely. Rather, there was a dispute as to whether the

could eat meats, if they were ignorant of the origins, it is better for one to give up that freedom for the sake of one who totally forsakes all marketplace meats.

- 2) Abstain from blood. This law is specifically found in the Torah (Lev. 3:17; 17:2). Adonai has forbidden the drinking or eating of blood. In the pagan temples, the ingesting of blood was commonly practiced as part of the rites.
- 3) Abstain from things strangled. This command is not specifically found in the Torah, but is certainly connected to the command not to eat the blood. Given that most modern people have no knowledge of butchering techniques, it is easy to see why this command would be confusing. If one strangles an animal, none of the blood escapes, as the heart no longer pumps. The meat stays saturated with blood. This is why kosher killing practices (dogma) were developed, so that the blood is drained out. Furthermore, the strangulation of an animal causes severe stress for the animal. Simply put, it is inhumane. To place undue suffering on a creature is diametrically opposed to the spirit of the Torah and runs counter to the instructions given in Prov. 12:10. A true man of the land and agriculture should never mistreat animals, even during the butchering process.²³⁷ Finally, and most importantly, to torture an animal for the sake of demon satisfaction shows a level of human depravity that can only be overshadowed by human sacrifice. Torture of animals is a violation of the creation mandate (Gen. 1:27-28), and to do it for an idol is simply abominable.

marketplace biblically clean meats were made unclean simply because of their proximity and the possibility of contamination from pagan temples. Paul's ruling is to abstain from unholy things (confirming Acts 15).

²³⁷ Even today the best methods for humane butchering come in the form of draining the blood as opposed to electrocution. See Joel Salatin, *Pastured Poultry Profits* (Swoope, VA: Polyface, 1996), 7-17.

- 4) Abstain from Fornication. This is another command found in the Torah. As it is written, “Do not commit adultery.” Pagan temple prostitution is wrong and sexual promiscuity on top of pagan worship is obviously against the entire biblical thrust of holy living. Furthermore, as this dissertation has already pointed out, apostasy is adultery.
- 5) Observe the Sabbath. This is not in verse 29, but is included in verse 21. The first four commands are the “essentials” that the Apostles put in place for the Gentiles to even come into the synagogue in order to follow the fourth commandment of the decalogue. Given the historical context, the new Gentile converts would be going to a synagogue where Moses is *naturally* preached. It seems reasonable that it was expected that the Gentile converts would be in the community and would have been on the traditional Sabbath where they would obviously hear Moses and the Prophets read. If Moses is read, then it was expected for Gentiles to hear and obey.²³⁸

The First Day of the Week Objection: An Excursus

At this point, the common retort against the traditional Sabbath as said above is that it is thought that the day of worship and hearing the Law moved from the biblical and traditional Sabbath and transitioned 24 hours to the right. This position is typically supported by Church history, recalling the Converts Catechism from Roman Catholicism mentioned early in this dissertation.²³⁹ The *transition* to Sunday is buttressed with four interpretative maneuvers based on the following accounts:

²³⁸ J.K. McKee, *The New Testament Validates Torah* (Richardson, TX: Messianic Apologetics, 2012), 86.

²³⁹ Peter Geiermann, *Convert's Catechism of Catholic Doctrine*, 12th ed., 50-51. “By what authority did the Church substitute Sunday for Saturday?” “The Church substituted Sunday for Saturday, by the plenitude of that divine power which Jesus Christ bestowed upon her.” See also the introduction of this dissertation and Habermas’s “minimum facts” which uses the moving to Sunday as a proof of the resurrection. Although the date for the real start

- 1) The Resurrection accounts in the Gospels.
- 2) Colossians 2.
- 3) Rom. 14.
- 4) Acts 20:7-12.
- 5) 1 Cor. 16:1-3.

No Transition in the Resurrection Account: Seeing The Forest Through the Trees and The Problem of Early Church History

Perhaps the biggest evidence for those claiming a transition to Sunday use the resurrection as solid proof of a transition. The problem is that most have failed to understand the Holy Days written about in the Tanakh, so they fail to understand the timing and the greater context that is presented in the Scriptures in regard to the death and resurrection of Messiah. Although this dissertation is not concerned with showing the chronology of the crucifixion and how the synoptics as well as John display a consistent timing of both the death and resurrection, this dissertation is most interested in showing how Christ's death and resurrection follow an exact adherence to the Law of Moses, not transitioning away from it.²⁴⁰ In 30AD, the Passover was on a Thursday (14 Nisan/April 6) and the sighting of the crescent moon on 1 Nisan/March 24.²⁴¹ This would mean that the beginning of the counting of the Omer for Shavuot/Pentecost (Feast of Weeks) would begin on Sunday (17 Nisan). The resurrection accounts all point Christ

of the RCC is much later than the 2nd Century, which will be investigated shortly, the position taken by Geiermann is indicative of the thoughts that started much earlier.

²⁴⁰ For an excellent overview of the Chronology and a study on how the synoptics and John can be synthesized into a cogent timeline (especially that the "Last Supper" was indeed a Passover meal see, Joachim Heremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus* (New York, NY: Macmillin, 1955).; Tim Hegg, "The Chronology of the Crucifixion: A Comparison of the Gospel Accounts," *Torah Resource* 2017.

²⁴¹ It is important to note that Hebraic days are counted from sundown.

arising sometime after the end of the Sabbath and that before it is light on the third day. This day is indeed a “Sunday,” but in the rush to see a mere Sunday and thus a transition away from the Sabbath, the majority actually miss the target, that being Christ arising on the first day of the *first fruits* season proclaimed in the Law of Moses during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. A fact, which is not lost on the Apostle Paul in 1 Cor 15:20.²⁴² The fact is, that “Sunday” 17 Nisan was an essential element of the biblical feasts of Unleavened Bread and the Feast of Weeks. Instead of a transition to a new thing as claimed by much of Church history, Christ’s resurrection is miraculously and meticulously following ancient patterns laid out by Moses from the Word of God.²⁴³ Merely seeing a “Sunday” and assuming a required change is to miss the forest for the trees.²⁴⁴ In fact, a true following of the scriptures would have everyone participating in the Passover and First Fruits to remember Christ and not transitioning to holidays which have no mention in the Tanakh and have their origin, primarily in the early, not to mention contested development of Roman centered theology in the 2nd Century.²⁴⁵

²⁴² Interestingly enough, it is well known that there was a disagreement between the Sadducees and the Pharisees as to how to count the Omer to Shavuot (Pentecost). Whether the count begins after the high Sabbath or after the weekly Sabbath. When Christ rises from the dead on 17 Nisan in 30AD it was a rare time when both the Pharisees and Sadducees would agree on the Omer Count. This most certainly would have been a statement against the error of the Sadducees who did not believe in the resurrection, but more importantly would speak to the greatest number of Jews (Pharisee) and follows the Torah precisely (See Lev. 23:11-22).

²⁴³ Although, the majority view today has by in large taken the view of Easter/Sunday, there was significant disagreement particularly between the Roman leaders and leaders in Asia Minor. But even the geographic difference can be debated, contra Eusebius who claims that churches, with the exception of churches in Asia Minor, celebrated Easter on Sunday (*Ecclesiastical History* 5.23.1), Bacchiocchi indicates that that this supposed “heresy” was quite widespread and may have continued until the forced removal of circumcised bishops around 135AD. It is well known that both Polycarp and Polycrates, who claims to have had direct instruction from both John and Philip refused to accept the edicts from the Roman Vicars regarding their celebration of Passover. See Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday*, 198-212. In other words, both the transition to Easter and to Sunday were not universally held in the earliest Church, especially in areas that had more direct access to the earliest converts to the Jesus movement.

²⁴⁴ Eusebius writes in *De Solemnitate Paschali*, 7, “While the Jews faithful to Moses, sacrificed the Passover lamb once a year...we men of the New Covenant celebrate every Sunday our Passover.” Even today, Italians recognize Sunday as “*Pasquetta*,” which means “Little Easter.”

²⁴⁵ The position taken here is that Polycarp and Polycrates were correct in their observance of the Passover and that those who held the Quartodeciman view are indeed correct.

Bacchiocchi says, “The role that the Church of Rome played in causing the abandonment of the Sabbath and the adoption of Sunday has been underestimated, if not totally neglected in recent studies.”²⁴⁶ The contested nature not only of the Sabbath but a transition to other holidays and other methods of time reckoning is evidence that perhaps it is not Scripture that mandates a change, but rather it was the development of theology and social pressures that were the true cause of the supposed transition to Sunday and Easter.²⁴⁷ ²⁴⁸ In fact, both Pagan and Christian sources denigrate the “superstitions” of the Jews as reasons why the Sabbath should be discouraged and even penalized.²⁴⁹ From the time of Hadrian, a radical and repressive policy

²⁴⁶ Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday*, 211. I must give Bacchiocchi much praise in his work *Sabbath to Sunday*, as his work and research was indispensable guiding my research on this topic, primarily in the identification of primary sources.

²⁴⁷ See the *Didascalia Apostolorum* 21:17 which mandates the following of 14 Nisan, however, many like Epiphanius think that those who followed the Quartodeciman view were mistaken and that there should be unity by adopting Easter-Sunday thus replacing 14 Nisan (See *Adversus Haereses*). What should be noted is that the transition from 14 Nisan and Sabbath did not really being in earnest until *after* Hadrian’s oppressive regime and the replacement of bishops who were viewed as Judaizing by following the Quartodeciman model. *Didascalia Apostolorum*, trans. Margaret Dunlop Gibson (London: Cambridge University Press, 1903). <https://dn790004.ca.archive.org/0/items/didascaliaaposto00gibsuoft/didascaliaaposto00gibsuoft.pdf> (Accessed April 8, 2024).

²⁴⁸ Theology is the result of method, hermeneutics, and assumptions. So, for instance, using Ignatius’s hermeneutics as an example, in *Magnesians*, he attempts to show that it was the Prophets of the Tanakh that began the trend in “no longer Sabbatizing.” According to Ignatius, since the Prophets lived in accordance with Jesus Christ (*Magnesians* 8:1-2), they were no longer Sabbatizing but living according to the Lord’s life. This type of hermeneutics is not based on any actual historical nor a plain reading of the prophetic literature, but seems to be theologically derived, through *a priori* rejection of both the Sabbath and anything based on the Law. Is. 66:23 is one such example which go against Ignatius’s view. Rather, Ignatius’s hermeneutics seem to be from a deep-seated anti-Jewish bias developed from social, political, military, and economic pressures. See W.D. Davies, *Christian Origins and Judaism* (New York, NY: Arno Press, 1973, 74). Bruce Metzger, as quoted by Bacchiocchi, likewise shows that after the Jewish rebellion under Hadrian “...it became vitally important for those who were not Jews to avoid exposing themselves to suspicion; and the observance of the Sabbath was one of the most noticeable indications of Judaism. See Metzger, *The Saturday and Sunday Lessons from Luke in the Greek Gospel Lectionary, Studies in the Lectionary Text of the Greek New Testament*, Vol. 2, no. 3 (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 1944), 12; quoted on Bacchiocchi, *Sabbath to Sunday*, 212.

²⁴⁹ Plutarch, *De Superstitione*, section 8, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A2008.01.0190%3Asection%3D8> (Date accessed March 31, 2024). Early Christian sources attest to viewing the physical obedience to the Law as “superstitions.” The *Letter to Diognetus* says, “superstitions as respects the Sabbaths.” The same can be said for the writings of Justin (*Dialogue with Trypho*, 29.3) and Chrysostom (*De Christi Divinitate* 4) as well as others such as Epiphanius (*Adversus Haereses*). As far as theological methodology is concerned, it seems that much of the early apologists and their staunch anti-Judaic bent infected much of their hermeneutics *a priori*. To the credit of dispensationalist theology, much of their efforts have been to show both the early apologists as mistaken in their anti-Semitism and

against the Jews was enacted and is spoken of in the Talmud that has eerie similarity to the tyranny that earlier Jews were exposed to during the time of the Maccabees.²⁵⁰ As Bacchiocchi notes, where these social pressures (anti-Jewishness) were less influential, the observance of the Sabbath, Passover, and other Moedim was much more common, particularly in Asia Minor and surrounding Israel, as shown by the writings of Epiphanius and Eusebius.

A very potent case study, masterfully done by Ray Pritz, in his book *Nazarene Jewish Christianity*, details an example of this bifurcation in historical Christianity with the history of the Sect of the Nazarene.²⁵¹ Interestingly, Pritz found within these early writings in the 2nd through 4th century, particularly that of Eusebius, Epiphanius, and Jerome, a sect of Law-keeping Christians of Jewish background.²⁵² From these writings in ecclesiastical history, clues begin to emerge of a very early sect formed just after the Resurrection, based in Jerusalem, and directly connected to the earliest Church led by James (Acts 21). These people eventually fled to Pella (70 AD) and then began disappearing or were persecuted to death sometime around the 4th

how this type of thinking was the grounding for the Magisterial Reformers' violence against European Jews and eventually for the Holocaust. See House, "The Church's Appropriation of Israel's Blessings," 77-103.; Walter C. Kaiser Jr likewise postulates that replacement theology originated in the "early political-ecclesiastical alliance forged between Eusebius Pamphilus and the Emperor Constantine." Complementing this view, full replacement theology is likely the result of a historical progression as Greeks and those under the influence of Rome became the majority believers. In other words, this social change cannot be directly attributed to the writings of the New Testament. See Walter C. Kaiser Jr. "An Assessment of 'Replacement Theology: The Relationship Between Israel of the Abrahamic-Davidic Covenant and the Christian Church," *Mishkan* 21 (Feb. 1994), 9; Ray Pritz, "Replacing the Jews in Early Christian Theology," *Mishkan* 21 (Feb. 1994), 22. From a hermeneutical perspective, if indeed the Tanakh is the Word of God and inspired by the Holy Spirit, how can instructions given by Adonai be "Superstitions"? This is not to say that the Jews did not have superstitions, which we know that there were by Pauline insistence (1 Tim. 4:7), but there is a difference between what was given by Adonai and written by the hand of Moses, as opposed to oral superstitions. To this end, if the reasoning of the early Church apologists cannot be substantiated via the scriptures in regard to supersessionism and its direct links to the abolition of Sabbath, then any appeal to "Church history" becomes irreparably tainted. For church history only tells us what happened, but the Scriptures tells us what ought to happen.

²⁵⁰ *Rosh Hashanah* 19a.; *Baba Bathra* 60b.

²⁵¹ Ray A. Pritz, *Nazarene Jewish Christianity* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University Press, 2006).

²⁵² Pritz, *Nazarene Jewish Christianity*, 108.

century.²⁵³ Pritz details that the Sect of the Nazarene was actually confused by several of the early Church apologists as either Ebionites or other heretical offshoots. Pritz however makes the point that these believers had several doctrinal factors, primarily their Christology *and* their acceptance of Paul as conforming to much of the orthodoxy forming in Rome starting with Ignatius and Irenaeus.²⁵⁴ Primarily, that they had a basically trinitarian view, they accepted the virgin birth, they accepted the divinity of Yeshua, they had a growing doctrine of the Holy Spirit, they did not reject Paul, and they accepted Gentiles. What is quite interesting is that even the most ardent of the fourth century “fathers” could find no real fault with this group. Quoting M. Simon, Bacchiocchi writes about the Nazarenes, “they are characterized essentially by their tenacious attachment to Jewish observances. If they became heretics in the eyes of the Mother church, it is simply because they *remained fixed on outmoded positions*. They well represent...the very direct descendants of the *primitive community*, of which our author knows that it was designated by the Jews by the same name of Nazarenes.²⁵⁵ In other words, Epiphanius and others can find no fault with the Nazarenes in Christology or other areas of potential “heresy,” save that they observed what was now considered “outmoded.”²⁵⁶ The main contention

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, 10. The evidence as presented by Bacchiocchi, Davies, Metzger, Kaiser, Nanos, and others seems to indicate that persecution has come from three sources 1) Unbelieving Jews, who no doubt began to expel those in the Jesus Movement out of their synagogues. See D. Thomas Lancaster, *From Sabbath to Sabbath: Returning the Holy Sabbath to the Disciples of Jesus* (Marshfield, MO: First Fruits of Zion, 2016), 257. 2) Pagans who regarded any form of Jewish practice, primarily circumcision and rejection of cultural idolatry as reasons to consider people *persona non grata*. 3) Roman Christians who view any form of obedience to the Law of God as “Superstitions” and “Judaizing.”

²⁵⁴ The earlier Polycarp maintained at least observance of the Passover as shown above.

²⁵⁵ Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday*, 156. (Italics for emphasis).

²⁵⁶ See Epiphanius, *Adversus Haereses*, 29, 7. As to how the Word of God can become “outmoded” in any form or fashion seems to be negated by Paul’s own insistence that the Tanakh is good for teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness” 2 Tim 3:16. However, the likely source of this “outmoded” interpretation is from Heb. 8 and 9 which will be discussed later.

that the leaders in Rome had with the Sect of the Nazarene was praxis and insistence on Mosaic continuity, including childhood circumcision, the Sabbath, and the moedim.²⁵⁷

Further substantiating this view is that the *Didache* seems to point to the “Lord’s Day” being the Sabbath. *Didache* 14:1-2 says, “On the Lord’s own day, when you gather together, break bread and give thanks [Or: celebrate the eucharist] after you have confessed your unlawful deeds, that your sacrifice may be pure. Let no one quarreling with his neighbor join you until they are reconciled, that your sacrifice may not be defiled.”²⁵⁸ Perhaps, if one considers that Christ himself said he is “Lord of the Sabbath,” that the “Lord’s own day” could actually be referring to the Sabbath instead of being *assumed* as Sunday. Historically, as Bacchiocchi demonstrates, Sunday worship did not become common until later in the 2nd Century, thus making that interpretation anachronistic.²⁵⁹ What is more, internal evidence within the *Didache* itself mentions “preparation day,” in *Didache* 8:1, which is the traditional designation for Friday.²⁶⁰ Therefore, to assume that “Lord’s own day” in the *Didache* must mean Sunday does not necessarily follow, for the evidence, both scripturally and internally have significant markers toward the Sabbath. The question that presents itself is, when did the Sabbath become

²⁵⁷ Pritz, *Nazarene Jewish Christianity*, 109. The Laws about Circumcision were discussed earlier in this dissertation, and it was shown that no scriptural transition can be found. Although, normatively, all the physical descendants of Israel would be circumcised on the 8th day, the Gentile converts are counted as circumcised by their circumcision of the heart, which is required by both Moses and Paul (Rom 2:29; Deut. 10:16; 30:6). Should one choose to be physically circumcised, they must not do so out of compulsion (Gal. 6:12 and the example of Titus Gal. 2:3) but out of faith (Timothy – Acts 16). Unlike the babies of native-born Israel, *grown* Gentile converts are *not compelled* to circumcision. The command of circumcision is for *children* to be circumcised, not adults. However, it seems likely that, when Gentile converts have a child, they would circumcise their child on the 8th day in accordance with the Law, thus full societal integration would take place over time, through faith and faithful obedience. This seems to be the process of generational assimilation, into the politeia of Israel. Therefore, it seems the only place where this transition can be found is in Church history, not explicitly in the Scriptures.

²⁵⁸ From Bart D. Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers*, vol. 1, 439.

²⁵⁹ Mt. 12:8; Mk. 2:28; Lk 6:5. Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday*, 198-212.

²⁶⁰ Mt. 27:62; Mk. 15:42; Lk. 23:54; Jn. 19:14; Josephus, *Antiquities* 16:163. παρασκευήν is translated as “Friday” in most English translations, but more commonly means “preparation day.”

“outmoded” because neither Scripture nor the *earlier* Christian writings seem to indicate the Sabbath as “outmoded.” Rather, observance of the Sabbath seemed to be a common and continuous marker for the believers in the 1st Century.

Therefore, given the extremely early origins of this group of Jewish Christians, which stem back to the teaching of James, there is significant historical grounds to consider the Sect of the Nazarene as the gold standard in historical orthopraxy and orthodoxy. Contra the claims of a universal belief and proper practice as proclaimed by many of the leaders in Rome, the Jewish and Gentile congregations in *earlier* Christianity, particularly the sects of Christianity with direct ties to the *earliest* believers in Asia Minor and Palestine, maintained a significant orthopraxy tied to the Mosaic Law, as opposed to emerging cultural and political influences that were much more pronounced in Rome, especially during the reign of Hadrian. In closing this section, what the Scriptures present is Christ commanding, “Do this in remembrance of me.” The “this” is the Passover, and everything associated with the *timing* of the Passover and associated feasts of Unleavened Bread and Shavuot (Pentecost) can only be accomplished by calculations of the Sabbaths biblically. Therefore, there is no biblically mandated transition from Sabbath to Sunday found in the resurrection accounts.²⁶¹ History and literal hermeneutics show that this transition is not explicitly found in scripture, but is only found through theological additions. Whether this shift was intentional or not is irrelevant, but like Purim or Hanukkah, this additional celebration of the resurrection, which was likely on a Sunday, probably began as a once a year occurrence during the Feast of Unleavened Bread.²⁶² However, this additional celebration actually

²⁶¹ J.C. Laansma says, “There is no indication in the NT evidence that the day (Sunday) displaced or rivaled the Sabbath, that it was a day of rest, that it had anything to do with the Fourth Commandment or that it involved any sort of transfer theology.” *Laansma, “The Lord’s Day” in The Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1997), 683.

²⁶² Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday*, 204-207.

corresponds to an *already existing* day for the beginning of the “First Fruits” Omer count, so there was not really an additional celebration created, rather, its Messianic implications became fully manifested.²⁶³ Over time, this additional day became the dominant day through social, religious, and economic pressure.²⁶⁴ In short, Sunday worship is tradition that cannot be substantiated via the resurrection accounts but was a developmental and societal/political creation steeped in anti-Judaic rhetoric.²⁶⁵

No Transition in Rom. 14

C.E.B. Cranfield, in his commentary on Romans, takes the common interpretation that what Paul is speaking of in regard to days is a change from the Sabbath to Sunday and is indicative of the majority view about this particular text, especially v. 5-6.²⁶⁶ Firstly, it cannot be clearly substantiated that Rom. 14 is dealing with the Sabbath. Primarily, because the word Sabbath does not appear anywhere in the text. There are three likely sources of the disagreement as to what days Paul is referencing. The first was briefly mentioned above. That being the disagreement between the Pharisees and Sadducees as to the counting of the Omer. The second

²⁶³ Ex. 23:16; Lev. 23:15-17. This is not lost on the Apostle Paul, who says Christ is the first fruits from the dead. 1 Cor. 15:23.

²⁶⁴ It is my opinion that Paul even recognized the potential social, political, economic, and military context which could cause a bifurcation like the transition from Sabbath to Sunday. Romans 13 can be interpreted as an effort to ensure that new Gentile converts would continue to identify with their Jewish brothers. For example, Gentiles should pay their taxes (*fiscus Judaicus*) and Jews should pay the tax as well (even though it is unjust). Rather, what Church history has shown is that in order to distance themselves from any association with Jewish rebels during the time of Hadrian, it became advantageous to have doctrines that showed no association, for any perceived association, whether the Sabbath or other Moedim, would have brought severe distress, much like that in the time of Nero.

²⁶⁵ “Let us then have nothing in common with the detestable Jewish crowd...all should unite in desiring that which sound reason appears to demand and in avoiding all participation in the perjured conduct of the Jews.” Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, 3.18-19. <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/25023.htm> (Accessed April 2, 2024).\

²⁶⁶ C.E.B. Cranfield, *Romans*, vol. 2, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975), 705.

source of the disagreement could have been which day was set apart for fasting each week.²⁶⁷

The third source is that the days spoken of to refrain from meats could actually be pagan festivals in which the marketplace meats would have been most certainly the product of pagan sacrifice.²⁶⁸ Given the fact that Paul underscores that this is based on *opinion*, should clue the reader in that the issue at hand is halachic in nature, not involving a major doctrinal change or the status of word of God, but is still binding for those who receive it. Given the status of dogma, the text cannot be speaking of the Omer count as the source of the disagreement and likewise, makes the *moving the Sabbath all but an impossibility*. It also cannot mean that he is allowing the consumption unclean meats. For these issues are in and of themselves are concretely settled by the Torah, and are thus not based in opinion. In other words, it was a given that they would be observing these commands.²⁶⁹ For such a transition would have been more than mere *opinion* for Paul, and to the congregants in Rome and elsewhere. Furthermore, should Paul have taught the abolition of any of these commands in Rom. 14, he would be committing apostasy from Moses and the charges against him in Acts 21 would have been true. Considering the actual context found in Rom. 14, reading Sabbath abolition into this passage is to commit eisegesis, inserting the theology of Sunday into the text, which is unwarranted by the text and anachronistic.

²⁶⁷ Lk. 18:12.; *Didache* 8:1.; See also m. *Ta'anit* 2:4. Rabbinic sources prohibit fasting on Shabbat and other Festival days (the main exception is Yom Kippur, where “humble yourselves” is taken as a command for fasting. See Num. 29:8; Is. 58:6-14). b. *Eruvin* 41a; b. *Ta'anit* 10a.

²⁶⁸ This could connect Rom. 14 and 1 Cor. 8 & 10. Logan Williams and Paul T. Sloan, “Neither Sabbath nor Kashrut, but a Demonic Third Thing: Pagan Holidays and Food Sacrificed to Idols in Romans 14:1-23,” (Paper presented at the 2023 Institute for Biblical Research Annual Conference, San Antonio, TX, November 2023).

²⁶⁹ We are not told whether or not Paul would have instructed the counting of the Omer according to Pharisaical tradition. But it seems likely given that this was the majority opinion of Pharisees, and that Paul was a Pharisee. In any case, Paul is *not* speaking of not counting the Omer, not observing the Sabbath, or consuming swine’s flesh. Rather the argument seems to be one of the first instances of creating dogma for relinquishing freedom to those weaker in the faith for those who would refrain from even clean things due to possible (not confirmed) contamination of meats in the marketplace.

No Transition in Acts 20:7-12 nor 1 Cor. 16:1-3

The context of Acts 20:7-12 shows a meeting that started in the evening and went late into the night “on the first day of the week.” I ask why didn’t they just meet Sunday morning like normal people who sleep during the night hours? Keener indicates that the presence of “many lamps” indicated that the people here in Troas were prepared for an extended “nocturnal teaching.”²⁷⁰

To begin, there is nothing here that demonstrates a transition from the Sabbath as the official day of worship nor the day of commanded rest that was founded at the beginning of the world. John McArthur makes an indicative remark surrounding the Sabbath and Sunday, “Remember what I told you last time about the Sabbath Day? The Sabbath was the seventh day of the week...so, the New Covenant has its own day, a day in which we focus on God as our savior.”²⁷¹ In fact, McArthur makes a similar appeal as this dissertation to an earliest orthopraxy, saying,

“‘On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread’ – isn’t that interesting? No law has been given to establish this, but here we are well into the ministry of the Apostle Paul. Years have passed since the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and it’s not remarkable, its matter of fact... This church at Troas is exemplary of the Pattern of Sunday worship in the early church and ever since.”

Craig Keener, however, points out the problem with this view, underscoring that the narrative need not assume that this particular gathering in Troas was permanent.²⁷² Rather the

²⁷⁰ Craig Keener, Acts: An Exegetical Commentary, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 2970.

²⁷¹ John McArthur, “Why Sunday is the Lord’s Day,” <https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/90-380/~/about>. (Accessed March 31, 2024). PDF transcript, 4, 12.

²⁷² One should also note that Luke records in verses 5-6 that Paul and others were continuing to observe the Torah festivals.

context in Acts emphasizes Paul’s brief stopover. Keener says, that this meeting could also “point to a practice that was unusual; in any case, Paul met with the believers at length then because he would leave soon afterward.”²⁷³ Furthermore, other texts that say the earliest believers were meeting daily and had daily activities associated with their ministry, so there is no real reason to *assume* that this text indicates a shift to Sunday worship.²⁷⁴ For there is nothing in the text that says anything about worship, the extraordinary nature of this meeting at Troas (Paul’s quick departure and an accidental death followed by a miraculous raising from the dead) marks a unique instance which Luke records. Although this meeting could have been a regular meeting, there is no biblical evidence to support this being any replacement or transition away from the Sabbath.²⁷⁵ To read Sabbath abolition into the text is to anachronistically place 2nd Century theological assertion of Sunday worship into the text where it is not abundantly clear and according to Barrett, is theologically insignificant.²⁷⁶

²⁷³ Craig Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 2962-2969.

²⁷⁴ Acts 6:1; 16:5; 17:11; 19:9; 2 Cor. 11:28.

²⁷⁵ Historical pressures which I have already covered above, could have already begun to force Jewish believers and Gentile believers away from other Jewish communities. Conflicts within the Synagogue could have necessitated meetings at other locations. But from the biblical evidence, there is a notable paucity of direct commands abolishing or transitioning away from the Sabbath as the day of worship in Acts 20. Whereas previous historical narrative that *contain* direct commandments from the Apostles (Acts 15), directly mention hearing Moses preached on the Sabbath. This marks the difference between historical narrative between Acts 15 and 21 and the text of Acts 20. In that since historical narrative tells us what happened and not what ought to happen, the genre of history in Acts 15 and 21 is a delineation of oughts (Acts 15) and following previously established oughts (Acts 21), as opposed to a mere gathering within a text that says nothing commanding gathering on Sunday. To read a transition is unwarranted by the text and previously established doctrine.

²⁷⁶ C.K.A. Barrett, *Acts: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994,1998), 951-52.; Both Messianic and Adventist theologies underscore that the Scriptural evidence either decreeing or clearly delineating a transition from Sabbath to Sunday is severely lacking, and the transition only gains its momentum well into the 2nd Century and is also geographically centered in Rome or Alexandria. Whereas in Asia Minor, Palestine (as shown above), and even in places such as Ethiopia or further out in Asia, the persistence of Sabbath continued, being geographically separated from the influence of the bishops in Rome or Alexandria. See Heye, *Sabbath in Ethiopia: An Exploration of Christian Roots* (Lincoln, NE: Center for Creative Ministry, 2003), 37-39, 48, 60.

A buttressing argument for the meeting at Troas not being a transition away from the Sabbath considers the prevalence of slavery and economic milieu. It seems unlikely that many Gentiles, whether slaves or not, would have been allowed the Sabbath day off.²⁷⁷ Instead, the slaves would have had to finish their tasks before they could do anything else. Given this economic milieu, it is possible that whoever was leading the home fellowship at Troas may have been meeting on the “first day of the week” to facilitate meeting for those unable to meet at the normal time at synagogue.²⁷⁸ Here, it seems, should this have been a regular meeting, instead of the impromptu meeting discussed above, the leaders at Troas opened up a time for them to “meet daily” in order to minister to believers, perhaps as a gathering that is more in line with the traditional Oneg feast or even a bible study.²⁷⁹ In that, after the traditional Sabbath services, people gather together to break bread and to discuss the text and even do some teaching. Again, the context is especially relevant in 1 Cor. 11:33 where Paul instructs the congregation to *wait* on

²⁷⁷ Keener, *Acts*, 2966.

²⁷⁸ Although there is some debate as to whether or not this took place on Saturday evening (Jewish reckoning) or on Sunday evening (Roman reckoning) as favored by Keener (See *Acts*, 2967). In any case, Rackham, Banks, Fitzmyer and Wall have made assertions that this is indeed a Saturday evening. See Richard Belward Rackham, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 14th ed., (London: Methuen, 1951). Reprint (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1964), 376.; Robert Banks, *Paul's Idea of Community: The Early House Churches in Their Historical Setting* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980), 41.; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York, NY: Double Day, 1998), 668; Robert W. Wall, “The Acts of the Apostles,” in *New Interpreters Bible* vol.10, 227. Sources originally found in Keener, *Acts*.

²⁷⁹ Oneg is a traditional meal that is eaten on the Sabbath (either Friday night or even on Saturday as a community or at *Havdalah* which is the ceremony which concludes the Sabbath). Interestingly, it was this type of eating and feasting on the Sabbath that several of the early apologists attempted sever from practice, by instituting fasting instead of feasting. The *Didascalia Apostolorum* 21 commanded Christians to fast on Friday and the Sabbath and to make good cheer and rejoice on Sunday. This was further instituted by the Council of Laodicea that orders Christians to work and not be idle on the Sabbath, but should work on that day...” For this author, it seems quite ironic that even the Council of Laodicea (*Canon* 29) all but concedes the continued existence of the Sabbath by its own decree, thus making it, at least in part, self-defeating. As in, by the time of the Council of Laodicea, the Sabbath was still the 7th day and still *called the Sabbath*, therefore, the idea of Sunday being the “Sabbath” had not yet taken hold.

those who would be late to the Lord's Supper.²⁸⁰ Therefore, instead of showing a transition, the evening gatherings were not in replacement of the Sabbath, but are additions to assist those who could not attend the traditional Shabbat services, or for the collection of money (1 Cor. 16:1-3), or for ministering and "meeting daily" as was common by this time. Lastly, it seems that the Apostles were taking the opportunity to continue teaching the *Messianic connections to the weekly Parashah portions* that were covered during the traditional service. These teachings happened after the traditional synagogue service and occurred from the evening to late at night. It would be like going to "Sunday night church" but occurring on Saturday night (which begins the first day of the week). Whatever the case may be, as Keener and others demonstrate, there is no contextual grounding to infer that the meeting in Acts 20:7 is indicative of a transition to a new understanding of the Sabbath, nor a replacement of the Sabbath.

As for the only other reference to "the first day of the week," found in 1 Cor. 16:1-3, the context appears to be in reference to the collection of money. The text in and of itself, similarly, to Acts 20:7 does not appear to be a command of Paul that abolishes the Sabbath or somehow overrides the Sabbath and there is no need to force the text to say that. If there is any command, it simply commands the saving or storing up of money for those in Jerusalem.²⁸¹ It is well known that handling money and collecting money on the Sabbath has always, traditionally, been viewed as inappropriate. The synagogues and the Temple use boxes for the collection of tithes and

²⁸⁰ I view the meal spoken of to be the Passover as the context of which Paul is speaking to is the story of the Last Supper (a Passover) which would be done "in remembrance of Him." It seems Paul is exhorting those who are not slaves to wait on those who will be late.

²⁸¹ Whether this is for charitable purposes (remembering the poor in Jerusalem., i.e., Gal. 2:10) or if this was money collected for the Sanhedrin in the month of Adar (the Half-Shekel tax) is not necessarily clear. See Mt. 17:24-27. It seems that this half-Shekel was still being collected on the Sabbath before or after the new moon of Adar (When Exodus 30:11-16; 2 Kings 12 would have been read as part of the Torah reading cycle). Since this text in Corinthians takes place before the destruction of the Temple, there is a case to be made that perhaps Paul could have been collecting this tax to take to Jerusalem. Of the two options however, it seems that perhaps the charity option carries more weight given the use of *λογεία* in 1 Cor. 16:1 when *κῆρυκος* could have been used for specificity.

offerings instead of a direct handling of money.²⁸² The money is then collected on the next day (at sundown at the end of the Sabbath). The Apostles in this text are simply collect money at the same time. Instead of abolishing the Sabbath, the Apostles are could simply be upholding a tradition about the handling of money and to force a transition in worship is unwarranted by the text.

No Transition in Colossians 2

The historical interpretation of Col. 2 as a text to show that Paul regarded the Sabbath as either completely defunct or a matter of adiaphora, especially for Gentiles, goes back to at least Tertullian.²⁸³ Likewise, many of the major names in Protestant theology interpret Col. 2:8-17 in the same manner.²⁸⁴ Bacchiocchi points out that the majority interpretation of Col. 2:8-17,

Has been interpreted quite consistently to mean that Paul regarded the Sabbath as an Old Testament typological institution fulfilled by Christ and therefore no longer binding on Christians. Since this interpretation has been ‘hallowed’ by history, to submit the Colossians and related passages to a new critical scrutiny may appear as a pretentious undertaking. Yet this is a service that needs to be rendered to test the validity of any inherited interpretation.²⁸⁵

Whether there is a transition in Col. 2 hinges on the historical context and what heresy or false teaching Paul is addressing. In other words, is Paul is addressing the Law of God directly (as the majority of history has suggested) or is he speaking to something else?

²⁸² Lk. 21:1-2.

²⁸³ Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, 5.19. “...the apostle here teaches clearly how it has been abolished, even by passing from shadow to substance.”

²⁸⁴ See Augustine, *Sermons on New Testament Lessons* 86.3. <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/160386.htm> (Accessed May 2, 2024).; John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*. Trans. John Pringle (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library). <https://ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom42/calcom42.i.html> (Accessed May 2, 2024). Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday*, 340.

²⁸⁵ Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday*, 342.

Beginning in v.8 one receives the first clue as to what Paul may be addressing, that being *the philosophy, human tradition, and elemental spirits* which resulted in both theological error and errors in orthopraxy (syncretism and asceticism).²⁸⁶ The text seems to indicate that this philosophy is *man-made (paradosis; v.2:8)* and was claiming to impart upon the adherents wisdom (*sophia; v. 2:3, 23*), knowledge (*gnosis; v. 2:2,3; 3:10*), and understanding (*sunesis; v.1:9, 2:2*) in a fashion greater than Christ.²⁸⁷ In order to obtain this type of enlightenment, these Colossian “philosophers” were persuading the communities there to worship or venerate the angelic principalities and the elemental elements of the cosmos in order to have guaranteed access to the fullness of the divine (*pleroma; v.2:9-10*).²⁸⁸ To that end, Arnold, Newsom, and others demonstrate a unique confluence of factors that is actually quite different than the other examples which have been touched on above (primarily Jewish oral law).²⁸⁹ Instead of

²⁸⁶ Clinton E. Arnold, *The Colossian Syncretism: The Interface between Christianity and Folk Belief at Colossae* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1996), 218. Arnold quotes Hippolytus regarding the teachings of Elchasai (see *A Refutation of all Heresies* 9.11) as an example of how Christianity was being infected locally by some form of syncretism either of Jewish Henotheism or Paganism.

²⁸⁷ Again, it seems that a distinction between man-made law and the Law of God must be reemphasized. Given that the Torah is given by the mouth or the hand of God, there could be an *a priori* case that Paul is not speaking to anything in the Torah, but is speaking to some type of oral tradition or in this case a philosophy or sect which has developed a doctrine and practice that is by nature outside of the Law of God. Should one take the text as speaking to the Law of God directly, that would be explicitly stating that the Torah was only ever *paradosis* and *philosophia* which goes against other Pauline insistence that the Scriptures are “God breathed” and that the Law of God is “holy” (2 Tim. 3:16; Rom. 7:6). Similar interpretative problems plague other texts such as 1 Tim. 4 which seem to be tangentially related to Col. 2. Many take the text in 1 Tim. 4 to be speaking of the Torah, especially in relation to “foods,” (1 Tim. 4:3). This interpretation however falls flat, as Paul seems to be addressing a theology that also commands abstaining from marriage, which is encouraged in the Torah. Secondly, 1 Tim. 4:5 says that food is sanctified by means of the *word of God* and prayer. As far as I know, the only place where food is sanctified (set apart) in the Word of God is in Lev. 11. Food is sanctified by prayer in Deut. 8:10. Thirdly, 1 Tim. 4 explicitly says that this doctrine that Paul is combating is a “doctrine of demons” and “worldly fables.” Should the written Word of God be a doctrine of demons, it would not be good for correction and reproof as Paul says elsewhere (2 Tim. 3:16). It seems likely therefore that in Col. 2 and 1 Tim. 4 Paul is combatting some type of syncretistic practice that explicitly violates not only the Torah, but also the dogma of the 1st Jerusalem Council.

²⁸⁸ Col. 2:8, 10, 15, 18, 20.

²⁸⁹ Interestingly Paul does not employ the word *nomos* in this text, which seems to indicate that he is not making a distinction between the Law of God and the Oral Laws. This nuanced distinction will be addressed more thoroughly in the following section regarding the Conciliatory Theory, particularly 1 Cor. 9.

addressing Jewish oral halakha, Paul is confronting a unique sect, probably of Gentile origin, that has combined Phrygian folk religion, Jewish mystical angelology, the Law of God, and portions of Apostolic teachings.²⁹⁰ This sect, although likely accepting Christ, had been invoking either magical incantations to call upon or venerate angels, which ultimately caused a “diminution of one’s relationship to Yahweh (and now Christ), in favor of a manipulative relationship with angels.”²⁹¹

The practical outworking of this sect could have been some type of forced circumcision (2:11), prohibitions against tasting and touching certain kinds of foods and drink (2:16, 21), some type of very strict and ascetic observance of sacred days, festivals, new moons, and the Sabbath (2:16), and harsh treatment of the body (2:23) in order to achieve some form of righteousness, protection through satiation of the powers and principalities, or spiritual enlightenment.²⁹² On the matter of circumcision, it has already been covered above, so there is no need to rehash the topic.²⁹³ On the matter of food and drink, it seems that the Greek here is

²⁹⁰ On the Gentile origin of this sect, see G.B. Carid, *Paul’s Letters From Prison* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 198. Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday*, 346 (Especially footnote 19).; Arnold, *The Colossian Syncretism*, 91-102; 228-244. Carol Newsom, *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice: A Critical Edition*, Harvard Semitic Studies, vol. 27 (Leiden: Brill, 1985), 16. On Jewish syncretic practice, see Philo, *Decalogue* 53. See also Jubilees 2:2; 1 QM 10.11-12. Of particular interest is the *Song of the Sabbath Sacrifice* (4QShirShabb) which has a significant emphasis on angelic veneration that demonstrates that within some sects of 1st Century Judaism this type of syncretic veneration was already taking place. Newsom points out that this type of worship was to “direct attention to the angels who praise rather than to the God who is praised.”

²⁹¹ Arnold, *The Colossian Syncretism*, 103.; See also, Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday*, 345.

²⁹² Cha, *Galatians*, 120. Bacchiocchi notes that the severe treatment of the body is quite foreign to the philosophical assumptions within Judaism. In that, contra the more dualist ascetics which were more common in Greek philosophy and also subsequently in Alexandrian Christianity (think Origen and his own mutilation), Judaism of the 1st Century was against such abasement. See Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday*, 354-354.

²⁹³ See P. 77. See also, Benjamin Szumskyj, “The Role of the Law in the Sanctification of the Believer Today: A Brief Introduction to Pronomianism,” Ph.D Dissertation (Lynchburg, VA: Liberty University, 2024), 142.

pointing to the *act* of eating and drinking, not about delineating what is proper food or drink.²⁹⁴ The philosophy had rules and regulations not only about what to eat (which could be considered biblical), but added to this extreme ascetic practice (2:23), including long fasting and starvation to please and receive protection from the powers and principalities.²⁹⁵ As for the new moons, festivals, and Sabbaths, O'Brien notes that the moedim, given by God through his Law, were one of the primary indicators of Israel's election.²⁹⁶ However, here at Colossae these Holy Days were mixed with other religious ideas and practices that were foreign to the Torah and the God of Israel.²⁹⁷ In this respect, the observance of these days in light of these gods or angels is decidedly *against* what the written Torah commands.

What Was Nailed to the Cross?

Interestingly, Paul does not employ the use of *nomos* to reference what was nailed to the cross. Rather, he develops his argument through a "certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us." Rightfully, the Torah does demand the death penalty for some sins, primarily sins like apostasy and idolatry. However, a relevant question that presents itself is how would abolishing the commandments of God provide any real assurance of forgiveness? Simply removing the law does not provide forgiveness for anything, it simply removes potential future guilt from sin because, technically, there would not be any sin. For if

²⁹⁴ Βρῶσις and πόσις (eating and drinking). See Johannes Behm, *TDNT* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1968), vol. I, 642 and Leonhard Goppelt, *TDNT* VI, 145-148. Given that Moses is silent on beverages also seems to indicate that Paul is not speaking about the Law of God but the philosophy in question.

²⁹⁵ Arnold, *The Colossian Syncretism*, 311.; Wilber, *Remember the Sabbath*, 58-59.

²⁹⁶ Peter T. O'Brien, *Word Biblical Commentary: Colossians, Philemon* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1982), 139.

²⁹⁷ Douglas Moo, *Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Letter to the Colossians and to Philemon* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 221.

there were no legal decrees against us from the time of the cross, there is nothing that needs to be satisfied. Rather, it seems that given the lack of the use of *nomos*, it is not the law as the standard that is nailed to the cross, but *our* violation and guilt according to that law. It is our record of transgressions against that law which is nailed to the cross.²⁹⁸ In other words, God destroyed the written record of our sins and not the *legal grounding* of sin. Furthermore, it seems that without a law, there would actually be no such thing as mercy. Bacchiocchi makes an astute connection regarding the mercy of God and the written record of our sins in that “By destroying the *evidence* of our sins God has also ‘disarmed the principalities and powers’ (2:15), since it is no longer possible for them to function as the accusers of the brethren (Rev. 12:10).”²⁹⁹ So, in this regard, the heresy at Colossae is doubly wrong for trying to please divine powers to garner favor, when the record of debt was truly forgiven by God through the Messiah. The ascetics of this philosophy, in their feelings of inadequacy, were, through punishment of the body, attempting to bring about forgiveness and protection in a continuous cycle of debt payments to these angelic powers. Paul’s argument is that these divine beings need not concern you, as your record of debt as already been paid.

The Shadow and Things to Come

Having seen what the philosophy at Colossae was teaching and its practical outworking, Paul’s teaching in verse 17 can now be analyzed. Although typically interpreted as that Christ has rendered all the Holy Days of the Torah as unimportant, I believe that the historical context and syncretism at Colossae make Paul’s rhetoric on “shadows” a poignant lesson, instead of

²⁹⁸ 1 Jn. 3:4.

²⁹⁹ Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday*, 351.

pointing toward a transition away from the Torah. To begin it should be without question that everything in the word of God (the Scriptures) is a written and derivative form of the person of God, and as such can only point us to the very concrete person of God.³⁰⁰ To this point interestingly, Paul says that these feasts are shadows of “things to come,” and therefore, *not* things that have already transpired. Paul is seemingly looking toward a *future* fulfillment of these days, of which all of them were and will be focused on Christ. Wilber writes, “These commands function not only in memorializing Yeshua’s work of atonement on the cross but also continue to point forward to his future work to occur at the end of the age.”³⁰¹ Given this, like all ceremonial rites and celebrations they inherently point to a greater reality.³⁰² At Colossae, unfortunately, the philosophy had used these days and ascetic practices to venerate and appease other and inferior angelic/demonic beings. In other words, the signposts of the Torah should be used for worshipping the Messiah, for this is what the Moedim point to.³⁰³ Paul, therefore, is not condemning or transitioning away from the Torah, rather he is correcting an errant sect of syncretic Judaism that began to misappropriate the shadows through man-made philosophy. To that end, shadows are not unimportant, far from it, in fact they are the ever-present and God-

³⁰⁰ Morrison, *Has God Said?*, loc. 209 (Kindle).

³⁰¹ Wilber, *Remember the Sabbath*, 60-61.

³⁰² For example, are not fireworks on the American Independence Day (July 4) symbolic of the “Star Spangled Banner” (bombs bursting in air), which itself is representative of the Battle of Ft. McHenry during the War of 1812, which was essentially the second war for American Independence. In other words, all celebrations and memorials always point to a larger narrative. The derivative shadows of the Torah are the same. They point to the single greatest reality, that being the Creator and Master of the universe.

³⁰³ 1) Passover: Redeeming the Bride. 2) Pentecost/Shavuot: Marriage contract and betrothal. 3) Day of Trumpets/Yom Teruah/Rosh HaShanah: Calling the bride back to faithfulness to the betrothal agreement (Torah). 4) Yom Kippur/Day of Atonement: Cleansing of the bride. 5) Sukkot/Feast of Tabernacles: Dwelling together, marriage consummation, and the “eighth day” representing eternal communion with God. Even with all this richness of meaning, one could, like unbelieving Jews, perform the requisite ceremonies, yet completely miss the substance.

breathed, reminder of the light, for shadows do not exist unless the light first exists.³⁰⁴ Since Christ was raised from the dead and had yet to return, Paul's emphasis on "the things to come" confirms that the *shadows* are the *current* reality of God's promises to redeem both Jew and Gentile.³⁰⁵ Instead of using "shadow" as a pejorative, as the transitory theory and others since Tertullian would proclaim, Paul's use seems to be more indicative of viewing the shadows as a majestic reminder of past, present, and *future* redemption, thus necessitating their continued importance in the life of believers.

In closing this section, it seems that the contexts of the above passages do not support the notion of the Sabbath transitioning. Furthermore, given the preponderance of indications of direct commands to keep the Sabbath and no specific command or prophesy to abolish the Sabbath, and Paul's indication to James that he did not apostatize from Moses, the above passages should be read in a way that upholds the Law as opposed to transitioning the Law, abolishing the Law, or replacing the Law with new dogma. If the Apostles created new Dogma that transitioned the Sabbath, to "the first day of the Week" they would actually be guilty of Christ's rebuke of the Pharisees in Mark 7. That through their traditions, the Apostles made void the Law of God and the Sabbath which has always been on the 7th day ever since the beginning of Time.

Historical Context and Different Rules For Gentiles

Acts 21:19 shows that myriads were coming to faith of which many were Gentiles. Now these new Gentile converts are completely foreign to the standard of holy conduct, having been

³⁰⁴ Ps. 119:105 says, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." Jesus says in Jn. 9:5, "I am the light of the world." The derivative light will always be dimmer than the source and substance of the light.

³⁰⁵ It has not happened yet (because heaven and earth have not passed away). Paul says in 1 Cor. 13:12 that "For *now* we see in a mirror dimly, but *then* face to face; *now* I know in part, but *then* I will know fully just as I also have been fully known. (Italics for emphasis.)

mostly steeped in pagan religion and culture.³⁰⁶ These Gentiles were, before coming to faith, participating in pagan rituals (at least at a level of cultural participation), which included all sorts of unclean practices, fornication, strangulation, drinking blood, among a myriad of other sins. All of these things are prohibited by the Torah or are against the spirit of the Torah. The question that should be asked in regard to the context presented to the reader is, could any new Gentile believer continue to practice these things while in fellowship with people who follow the Law of Moses? The obvious answer is no. Furthermore, what is quite interesting is that these Gentiles have no idea what the Law of God fully contains. When someone gets saved, even today, do they know everything? Of course not. New believers must start somewhere. What the Apostles seem determined to show is that the first step for covenant inclusion is not circumcision, rather it was faith. Therefore, knowing that they are saved by grace, through faith, not by proselyte circumcision (which is Pharisaical dogma), they are allowed entry into the community (the Politeia of Israel), because they have claimed to attach themselves to the Most High, through Messiah, and agree to walk in his ways. An astute reader would note that this is indeed similar to the Israelites at Mt. Sinai (Ex. 19). The people agree to do all that the LORD says before they even received the Law (Ex. 19:8). The Israelites were saved out of Egypt and then received the Torah. Likewise, when someone is brought from darkness to light (Acts 26:18), though their knowledge is incomplete, they affirm that they *will obey what they do not yet fully know*. Here, the Gentiles are commanded to immediately stop all pagan worship practices and to act and behave as Abraham did.³⁰⁷

³⁰⁶ Eph. 2:12.; Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 463.; Matthew Thiessen, *Contesting Conversion* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011), 148; C.G. Montegiore and H.M.J Loewe, eds., *A Rabbinic Anthology*, 570.; m. *Horayot* 3:8; m. *Bikkurim* 1:4.

³⁰⁷ Jn. 8:39.

These dogmata are said to be good to the Holy Spirit.³⁰⁸ Why is this? Well, because it is the Holy Spirit's role to write the Torah on their heart as promised in the New Covenant.³⁰⁹ The Holy Spirit is in the business of sanctification, which indicates that the Gentiles were to grow into obedience, hence the phrase found in Acts 15:21.³¹⁰

Again, there is no reason to have Moses preached to Gentiles if the Law was abolished.³¹¹ These dogmata for the Gentiles are thus practical and *immediate* requirements for entrance into the community, not the total body of rules and regulations which is only found in the Tanakh and their explanations by the Apostles.

Acts 15:28 gives another clue in that the Gentiles were not to be burdened with more dogmata than these *essentials* at the beginning of their journey. The Greek word used for

³⁰⁸ Acts 15:28.

³⁰⁹ Jer. 31:31-33.

³¹⁰ Charles Savelle in his article "Acts 15:21: Moses is Preached and Read in the Synagogues," JETS 65.4 (2022), 707-717., lays out five differing interpretations on could have been meant in this passage. The first view is that "Jewish teachings and practices are unaffected." The second, "The decrees are consistent with the teaching of Torah concerning Gentiles." The third, "The view that Gentiles can still learn Torah." The fourth, "The view regarding the historical effect of synagogue proclamation upon Gentiles." The view that Jewish sensibilities are a rationale for the decree." Savelle also concedes that interpreters can also intermix these options choosing to combine the various explanations (p.717). Accordingly, I, much like Polhill, view that several of the options are at play, primarily options 1, 2, 3, 5. See John B. Polhill, *Acts*, vol. 26, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1992), 331-332. However, contra Polhill and Savelle, and others, the thrust of the council seems to be aimed at both Justification and Sanctification. As in, given the opening verses of Acts 15 the Apostles lay out the justification rationale. No one is saved by circumcision, which stands opposed to the required proselyte circumcision being taught by the Party of the Circumcision. Then, in order to have proof that new Gentile converts are indeed following the God of Israel, four immediate, essential requirements are needed. Then Luke's use of the coordinating conjunction indicates some form of rationale for the verse at hand (Acts 15:21). The rationale it seems shifts toward Gentile sanctification as members of the covenant. "For Moses is preached..." This view indeed does placate both the Jewish-Christians and unbelieving Jews within the Synagogue, but only as an essential means for entry. The dogma given do not change any Laws found in the Torah and then Luke seemingly brings in the additional understanding that there is One-Law for the foreigner and native born. To that end, given that there is One-Law for both native and foreigner, the view I take is that the reason for Acts 15:21, is that these new Gentiles were expected to be in the community and learning what it means to be in covenant with the God of Israel. In other words, they are to conform themselves to the existing Word of God learning it every Sabbath. To fully integrate with native Israel as adopted sons and daughters.

³¹¹ G.K. Chesterton, "Enemies of Property" in *G.K. Chesterton Collected Works: Family, Society, Politics*, vols. IV (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1987), 64.

“essentials” is *epanagkes*. This word carries with it the meaning of *necessarily required*. In fact, so necessary that they can be compelled.³¹² The rest of the Law would be learned from Sabbath to Sabbath. Thus, the Apostles will not compel (by force) the Gentiles to follow the Law of Moses (or the rabbinic halacha). Rather, it is the job of the Holy Spirit to *impel* them to obedience, as the Law, interpreted and lived out by Messiah, is being written on their hearts.³¹³ However, the new Gentile converts need an essential and objective starting point, guided by the Apostles, as opposed to the yoke of the Pharisees or other sects, not only to give assurance to the existing members of the congregation of their obedience and commitment to the God of Israel, but also demonstrate saving faith.³¹⁴

What can be determined from all this? 1) In order to even have fellowship with the Apostles (who are Jews) and the Jews in general, the new Gentile converts must adhere to some minimum *essentials*: faith in the Messiah, and no pagan rituals.³¹⁵ They would willingly obey, be compelled to obey, or else be kicked out. 2) Entry requirements are not based on the status of the flesh, nor of ethnicity. All Jew and Greek are justified by faith. But there is a pivotal verse, and it presents the imperative for sanctification, based on a concrete and written standard. It cannot be stated enough. There is a difference between justification and biblically required sanctification. Acts 15:21 raises a truly startling question: if there was an evolutionary transition away from Moses and the Gentiles only had four rules to keep in perpetuity, then why expose them to Moses every Sabbath where he is preached? The answer ends up being nonsense and the

³¹² Thayer's, G1876.

³¹³ *Ennomos Christos*. 1 Cor. 9.

³¹⁴ See “The Conciliatory Theory” below and the emphasis on *ennomos*.

³¹⁵ Gentiles are grafted into an existing structure.

question is moot and self-defeating. There would be absolutely no reason for the Apostles to expose the Gentiles to the Law, should the Apostles be transitioning away from the Law. On these grounds, the transitory theory does not conform to the reality of the biblical text. By contrast, the reason the Gentiles should hear Moses preaches becomes much clearer when considering their sanctification. They would learn the righteous requirements of the Law every Sabbath and would conform themselves to it, through the work of the Holy Spirit. In short, they would learn the truth by doing the truth.³¹⁶ They would walk according to the perfect Law of liberty.³¹⁷ They would walk *ennomos Christos*.

This personal transformation and sanctification are, therefore, the truest version of the transitory theory: that those believers would develop into men and women of God moving into the fullness of God. The real transition is transformation. Thus, the four laws of Acts 15 were only entry requirements. A first century version of a seeker-friendly ekklesia.

Concluding the Transitory Theory

The above section has been I have attempted to show that there has been no transition or creation of a new Gentile religion in the biblical text. It has been shown that the transitory theory fails philosophically and hermeneutically and does not correspond to the historical reality presented in Scripture. Although it could be said that a transition has in fact taken place because the church does not hold to the position presented in this dissertation, that transition is not necessarily because of the scriptural or historical evidence. It is my contention that the only transition presented in the scriptures is a transition away from theological error, back toward the preexisting standard, which is the Law of God, written by the hand of Moses, lived out by the

³¹⁶ Ps. 119:142.

³¹⁷ Ps. 119:45; Jas. 1:25.

Messiah, and upheld by the Apostles, the foremost being Paul. Since Paul insisted he did not apostatize/transition away from Moses, then the most logical solution is that Pauline epistles should be read via the conciliatory or continuous theory.

The Conciliatory Theory of Acts 21

Having dealt with the transitory theory, with its penchant for evolutionary theology and its inability to ground itself in the earliest historical and biblically-based sources, the only real hurdle left for the Continuous Theory to overcome is being “all things to all men,” which is the bulwark verse of the Conciliatory Theory and its supposed connection to Acts 10 and 11.³¹⁸

In order to explain the actions of Paul and James in Acts 21, the most common evangelical response is that Paul and James are making a conciliatory action toward the Jews, who are apparently *overzealous* for the Law. A quote from the NET Bible translator notes illustrates this theory in no uncertain terms.

That is, undergo ritual cleansing. Paul’s cleansing would be necessary because of his travels in ‘unclean’ Gentile territory. This act would represent a conciliation gesture. Paul would have supported a ‘law-free’ mission to the Gentiles as an option, but this gesture would represent an attempt to be sensitive to the Jews (1 Cor. 9:15-22).³¹⁹

Polhill also presents another version of the conciliatory theory that revolves around historical compromise, but also rests on similar assumptions as the interpretative note found in the NET.

Polhill says,

The elders’ proposal (vv. 22–24) was strictly for Paul, that he as a Jewish Christian demonstrate his fidelity to the law to offset the rumors in the Jewish Christian community. *It was a sort of compromise solution and thoroughly in accord with the picture of*

³¹⁸ 1 Cor. 9:22.

³¹⁹ Note Acts 21:24, “ae,” *NET Bible*, 2nd ed. (Biblical Studies Press, 2017), 2109.

James at the Jerusalem Conference. The apostolic decrees were themselves a type of compromise. James wanted both to acknowledge the legitimacy of Paul’s law-free Gentile mission and to maintain an effective witness among the Jews, for which faithfulness to the law was absolutely essential. Ultimately the *compromise* did not work—either in this instance for Paul or in regard to the larger issue of the relationship between Jewish and Gentile Christianity... As Jewish nationalism increased, the Gentile mission became more and more of a liability to Jewish Christianity. In the aftermath of the Jewish War with Rome and the fall of Jerusalem in a.d. 70, Jewish Christianity was declared heretical by official Judaism; and it was no longer possible for a Christian Jew to remain in the Jewish community. James had seen the problem well and sought to present himself as a strict, Torah-abiding Jew, doubtless to strengthen the credibility of his witness to his fellow Jews. Ultimately, he gave his life for his Christian witness, being put to death at the order of the high priest Ananus in a.d. 62.³²⁰

The theories presented here unfortunately has at least one major problem, some major assumptions, and a few misinterpretations that need to be addressed.

“Unclean” Gentile Territory – The Major Historical and Scriptural Problem

The founding axiom of the Conciliatory theory is that Gentiles and Gentile territory were considered unclean.³²¹ While it is true, as covered above, that certain groups within Judaism

³²⁰ John B. Polhill, *Acts: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, vol. 26, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 449–450. As shown above from the historical analysis conducted within the section on the Transitory Theory regarding the change from Sabbath to Sunday, Polhill, likewise, does an excellent job at showing historical influences for the division of the early synagogue and the Christians. Likewise, adding to Polhill’s analysis, Bacchiocchi shows that there were also significant Pagan and civil/social pressures that the believing gentiles and Jews both believing and unbelieving would have felt as well, especially in the diaspora. The Jesus Movement of this time was the target of both Pagan milieu and hostility from unbelieving Jews. As for Polhill’s conjecture about whether or not James was shrewd enough to foresee this increase of unbelieving Jewish nationalism, and thus attempt to show his loyalty to the Torah leaves a little to be desired, as then obedience to Torah by this point in history is for mere prudential self-interest, as opposed to a heartfelt devotion and obedience to the Messiah. See David A. DeSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship, and Purity: Unlocking New Testament Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: IVP, 2022), 137-184.

³²¹ The notion of Gentiles being unclean is indeed prevalent in 1st Century Jewish thought. See *Ketubot* 110b. “But is it conceivable that he who lives outside of the Land has no God?! No. But what this means is that he who lives outside the Land is regarded as if he worshipped idols.” There are even rabbinic sources that claim that Jews who live outside of the land of Israel are idolators. See *Avodah Zerah* 8a.

were in fact hostile to Gentiles even after their proselyte ceremony and considered being in Gentile dominated areas as contaminating, there is even some evidence that some Jews would take ritual baths after going out and about in Jewish-dominated areas.³²² The major historical problem is that the remedy for that type of uncleanness, should it exist at all, would have been a mikveh, not a vow—and certainly not a Nazirite Vow—which seems to be the ceremony indicated by James’s remedy.³²³ Now besides this major flaw, what is actually more important scripturally is how the *Apostles* viewed Gentiles by the time of the Second Jerusalem Council.

In order to ascertain the Apostles’ view of Gentiles and what it means for the interpretation of Acts 21, one must first turn to Peter’s vision in Acts 10 and 11 and Paul’s rebuke of Peter in Gal. 2

³²² See above P. 106. Matthew Thiessen, *Contesting Conversion* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011), 148; C.G. Montegiore and H.M.J Loewe, eds., *A Rabbinic Anthology*, 570.; m. *Horayot* 3:8; m. *Bikkurim* 1:4.

³²³ Witherington notes that there has been considerable debate as to whether or not this is an actual Nazirite vow, and he disputes the fact that Paul was taking a Nazirite vow given the limited time period of seven days as recorded in Acts 21. Citing the traditional period of 30 days that is described by Josephus *Wars of the Jews* 2.313. See Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 649-651. However, contra Witherington, it could be plausible that Paul *began* his vow sometime before his visit to Jerusalem. In Acts 18:18, it is directly noted that Paul shaved his head “for he was keeping a vow.” Although this could be interpreted as the end of a Nazirite vow, this does not seem plausible as it is clearly indicated that Paul is not at the Temple which is where the head would need to be shaved. It should be noted that biblically there are only two times where it is permitted to be shaved in such a manner (for a Nazirite – Numbers 6 and for a Leper – Lev. 13 and 14). The narrative also does not indicate a form of mourning and therefore precludes any relation to Job 1:20. It seems that there are three possible solutions. The first option is that this could be the way Paul prepared for a Nazirite vow, as in, all the hair from this point on is dedicated. (See D.G. Dunn, *The Acts of the Apostles. Narrative Commentary* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996) 246-47; Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, ed. Daniel J. Harrington (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992), 330. The second option is that while he was travelling he somehow became defiled by a dead body and shaved his head (there is no way to prove this option), and according to Keener, Diaspora Jews extrapolating from texts like Deut. 12:21; 14:24 made room for partial Torah observance when away from the land (See b. *Hullin* 89b; 100b; *Numbers Rabbah* 10:13; Keener, *Acts*, vol. 3, 635.) According to the Law of the Nazirite in Num. 6, after the days of purification, the Nazirite would have to shave his head and start the process of regrowing the hair should he have been defiled by a dead body. The last option is that Paul decided to complete a Nazirite vow without the requisite sacrifices at the end (no way to prove this option, either). Of the three viable options, it seems that perhaps option one enjoys a less cumbersome reading and execution because it does not require Temple service. As Keener points out, it allows Paul to keep his hair orderly, but also as time went on, he could enjoy the status as philosopher (Acts 19:9), which during this time in history, philosophers typically had longer hair. Paul’s identification with, if not full participation in, the Nazirite vow in Acts 21:23-24 is “not simply a ruse to pretend that he allows Jews to keep the law but a fair portrayal of his own Jewish convictions.” See, Keener, *Acts*, vol. 3, 635-6.

Peter's Vision – Acts 10 and 11

Acts 10 and 11 are often cited by interpreters to show that all “foods” are now clean to eat. They cite Peter’s vision with all the animals, clean and unclean, coming down. The Lord says to Peter, “kill and eat” (Acts 10:13; 11:7). Peter then replies, “Not so Lord, I have never eaten anything common or unclean.”³²⁴ The voice of the Lord responds, “What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy.” The majority interpretation of this text thinks it is a slam-dunk case for the consumption of swine or other unclean meats. The problem for the majority interpretation is that Peter received an explicit interpretation of his vision.³²⁵ As is pointed out by Warfield, whenever a prophet is given a vision, it is always accompanied by an interpretation!³²⁶ Firstly, Peter is greatly perplexed.³²⁷ This begs the question: if Christ declared all foods clean in Mk. 7:19 when he was alive, why would Peter be confused here? It is my contention that Christ did not give permission for ham sandwiches or shrimp po’boys. In other words, if Christ taught

³²⁴ This test of Peter’s is actually very similar to that of the prophet Ezekiel. In Ez. 4:12, the Lord says to Ezekiel, “You shall eat it as a barley cake having baked it in their sight, over human dung.” Ezekiel says in 4:14, “Ah, Lord GOD! Behold I have never been defiled; for from my youth until now I have never eaten what died of itself or was torn by beast, nor has any unclean meat ever entered my mouth.” (e.g., nothing common or unclean). Two visions, two prophets with essentially the same answer.

³²⁵ Fruchtenbaum, *Israelology*, 890.; Ryrie says, “Nobody ever criticizes the dispensationalist for teaching that the dietary regulation of the Mosaic Law have no application to the Christian.” Charles Ryrie, *Dispensationalism* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 2007), 83.; C.I. Schofield, *Scofield Reference Bible* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1909), 94-95.; Bahnsen, states, about Acts 10 “the dream which taught him that no longer is any meat unclean,” See, *Theonomy*, 225-226. This interpretation is majority view in both Reformed and Dispensational camps with very few exceptions like Rushdoony. See Rousas John Rushdoony, *Leviticus*, vol.3 of *Commentaries on the Pentateuch* (Vallecito, CA: Ross House Books, 2005), 107-126.

³²⁶ Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, ed. Samuel G. Craig (Phillipsburg, PA: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1948), 83-96.

³²⁷ Acts 10:17.

the abolition of Lev. 11, Peter would not be confused here, for Christ's teachings would have already been known, and a transition from Lev. 11 would have already been established.³²⁸ Furthermore, should one continue reading, the text of Acts 10:28 gives the actual meaning of the vision. "God has shown me that I should not call any *man* unholy or unclean."³²⁹ From this the reader can deduce that the whole context of Acts 10 and 11 was never about food at all! The context is about interaction between Jew and Greek. The point is that since the command to eat unclean meats is unlawful, Peter is searching for an alternative meaning to the vision.³³⁰ The interpretation comes when he is visited by the Gentiles who were sent by God. Peter says, "You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a man who is a Jew to associate with a foreigner or to visit him; and yet God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean."

Where is it Written that it is Unlawful to Eat with Gentiles?

During the 1st Century it seems to have been common practice to assume that all Gentiles were perpetually unclean due to their continued exposure to idolatry. This is evidenced by several rulings from Hillel, Shammai, and the writings of Josephus.³³¹ Biblically, this is confirmed to have been common place given Peter's and Barnabas's susceptibility and

³²⁸ Rabbi Shmuley Boteach, *Kosher Jesus* (Jerusalem: Gefen Publishing House, 2012), 33, 124-125.; Michael L. Brown, *The Real Kosher Jesus* (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma Media, 2012), 91-124. Again, this is a notch against the transitory theory as well.

³²⁹ Italics added for emphasis.

³³⁰ One could say he had a Pronomian paradigm! Since he received revelation that, *prima facie*, went against what he knew to be true, there must be an alternative interpretation that is lawful.

³³¹ Hillel and Shammai seem to have differing degrees of the impurity that Jews would incur should they come in contact with Gentiles. "A proselyte who converted on the eve of Passover – the House of Shammai say, 'He immerses and eats his Passover offering in the evening.' And the House of Hillel say, "He who separates himself from his uncircumcision is as if he separated himself from the grave [and must be sprinkled on the third and seventh day after circumcision as if he had suffered corpse uncleanness]. m. *Pesachim* 8:8. Here it becomes clear that Shammai thought the impurity was light. Josephus likewise records the stringent regime of the Essens in regard to foreigners saying, "Now after the time of their preparatory trial is over, they are parted into four classes; and so far are the juniors inferior to the seniors, that if the seniors should be touched by the juniors, they must wash themselves, as if they had intermixed themselves with the company of a foreigner. See *Wars of the Jews* 2.8.10.

hypocrisy.³³² I would like to invite all to search the Tanakh for such a command, in fact the opposite is often found; one prime example is Numbers 15:16, but we also see the prophets declaring all the nations coming to Zion and the Temple being a house of prayer for all the nations.³³³ Hegg points out that instead of enmity between Israel and Gentiles, the Tanakh presents a totally different picture,

The foreigner who desired to worship the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was to be welcomed into the community and treated with the same respect as we give the native born (Ex. 22:21; 23:9; Lev. 19:33, 34, 25:35; Deut. 26:12). They were to be given full participation in matter of Torah and Torah-life (Sabbath, Ex. 23:12. cp. Is. 56:3ff; Gleanings, Lev. 19:19; Justice, Ex. 12:49; Lev. 24:22; Festivals, Deut. 16:11, 14; Worship and prayer in the temple, 1 Ki. 8:41-43; cp. 2 Chron. 6:32, 33). And the prophets pronounce judgment upon any who would neglect their God-given responsibilities to the ‘stranger,’ on the same grounds as neglect of orphans and widows (Ps. 94:6; Is. 56:3ff; Jer. 22:3; Zech. 7:10)...³³⁴

Since one would search in vain to find such a law that separates, the law of which Peter must be speaking about is, again, the oral traditions and law (dogma) put in place by the rabbis that violates the very intent of Israel to be a light unto the nations.³³⁵ One cannot be a light if one cannot associate and if by mere contact with a different race of people one automatically becomes unclean. This dogmatic “unlawfulness” was, in and of itself, an unlawful yoke that the Jewish leadership placed on the people, and themselves, as a dividing wall and fence around the

³³² Galatians 2.

³³³ Is. 56:7; 66:23.

³³⁴ Tim Hegg, “Can we Speak of ‘Law’ in the New Testament in Monolithic Terms?” Presented at *Evangelical Theological Society*, Northwest Region meeting (April 1995), 18.

³³⁵ Is. 42:6; 49:6.

actual Torah found in the Word of God. These burdensome yokes and manmade commandments are the very “laws” Christ castigates in Mk. 7:8, 10-13.

The Dividing Wall – An Excursus

The dogmatic dividing walls spoken about by Peter are also mentioned by Paul in Eph. 2:14, wherein Christ destroyed (*katargeo*) the barrier (*phragmos*) of the dividing wall (*mesotoichos*) which is the law (*nomos*) of commandments (*entole*) in ordinances (*dogma*). At first glance, it could be easy to assume that Paul is speaking of the Mosaic Law. It should be noted however, that the Law of God nor the Law of Moses are ever referred to as *dogma* in the LXX nor in the apostolic writings.³³⁶ *Dogma* is only used in reference *man-made* ordinances or traditions. Thus, it seems what Paul is speaking about here is that it was the rabbis who were building unnecessary “fences” that were causing the enmity between Jew and Gentile.³³⁷ It was the unwarranted traditions and continued denigration of Gentile converts that was creating enmity, not the Law of God, which is perfect. Commandments to bar association between Jew and Greek are not found in the actual Torah of God and go against the crux of the Abrahamic covenant to bless all the nations of the earth. How can one be blessed if one is not even allowed to associate with the people of God by building a dogmatic wall of division? In fact, in the life of Messiah, it is easy to see where he was already countering the trend of separation in 1st Century Judaism, which was to build dogmatic walls between races of people, instead of reaching out to them as a light, and bringing them into alignment with the Word of God through repentance.

³³⁶ In 3 Maccabees 1:3, *dogmaton* can rightfully be translated as traditions or ancestral traditions. See Bruce Metzger, Oxford Annotated Apocrypha: *Apocrypha of the Old Testament* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1977), 295.

³³⁷ *Pirkei Avot* 1.1.

Christ's actions are indicative of bucking against theological dogma to actually fulfill the will of God by the Word of God.

Although it is true that Josephus uses the phrase *ho mesos toixos* “the middle wall” describing the physical wall preventing Gentile and unclean Jewish visitors to the temple from proceeding into the court of the Jews, it is never described or designated as *phragmos* by Josephus or in any other ancient writings.³³⁸ In fact, the physical wall itself was inscribed with the word *drufaktou* and the warning not to proceed. Paul would have been well aware of the physical, unlawful wall at the Temple, so it seems likely that he would have used its common name, *drufaktou*, if he were referring to the physical wall.³³⁹ That being said, the physical barrier at the temple is merely the concrete representation of the dogma and theological thought and is therefore not the thing being spoken of by Paul.³⁴⁰ Accordingly, the Greek grammar, as Cha argues is that the genitive be understood appositionally. Thus, *to mesotoixon tou phragmos* should be understood as “the barrier consisting of the fence” which are the dogmatic ordinances that brought separation between Jew and Gentile.³⁴¹ The physical wall and the theological separation are integrally connected, but dogma is a much harder barrier to resolve, as concrete walls can simply be knocked down, but ideas are a bit more pernicious.³⁴²

³³⁸ Josephus, *Antiquities*, book 8. Chapters 3-4. <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/2848/2848-h/2848-h.htm#link8noteref-12> (accessed August 8, 2023). As for the legal authority to build such a wall, it is only found in tradition and nowhere in the Scriptures. As it is supposed to be a house of prayer for all nations. Is. 2:2; Is 56:6-7; Is 66:20-23; Jer. 3:17.

³³⁹ Tim Hegg, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians* (Tacoma, WA: Torah Resource, 2019), 144.

³⁴⁰ Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 59, 375-6.

³⁴¹ M.I. Cha, *Misunderstanding Galatians: An Exegetical, Originalist Commentary* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2021), 18.

³⁴² See *m. Avot* 1.1.; The Epistle of Aristeas, which is dated 250-100BCE, is an early source that uses the word *phragmos* as a descriptor of the oral torah as the dogmatic/halachic fence that separates the Jews from the Gentiles. R.H. Charles, ed., “The Letter of Aristeas,” (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1913), <https://www.ccel.org/c/charles/otpseudepig/aristeas.htm> (date accessed March 15, 2023).; See E.P. Sanders,

With both a physical barrier at the temple, doctrinal dogmatic divisions, and racism, the Jews had violated their command to be a light unto the nations. Therefore, it is highly likely that it is the dogmatic and social barriers which are the emphasis of Paul in the context of Eph. 2:14-15. Paul is underscoring that Christ is the fullness of the Abrahamic covenant, by the making of one new man, by ingrafting the Gentiles into the politeia of Israel. To that end, the dividing wall was not the Law of Moses, but rather is the unlawful *dogma* and those man-made regulations that go against the Words of God (Mk. 7:6-13).

Peter's Backsliding and Paul's Rebuke in Galatians

Again, it is of utmost importance to remember the chronological order of the text.

- 1) Peter's vision.
- 2) Paul's mission to Galatia and the penning of Galatians.
- 3) The actions recorded in Acts 21.

Peter, having *already had the vision* in Acts 10, begins acting hypocritically by refusing to eat with Gentiles, so Paul rebukes him in Galatians 2 because he is reconstructing the dividing wall! What this means historically is that James and Paul affirm that Gentiles are "clean" according to Peter's earlier vision and the explicit instruction of the Lord. It is Peter who is not following the correct doctrine, which is why he stands condemned by Paul in Gal. 2.

The Failure of the Idea of "Unclean Gentile Territory" in the Conciliatory Theory

In Acts 21, one is presented with Paul and James, *after* Peter's vision and Paul's rebuke of Peter in Galatians. If, as the Conciliatory Theory contends, Paul was required to purify himself

Judaism: Practice & Belief 63BCE-66CE (Trinity Press International, 1992), 61.; Adolf Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1978), 80.

after his travels in “unclean Gentile territory” simply to appease the Jews that were “zealous for the Law,” then Paul and James would be as utterly guilty of hypocrisy as was Peter in Galatians. Given that James’ and Paul’s understanding that Gentiles are declared clean by God (the Gentiles were never unclean, rather God is correcting faulty theology of 1st Century Judaism), and that there is no Law in the written Torah that they *are* ontologically unclean, and there is nowhere in the Torah that says that Gentiles are *irrevocably* contaminated (*koinoo*) by their idols. Therefore, there is no way that the Apostles could have been affirming the need for Paul to perform a cleansing ceremony simply because he was in a Gentile-dominated area. This would make James and Paul guilty of succumbing like Peter did and doubly guilty by having it cemented as doctrine by the second Jerusalem council, thus contradicting the word of God given to Peter in Acts 10.

The notion of unclean Gentiles in the Conciliatory Theory is not only untenable for doctrine, making Paul, James, and Peter all hypocrites, but it is utterly unbiblical, based on the interpretation of both the Abrahamic covenant (all the nations of the earth being blessed) and the written and hermeneutically consistent, cohesive, and comprehensive interpretation of Peter’s vision. Lastly and importantly, confirming the analysis above, is that the purification that Paul undergoes is likely for the Nazirite Vow. What is interesting is that the other four people under a vow purify themselves, too! The context makes it seem that these four men were in Jerusalem with James and not with Paul in Gentile territory, so why should they need purification if they were not in Gentile territory? This obviously means that the purification was not for travel (because contextually the other four were with James in supposedly clean territory), but the purification is for the *legal requirements* of the vow to prove Paul's innocence against the charge of apostasy. The only logical conclusion then is that Paul undertakes this purification ritual in order to perform the Nazirite Vow (thus proving he has not committed apostasy) and not to

cleanse himself after travelling amongst the Gentiles (whom Paul already considers clean) based on his earlier rebuke of Peter! Thus, historically, contextually, and hermeneutically, the assertions of the Conciliatory Theory fail.

But What About “All Things to All Men?”

Although, as shown above, the Conciliatory Theory is on dangerously thin ice, there is perhaps, a hermeneutical lifeline found in 1 Cor. 9:19-23, in that Paul’s appeasement was an attempt to be “all things to all men” and that he is not “under Law.” This, as pointed out by the translators note above, is the true crux of the Conciliatory Theory, even though its foundational crutches in Acts 21, Acts 10-11, and Gal. 2 failed.

Given what has been covered so far, how can one interpret Paul’s words in Corinthians? Is there a “law-free” option as the Conciliatory/Appeasement/Compromise Theory contends? Are orthodoxy and orthopraxy *culturally* relative, even though elsewhere Jew and Gentiles are not separated (Eph. 2:11-12, Rom. 10:12; Rom. 11; Col. 3:11)? Surely, there is a way to synthesize mutually-exclusive truth claims without making Paul, James, and Peter hypocritical doctrinal chameleons.

The Text of 1 Cor 9:19-23

¹⁹For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may win more. ²⁰To the Jews, I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law, though not being myself under the Law, so that I might win those who are under the Law; ²¹to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God, but under the law of Christ, so that I might win those who are without law. ²²To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some. ²³I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it.

Context is King

This section takes place in the greater context of Paul's work at Corinth. Firstly, at Corinth, there were significant internal divisions that had happened, namely a conflict between those who follow Paul, Apollos, and Cephas (1:32; 3:22). Secondly, these divisions were monumentally exacerbated by the acceptance of significant sexual sin (Ch. 5). Thirdly, the division had become so severe that members of the community found it necessary to pursue lawsuits in the pagan courts. These pagan court proceedings would have, in all likelihood, required a pagan sacrifice, which is an obvious violation of the dogmatic regulations from the 1st Jerusalem council (not to mention the prohibition against idolatry in the Torah itself).³⁴³ Fourthly, there were those within this synagogue who were members of the Party of the Circumcision, who believed that Gentiles must be circumcised in order to be saved. Fifthly, there were Jews who did not believe in Messiah. In short, Corinth was a doctrinal and pastoral nightmare.

Knowing this, the immediate textual context of ch. 8-10 is Paul's appeal to *forfeit one's freedoms*, if necessary, to the ones who are "weak." In 9:14-18 Paul shows that he gave up his right to be paid for his services so that he would be more effective in ministry. In fact, he describes himself as a slave (*doulos*) and therefore effectively renders himself with no rights at all.³⁴⁴ This brings one to the text at hand, which begins with "for," which means one must ask, "What is that conjunction there for?" This conjunction connects the passage verses 1-18 to the current passage in verses 19-23. Thus, Paul's own example of forfeiting pay is directly linked to the example he is about to make. In other words, the reader should be viewing the context as the

³⁴³ The rules set forth in Acts 15 are described as *dogmata* in Acts 16:1.

³⁴⁴ Yosef Koelner and Jeffrey Seif, *Sha'ul/Paul God's Shaliach (Apostle) Corresponds with the Corinthians* (Clarksville, MD: Messianic Jewish Publishers, 2023), 86.; Brian S. Rosner and Roy E. Ciampa, *First Letter to the Corinthians* (Nottingham: Apollos, 2010), 424-425

relinquishing of personal freedom and not the expansion of doctrinal freedom or allowing apostasy from Moses.

The text at hand even seems to have a Hebraic parallel structure.³⁴⁵

- A) I made myself a slave to all in order that I might gain more (19)
- B) I became, to the Jews, as a Jew in order that I might gain Jews (20a)
- B1) To those under the Torah, as under the Torah...To gain those under the Torah (20b)
- C) To those outside of Torah, as outside of Torah...To gain those outside of Torah (21)
- D) I became, to the weak, weak in order that I might gain the weak (22a)
- A1) I have become all things to all, in order that I might in all circumstances save some of them (22b).

The next thing, besides the structure that presents itself, is that there only seems to be three groups of people that Paul is speaking about. This stands counter to the idea that there are four groups. The first group is Jews (B). This group of Jews is further designated as “under Torah” (B1). The group spoken of in line (C) are those “outside of Torah.” The next group is further specified as “weak” (D).

Can Paul Become a Jew?

Logically speaking how can Paul become a Jew? He was already a Jew. It is well-known that Paul never renounced his Jewishness.³⁴⁶ Thus, there is really no way that Paul can become a Jew because he already had that status, so how can the interpreter of this text make sense of this

³⁴⁵ Tim Hegg, “All things to all men: Paul and the Torah in 1 Cor. 9:19-23,” <https://torahresource.com/all-things-to-all-men/> (Accessed April 13, 2023). My analysis differs slightly from Hegg’s here. He identifies 2 groups, whereas I find three. Hegg’s chiastic structure is A, B, B1, C, C1, A1.

³⁴⁶ Acts 19:34; 21:39; 22:3; Phil 3:4-6. Hegg, “All Things to All Men,” *Torah Resource*, 6. <https://tr-pdf.s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/articles/all-things-to-all-men.pdf> (Accessed January 5, 2023).

statement? The answer comes in (B1): Paul adds a clarification of those Jews by the phrase “those under the Law/Torah.” It is this phrase “under Torah” that really needs to be understood in order to ascertain the meaning of the text. It is my contention that it should, primarily, be understood as being under the condemnation of the Torah (Rom. 7:13; 8:1). However, Paul is also particularly interested in contrasting the Law of Christ with the oral law and ancestral traditions.³⁴⁷ Therefore, the phrase *hupo nomon* is indicative of those who are reliant on the Law, primarily the status of the flesh and adherence to the oral law, to bring about salvation. The Party of the Circumcision thought that Jewish identity, as described in the Law, is what allowed them participation in the kingdom of God. To Paul, these Jews are under the condemnation of the Torah, because they do not have the faith that is supposed to precede faithful obedience as the Jewish law was in violation of the written Law of Moses. This fact is precisely why Paul then adds that he himself is not under Torah. It seems that Paul wants to make it abundantly clear that neither Jewish status nor works of the Law (primarily circumcision) were the basis for justification. In this case we see that Paul is neither under the condemnation of the written Torah, having been set free from the Law of Sin, but also that he is not under the oral torah as well as a result. Furthermore, from the analysis earlier, we know that Paul and James clearly understand that *forsaking Moses is considered apostasy*. So, it would be quite disingenuous for Paul to say that he is forsaking Moses to the ekklesia at Corinth, but then telling James that he did not commit apostasy from the Mosaic Law. The point is, in Paul’s view, oral Law and Jewish status cannot bring about righteous standing before God. Justification before God is through faith. Without actual faith and belief in the Messiah, those that continue to believe this are under the Torah because the Torah is condemning them in their sin.

³⁴⁷ Cha, *Misunderstanding Galatians*, 17.

So then, what can it mean that Paul became “under Torah?” Paul himself says that he became under law, but he was not himself under law, so that he could win some under law. Assuming that when he says, “under law,” Paul is referring to the *condemnation* of the Mosaic Law, so the verse would sound like this, broken down into its primary propositions:

- 1) To those under the condemnation of the Torah I became under the condemnation of the Torah,
- 2) though not myself under the condemnation of the torah,
- 3) so I might win some under the condemnation of the Torah.

Admittedly, the writing is “difficult to understand.” Once a person is freed from the condemnation of the Torah, they cannot become under its condemnation again, unless of course they apostatize (but we know that Paul is not an apostate, for this violates Acts 21). So, it seems at first glance that propositions 1 and 2 are contradictory. One cannot be “under” and “not under” simultaneously. Additionally, in terms of soteriology, if being under the Torah is the same as not being saved, how could a person who is not saved then save someone? It would be like a lifeguard trying to rescue a drowning person in extremely hazardous water by throwing himself into the water, instead of throwing a life-preserver. A drowning person cannot rescue another drowning person. Therein lies the rub. Paul’s relinquishing of personal freedom and his sacrificial attitude is what is on display. Taking Paul’s earlier words in Rom. 9:3 at face value, he would consider himself accursed, separated from Christ (i.e., under the condemnation of the Torah) in order to save his brethren.³⁴⁸ Paul demonstrates this sacrificial heart by even submitting himself to the halachic rulings in order to maintain fellowship with the Jews. In fact, Paul’s continued submission to the synagogue authorities *up to the point of lashings* (2 Cor.

³⁴⁸ Rom. 9:3.

11:24) makes his stance abundantly clear.³⁴⁹ By forfeiting his freedom, he submitted himself to be under the law of their *dogma* so that he could win some of them to faith because they were, in fact, the ones still under the condemnation of the written Law.³⁵⁰ Submitting to the synagogue authorities was Paul's way of showing that he would actually die and be damned for his brothers. He did this so that he could reach the unbelieving Jews, who were without Christ. Perhaps this is the true biblical version of the Conciliatory Theory, as Paul did everything in his power to maintain association and unity with his Jewish brethren, being beaten five times to remain in fellowship, in the hopes that they would find the Messiah.

The Other Groups

Remember the idea that was prevalent in the 1st century Judaisms, that Gentiles must become Jewish to partake in the Kingdom of Heaven? This becomes very important in understanding verse 21 and the reason behind Paul's use of *anomos* and *ennomos*. 1 Cor. 9:21 says, "To those who are without law (*anomos*), as without law (*anomos*), though not being

³⁴⁹ Nanos makes a relevant argument from 2 Cor. 11:24 which connects, according to him, directly to Rom. 13 and the synagogue authorities being the ones actually bearing the sword, as opposed to the anachronistic interpretation of secular government. Although commentary on Rom. 13 is outside the scope of this dissertation, Nanos, quoting E.P. Sanders, underscores how integrally connected the Jesus movement and the synagogue must have been for Paul to have received these lashings. Given that Paul submitted to lashings and that he and Messiah were encouraging believers to submit to those in the seat of Moses, though not to certain halakhic rulings (coerced circumcision or other traditions that violate Moses), it would have put many believers afoul of the ruling elite. Nonetheless, with the emerging separation of dogma, it seems, as Sanders points out, that "*punishment implies inclusion.*" See, Mark Nanos, *The Mystery of Romans*, 311. Nanos quotes E.P. Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish people* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1985), 192.; See also Jacques Ellul who also takes a distinct view that Rom. 13 that runs counter to the anachronistic view taken after the 3rd century. Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1991), 79-85.

³⁵⁰ Cha, *Misunderstanding Galatians*, 17.; Yosef Koelner and Jeffrey Seif underscore that Paul "operated within clear halachic boundaries in his efforts to win both Jew and Gentile in Messiah." Koelner and Seif, *Corinthians*, 83.

without the law of God (*anomos Theos*) but under the law of Christ (*ennomos Christos*), so that I might win those who are without law (*anomos*).”

Firstly, and most importantly, here is the explicit instruction that Paul is not without the Law of God (*anomos Theos*) and that the law of God is synonymous with the necessary, direct, and proper execution of that law, which is the Law of Christ (*ennomos Christos*).³⁵¹ Since Paul is not without the Law of God, any notion that Paul set aside the Torah should be put to rest.

Secondly, the very phrase “without Torah” has substantial usage within the traditional synagogue, in the LXX, and was later codified in Talmudic writings, which describe the Gentiles and apostate Jews as transgressors of the Law of God and are thus described as “*anomos*” or outside of the covenant promises of God.³⁵² Paul in Eph. 2:11-12; 4:17-32 even partially confirms this prevailing view of 1st Century Judaism, that *unbelieving* Gentiles are outside the covenants of God, as they are cut off, without hope, and walk in a manner that is *anomos* (especially Eph. 4:18-32). So, it seems here that Paul is showing himself to be fully lawful while reaching out to those who are fully without Torah and are outside of the covenant promises. The addition of *ennomos Christos* is to show that Paul is walking in a manner like Christ, which is the proper pure manifestation of the Law of God. This view stands in contrast, to other laws or rulings, particularly of the rabbinic authorities who might have forbade association with those Gentiles who were *anomos* and even considered “enemies of God.”³⁵³ So, for instance, Paul

³⁵¹ *Ennomos* was used during the 1st century to define proper law and practice of those who conformed their lives to it. See Liddell & Scott, *Lexicon*, “ennomos.” This understanding is confirmed and found in the LXX in Sirach (Ecclesiasticus) prologue v. 10.

³⁵² 1 Macc. 7:5; 9:23, 58, 69; 11:25; 14:14.; t. *Demai* 2:5 says, “A proselyte who took upon himself all the obligations of the Torah except for one item, they do not receive him.” In this case, the primary contention being circumcision. This would render the gentile convert in the eyes of the Party of the Circumcision as *anomos* and still outside the Covenants of the Promise.

³⁵³ C.G. Montegiore and H.M.J Loewe, eds., *A Rabbinic Anthology*, 570. Interestingly, should we view the enemies of God in the Tanakh, *neichor/nochri* (see Josh. 24:20; Jer. 5:19; 8:19; Mal. 2:11; 2 Sam 22:45-46; Neh 9:2; 13:30; 1Kings 11:1; Ezra 10:2; Prov. 2:16; 5:20; 7:5; 23:27), it is only in Isaiah’s prophecy where the *neichor*

might have to enter the house of a pagan to share the Good News. Paul could go and associate, while remaining fully Lawful and true to the Torah. In other words, although the unbelieving Gentiles are without the Torah, Paul would stay within the confines of the Torah, so that he could win some who were without Christ and his Law. Given the specificity, it almost seems that Paul is trying to show that he is not an apostate from Moses in his teaching of both Jew and Greek in Corinth. In short, Paul would not sin for evangelistic success and, considering the text in Acts 21, he is avoiding the charge of apostasy, altogether, not to mention seemingly beginning the fulfillment Isaiah's prophesy to bring the *neichor* to faith in and obey the God of Israel.³⁵⁴

Being "Weak"

Having identified the two groups he is trying to win 1) unbelieving Jews and 2) unbelieving Gentiles, how can one understand what being "weak" entails? From the book of 1 Corinthians, weakness seems to be a relevant theme, especially in the preceding chapter and proceeding chapter about relinquishing freedom in regard to foods found in the pagan temple district.

Paul is identifying with the group that are labeled "weak" because if the context is about relinquishing freedom, Paul would gladly relinquish his liberty to eat clean meats, for those who considered any meats purchased near the pagan temples to be unclean. In fact, Paul says that if one knows that they are sacrificed to idols, "Do not eat."³⁵⁵ Eating of pagan sacrifice is a violation of the First Jerusalem Council, and the greater context at Corinth seems to suggest that

(primarily Gentile enemies) are brought into Israel's covenant and participating in the Sabbath as a mark of the covenant. See Is. 56:3, 6; 60:10; 61:5.

³⁵⁴ Is. 56:3, 6; 60:10; 61:5. Especially Is. 56:6 which has the foreigners participating in the Sabbath.

³⁵⁵ 1 Cor. 10:28.

there are those within the congregation who were quite concerned about the marketplace meats being unclean simply by their proximity and the *possibility* of the meat being a product pagan sacrifice. Paul also gives the injunction about marketplace meats, that if one is ignorant of its status, do not ask.³⁵⁶ But the point is, keeping with the theme, if there is one who is weak in conscience, Paul, although not actually being weak in faith or conscience, would gladly relinquish freedom to help support those who were weaker. In other words, just because it is lawful to eat a clean marketplace meat, does not mean that it is profitable to the whole community.³⁵⁷ In this way, Paul can truly say that he became as weak, fully identifying with that group, although the text shows that Paul is definitely not weak in conscience. To the contrary, the relinquishing of freedom shows monumental strength of character.

To conclude this series of verses, Paul says, “I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some. I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it.” Using his own life as the example (imitate him as he imitates Christ), Paul underscores the very sacrificial love of Messiah. He not only submits himself to the authorities of the synagogue, but would also go amongst the nations to win some. In short, he sacrificed his very freedom for the sake of the gospel. This is what the Conciliatory Theory should be. The passage was never about the continuity of the Mosaic Law at all, but rather Paul’s radical obedience to the Law and the Great Commission as taught by Messiah (*ennomos Christos*). The Jews who rejected the Messiah are still under the condemnation of the Torah. Their reliance on the status of the flesh and oral law rendered them lost, just like the unbelieving Gentile. To that end, it seems that if the Law is the standard of righteousness and the defining standard of sin, and

³⁵⁶ 1 Cor. 10:25.

³⁵⁷ 1 Cor. 10:23.

that Paul walks orderly keeping the Torah (Acts 21), there is no way that Paul would commit a sin (violating the Torah) so that “grace can abound” to the Gentiles.³⁵⁸ In other words, Paul is not free to eat swine in the presence of a Gentile for evangelistic success. The bottom line is that if Paul is violating the Torah to win Gentiles, he would be sinning so that grace would abound to the Gentiles. This is nothing short of apostasy, and would necessitate a third Jerusalem Council to finally convict Paul of apostasy. Is not the goal of the nation of Israel as a whole, and Paul in particular, to bring the nations into alignment with the *established Word of God*, not bring the Word of God into alignment with the lawless Gentiles?³⁵⁹ Here at Corinth, Paul was willing to sacrifice his freedom so that he could win unbelieving Jews, and unbelieving Gentiles. Furthermore, Paul is also willing to sacrifice even his freedom within the Law so that those of weaker consciences would not stumble. Paul is ready and willing to sacrifice any perceived freedom he has to win either Jew or Greek and promote unity within the community. He is willing to do all *lawful* things for the sake of the gospel, even sacrificing his body to lashings or forfeiting his own salvation!³⁶⁰ Never, at any time, does Paul agree to violate the Law of Moses to have evangelistic success for those who have not been exposed to the Law of Moses. As Paul says elsewhere, “Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? Far from it! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?”³⁶¹ Therefore, it is quite unlikely that this text is speaking to bilateral orthopraxy, violating the Torah for evangelism, or the notion that Paul is merely performing his Nazirite Vow in Acts 21 as a conciliatory act. In fact, Paul’s actions at Corinth

³⁵⁸ Rom 6:1-2.

³⁵⁹ Rom. 15:18.; Obedience to the righteous standard found in the Torah. Remember Acts 15 is merely the starting point for obedience and acceptance to the community. Historically, the only existing and established Word of God is the Tanakh for the New Testament is still being written.

³⁶⁰ 2 Cor. 11:24; Rom 8:18; Rom. 9:3.

³⁶¹ Rom. 6:1-2.

are more indicative of reconciliation and genuine unity as opposed to conciliatory. Paul is desperately, up to the point of death, trying to bring Jew and Gentile together and to build up the body in Messiah. Conciliation means *changing* doctrine to accommodate or compromise, whereas reconciliation is joining together under a single banner, that is Christ and his Law.

What Does This Do to the Conciliatory Theory as Commonly Understood?

Based on the analysis above, Paul never, at any time, taught the Jews or the Gentiles to apostatize from Moses. The Nazirite Vow of Acts 21 was not a conciliatory or compromise gesture toward the Jews; it was to show Paul's radical adherence to the Law.³⁶² Paul told the truth to James. "Being all things to all men" is simply a rabbinic rhetorical device that Paul used to show his willingness to *sacrifice himself* for the sake of Christ and fulfill the Abrahamic covenant in blessing all the nations. This sacrificial love is, of course, is the true definition of conciliatory, but in reality it is more in line with reconciliation of people toward God and into the Covenants. Paul is willing, by all *lawful* means available to him, to bring two disparate groups and make them one in Messiah, fulfilling the promise to Abraham to bless all the nations of the earth. For God is not faithful unless all the nations of the earth are blessed, according to the Abrahamic covenant. Paul believes that the Tree of Life (the Torah and the Messiah) are healing for the nations.³⁶³ Therefore, one can conclude that in no way does Paul preach apostasy from Moses, but rather he underscores his desire (Christ's desire) to see both Jew and Greek become partakers in the Covenants of the Promise. The Torah serves as the rules for the marriage covenant and the fundamental promise of the New Covenant.³⁶⁴ There is no distinction between

³⁶² Rom. 3:31.

³⁶³ Rev. 22:2.

³⁶⁴ Jer. 31:31-34.

Jew and Greek, and there is but one God, one Lord, one Law, one faith, and one baptism for the Jew and the Sojourner among them.³⁶⁵ A compromise or appeasement theory for the prudential self-interest in the face of either Jewish Christians or unbelieving Jews, or Jewish nationalists as Polhill contends makes Paul and James doctrinal chameleons at best and goes against other scriptures which emphasize there being one people.³⁶⁶ In this vein, Acts 21 would be the only time in the bible where men verbally ordained by God, Apostles who saw the risen Lord, conceded doctrinal ground to *appease* people who are in the wrong, and not have it be corrected.³⁶⁷ It is my contention, that this is not the case. Rather, considering the fact that the Tanakh explicitly says there is One Law and One God, and that the Apostles declare there is only one faith and one baptism, and that Adonai is the God to both the Greek and the Jew, it seems to preclude any notion of appeasement or compromise.

It seems more likely that as the Gospel spread – all the nations of the earth being blessed (Gal. 3:8; Gen. 12:3), that the Law should also spread to the nations, thus fulfilling Deut. 4:6-8 and the promise of the New Covenant. The prophets also were inspired to write that *through* the work of Israel and her Messiah, that the Gentiles would come to know and obey the Torah.³⁶⁸ Is not the New Covenant prophesied to write the Torah on the heart which results in faithful obedience from heart of love toward God?³⁶⁹ It is my contention that when Gentiles believe in

³⁶⁵ Num. 15:16; Is. 56:6-7; Acts 15:9; Rom. 3:22; 10:12; Col. 3:11.

³⁶⁶ Rom. 11.; John B. Polhill, *Acts*, 449–450.

³⁶⁷ Peter's hypocrisy is the only instance we have of an Apostle doing wrong, and he is corrected by God himself (Acts 10-11) and Paul (Gal. 2). Nowhere are James and Paul corrected by insisting Gentiles hear Moses Preached (Acts 15:21) nor by continuing in Temple sacrifices (Acts 21).

³⁶⁸ Isaiah 2:1-4; Micah 4:1-5.

³⁶⁹ Jer. 31:31-33; Hos. 1:10; Rom. 9:25. As it is written in several forms, "If you love me, keep my commandments." Ex. 20:3-6; Deut. 5:8-10; 7:9-11; 10:12-13; 11:1, 13-14, 22-23; 19:8-9; 30:16; Josh. 22:5; Dan. 9:4; Neh. 1:5-6; Jn. 14:15, 21; 1 Jn. 5:2-3; 2 Jn. 1:6.

the Messiah they become *full* covenant members into *all* the covenants of God, which cannot be annulled or abrogated once initiated.³⁷⁰ As Paul says elsewhere that Gentiles were excluded from the *Politeia* of Israel and strangers to the *covenants* of the promise.³⁷¹ In other words, instead of Israel being replaced as is common in Covenant Theology, and trying to carve out a Gentile Church age as Dispensational theology tries to do, I propose that a more accurate depiction is that of Enlargement of Israel that consist of both the native born and the Gentiles.³⁷² So instead of seeing compromise, conciliatory attempts, or appeasement, I propose that Acts 21 is demonstrating radical reconciliation, bringing all the nations and the Jews into alignment with the Word of God as taught by Messiah. Paul's mission is to bring radical obedience to the Gentiles, while James and Peter were attempting the same with the unbelieving Jews.³⁷³ This obedience of faith is not following the *unlawful* traditions of 1st Century Judaism, but following

³⁷⁰ Paul says in Gal. 3:15-17 that covenants cannot be set aside once they are ratified. A potential defeater for the position however is found directly after in Gal. 3:19. To begin, there are significant textual disagreements surrounding this verse and the syntax can be read in different ways. As Staples points out, a reading of τῶν πράξεων instead of τῶν παραβόσεων has earlier historical attestation. Thus, the translation is more akin to "Law of Deeds." These additional halakhic laws to the Torah were "added." Which brings close similarity to Gal. 3:10 and the idiom of "Works of the Law," which has already been shown to be the denominational markers between sects of Judaism as typified by its use at Qumran (1QS v. 21, 23 and 4QFlor. i.7, 4QMMT). See Staples, "Law of Deeds," in Gal 3:19a, 126-127. So, Paul may not actually be addressing the Biblical Law of God, but rather Pharisaical Law. See Wallace, *Exegetical Syntax*, 306, 308; Dunn, *Galatians*, 189.; Cha, *Misunderstanding Galatians*, 169.; Keener, *Galatians*, 281. Most importantly, should the text be read as Mosaic abolition, it is my contention that this directly contradicts the Messiah's own words in Mt. 5:17-19. In this regard, Longenecker concludes that the traditional view of Galatians 3:19 would be a wild departure from any form of Judaism and the teaching of Messiah as there are no other sources within Judaism that speak of the Law this way, nor are there any other Biblical sources that speak of the Law as a temporary structure. See Longenecker, *Galatians*, 139. In other words, Gal. 3:19 is better interpreted as saying that the purpose of the Jewish law (law of Deeds), was to function temporarily, until the Messiah would come. These human messengers were the intermediaries who established what Judaism became. When the Messiah came, he brought the Law of Christ, which is the proper interpretation of the Mosaic Law/Law of God.

³⁷¹ Eph. 2:13. (Plural covenants, a singular promise)

³⁷² Alex Jacob, *The Case for Enlargement Theology*, 2nd ed. (United Kingdom: Glory to Glory Publications, 2011).; Jason A. Staples, *Paul and the Resurrection of Israel: Jews, Former Gentiles, Israelites* (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2024).

³⁷³ These actions seem to be the inauguration and beginning fulfillment of the New Covenant promises, ultimately to culminate and come to full fruition upon the return of the Messiah and Millennial reign.

the Law of Christ.³⁷⁴ This nuanced message was misinterpreted by many in the diaspora. To these people's credit, should Paul have been teaching apostasy, he would have been guilty of violating Deut. 13:1-4. However, in order to show that Paul, did not violate this commandment, he participates in Temple service, at least paying for the Nazirite vow, if not himself partaking in a Nazirite vow. To read compromise or appeasement in Acts 21 however, is to insert interpretations and assumptions, particularly from 1 Cor 9 and Galatians, into the text, which are not necessarily warranted given Paul's nuanced use of νόμος, use of idioms such as "works of the law" and "under law" combined with textual issues which emphasize oral law over Biblical Law. These issues, in addition to the misunderstanding of Peter's vision in Acts 10-11, seems to give significant weaknesses both historically and hermeneutically to the Conciliatory theory given it cannot maintain consistency when placed against the words of Christ, the prophets, and among the Apostles own writings placed in historical context.

Other Objections:

Sacrifices, The Land, Moot Laws (Ought Implies Can) and Paul's Ritual Adiaphora

Having shown the potential deficiencies and misinterpretations that plague both the Transitory theory and the Conciliatory theory, there are a few objections that could remain and that should be cleared up before moving into the more philosophical portion of this dissertation.

The Moral, Civil, Ceremonial Distinction: Paul's Emphasis on Moral Commandments

A potential reply to the thesis presented in this dissertation is that there is a distinction between the moral, civil, and ceremonial law.³⁷⁵ To begin, this dissertation has already addressed many of the assumptions that ground the supposed moral, civil, and ceremonial distinction and these have been addressed above (primarily the misreading of Acts 10-11, Mk. 7:19, Paul's

³⁷⁴ The promise is granted by faith. The Law is how people of faith act and abide in grace.

³⁷⁵ *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1646); *London Baptist Confession* XIX (1677)

nanced use of *nomos* [as well as “under law”], idiomatic identification of “Works of the Law,” the historical and social reasons for a shift from Sabbath to Sunday, eschatological reapplication of the Mosaic Law, etc.). Furthermore, even if one grants the *assumption* that the Law of God can be divided into these parts, which considering the tight interweaving of these components in the Tanakh makes the theological tweezing difficult at best and would be wrought with disagreements among various sects and traditions. For example, Ex. 22:19-29, contains regulations that are moral, civil, ceremonial and often covering multiple categories.

Whoever lies with an animal shall surely be put to death (*moral*). He who sacrifices to any god, other than to the LORD alone shall be utterly destroyed (*Moral, Ceremonial*). You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt (*Moral, Civil*). You shall not afflict any widow or orphan (*Moral, Civil*). If you afflict him at all, and if he does cry out to Me, I will surely hear his cry; and my anger will be kindled, and I will kill you with the sword and your wives shall be come widow and your children fatherless (*Moral, Civil*). If you lend money to My people, to the poor among you, you are not to act as a creditor to him; you shall not charge him interest. If you ever take your neighbor’s cloak as a pledge, you are to return it to him before the sun sets, for that is his only covering; it is his cloak for his body. What else shall he sleep in? And it shall come about that when he cries out to Me, I will hear him, for I am gracious (*Civil, Moral*). You shall not curse God, nor curse a ruler of your people (*Moral, Civil*). You shall not delay the offering from your harvest and your vintage (*Moral, Ceremonial*). The firstborn of your sons shall give to me (*Moral, Ceremonial*).³⁷⁶

In other words, the scriptures do not contain an ascertainable way to make distinctions among the moral, civil, and ceremonial laws, they are all linked in various ways through the narrative and seemingly intertwine the individual imperative and how these fit into both a collective and religious context.

³⁷⁶ Parentheticals and Italics for emphasis and categorization.

Another demonstration of this can be seen in Lev. 19, which starts with a command to “be holy.” The rest of the chapter details what “holiness” means, ranging from loving one’s neighbor (*Moral, Civil*), to impartiality in court (*Moral, Civil*), not holding grudges (*Moral*), to keeping the Sabbath (*Moral, Civil, Ceremonial*).³⁷⁷ All these various instructions have multiple functions within the people of God, all are moral, but these moral Laws also bleed over into other categories.

To that end the commands for Sabbath are particularly difficult to separate into moral, civil, and ceremonial constructs. For in Ex. 31:12 it says that “this is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations that you may know that I am the LORD who sanctifies you.” As in, any abolition, profaning, or disregarding the Sabbath would be to disregard one of the means by which God intends to make persons holy. Furthermore, disregarding the Sabbath and its instructions (not buying, selling, or working people or animals) incurs the death penalty in Ex. 31:14. Lastly, the Sabbath was instituted at the beginning of creation as a means to designate the time of the week, a method for determining, along with the moon, sun, and stars, the years and festivals, and demonstrating that even the agent of creation (Jesus Christ) rested from His work.³⁷⁸ Therefore, in the instances above the Sabbath has moral (being made holy), civil (no buying or selling and punishable by death), and ceremonial (determining times, seasons, and holy days) components which cannot be practically separated.³⁷⁹

³⁷⁷ Lev. 19:3; 19:15, 19:18. 1 Pet 1:14-16 exhorts the Gentile audience to “Be Holy as I am holy.” See also Lev. 11:44-45.

³⁷⁸ Heb. 1:2 (we are to imitate Christ).

³⁷⁹ Part of this ceremonial aspect likewise has a moral connection, as the people of God are morally obligated to “remember” why the ceremonies are actually done. 1) Creation 2) Redemption 3) Sanctification.

Furthermore, focusing on grammatical uses within the Torah and Paul's corpus when referencing the Torah, there are several instances of unitary language which stresses unity of the Torah. For instance, one can see how Paul uses the singular "commandment" in Rom. 7:9-11, in order to show that it is the full unity of the Torah that shows what sin and righteousness are.³⁸⁰ Here it seems that Paul is continuing the use of unitary language that was started by Moses, used by Joshua, and David.³⁸¹ What is more, however, is that this position of separating the moral, civil, and ceremonial components is troubled by trying to synthesize this viewpoint with Jesus's words in Mt. 5:18.³⁸² Christ does not make a distinction between any particular laws, but rather references the whole Law as a singular unit.

The Moral Emphasis in Paul and Torah Realism

There is no question, however, that Paul often emphasizes the moral side of the commandments in unique ways. For instance, Paul in 1 Cor. 9:9, 1 Tim. 5:18 uses Deut. 25:4, applying what would be both a civil/moral commandment, "You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing" and uses a lesser-to-greater argument to prove that those who get their living from the Gospel should likewise be paid. In other words, even rules that could be considered civil or even ceremonial have moral components. As in, there are no rigid boundaries between the moral, civil, and ceremonial. The literal command applies, and the moral command applies. Likewise, moral principles can and ought to take precedence over ceremonial and civil laws in some cases. In another case of a lesser-to-greater argument, Yeshua says, "How much more

³⁸⁰ This singular use is often used in conjunction with plural Torah synonyms such as "commandments," "statutes," and "precepts."

³⁸¹ See Ex. 24:12; Deut. 6:1; Josh. 22:5; Ps. 19:8.

³⁸² See Rev. 21:1.

valuable then is a man than a sheep! So then, it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.”³⁸³ So in this regard there is a normative moral, civil, and ceremonial command in the Sabbath, but also there could arise cases in which other moral commands (such as preserving life – e.g., loving your neighbor) would take precedence over what would normally be a time of rest and sanctification. These are obvious *legal* exceptions, and the Torah even indicates that sometimes certain Laws do not apply when the normally would, even in a ceremonial circumstances.³⁸⁴ Likewise, Christ underscores that Torah itself has matters of justice, mercy, faithfulness, and the love of God as higher in precedence and are thus “weightier.”³⁸⁵ Therefore, one can say that any directly moral commandment, or a moral precedent *derived* from other potential forms of commandments are the primary focus of the Law.

Given this weighting of the moral by both Paul and Messiah, it is easy to see how, combined with the various assumptions and interpretive commitments of the Conciliatory or Transitory Theories already touched upon, Paul’s writings might be displaying a move toward an exclusively moral law, or at least a Pauline adiaphora toward the Ceremonial Rites.³⁸⁶ In other words, Paul’s writings emphasize the moral and “circumcision of the heart” while Paul’s understanding of the Ceremonial (primarily Acts 21 and Timothy’s circumcision) are matters of indifference. For instance, Fruchtenbaum says, “Just as freedom from the law means freedom also to keep certain aspects of the law...such as the Jewish holy days.”³⁸⁷ He continues, “He is

³⁸³ Mt. 12:12, see also Mk. 3:4, Lk. 6:9.

³⁸⁴ See. Lev. 10:16-20.

³⁸⁵ Mt. 23:23; Lk. 11:42.

³⁸⁶ A potential definition of “adiaphora” is found in the *Formula of Concord* X.1-2. in 1577. Matters of adiaphora would be church rites that are “neither commanded nor forbidden in the Word of God.” <https://bookofconcord.org/epitome/> (Accessed April 5, 2024).

³⁸⁷ Fruchtenbaum, *Israelology*, 724.

free in Christ from these things, but he is also free in Christ to observe such things that do not violate clear New Testament teaching.”³⁸⁸ Firstly, what Fruchtenbaum is saying here is dependent upon his understanding of passages already covered in this dissertation so there is no need to rehash them here (Rom. 14, Acts 10-11, 20:7; Gal. 3:10, 17-19; 1 Cor. 9; Heb. 8-9).³⁸⁹ In essence, however, the theory is, Paul (and the other Apostles) could simply have been performing the Temple service, even though they already knew they were ultimately not needed. That one can perform them if they want to, or not perform them if they do not want to.

To address this position, it is helpful, ironically, to begin with Eschatology. Assuming premillennial eschatology, if Christ’s death and resurrection were effectual for abolishing the Ceremonial laws, thus explaining Paul’s potential adiaphora, then this efficaciousness would continue into eternity, would it not? Is not Christ’s effectiveness perpetually effective? The question that arises, is why do the prophets continually proclaim not only the Law’s continuance, but also its observance by both ethnic Jews and those from among the nations? A main theme in the prophets is the proclamation, not only of a victorious Messiah, but also the continuity of both civil and ceremonial laws in the earthly reign of the Messiah.³⁹⁰ It is further said that the nations will not receive rain, should they fail to observe *ceremonial* commands for the Festival of Sukkot.³⁹¹ The point is that if Christ had actually abolished those Ceremonial or Civil rules with

³⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 909.; See also Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, XII, Ch.75, 15.

³⁸⁹ Fruchtenbaum (and the typical interpretation) understanding of New and Old Covenants based on Hebrews 8-9 has not been addressed above, but will be addressed in the next section.

³⁹⁰ Ez. 36:24-28. “I will cause them to walk in my statutes...” Ezekiel elsewhere describes the laws for charging interest (18:17), keeping the Sabbath and the festivals (20:13, 16: 44:24). Other examples abound See Is 56:6-7 (which has Gentiles observing the Sabbath and holding fast to the Covenant, in the Temple [“House of Prayer”], making burnt offerings and sacrifices.). Zech. 14:16 (Has all the nations going up to observe the Feast of Sukkot).

³⁹¹ Zech. 14:18. This verse is particularly interesting as it has a collective *civil* judgement against a nation resulting in no rain, thus showing how it is a *moral* failure, for not obeying a *ceremonial* command.

his death and resurrection, then it would be impossible for them to be reinstated scripturally, for what was accomplished at Golgotha, was done once and for all, and cannot be overturned.³⁹² One could also say that Christ precludes this before his death saying that he did not come to abolish the Law.³⁹³ What seems to be *one of the* overarching themes of Jesus’s salvific purpose was to actually secure His *faithful* bride’s obedience to the Law (replacing the heart of stone with a heart of flesh).³⁹⁴ That the (super)natural outworking of this salvation is *living* by faith, and doing the works of that faith.³⁹⁵ As such, it is quite a mistake to view grace through the lens of

³⁹² Heb. 9:2 (Heb. 8 and 9 will be addressed next section).

³⁹³ Mt. 5:17-20.

³⁹⁴ Jer. 31:31-33; Ez. 11:19, 36:26-27. “I will put my Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.” In other words, Paul’s (and Moses’s) emphasis on Circumcision of the Heart is synonymous with the faithful obedience to God’s word, which is the *result of faith*. Hab. 2:4; Heb. 11:28 says, “By faith he kept the Passover...” Heb. 11:32-33 says, “And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets, who *by faith* conquered kingdoms, *performed acts of righteousness*, obtained promises...” (Italics for emphasis – “acts” in 11:33 is italicized in NASB95).

³⁹⁵ The righteous shall live by faith (Hab. 2:4; Rom. 1:17). James 2:17 says, “Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.” To that end, the *ontology* of faith consists of an intellectual/emotive component, but is also combined with works for it to actually be *alive*. This does not mean however that one can be justified by the Law (Rom. 3:28), for all have fallen short of that. However, just because one cannot be declared righteous by the law, does not mean that *the standard and Covenants* by which we fell short of no longer apply, through Christ. Rather, the salvific act of faith should be transformative as to bring full alignment to those covenants (Eph. 2:11-15). For even Abraham, by faith, obeyed the Lord as demonstrated by Gen. 26:5 by keeping, “My charge (*mismeret*), My commandments (*mitzvah*), My statutes (*huqqa*), and My Laws (*Torah*). As such, Michael Bird demonstrates, that justification and sanctification are linked logically rather than conceptually. With that integral link, “obedience, faithfulness, righteousness, and love are *imperatives* that grow out of saving faith.” Bird, *The Saving Righteousness of God: Studies on Paul, Justification and the New Perspective* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2007), 111 [italics added for emphasis]. However, Bird’s analysis and use of the word “imperative” marks a necessary tension of works/faith synergy. For “imperative” brings an essential and *obligatory* requirement of works. As in, faith’s necessary response to grace is submission to God’s righteous requirements for living (Rom. 8:7; Lk. 14:27-33). It does not matter if this submission is for a few hours (e.g., the rebel crucified with Christ) or over the course of a longer life. Furthermore, Mt. 7:23 and Heb. 6:4-6; 10:26-27 (See also Rev. 2-3) are of particular importance as they demonstrate that deeds, as defined by the Word of God, are how people are judged by God. So how is this tension released? It seems that much of the tension can be resolved if one views grace (*charis*) more like patronage. As in redemption is granted by grace alone, but in the patronage model, the one receiving the benefit returns the favor, in a system of reciprocal and faithful service, as the gift received was given solely because of the undeserved good will of the patron. In return, the receiver of said grace and *must* perform any and all service demanded of them, because those receiving the grace could in no way obtain it or attain it on their own (e.g., the way a patron might pay for or might provide capital, like providing a ship for an explorer or trader). The beneficiary of that grace, is now obligated to the patron in all things, giving them preference. With the case at hand, “free” voyages or transit, and priority when using said ship and perhaps 10% of all profits and increase. In much the same way, since all believers in all times are granted grace, the demands of that grace, accordingly, are repentance and *faithful obedience to the terms of*

late medieval piety via the Protestant polemics of trying to earn salvation through pious works.

Rather, there is a significant thrust in the ancient world that grace has a direct and necessary

response from the receiver of grace.³⁹⁶ DeSilva notes,

As in asymmetrical relationship between human patrons and clients, those of lower station do not presume that they can match the favors they have received from a much greater and better-resourced patron, but rather devote themselves to making the fullest return that lies within *their power* (and that, too, supported here by God's sustaining help).³⁹⁷

This becomes evident in Pauline ecclesiology and eschatological judgment as he develops a case for removing either Jew or Gentile from the community. In 1 Cor. 5:13, Paul exhorts the community to purge the wicked from among yourselves.³⁹⁸ This language Paul is employing is coming mostly from Deuteronomy.³⁹⁹ The contexts in these texts from Deuteronomy seem to be indicating numerous issues, such as idolatry (Deut. 13:5, 17:7), *any iniquity or any sin* and *malicious* witnesses (Deut. 19:15-17), the drunkard and rebellious son (Deut. 21:21), sexual immorality (Deut. 22:21, 22, 24), kidnapping and human trafficking (Deut. 24:7).⁴⁰⁰ With that, the surrounding context in Corinth seems to show the only thing lacking in their sin is the kidnapping (1 Cor. 5:1, 11). In Corinth, the way Paul executes the purging of the wicked is to hand these people over to Satan for the destruction of their flesh, so that their spirit may be saved

the Covenant of that grace, in all facets of life since this grace has *gifted is life itself*. See, David A. DeSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship, and Purity: Unlocking New Testament Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: IVP, 2022), 137-184.

³⁹⁶ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 8.14.4; Seneca, *de Beneficiis* 2.24.4.

³⁹⁷ DeSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship, and Purity*, 161. (Italics for emphasis – as in, to the extent capable)

³⁹⁸ Christ's method for this is laid out in Mt. 18:15-17.

³⁹⁹ Deut. 13:5; 17:7; 19:19; 21:21; 22:21, 22, 24; 24:7; Judges 20:13.

⁴⁰⁰ See also Heb. 10:28. Interestingly, the author of Hebrews casts this verse in present tense.

in in the day of the Lord Jesus.⁴⁰¹ In addition to this, the author of Hebrews as well as Christ's words, seem to temper the potential conclusion that being delivered to Satan for the destruction of the flesh will *automatically* guarantee an eschatological salvation.⁴⁰² In other words, each man must be careful how he builds on Christ's foundation.⁴⁰³ There are three possible outcomes of the fire in which one's works are judged. Gold, silver, or precious stones are refined and remain. Wood, hay, and stubble are burned up, yet that person is saved as through fire.⁴⁰⁴ However, Paul also says that destruction can also ensue, in 1 Cor. 3:17, that "If any man destroys/corrupts the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the Temple of God is holy, and that is what you are." In other words, abiding in holiness is a moral obligation with both ecclesiastical pragmatism and *potential* apostasy resulting in eschatological judgment, should one continue to *practice willful* sin thus causing a "shipwreck to their faith."⁴⁰⁵

This brings the argument back to the four essentials of Acts 15. The sins that require immediate purging are idolatry and sexual immorality, but these commands in no way negate the standing commandments surrounding ceremonial laws. For instance, foreigners wanting to partake in the *sacrificial* components of the Passover must be circumcised.⁴⁰⁶ It is here at the Temple service where I believe that Paul's moral emphasis to Gentile communities is confused

⁴⁰¹ 1 Cor. 5:5; 1 Tim. 1:20.; I would also place Judas Iscariot in this category as well (Jn. 13:27). This seems to show that temporal destruction and judgement need not necessarily lead to eschatological damnation.

⁴⁰² Heb. 6:6; Heb. 10:26-31.; Mt. 7:23.

⁴⁰³ 1 Cor. 3:10-11.

⁴⁰⁴ Mt. 5:19.

⁴⁰⁵ As in continually and unrepentantly. 1 Tim. 1:19.

⁴⁰⁶ Ex. 12. These are the rules the Patron has made for worship in this way.

with sacrificial adiaphora as opposed to a legal understanding of potential mootness in both civil and ceremonial cases.

Accordingly, 1st Century Judaism, in accordance with the provisions laid out in the Torah, had already developed ways to obey the commandments of God while in locations that were considerable distances from the Temple.⁴⁰⁷ Other Rabbinic sources underscore the importance of being in the land and how it is tied to an ability to *fulfill* the commandments.⁴⁰⁸ Deut. 12:5, 11 further clarifies saying,

⁵But you shall seek the LORD at the *place* which the LORD your God will choose from all your tribes, to establish His name there for His dwelling, and *there* you shall come...¹¹then it shall come about that the place in which the LORD your God will choose for His name to dwell, there you shall bring all that I command you: your burnt offerings and your sacrifices, your tithes and the contribution of your hand, and all your choice votive offerings which you will vow to the LORD.

In short, *full* observation of the ceremonial commandments is geographically dependent. Likewise, *full* observation of the ceremonial commandments requires a functioning Temple/Mishkan and Levitical priesthood. In other words, *obligation is geographically contextual* and based on *capacity for observation*.⁴⁰⁹ If these conditions are not met for the portions of the Torah that outline ceremonial or civil structures then there is no concrete obligation, based on the word of God, to do them. What is more, it might be sin should one

⁴⁰⁷ Keener, *Acts*, vol. 3, 635.; Deut. 12:21; 14:24; See b. *Hullin* 89b; 100b; *Numbers Rabbah* 10:13;

⁴⁰⁸ m. *Kellim* 1:6.; *Midrash Siferi, Re'eh* 80 says, "When they arrived in Tzidon, and remembered the Land of Israel, they lifted up their eyes and tears dripped from them, and they ripped their clothes and recited the verse, 'You shall inherit it, and settle in it, for in it you can *observe all the laws*.'" (Italics for emphasis – the verse is from Deut. 11:31) "They said: Settling in the land of Israel is equal in worth to all the commandments in the Torah combined. And they turned around and went back to the Land of Israel." *Deut. 11:31-32 actually says, "For you are about to cross the Jordan to go in to possess the land which the LORD your God is giving you and you shall possess it and live in it, and you shall be careful to do all the statutes and the judgments which I am setting before you today."

⁴⁰⁹ DeSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship, and Purity*, 161.

attempt to perform them without the appropriate structures in place. In other words, *ought implies can*. An excellent example of this is Daniel, who despite being in exile, continued to pray toward Jerusalem three times daily, indicative of the sacrificial times (evening, morning, and noon), but did not perform the actual sacrificial service.⁴¹⁰ Daniel likewise could observe the Kashrut laws, and Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah did not commit idolatry.⁴¹¹ Other examples, include the Apostles and Jesus's continued support and use of the Temple system despite the fact that the Ark of the Covenant was not present in Herod's Temple.⁴¹² Furthermore, civil structures are likewise upended or made moot by invading conquerors and the empires of Babylon, Persia, Assyria, Greece, and Rome. To that end, Paul's potential ceremonial adiaphora is not indicative of those portions of the Law as being unimportant for Gentiles. Quite the contrary, Paul's moral emphasis is indicative of a legal interpretation already common within Judaism. For if Paul's participation in the Nazirite vow means anything, as Keener demonstrates, it is "not simply a ruse to pretend that he allows Jews to keep the law but a fair portrayal of his own Jewish convictions."⁴¹³ But, contra Keener, it is not simply, "Jewish convictions" about which Paul is concerned, rather, it is what the Word of God prescribes as lived by the Messiah. Jesus says,

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done *without neglecting the others*.⁴¹⁴

⁴¹⁰ Dan. 6:10.

⁴¹¹ Dan. 1:8; Dan. 3:12.

⁴¹² As to the location of the Ark, no one is quite sure. 1 Esdras 1:54 claims that everything including the Ark was taken to Babylon, while 2 Macc. 2:5,7 claims that the Prophet Jeremiah removed the Ark and placed it in a cave to remain unknown until God gathers his people again.

⁴¹³ Keener, *Acts*, vol. 3, 635-6.

⁴¹⁴ Mt. 23:23; cf 11:42. (Italics for emphasis).

Therefore, understanding the fact that Torah observance of *sacrificial and civil* laws have necessary *geographical* and *contextual* limitations, and that the Law in and of itself does not serve in a forensic capacity for justification via grace (primarily that of circumcision), this motivates Paul to underscore the weightier provisions outlined in the Torah.⁴¹⁵ This, emphasis of Paul, however, does not negate the ceremonial components, nor does it negate partial observance of the commands which is what Deut. 12:21 and 14:24 are driving at.⁴¹⁶ For even Paul says in 1 Cor. 7:19, “Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but *what matters is* keeping the commandments of God.”⁴¹⁷ If *what matters* is keeping the commandments of God, then Paul is underscoring that the Law of God has to be followed properly.⁴¹⁸ Accordingly, it seems that Paul outlines what a proper response to grace entails. As such, he guides the early believers in Christ to act in a way that is befitting, otherwise, they (and we) could be making an ungrateful response to the lovingkindness of the patron, thus potentially excluding us from future favors that have yet occurred.⁴¹⁹ So then, contra the argument from Fruchtenbaum and others that claim observing ceremonial parts of the Law is a matter of adiaphora for Paul and a mere option for the Gentiles, seems to be incorrect, for the prophets indicate a significant involvement for Gentiles following the Law and Ecclesiastical discipline and potential judgment is dependent upon one’s

⁴¹⁵ Much like the prophets, whose contexts have fully functioning temple systems, but emphasize moral components.

⁴¹⁶ See also Polycarp and Polycrates and the Quartodeciman’s who *observe* Passover, but do not fulfill the sacrificial requirements. Setting apart the day is something that *should* be done no matter one’s location, whereas the sacrificial requirements can (and should) only be performed at the Temple/Mishkan.

⁴¹⁷ Italics original in NASB 95. See page 79 of this dissertation in regard to circumcision.

⁴¹⁸ Eph. 4:1; Phil. 1:27; Col. 1:10. Cicero famously wrote, “Law is the highest reason, rooted in nature, which commands things that must be done and prohibits the opposite.” See *On the Commonwealth of and on the Laws*, 1.18. Applying this logic here, the Torah prescribes specific ways to observe its ceremonial ordinances, to do them outside of those contexts is prohibited. As it is written, “Scripture cannot be broken.” Jn. 10:35.

⁴¹⁹ DeSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship, and Purity*, 184.

willing and continual violation of the Law (sinning), *after* having come to the knowledge of Messiah.⁴²⁰ Furthermore, Paul’s understanding of the geographical and historical limitations besetting *all the nations of the earth* being unable to *physically be in Jerusalem* to perform the ceremonial rites, underscores his emphasis on the moral but in no way demonstrates adiaphora toward the ceremonial rites for both Jews and Gentiles. Rather, the distinction is made in the ability to actually perform the requirements. Since the receivers of God’s grace are in a place where they are physically, financially, politically, and geographically unable to give Adonai worship at the physical Temple, they are instructed to give the eternally beneficent patron due honor in all things that they are able to do. For the human, as a mobile temple of God is not to be defiled. As Paul writes elsewhere, “Therefore, come out from their midst and be separate,” says the Lord. “And do not touch what is unclean; and I will welcome you.”⁴²¹

The Hermeneutical Key: Confirmation in History and a guide to Difficult Pauline Texts

This dissertation has shown that both the Transitory and Conciliatory Theories of Acts 21 do not hold up, when examined closely. This leads to the logical and hermeneutically consistent conclusion that the Continuous Theory has the most explanatory power, is less ad hoc, and makes the most sense of the biblical data. Based on the results above, the very actions and admission of Paul and James in Acts 21, which is after the writing of Galatians, show that they consider not walking according to Moses, as interpreted by Messiah, to be apostasy from the one true religion. This fact alone is sufficient for the Pronomian Paradigm and serves as the hermeneutical key for unlocking other Pauline rhetoric and his midrashic applications. Although

⁴²⁰ See Mark Kinzer, *Post-Missionary Messianic Judaism*, 152, 160.

⁴²¹ 2 Cor. 6:17; Is. 52:11.

the establishment of the paradigm renders any further explanation and exegesis of “difficult to understand” texts unnecessary, I assert that, based on Paul’s and James’s admissions, if one comes across a text that seems to speak against the continuity of the Torah in the Apostolic writings, then that interpretation is *automatically* mistaken. Based on that, the reader should seek other interpretations based on this *a priori* argument alone. In short, when one reads a text with Torah lenses in the Hebraic context, through Christ, all the texts that seem to speak against the Torah are actually speaking for the Torah. That being said, I think that a limited explanation of Heb. 8:13; 9:15 and 2 Cor 2:13-14 is appropriate to further strengthen the analysis above.

**Applying the Paradigm:
(Hebrews 8:8-9; 9:15, Colossians 2, and 2 Corinthians 2:13-14;)**

Having shown the Continuous Theory to be the most consistent and comprehensive explanation to the data found in Acts 15, Acts 21, Acts 10 and 11, and 1 Cor. 9, readers of this dissertation would likely turn to the following passages as evidence that the Pronomian Paradigm is not as comprehensive or consistent as shown. How would the Pronomian Paradigm answer apparent abandonment of the Law found in Heb. 8:8-9, 13; 9:15 and Paul’s words in 2 Cor. 2:13-14?

To keep this section at a reasonable length, this dissertation will not be doing a full exhaustive exegetical attempt, but rather will apply the paradigmatic lens which informs the Pronomian understanding of the text.

Heb. 8:8-9, 13; 9:15

First and foremost, it is of the utmost importance to establish the starting points. To that end, there are three starting points that are fundamental in the Pronomian Paradigm’s understanding of the text. 1) Covenants in the Bible are not last wills or testaments. 2) Apostasy

from Moses is doctrinally untenable. 3) The New Covenant is founded upon the Mosaic Covenant (The Torah must be written on the heart) and is given to Israel.

First, the New Covenant is given to Israel—and Israel alone—and must be read in this light.⁴²² The words “New Covenant” (*B’rit Chadasha*) is used only in Jer. 31 and specifies that the collective of Israel will be faithful and obedient to Adonai. Unlike when the Mosaic Covenant was made, for even before Moses came down the mountain the Israelites were already willingly violating the commandments they had just promised to keep, Israel will now be the faithful bride they were intended to be.⁴²³ Jeremiah’s vision has all of Israel, for the first time in history, being in Covenant and obedient to the Most High. This is indeed a *new* thing for at no time in history has this actually occurred.⁴²⁴ Secondly, and of the utmost importance, is that according to the prophesy, the very crux of the New Covenant *is* the Torah written on the heart. In other words, the New Covenant, according to Jeremiah, is Torah-centered obedience and faithfulness to the Lord. To that end, the Prophet makes it clear that the Mosaic Covenant serves as the legal foundation of the New Covenant and is the basis of the promise and the responsibility of those who are a part of the New Covenant. Therefore, we can say with a fair bit of certitude that if Christ and the New Covenant came to abolish the Mosaic Covenant, the New Covenant’s prophesy would actually be null and void, rendering Jeremiah a false prophet, for there is no need for the abrogated Law of the Torah to be written on the heart in the New

⁴²² Jer. 31:31-34.

⁴²³ Jeremiah even foresees the day when the House of Judah and the House of Israel are reunited. Interestingly enough, this has not yet occurred in history. The northern tribes are never recorded as having returned. Although 1948 could have been a beginning of that return, the only biblical evidence is that the tribes of Judah returned. In this regard, the New Covenant is still in the process of being fulfilled and is not fully manifested, and since all of Israel is not yet believing, nor have the all the believing Gentiles come into Israel, the New Covenant is still in the process of being fulfilled.

⁴²⁴ As for the Gentiles, they are grafted into the promise of the New Covenant, partaking in the benefits *and* responsibilities of the covenant as part of Israel, not in replacement of Israel.

Covenant. This fact is further evidenced by Paul's writings in Galatians and Romans, where he says that subsequent covenants do not invalidate the previous covenants.⁴²⁵ Rather, the covenants get stacked on top of one another and work symbiotically. Therefore, based on the words of Jeremiah and Paul, the Mosaic Covenant contains the rules and responsibilities of the New Covenant, thus mandating its continuity.

Furthermore, refocusing on the Book of Hebrews, one finds that it is about priesthoods, covenants, and not testaments (wills). The author of Hebrews goes through great pains to delineate the limitations of the Mosaic Covenant and the Levitical priesthood, the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur), and why the New Covenant required a different type of sacrifice to be initiated. Between Hebrews Ch. 6 and 10, the author meticulously compares the Mosaic Covenant (primarily the Levitical priesthood) and the New Covenant's Melchizedekian priesthood, and how they function as two *concurrent* priesthods with different modes and Laws, and for the time being, geography. At no time is there any discussion about a last will and testament of Christ. Rather, Christ is described as a *mediator*, which is different than the covenant makers, a topic which will be covered below. So, where did this whole notion of a last will and testament come from? It came from an unfortunate mistranslation in the Vulgate which has spurred no end to theological misunderstanding.

What is ~~truly~~ baffling is that the Vulgate does translate Jer. 31:31-32 correctly from the Septuagint.⁴²⁶ For reasons unknown (although supersessionist *a priori* from Jerome is probable), the Vulgate changes the direct quote of Jer. 31:31-32 in the Book to the Hebrews using the word

⁴²⁵ Gal. 3:15-17.; Rom. 3:31.

⁴²⁶ "*foedus novum non secundum pactum*," *Foedus* is generally defined as a "league, treaty, compact, or alliance." *Pactum* is typically an "agreement, covenant, contract, stipulation, compact, or pact."

testamentum instead of *foedus* and *pactum* as shown in Jer. 31.⁴²⁷ The scribes of the Vulgate or Jerome himself used *testamentum* to translate the Greek word, *diatheke* which, biblically carries the meaning Covenant. Although *diatheke* can carry the meaning of a last will and testament, the concept of a last will and testament is foreign to the text, and most importantly in biblical texts about covenants. To that end, it is important to understand that there are very key differences between a will and a covenant. In Latin, a *testamentum* is the will and the declaration of how to dispose of or distribute property after one's death. The key point about *testaments* is that they are solitary, individual declarations, whereas covenants *by necessity* require agreement between more than one party. Covenantal agreements also necessitate that both parties are *alive*. Furthermore, testaments do not need a mediator.⁴²⁸ Lastly, testaments do not require sacrifices, whereas all covenants require some type of sacrifice to be initiated. This basic error in the Vulgate has essentially infected all biblical interpretations since, and has led to everything before Matthew being termed "Old Covenant" and everything after Malachi (or 2 Chronicles), being the "New Covenant."⁴²⁹ More importantly, for the case at hand, this mistake has rendered interpreting Heb. 8:13 and 9:15-18 exceedingly difficult, if not impossible.

Given this initial misunderstanding from 8:8-9, the text in Heb. 8:13, according to most translations make *covenant* the object of the adjective "new."⁴³⁰ The text says, "When He said,

⁴²⁷ *Super domum Israehl et super domum Iuda testamentum novum non secundum testamentum quod feci patribus eorum*

⁴²⁸ Heb. 9:15.

⁴²⁹ An unfortunate consequence of this is that all the foundational covenants are now contained within the books of the Scriptures now called the "Old Covenant" A.K.A. The Old Testament. So, the real conundrum is, are Covenants, like the Noahic Covenant, that are contained within the "Old Covenant" now abolished too, or is the Old Covenant simply a phrase of the Mosaic Covenant according to the majority view? Or is the Old Covenant the time from Sinai until Christ? These questions are spurred all because of misunderstanding here.

⁴³⁰ KJV, ESV, NASB 95, RSV, NRSV, NIV.

‘A new *covenant*,’ He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear.” In all honest translations, the word *covenant* is italicized to indicate it was added. In short, the word *diatheke* does not appear in any manuscript evidence. Unfortunately, misunderstanding this text to be speaking of covenants is merely a theological opinion that seeks to contrast the New Covenant as totally separate from the Mosaic Covenant. To that end, the Pronomian stance, considering that apostasy from Moses is quite out of the question based on Paul’s actions in Acts 21, asks why the author of Hebrews didn’t include the word covenant and why no extant manuscripts contain the word *diatheke*.⁴³¹ The most logical answer, it seems, is to show that he did not want the reader to think he was making the case for the transition between the New Covenant and the first covenant. Considering the fact that the whole context in Hebrews, up until this point, was the *priesthood*, it seems the point of the author is to show how the Levitical priesthood and the sacrifices of the Mosaic Covenant could not be the confirmation of the New Covenant. The reason for this is due precisely to the limitations of the earthly priesthood found in the Torah itself, primarily, that the Levites first had to make themselves pure with a calf, and that the Levites were not pure ontologically. In short, the promise given to Jeremiah requires a different priesthood and a different sacrifice to initiate it Lawfully. Therefore, in light of the requirements of the New Covenant, there indeed needs to be a new priesthood, and that it is not the covenant that is waxing old, but rather the ability of the Levitical priests to initiate the New Covenant.⁴³²

⁴³¹ Should the author of Hebrews actually be Paul, the problem would be most severe if now apostasy from Moses was mandated. Theories about the author abound, whether it be Barnabas, Apollos, Timothy, Clement, or perhaps Priscilla, but the likelihood is that the author most likely knew Paul, James, or both, and would have been aware of James and Paul’s actions at the Second Jerusalem Council. Thus, the requirement for non-apostasy is required, unless of course Paul and James are now to be considered liars...

⁴³² There is also a supporting case for the author of Hebrews to be speaking prophetically here. In that, if this epistle was written before the destruction of the Temple, the author could be pointing to the destruction of the priesthood based on the rejection of Messiah and the corruption of the Temple under the Sadducees. However, like

Accordingly, the Levitical priests are “obsolete” only in the sense that they are unable to initiate something New and a new thing that is *ongoing*. It is critical to note that the Levitical obsolescence is not referring to their role within the Torah, the Mosaic Covenant, and in the Temple/Tabernacle service. Furthermore, other prophesy makes it clear that Christ is not replacing the human priests and making them obsolete. Ezekiel’s Eschatological temple demonstrates *concurrent* priesthods, in much the same way David (Melchizedek) and the Levitical Priests served concurrently during his time. So, it seems that the *co-existence* of Melchizedekian and Levitical priests has not been adequately accounted for in the majority view. The “Prince” in Ezekiel, could be Yeshua, is the highest priest in the Melchizedekian line.⁴³³ The Levites, accordingly, are ministering to the Melchizedekian King, and also helping the people approach the holy mountain. In short, it seems that the Levitical fading away is only in terms of their ability to initiate the New Covenant, not their importance nor continued function under the Covenant of the Law, which is still fully in effect and confirmed by the resurrection of Messiah, future prophesy, and the very rules and responsibilities of the New Covenant.

Kistemaker, I typically read the book of Hebrews as being written in the 80s AD or after the destruction of the Temple. It is known from Josephus (*Contra Apion*) and from m.*Pesachim* 7 that the priesthood did have some limited functionality after 70 AD, but was by and large defunct from a status of actual physical inability. Thus, “ready to vanish away” is a historical marker which, considering the Greek *pepalaioken*, which instead of meaning cancellation or abolition, means to no longer function as designed, is a clear admission of the historical context (See H.G. Liddell and R. Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 1290. In addition to this, given that Hebrews was written some 30+ years after the resurrection (80s AD), logically speaking, the obsolescence of the Levitical priesthood should have already taken place back in 30 AD *at the resurrection*, based on the majority interpretation of Christs resurrection being the moment in time when the Law was abolished (thus it cannot be *currently* waxing old as the text in Hebrews mandates). Rather the text at hand seems to indicate a current and ongoing obsolescence which cannot be explained by the typical interpretations. Therefore, it seems likely that the historical view above and the position taken in this dissertation as positional “obsolescence” or inability to bring into effect the New Covenant seem to be coordinating and can be held together and explains the data. To that end, this text is most certainly not speaking of covenants and is likely historical and doctrinal, speaking to the inability of the Levites to actually fulfill the New Covenant (by ability [being merely men] and by historical context [no Temple]). See Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Epistle of the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1984), 14-16.

⁴³³ There is also a possibility that the Prince could be David, or even the High Priest. The determination of this is outside the scope of this dissertation.

Remember that the earthly Tabernacle was a copy of the heavenly Tabernacle, which the author of Hebrews so aptly points out in 9:24 and Moses demonstrates in Ex. 25:9. This leads to a few interesting conclusions from a Pronomian Paradigm perspective. First, since the author of Hebrews indicates the earthly was a copy, that would, by necessity, mean that the heavenly tabernacle *predates* the earthly.⁴³⁴ Secondly, Melchizedek (Messiah), has always been operating in the heavenly tabernacle. When the New Covenant was initiated, Christ's blood was brought into the Most Holy Place of the Heavenly Tabernacle, for as a non-Levite, Christ could not enter into the *earthly* Temple. As the High Priest on earth enters into the Most Holy Place once a year, so Christ entered into the Heavenly Tabernacle applying his blood to initiate the New Covenant.⁴³⁵ What this means is that, the Levitical service cannot be made old, or obsolete as far as the *Mosaic Covenant* and *earthly service* is concerned, but when viewed by the initiation of the New Covenant, the Levites are indeed old and obsolete, because they are powerless to bring into effect the sacrifice required, nor do they have access to the Tabernacle in the Heavens! In other words, the Levites and the High Priest have strictly defined roles, regulations, and capability.⁴³⁶ For them, or Christ to step outside of that would be to violate Torah and to negate the eternal plan of the Messiah. This is precisely what the author of Hebrews says in Heb. 8:4. Since it is explicitly against the Law for Christ as Man to enter into the Holy of Holies, the

⁴³⁴ The Heavenly Tabernacle could by all accounts be *eternally* present in the heavens. This is unprovable, but ought to be a consideration. If this is true, it total renders preterist eschatology as null and void.

⁴³⁵ Although Christ's death happens during the Passover, thus mirroring the blood of the lamb, redeeming Israel in Egypt, the author of Hebrews makes the case from the Day of Atonement. To that end, I am not trying to say literally the blood of Christ was stored in the heavenly tabernacle until the appointed time, but rather the sacrifice at Passover is also valid for the Day of Atonement.

⁴³⁶ Again, Ezekiel's temple is an amazing example of both priesthoods operating concurrently when the heavenly and the earthly become one again. Melchizedek cannot negate eternal promises to the Levites. Since Abraham tithed to Melchizedek, the Levites likewise serve and minister to the Highest of all High Priests.

author of Hebrews seems to be showing the continue validity of the earthly law, but its inherent weakness to initiate something outside of its Lawful bounds.⁴³⁷

Having shown that Heb. 8:13 was speaking of priests, not covenants, a rather unfortunate hermeneutical quandary really manifests in Heb. 9:15-18 where most translations actually render self-defeating, incomprehensible, and seemingly unbiblical understanding about covenants.

The NASB says,

¹⁵For this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant, so that, since a death has taken place for the redemption of the violations that were *committed* under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.

¹⁶For where there is a covenant, there must of necessity be the death of the one who made it.

¹⁷For a covenant is valid *only* when *people are* dead, for it is never in force while the one who made it lives.

¹⁸Therefore, even the first *covenant* was not inaugurated without blood.

Firstly, in verse 16, covenants are made by two or more people. Not “the *one* who made it.” If there is only one person making the covenant, it’s not really a covenant and there can be no mediator. So right away it seems therefore, that the one who “made it” must be referring to the *sacrifice* that confirms the covenant. The translation above also pits verse 16 against verse 15. A mediator, by simple logical necessity stands between two *other* parties (in this case Adonai and Israel). In the Mosaic Law, the Levitical High Priest used calves on the Day of Atonement to mediate for sins committed in ignorance.⁴³⁸ These transgressions committed in ignorance really inform what is said in verse 15. If Yom Kippur was only efficacious for sins done in *ignorance*,

⁴³⁷ David M. Moffitt, “Weak and Useless? Purity, the Mosaic Law, and Perfection in Hebrews,” *Law and Lawlessness in Early Judaism and Early Christianity*. (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2019), 101-102.; Matthew Thiessen, “Hebrews and the Jewish Law,” in *So Great a Salvation: A Dialogue on the Atonement in Hebrews*, eds., Jon C. Laansma, George Guthrie, and Cynthia Long Westfall (New York, NY: T&T Clark, 2019), 190-191.

⁴³⁸ Heb. 9:7.

as the author of Hebrews indicates, that would mean that sacrifices from animals were never sufficient for high-handed and intentional sins. This fact is what David tells us in the Psalms (Ps. 51:16). In short, the death and resurrection of Messiah was geared precisely to atone for deliberate sin and apostasy from the covenants, which this dissertation has already discussed. Given that David, as well as the prophets, already insisted that the blood of animals was not sufficient for intentional sin, it seems there was already an understanding that the Levitical priesthood was only efficacious for certain things (sins done in ignorance and physical temporal purity).⁴³⁹ Furthermore, Heb. 10:12 informs us that Christ's sacrifice, unlike the yearly sacrifice, was sufficient for all these sins for all time (past and future).

Secondly, verse 16 is a false statement all together, according to the translation above. All the covenants in the Bible were made between *living* people. Neither God nor Adam died in cutting of the Adamic Covenant. God nor Noah died in the cutting of the Noahic Covenant. Neither God nor Abraham died in the cutting of the Abrahamic Covenant. Neither God nor David died when the Davidic Covenant was given. Neither God nor Moses died when the written Torah was given. Lastly, neither God (the Father) nor Israel died when the New Covenant was cut. Thus, the translation of verse 16 is fundamentally flawed, in light of the biblical evidence and simple logic.

Thirdly, as if the false statement in verse 16 was not bad enough, verse 17 also contains a falsehood. Again, covenants are established between living people. Therefore, the translation of verse 17 is blatantly incorrect, for the covenant holders are not dead people, rather the covenant holders are alive. So instead of the people being dead, it is the *sacrifice* for the covenant which died. Fourthly, Heb. 9:15 speaks of the mediator of the New Covenant. It becomes abundantly

⁴³⁹ Hos. 6:6; Ps. 40:6-8; 50:8; Is 1:11

clear at this point that Jesus *is not* the covenant maker. The son is to *mediate* the covenant between Israel and God (the Father). So, in this case, the ones who made the covenant are not dying at all, thus the interpretation found above negates itself.

So how should this text be interpreted? The Pronomian Paradigm, understanding the continuity of the Law and the eternal nature of covenant promises would render the text accordingly.

¹⁵ For this reason, He is the mediator of a new covenant, in order that those called may receive the promised eternal inheritance – since a death has taken place that redeems them from violations under the first covenant.⁴⁴⁰

¹⁶ For where there is a covenant, the death of the one that makes/confirmes must be established.⁴⁴¹

¹⁷ For a covenant is confirmed over dead bodies, for it is never in force while what made the covenant lives.

¹⁸ Therefore, even the first covenant has not been established without blood.⁴⁴²

This keeps the literal meaning of the text, is not contradictory, and maintains hermeneutical consistency and correspondence to Acts 21. Since the actual covenant makers (God and Israel) are not the dead bodies, the context mandates that the “one” who made the New Covenant active is the dead body spoken of in verse 17. Christ is that sacrifice of the New Covenant, in the same way that the blood of calves initiated the Mosaic Covenant. It is the death of Christ that makes the covenant between the Father and Israel active. Christ is the mediator and the redeemer.

⁴⁴⁰ Tree of Life Version (TLV). Intentional sin and apostasy from the Mosaic covenant, required something greater than the bulls and calves and a blemished high priest.

⁴⁴¹ The “one” being the thing/person sacrificed, not the actual covenant makers. The covenant makers must continue to live in order for the covenant to be effective. Since the New Covenant is between God and Israel, they cannot die. Therefore, it is the Mediator (Messiah) who dies, not the covenant makers.

⁴⁴² Daniel Gruber, *The Separation of Church & Faith: Copernicus and the Jews*, vol. 1 (Hanover, NH: Elijah Publishing, 2005), 47.

If Christ came to redeem those who committed sins under the first covenant, then it begs the question as to why Christ would atone for deliberate sins from the first covenant, only to then allow the same sins after his death and resurrection? The answer, according to the Pronomian Paradigm, is that Christ would not and could not do such a thing. In fact, the opposite is true. Christ came to *confirm* the New Covenant by forgiving the intentional violations of the Mosaic Law and writing the Mosaic Law on the hearts of those whom he forgave. In other words, the bride (Israel/Ekklesia) would no longer commit adulterous apostasy according to the standard of the Mosaic Law and would be faithful to the rules of the marriage.

2 Cor 2:13-14: Seeking Moses, Finding Messiah

The next possible objection to the Pronomian Paradigm comes from the only time the words “old covenant” are used in the Apostolic writings.

Therefore, having such a hope, we use great boldness in *our* speech, and *are* not like Moses, *who* used to put a veil over his face so that the sons of Israel would not look intently at the end of what was fading away. But their minds were hardened; for until this very day at the reading of the **old covenant** the same veil remains unlifted, because it is removed in Christ.⁴⁴³

The primary contention here is the words “old covenant,” which just so happens to be a hapax legomena, in the same way that “new covenant” is a hapax legomena in the Tanakh. What is Paul speaking of here, and how would the Pronomian Paradigm approach the text?

Labels: Old Covenant and New Covenant

To begin, a few explanations are required. What exactly is the New Covenant? This was explained in the section above, but it is worthy of repetition. According to the prophet Jeremiah, the New Covenant is a covenant that is made with the House of Israel and the House of Judah, in

⁴⁴³ 2 Cor 2:13-14.

which it is explicitly promised that the Torah of God given at Sinai will be placed upon their hearts and that, for the first time in history, the entire nation of Israel (consisting of both northern and southern kingdoms, hereby united) will be loyal to her God and have faith in her Messiah.⁴⁴⁴ They will no longer be straying in adulterous apostasy, breaking the marriage covenant.⁴⁴⁵

Secondly, given that the prophesy is given specifically to Israel, it should be explicitly stated that this includes all the ingrafted Gentiles as well. We know that from the Apostolic writings, that Gentiles are grafted in (Rom. 11) to the politeia of Israel now partake in the Covenants of the Promise as one man (Eph. 2:11-12). Thus, Gentiles, although not physical descendants of Abraham, are blessed through the promised seed of Abraham and are graciously grafted into Israel. Therefore, just like physical Israel, these believing Gentiles are able to have the Torah written on their hearts, along with the sons of physical Israel, who are full members of the New Covenant.⁴⁴⁶ Recall earlier that Paul was reaching out to those who were without Torah, that Paul was not *anomos Theos*, but that he was *ennomos Christos*. This means that he would be teaching Gentiles to walk *ennomos Christos*, as well. These Gentiles are graciously able to partake in the marriage covenant in the same way the mixed multitude were able to partake in the first marriage at Sinai. Ultimately, being a member of the New Covenant, according to the prophet, means to be receptive to the Word of God, repenting, and following the Messiah of Israel. Like all Covenants that have come before, the New Covenant has specific requirements that are placed on those who partake in the Covenant. Here in the New Covenant, following the

⁴⁴⁴ This section in Jer. 31 begins by listing both Israel and Judah, but then combines them as simply “Israel” in verse 33 which is typically interpreted as showing the whole collective of Israel being united again. Given what we know from Rom. 11, I underscore the fact that “Israel” also includes the ingrafted Gentile believers. Therefore, Gentiles are included within the New Covenant.

⁴⁴⁵ Jer. 31:31-34.

⁴⁴⁶ Not all the physical sons of Israel are Israel. Not all Jews are Jews inwardly. Rom. 2:29; 9:6.

commands of the Torah are the human responsibility of gracious acceptance into the marriage covenant. If one recalls the story of Exodus, it is one of deliverance and redemption, first by grace and power, then through obedience to the Law which was given after.⁴⁴⁷ Grace must always come first.

So, what does the Pronomian Paradigm have to say about the “Old Covenant” if it is not referring to some epoch or dispensation and the now defunct Torah? Based on what we know of the time period, Paul is obviously dealing with several audiences, consisting primarily of new Greek converts, Jewish believers in the Messiah, and Jewish non-believers. From the Pronomian perspective, this expression, “old covenant,” used only here in the whole Bible, appears to reference Jewish unbelievers. Since they are unbelievers, they read the Tanakh without the illumination of the Messiah and only with the dull illumination of the oral law. That unbelieving Jews are the target audience here makes the most sense, as believing Gentiles probably already believe in the Messiah, and unbelieving Gentiles would not be listening to the Tanakh at all. Therefore, the only group remaining are those Jew who are either religious or merely cultural Jews, who do not believe that Yeshua was the Messiah for Israel and that positional righteousness is obtained by adherence to the Law *and* the oral traditions. When Moses is read, the truth is not fully perceived, as a veil is over their hearts. The Tanakh simply remains mere letters on stone, and it is impossible for the person to see and believe the Messiah of which the prophets and the Law speak. For, this Jewish person is trying to obtain salvation through either cultural ethnicity, or through “works of the Law,” which these things cannot provide.⁴⁴⁸

⁴⁴⁷ DeSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship, and Purity: Unlocking New Testament Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: IVP, 2022), 137-184.

⁴⁴⁸ Dunn delineates that the works of the Law are typically sectarian and factional understandings of how to follow the Torah. While it is true that one cannot work their way to heaven or earn salvation, the 1st Century historical context in which Paul was writing had extensive use of the phrase “works of the law” in which “works” were factional bounds of the various sects of Judaism. As such, these works were, in fact, the test of community

Therefore, without Messiah, the Tanakh and the associated oral law is indeed the “Old Covenant” but when the Spirit leads to the Messiah, the Torah is written on the heart, fulfilling the promise of the New Covenant. Logically speaking, the question has to be asked, if the Torah/Moses is old, fading away, and unneeded, why must it be written on the heart in the New Covenant? For there would be no need to write an abrogated Law on the heart of flesh.⁴⁴⁹ The apparent answer is that the Law is not abrogated in any way, because the Torah is the written image of God, and Messiah is the Torah in the flesh and the absolute perfect manifestation of the perfect Law of God. The reason the Torah must be written on the heart in the New Covenant is that Torah within the person is the mirror that reflects Christ and the glory of God. This perfect mirror stands in sharp relief to the burdensome and in some cases sinful works of the oral law. The Torah gets written on the heart so that the Word on the circumcised heart will impel the individual to reflect their God, thus restoring the image of God marred at the Garden. This restored image of God makes oral law defunct, and one’s old understanding of Moses fade in comparison to the illumination that Christ provides for the Law of God.

This written mirror of God serves several functions, but in the text at hand, the Torah is being used in both condemnation and sanctification functions. Without the Spirit, without faith, and without the Messiah, the Law, and especially the oral law, can only be viewed in terms of *condemnation* to both Jew and Greek.⁴⁵⁰ In other words, the Law cannot save and was never intended to save, instead it remains in its role of condemnation, instead of the means by which a

membership and whether or not that relationship could be sustained. Dunn cites 1QS v. 21, 23 and 4QFlor. i.7, 4QMMT showing historical context and how Jews typically used “works of the Law” to delineate right standing. See Dunn, *Galatians*, 136.

⁴⁴⁹ Ez. 11:19; 36:26.

⁴⁵⁰ Rom. 1:31.; Acts 10:34-35.

believer is sanctified and abides in grace with the Torah leading to life.⁴⁵¹ Recall above that even the most sacred ceremonies of the Day of Atonement could only cover sins committed in ignorance.⁴⁵² Therefore, intentional sin and adultery from the marriage covenant require something else: a better sacrifice, a New Covenant which returns the bride to a state of purity. Given this reality, the Law contains the rules and regulations of righteous behavior that God has graciously granted to men, so they can abide in covenantal relationship with him.⁴⁵³ What this reveals is the fact is that one must have a relationship *prior* to walking in the Law. In short, one must have the *faithfulness* of Abraham. Reliance on the Law, and especially the oral law, to obtain covenantal righteousness is to put the cart before the horse. The biggest contention of Paul's day was primarily circumcision for the purpose of salvific inclusion in the eschatological kingdom. Reading the Torah in this way is the Old Covenant to Paul, because it was an old and defunct understanding. Not that the Mosaic Covenant is old or defunct, rather in Christ it is fully established for it is written on the heart in faith, and not performed as mere works of the law.⁴⁵⁴

That being the case, the "Old Covenant" of which Paul is speaking, does not seem to describe the life of God's people prior to Christ's resurrection. Rather, the whole notion of the "Old Covenant" is simply to describe Torah obedience combined with faithlessness, thus relying

⁴⁵¹ Gal. 3:21. Daniel I. Block, *The Gospel According to Moses: Theological and Ethical Reflections on the Book of Deuteronomy*, (Portland, OR: Cascade Books, 2012), 131-132.

⁴⁵² Heb. 9:7.

⁴⁵³ Jn. 15:10 is of monumental importance. Christ and the Father are One (Jn 10:30), therefore, the Father's commandments are one with Christ's commands. So then, if one keeps the commandments, as Christ did, one *remains* in his love. The Law does not earn salvific love, rather, it is how one abides. Furthermore, there is no separation between what the father commanded and what Christ commanded and what Moses commanded. Christ, in his life and death, brought the fullness of meaning and significance to the Torah. In fact, it could be argued that since no one has seen the Father except the Son, then it was Christ who Moses saw and spoke with on Sinai (Ex. 33:23) and it was Christ's feet and glory also seen by the elders (Ex 24:10). One of Christ's missions was to fully explain and show how to fully live out his own Law by the people of God. For he did not come to abolish the Law, but to fulfill it (Mt. 5:17).

⁴⁵⁴ Rom. 3:31.

on the Law, and more likely adherence to oral law for salvation. The “Old Covenant” is Paul’s terminology for living a life with the knowledge of the Torah (being Jewish) but not actually receiving the Messiah to which the Torah points. A veil remains when Moses is read without faith. When the veil is lifted for the Jews, they would see the Messiah fully manifested and the institution of the New Covenant found in Prophets and prophesied by Moses himself.⁴⁵⁵

Paul says that Moses’s face shone so much that he needed to cover it with a veil.⁴⁵⁶ The text that Paul is referencing is Ex. 34:34-35 which says,

But whenever Moses went in before the LORD to speak with Him, he would take off the veil until he came out; and whenever he came out and spoke to the sons of Israel what he had been commanded, the sons of Israel would see the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses’ face shone. So Moses would replace the veil over his face until he went in to speak with Him.

The text here makes it clear that Moses’s face never actually faded! In fact, he had to wear the veil every time he spoke to sons of Israel and would only take it off when he spoke to the Lord.⁴⁵⁷ So, what can Paul actually be referring to if the glory of Moses never actually dimmed? This is what Paul seems to be implying by saying “fading as it was.”⁴⁵⁸ It seems, at first glance that Paul’s words are indicating that Moses was embarrassed that the glory was fading away, so he hid his face with a veil. But is this so? For the Tanakh makes no mention of any glory actually fading from Moses’s face. This would also pit Paul against Moses. How can one synthesize what Paul is saying with what Moses wrote about himself? If Paul was being honest with the Tanakh,

⁴⁵⁵ Deut. 18:15.; Jn. 1:45

⁴⁵⁶ 2 Cor. 3:7.

⁴⁵⁷ Exodus 34:33-35 seems to indicate that Moses *continually* had to take off the veil when speaking and then would re-veil after speaking. The Torah makes no effort to demonstrate that the glory diminished overtime, or that Moses was embarrassed by the receding of glow.

⁴⁵⁸ 2 Cor.3:7.

which he was, he cannot be speaking of the light literally fading away from Moses's face. Rather, Paul's point is to make a comparison between the glory of Moses and the unsurpassable weight of Christ's glory and the ministry of the Spirit. The glory of God himself (in Christ and the Spirit) makes Moses's *derivative* glory fade *in comparison*, like how the sunlight overcomes a small flashlight. Even with full power, the light of the small flashlight is enveloped and, for all intents and purposes, fades. Moses's glory was the derivative glory of the Lord, but it shone through his face. The glory of God *is* unapproachable light, and he *is* light.⁴⁵⁹ This is exactly what Paul seems to be implying, "For indeed what had glory, in this case has no glory because of the glory that surpasses it."⁴⁶⁰ This transcendent glory, which far surpasses Moses, cannot be seen when Moses is read with a veil is over their heart.⁴⁶¹ The veil of Moses and the veil over the heart serves as a midrashic ploy to show how the goal of the Torah, that being Christ, who had now been fully manifested in glory, is still veiled to the unbelieving Jews without faith and who rely on man-made laws to be considered just before God.

When the Torah is accepted and known without the Messiah, it is merely a letter of condemnation leading to death, not the Tree of Life it is intended to be.⁴⁶² This is a fact of which Paul, most of all, was aware. For he was a highly trained Jew advancing in Judaism, but, like the

⁴⁵⁹ 1 Tim. 6:16.; 1 Jn. 1:5.

⁴⁶⁰ 2 Cor. 3:10.

⁴⁶¹ Ex. 34:34-35

⁴⁶² Prov. 3:18; 11:30.; Gen. 2:9. Interestingly, the two trees in the Garden make quite the parallel to the text at hand. Since Adam walked with Adonai, we can certainly say that the Trees are not equivalent to Adonai. Quite the contrary, rather these are the words and commands of Adonai. Adam had a covenant relationship, following the command of the Lord was the way he was able to abide in that relationship. The Tree of Life (Righteousness and a life of faithfulness and sanctification) versus the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil (which all though was "good for food" served as condemnation). This tree is literally the fruits of unrighteousness. In other words, the commands of the Lord serve two purposes, one for condemnation, the other for life. See also, Deut. 11:29 which is also the parallel nature of God's commands. One mountain for righteousness, one for cursing. For Paul, the Torah without the Messiah and the Spirit is automatically cursing.

sons of Israel who could not see the glory of Moses, he had a veil over his heart, and could not see the glory of Christ. Without Messiah, the Torah, to the unbelieving Jews Paul is speaking about, is indeed the letter of condemnation. The glory of Christ makes that letter of condemnation old. Therefore, Jews who have the Torah, but not Christ, are in fact under the condemnation of the law, though they themselves think they are righteous by “works of the law.” When a person turns to the Lord the veil is taken away. Moses took the veil off when he went to the Lord, and likewise, when a Jew turns to the source of glory, that being Christ, the veil is removed. If one were to simply have Moses and its derivative glory, they miss the target, for Moses’s glory was derivative and even veiled. Rather, the Jews, like Moses need the true source of glory. This of course does not negate the Torah, rather, it shows that the Torah is not the source of salvation, nor the true glory, for as the 1st Century context indicates, the various sects of Judaism had to *interpret* Moses. When Christ came, the need for interpretation and reliance upon oral law ceased, for the Law was demonstrated by the Lord enrobed in flesh, and his sacrifice enabled positional righteousness.

The Veil Removed: The Torah as a Direct and Necessary Reflection of Christ

Given the Torah’s centrality in the New Covenant, the Torah becomes the mirror of the glory of the Lord, which is exactly what Paul says just a few verses down, in 2 Cor. 3:18, “But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.” As it is written, all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.⁴⁶³ The reader and doer of the Torah, in Messiah, is at liberty to walk in the perfect law of liberty, now freed from the chains of

⁴⁶³ Rom. 3:23.

condemnation and from a set of laws contained in ordinances.⁴⁶⁴ Like Moses's face, which shined in reflection of the Lord, the Torah of God serves as a *mirror* shining the glory of Christ. The Torah, properly viewed and illuminated by Christ, becomes a *necessary and direct reflection* of Christ himself, for he is the Torah, the Word of God made flesh, and in the New Covenant, has imprinted that *necessary and direct reflection of himself on our hearts*.

⁴⁶⁴ 2 Cor. 3:17; Rom. 8:1; Gal. 5:18; Eph. 2:14. One is no longer under the condemnation of the Torah (Romans 1:20 even indicates that knowledge of this condemnation is known by Gentiles). This gentile knowledge of Torah will be detailed in the next chapter. In both cases, Jew and Gentile, through faith, the function of condemnation of the Torah ceases and only the function of mirroring Christ in sanctification remains. As it is written, it is a two-edged sword (Heb. 4:22). It is also written that "Out of his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in its strength." (Rev. 1:16). Surely, the only thing that comes out of the mouth of God is the word of God. One side of the sword is condemnation, the other side life. One could say the Torah has multiple functions, one function of the Torah is being a Tree of Life, the other function being a knowledge of good and evil and the condemnation that knowledge brings.

Chapter 3

In the Wake of Euthyphro's False Dilemma⁴⁶⁵

Having made the Scriptural case for a Pro-Torah theology from Acts 21, it is now time to focus on the “reason pillar” by showing how Pronomian theology makes for a superior apologetic explanation for objective moral truth.⁴⁶⁶ This section is based on an attempt to find the Theo-logical conclusion of answering the *Euthyphro* Dilemma as a false dilemma.⁴⁶⁷ While the apologetic answer to *Euthyphro* certainly removes a barrier to belief based on Christian understanding of moral philosophy and the moral argument for God's existence, the answer actually creates a Theo-logical conundrum, which stands opposed to the major strands Christian thought. In other words, much theology disagrees with the apologetics regarding answering *Euthyphro's* dilemma. It is my contention that only Pro-Torah theology answers Euthyphro's dilemma while remaining consistent theologically, thus marrying theology and apologetics.

While the differences between the major theological systems can be quite stark, what they have *mostly* in common is some form of discontinuity of the Mosaic Law. I say *mostly*, because the Reformed, particularly the theonomists proclaim that the “Moral Law” continues from the Mosaic Law.⁴⁶⁸ Thus, the Reformed typically believe that the so-called “Ceremonial

⁴⁶⁵ This section was originally published by Liberty University's *Elutheria Journal*. See Gregory McKenzie, “In the Wake of Euthyphro's False Dilemma,” *Elutheria* 5, vol. 2 (Dec 2021). <https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/elevol5/iss2/6>. I have made many substantial revisions and clarifications since this article was published, but the main thrust of the argument remains the same.

⁴⁶⁶ Although this is the “reason pillar,” it by no means avoid scripture.

⁴⁶⁷ William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*, 3rd ed., (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 181.

⁴⁶⁸ See Greg L. Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1984).; Francis A. Schaeffer, *A Christian Manifesto* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1982), 28-9. There are some theonomists, particularly that of Rushdoony who also expand the list of the “moral law” to include things like eating biblically clean.

and Civil” parts of the Mosaic Law are abrogated or changed.⁴⁶⁹ The Dispensationalists, on the other hand, typically claim that the entirety of the Mosaic corpus (including the 10 Commandments) is abolished for the newly created Dispensation of Grace and the Law of Christ.⁴⁷⁰ It is here, however, at the Law vs. Grace or Continuity vs. Discontinuity of the Mosaic Law debate where the venom of Euthyphro seemingly paralyzes theological endeavor. Although the apologists found an astute philosophical answer to Euthyphro’s dilemma, the result has not been consistently applied to the major theological/philosophical commitments of the major Evangelical systems. This chapter does such an exercise. In short, using logical, theological, philosophical, and apologetic testing one can abductively determine the consistency, comprehensiveness, cohesiveness, and comeliness of this or that theological system.⁴⁷¹ Thus, if

⁴⁶⁹ John Calvin, *Institutes* Book II, Ch VIII.; Walter Kaiser, Jr., “The Law as God’s Guidance for the Promotion of Holiness,” in *The Law, The Gospel and the Modern Christian: Five Views* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1993), 198.; Greg Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, 51, 205-215. There has been a trend among the Reformed even pulling back from this concept of moral continuity among the Christian Nationalists, who reject theonomy because they claim that the moral prerogatives, especially in regard to societal matters, contained in Moses were merely *culturally-oriented*. It is my contention, as will be explained in this chapter, that the Christian Nationalists have yet to explain how this position does not lead to cultural moral relativism and by what standard morality is applied, other than an appeal to “natural law,” which thrusts them directly into Euthyphro’s dilemma. See Stephen Wolfe, *The Case for Christian Nationalism*, 269-270

⁴⁷⁰ Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Israelology: The Missing Link in Systematic Theology* (San Antonio, TX: Ariel Ministries, 2016), 622-624. Fruchtenbaum’s position seems to be an honest admission of full Mosaic abolition. Although Ryrie admits nine of the ten commandments are repeated in the NT, Fruchtenbaum would place those repetitions with the Law of Christ, as opposed to some Mosaic carryover. See Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, XII, Ch.75, 15.

⁴⁷¹ As for apologetic method, I believe that the commutative principle can also apply here. (E.g., In addition and multiplication, the order of the numbers does not affect the sum or product. In this case the “numbers” are apologetics and theology. One can start with apologetics or theology, but really both should be grounded with Scripture. For example, many presuppositional apologists would readily proclaim that theology comes first and that one’s theology drives apologetics. The presuppositionalist would take issue with the notion that apologetics drives theology. For one must believe something to develop apologetic methods to defend it and convince others of the position’s superiority. But ultimately, to the presuppositionalist’s chagrin, it is a *non sequitur* to think that theology automatically makes correct apologetics. The apologetics would simply be correct within that theological system and all of that system’s assumptions or conclusions, like Calvinistic soteriology or Mosaic discontinuity. In the example at hand, presuppositional apologetic method assumes their theology, typically Reformed theology, to be correct! Of course, using the presuppositionalist’s favorite mantra, “by what standard,” I could simply retort, by what standard is one’s theology correct, and how does one know? Thus, the real conundrum that presents itself is how does one test theological systems? The short answer is to test their consistency, comprehensiveness, cohesiveness, and their comeliness. This of course requires both theology *and* apologetics as checks and balances. Reason and Scripture must be co-laborers (in other words, *Sola Scriptura* ought to be chastened, because the term is

theologies violate the laws of logic and lose their explanatory power, which is typically done by violating the law of contradiction, violating their own doctrine, not corresponding to reality, being out of alignment with the Word of God, not being able to cohesively meld the various inputs of theological thought, or developing a system that requires extensive exceptions, then said doctrines should be reexamined to see where they fall short or abandoned altogether, if the deficiencies are severe enough. (Not that one should abandon the faith altogether, rather one's understanding and outworking of their faith should change). It is the contention of this section that the major theological systems of Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology cannot remain comprehensive, cohesive, consistent, nor comely when examined via their moral, theological, and philosophical commitments and their apologetics to answering The *Euthyphro* dilemma.

The *Euthyphro* dilemma is well known in moral apologetics and moral philosophy. The perennial argument started with Plato and has been raging ever since. Commonly, Christian moral philosophers, ethicists, and even secular moral philosophers are bound to deal with the venom of *Euthyphro*'s dilemma.⁴⁷² Everyone who attempts to explain ethics, morality, normative human behavior, and the existence of God must deal with Plato/Socrates and *Euthyphro*. Apologists and theologians ignore it to their own demise.⁴⁷³

a misnomer). This dissertation uses the moral argument and a test via *Euthyphro*'s dilemma as a tool to test the consistency, cohesiveness, comprehensiveness, and comeliness of the two main evangelical theological systems.

⁴⁷² William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*, 3rd ed., (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 181. David Baggett and Jerry L. Walls, *God and Cosmos: Moral Truth and Human Meaning* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016), 6-7, 39.; Russ Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism: A Defence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 42-3, 45, 47.; Erik J. Wielenberg, *Value and Virtue in a Godless Universe* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 51, 53-67.

⁴⁷³ Plato is the author of Socrates dialogue with Euthyphro. It seems possible that the whole thing is an invention by Plato that may or may not be historical. I attribute Plato and not Socrates. See, *Apology of Socrates*.

The Euthyphro Dilemma

The dilemma found in Plato's dialogue with Euthyphro is boiled down to two main points and goes as follows:

- 1) Either something is good because God wills it, or
- 2) God wills something because it is good.

The first implication of this either/or statement is that if something is good because God wills it, then what is "good" is essentially arbitrary. God could have willed that things like hatred, murder, or rape be "good." In this regard, to say that God might simply and arbitrarily command that something be good is implausible, because *perpetual* and real moral goods are needed for any basic functioning of family and society!⁴⁷⁴ What if, one day, God simply decided to reverse his previous commandments, judgments, laws, statutes, and promises and then commanded the opposite? What if God suddenly began commanding maleficence or, less maniacally, permitting actions that were previously forbidden, such as the consumption of swine's flesh, or began renegeing on previously everlasting covenants? Humanity *needs* good and permanent commands that are not arbitrary and changeable on a whim or by mere fiat.

The second implication arises, should one land on the other side of the dilemma. If one insists that God wills something because that thing is good, in and of itself, in an attempt to solve the problem of fiat presented by point one, this renders this goodness technically independent of God. This fact ultimately leads to the conclusion that God is truly not needed at all for morality.⁴⁷⁵ Here one gets a good and permanent standard for human behavior, but an inconvenient technicality is that God is lost the process. For instead of being the creator of

⁴⁷⁴ Not to mention to have a God who can make and keep promises.

⁴⁷⁵ See Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 181 for a fuller explanation of *Euthyphro*. Coincidentally, Plato as well as C.S. Lewis accept #2 of Euthyphro's dilemma, primarily because "good" simply exists as a brute fact of the universe.

everything, on this side of the dilemma, God is not the creator of moral good or the standard of normative human behavior, instead he adheres to a *preexisting* set of ideals, of which there is no real creator.⁴⁷⁶ Of course, for any moral argument to say that God does not exist because we do not need God for morality is difficult to swallow for any believer, no matter their theological stripes. But are Christians bound to be poisoned by the venom of Euthyphro's Dilemma and the unfortunate result of Godless moral realism?⁴⁷⁷

The False Dilemma

Many moral apologists have rightly insisted, that *Euthyphro's* Dilemma is no dilemma at all! It is simply a false dilemma and does not present all the possible options to choose from. The

⁴⁷⁶ Whether or not these moral ideals exist contemporaneously *outside* of God, before the foundation of creation, is up for debate among the Theistic Moral Platonists and most assuredly depends on whether said philosopher is a creationist or an evolutionist. The question of creation is beyond the scope of this dissertation (I assume creationism). However, it is at that point of creation where Theistic Moral Platonists must make a choice. Either they appeal to divine command in the creation of the physical universe and morality (thus having to deal with point 1 of Euthyphro's dilemma), or they make God subject to moral goods outside of himself, from which God used in creating morality, or that these morals simply exist as a brute reality (thus having to deal with point 2 of Euthyphro's dilemma). They technically could make a third choice and say that God did not create the universe, but then they are no longer within Christian orthodoxy, and they ought to be nihilists to be consistent. These types of moral philosophers could technically also be deists (i.e., Anthony Flew before the end of his life) who believe that God set forth a chain of events and what we see is the result of evolutionary chance, albeit started by a supreme being (this too is not within Christian orthodoxy of a sovereign God and renders all revelation impossible because, in this case, the Scriptures are actually totally unreliable and are mere human religious axioms, for deism forbids divine intervention [See the Transitory Theory *a priori* above]). Lastly, they could choose the "false dilemma," which, of course, technically assumes Divine Command/Initiative in the creation and morality. Should they concede creation by divine decree, the Theistic Moral Platonist all but concedes Divine Command but can still emphasize anthropological discovery of this "Natural Law." So, for the purposes of this dissertation one need not choose between Divine Command Theory or Natural Law Theory in this case, as the results are the same. Either God commanded morality in the creation, or he commands the moral standards from his own nature. Either way, God creates morality and ultimately defines moral good and normative human behavior. As the case may be, it still leaves both camps to deal with Euthyphro.

⁴⁷⁷ This argument would become moot should one accept to be poisoned by one or both fangs of the Euthyphro dilemma. To choose one or the other options in Euthyphro's dilemma renders the false dilemma answer ineffective. But the results mean that the consistent apologist and theologian should not use the false dilemma in their negative or positive argumentation in their apologetics. One must also live with the results, 1) a capricious God who can issue possibly immoral and sadistic commands, which positions the Christian in a way that they can have no assurance that God will not change or renege on his promises, or 2) a God who is not the ultimate creator or standard of moral goodness, but merely one who lived by a standard of moral goodness higher than himself. To not live with these results means to have an inconsistent and hypocritical worldview. In fact, C.S. Lewis and Plato chose number 2. See C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2001), 99.

answer is not in the either/or, but rather in a third option, which contains the following premise. What is considered good is dependent on divine initiative/command, but these commands are not arbitrary. Rather, all the commands of God are *necessary* expressions of God's good and just nature and are *morally obligatory for humanity to follow*.⁴⁷⁸ In other words, God *cannot* issue ordinances, laws, statutes, or commands that are not a necessary and direct reflection of his good, perfect, and just nature. Since God is God, his status as creator, renders all his good and just commands as morally obligatory for humanity to follow. God is good and just, therefore all his commands are good and just and ought to be followed. All of his commands are a *direct and necessary reflection of himself*. Any argument to the contrary would be logically impossible, like saying there exists a married bachelor or a square circle.⁴⁷⁹ Thus, the Christian is freed from the clutches of Euthyphro and spared its venom, at least philosophically.

The Philosophical God and the God the Bible (A is A): Marrying Theology and Apologetics

A primary contention of this dissertation is that Reason and Scripture are co-laborers and that they must be used in tandem. Therefore, our philosophical answer to Euthyphro is only partially correct, at least theologically speaking. The philosophical answer to Euthyphro, however, is not necessarily the God of the Bible, but rather is the same God created by the Moral Argument (mere theism). But what if we were to apply the same logic to Adonai, who is presented in the Scriptures and who has additional attributes besides being "good" and "just"? The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob who issues decrees, statutes, commands, and laws, is

⁴⁷⁸ Thus, all commands are moral commands and the distinction between Moral, Civil, and Ceremonial is a false distinction of applicability.

⁴⁷⁹ Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 181.

eternal, perfect, without sin, loving, gracious, immutable, supreme, faithful, holy, full of lovingkindness (*chesed*), omnibeneficent, omnipresent, omniscient, omnipotent, among his many ultimate and supreme attributes. Arthur Pink said it best by saying, “Whatever the attributes of God were before the universe was called into existence, they are precisely the same now, and will remain so forever.”⁴⁸⁰ Therefore, if the attributes of God are good and everlasting (e.g., not arbitrary) and have always been, then theologians seem bound to apply Euthyphro’s dilemma as a test to their theology, especially in regard to the ordinances of God. Is this not the goal of all apologetics and evangelism? To show that God exists, and then show that the God of the Bible is real and that he sent his son to save man from the law of sin and death?⁴⁸¹ To that end, if the philosophical answer to Euthyphro’s dilemma does not sync with theological commitments, then theologians are guilty of violating the Law of Contradiction.⁴⁸² In order to be consistent, Adonai (α) is the philosophical God (α).⁴⁸³ One must remember the basic laws of contradiction and

⁴⁸⁰ Arthur W. Pink, *Gleanings in the Godhead* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1975), 35.

⁴⁸¹ This method is often called the Classical Apologetic method. It offers a “two-step” approach to apologetics. This method is championed by apologists and theologians like William Lane Craig, R.C. Sproul, and J.P. Moreland. It first shows the existence of God, then shows the truth of Christ. There are other methods in apologetics such as Reformed Epistemology (the method of this dissertation described above). Another apologetic method known as presuppositionalism, whose proponents include Greg Bahnsen, Francis Schaeffer, and Van Til, bases its apologetics on the truth of the Bible as *a priori*. A fourth method is similar to Classical Apologetics called Evidential Apologetics, as popularized by Gary Habermas’ “minimum facts,” which attempts to show God and Christianity by one step rather than two by showing the validity of the resurrection through the earliest Pauline and non-Pauline creeds in the Apostolic Writings. For an overview of Christian apologetic methodology see Steven B. Cowan, ed., *Five Views on Apologetics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000).; An older discourse on apologetic methodology is outlined by Gordon R. Lewis, *Testing Christianity’s Truth Claims: Approaches to Christian Apologetics* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1976).; Rom. 8:2.

⁴⁸² Theological commitments are ideas and principles and systems *derived* from theological methodology (Scripture, Reason, History, Tradition). For example, ideas like supersessionism, reformed soteriology, all the various eschatological theories, anthropology, Dispensationalism, Covenant theology, and even this dissertation and its insistence on Pronomianism are subject to these parameters. Theological commitments must be able to answer Euthyphro’s dilemma without contradicting themselves or Scripture, thus making said theology self-defeating at worst or a system riddled with exceptions or “mysteries” needing to be solved by what I call “faith of the gaps” methodology, where tough questions are simply answered by, “You just gotta have faith.”

⁴⁸³ Again, the commutative principle applies. A is A. They must be the same.

identity (that α is α and that α cannot be both α and β simultaneously). If at any time the philosophical God and Adonai exhibit different attributes, differing behavioral standards, or a different ontology, that explanation fails a consistency test, lacks comprehensiveness, and does not correspond to objective reality.

Therefore, if the prevalent theologies believe that the God of the Bible is good, immutable, holy, and perfect, does Torah abrogation or cessation cause them to be poisoned by the venom of Euthyphro and furthermore expose an implicit cultural or epochal moral relativism?⁴⁸⁴ In other words, can an immutable, just, holy, and perfect God issue *temporary* (e.g., not objective) standards of human behavior without drastic ramifications in doctrine, primarily in Theology Proper, Christology, Pneumatology, and Bibliology? If a command of God for human behavior is temporary, is that law a direct and necessary reflection of his character, or are those law simply capricious and ultimately vicious?⁴⁸⁵ Do temporary commands

⁴⁸⁴ Cultural Moral Relativism: Different moral standards for particular people based on cultural values. Epochal moral relativism: Different moralities and punishments for different times or epochs.

⁴⁸⁵ There are, of course, certain demands/commands that God has made which are certainly temporary and for a *specific* purpose. For instance, Moses was commanded to go to Pharaoh and explain the plagues which were to be set upon Egypt. These commands obviously impose a binding moral imperative to Moses and Aaron, and the *narrative* indicates that these demands are contextually temporary (e.g., not binding objectively to all people). But even temporary commands contained within *narrative* can be applied for our benefit and found to be consistent within the moral life of all individuals and in complete alignment to the Scriptures. In the example noted here, Moses and Aaron obeyed God's instruction to them. Obedience to God is of course a moral principle which is applicable in all cases and all times. What this chapter is primarily examining are the laws, commands, statutes and ordinances, which are binding to all, and are enumerated within scriptural contexts (genres) that can be interpreted as commands, which are objectively relevant, or are typically made clear by words like "everlasting" or "perpetual," as opposed to commands that lend themselves merely to a single person within a story. The commands and ordinances examined here are given specifically and are contextually relevant in human behavior toward each other and toward the Most High. But even here a bit more specification is in order because the whole Law of God is technically not to all people, universally and equally. As in, there are certain functions and specifics of the Law which concentrate on certain populations (i.e., women, men, Levites, farmers, etc.). So, when people say, something like, "Christ followed the *whole Law* perfectly," that is not technically accurate, as he did not follow the laws concerning Levitical roles, because he was not a Levite, nor did he follow those for women. Christ, as man, followed only the Laws that were applicable to him and some special Laws which are not delineated by Moses (e.g., Melchizedekian Priesthood, who operate the heavenly tabernacle [Heb. 8:5; 9:24; Acts 7:44; Ex.25:9ff]). That is not to say however, that the laws not specifically applicable to Christ in the flesh, do not point to him. Quite the contrary, as the Levitical service, for example, not only points to a superior high priest (Melchizedek), but also that the primary function of the Levites is to be a minister unto the Lord and point the rest of the people toward the Lord, being the expert teachers and holiest among all peoples (Ez. 43-47). The possible objection that the Torah was only

make Adonai a cosmic sadist for his punishing Israel with now abolished commands? Lastly, if the commands of God directly reflect his holy nature, for example Lev. 11:44-45, would abrogation of those laws mean that God can lose an attribute? In the case of Lev. 11:44-45, the

contextually relevant to physical Israel and abolished at the Cross is actually a hermeneutical argument which this dissertation showed to be faulty above. Given the Scriptural veracity of Pronomianism shown above, this objection is moot. Pronomianism considers the scope of the Torah to be relevant to all men, save those commands that are specifically given to individuals and contextually temporary.

A further objection regarding contextuality that could potentially be raised is that given that all the *written* commands of God are established within historical context (early Bronze Age), their applicability to moderns is significantly limited. Given this contextual nature, are the commands of God limited to that historical context alone? For instance, how are commands on usury applied in a free market and capitalist society (should these even exist according to the Law)? Does the mixing of seed apply to things like GMOs? Do agricultural Sabbaths apply outside of the land? The list of questions could end up being quite long. In this regard, Judaism in its historical development has also created long tractates within the Talmudic literature which attempt to apply Torah principles within a modern context: things like automatic elevators on Shabbat, prohibitions on driving (creating fire) on Shabbat, or two kitchens within a house to separate meat and dairy. In essence, it could be argued that the continued application of the Law today inherently creates “heavy burdens.” There are a few relevant answers to this objection that should be considered. Firstly, the development of technology and current events do not negate the commands. In fact, one could actually judge the technology and events by the commands (e.g., whether or not “x” technology legitimately helps people, without radically transforming their humanity). For instance, technology can help glean the fields so that we produce more food to give to orphans and widows. Secondly, since the law judges the heart, it by nature can judge the motives and philosophy (techniques) behind technical advancement. Thirdly, another option, and perhaps the best option, is that one need not pass judgment on the modern applicability of the law at all. In this case, there is a difference between the meaning and significance of a command. In other words, the “how” question of the Torah’s modern applicability is a matter of adiaphora and is a matter of opinion that should be worked out in a community (tradition). In a similar manner, the Bible commands the wearing of tassels, but does not tell how to tie them. It was left up to the people to apply the command. Modern contextuality is much the same way. God has given man great power to apply the commands that are not fully developed as time progresses and human conditions change. God gives derivative authority to man. (God made the animals, but left it up to man to name them). The development of these opinions, however, is not the same as relativity or subjectivity. For instance, Paul’s epistles are evidence that the issuing of *opinions were needed* when new contexts arose. The nuance is that this form of opinion necessarily *confirms* the validity of the Law, having an attitude of spiritual submission to the Law while *seeking* a way to apply it, as opposed to the notion of relativity which dismisses any weight of the Law in times or contexts removed from the original audience (e.g., Derrida and postmodernism). To that end, I am inclined to think that there are also commandments which seem to *transcend* any contextuality. For example, humans are required to worship God, and God has set aside days for that purpose. These days are counted by the moon, sun, and stars (e.g., no contextuality and universal). Humans need rest. God has set aside a day for rest (the 7th day). *How* one rests is up to the person (i.e., some might refrain from social media, while others do not), but the standing orders are there (no working, buying, or selling). Therefore, even though the Law is ancient, it is able to be applied in Midrashic method within communities (*paradosis*). In other words, it seems that the development of various traditions *seeking to apply* the commands is a given and a good thing, as the Torah itself indicates this through the example of the advice given by Jethro to Moses (which inherently would mean that families and tribes would have different ways to apply a singular law – Ex. 18:17-27). Likewise, the digital age expression of the commandments will be different and diverse, but the law itself is the objective standard which serves as the anchor point. This would be as Vanhoozer says, “Wisdom” which is “‘knowledge appropriated’: *lived* knowledge.” Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*, trans. “Wisdom” Wilkinson (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1964.; Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text*, 437.

attribute in question is of holiness!⁴⁸⁶ It is the goal of this chapter to marry theology and apologetics, using Reason and Scripture as co-laborers. Therefore, if the major theological systems and their apologetics cannot remain consistent and comprehensive to the principles of objective truth, then it shows areas that need improvement.

Is There Objective Moral Truth? Immorality and Sin are Synonyms (A is A)

Like all philosophical and theological endeavors, getting terminology correct is the first step. In the case at hand, one must understand the terms immorality and sin. Theologians talk a lot about sin and righteousness. However, like many things in theology, it is hard to get a straight answer as to what sin is. My anecdotal experience is that many Christians cannot give a cogent answer as to what sin is biblically. Although many would give a correct answer in “missing the mark,” simply asking the follow up question, “what is the mark?,” or perhaps “what is the goal?,” or “by what standard?” many simply draw a blank and ultimately appeal to some type of personal conviction or feeling. Greg Bahnsen and Carl Henry describe the answers that are typically given as ultimately autonomous and subjective definitions of sin.⁴⁸⁷ Taking the first part of this dissertation into consideration, if Christ came to redeem us from the curse of the Law, it is quite safe to assume that the Law is the standard of sin from which we are saved. So biblically speaking, I assume that violation of the Law is sin.⁴⁸⁸ Ethicists and moral philosophers, on the

⁴⁸⁶ The context of Lev. 11 is the biblical food laws. The command is direct and easily interpretable. “Be holy as I am holy.”

⁴⁸⁷ Greg L. Bahnsen, *Theonomy*, 4ff.; Carl F.H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority: God Who Speaks and Shows*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1999), loc. 668-675 Kindle

⁴⁸⁸ 1 Jn. 3:4.; Rom. 1:31; 4:15; 5:14. Of course, if violation of the Law is sin, and if indeed Christ came to abolish that Law, that would mean that biblically, sin is no longer a logical category. Again, this is why there has to be an appeal to some other Law that is experientially felt “by the Spirit,” or that the Law of Christ is somehow different than the Father’s commands, even though Christ explicitly said he came teaching only what he had seen with the Father. (Jn. 8:38). So, does God change, and are his commands capricious? Todd Wilson, “Law of Christ”

other hand, speak a lot about truth, goodness, and beauty. Of course, like Pilate, one could ask the pertinent question, “What is truth?”⁴⁸⁹ Do these theological (sin vs. righteousness) and philosophical (truth, goodness, and beauty) categories mean the same thing, and are they objective? Since most major strands of Christianity accept objective truth (but unfortunately by no means all), *what* and importantly *when* is sin as a logical category?⁴⁹⁰

Instead of defining these terms in intricate detail, which is beyond the scope of this dissertation, I contend that much of the distinction between the two can be resolved simply by appealing to the law of contradiction, above. For, the philosophical God from which truth, goodness, and beauty comes is the same as Adonai who is concerned with righteousness. If they are the same God, and they must be in Christian theological philosophy, then surely the sin which Adonai is concerned with and, by grace, forgives must be the same as our philosophical God’s definition of failing to meet said truth standard. Therefore, if one commits a sin they are being immoral and if one is immoral they are sinning (A is A).⁴⁹¹ The standard of human moral behavior is the same in both the Philosophical God and Adonai. The question that should

in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, 2nd ed., eds., Scot McKnight, Lynn H. Cohick and Nijay K. Gupta (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2023), 624.

⁴⁸⁹ Jn. 18:38. Of course, the Psalmist gives a potential answer in Ps. 119:142. Christologically, should Ps. 119:142 be true, that would lead to the conclusion that since Christ *is* the Word of God, he *is* truth (which is the Torah) in the flesh. This is confirmed in Jn. 14:6. (Torah is also a light and life – Prov. 6:23). Christ *is* the inscriptured Torah made flesh. This conclusion of the ontological Word is best made by John Douglas Morrison, *Has God Said? Scripture, the Word of God, and the Crisis of Theological Authority* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2006), locations, 210, 4859, 5343 Kindle.; Richard Longenecker, *The Christology of Early Jewish Christianity*, 39-41.

⁴⁹⁰ The epochal question of *when* sin is, will be dealt with later in this chapter.

⁴⁹¹ Whether or not one apprehends if one is sinning is a different matter. For, it does not follow that human beings feel guilt or conviction for *all* possible sins. For sins done in ignorance are a viable philosophical and theological category (Lev. 4:2, 22, 27; Rom 7:7; Heb 9:7; 2 Pet. 2:21). This notion falls under the rubric of sanctification, where one might discover and repent of sins that were done in ignorance. C.S. Lewis’s “The Trouble with ‘X’ is an excellent example of the topic at hand, as people may be blind to their own faults! This certainly does not negate the conscience which serves as a generally *reliable* guide for many sins/acts of immorality, but the conscience is obviously fallible, as are all parts of the human, thus the felling of guilt or even the external judgement of people onto others cannot be the standard of moral goodness or sin.

rightfully be asked is: by what standard are righteousness and sin defined, and is this standard dependent upon time and culture?

There are ultimately three possible answers to the “by what standard” question above. The first standard is mere human perception of moral precepts, the second, the Word of God, and the third, a combination of the two working in concert. This question of “by what standard” will be answered soon, but in order to do so, one must actually begin with answering the cultural and epochal question due to theological commitments. Naturally, Christians of all stripes would more than likely say that the Word of God is the standard, but is this actually the case according to most theologies?

Christian theological philosophy typically appeals to the existence of objective moral truth.⁴⁹² J.P. Moreland says,

Once objective duty, goodness, and virtue were abandoned under the guise of scientism and secularism, the only moral map that could replace objective morality is... minimalistic ethics... In other words, the Christian believes that human rights are derived from the image of God in us; they do not ultimately come from the state.”⁴⁹³

This classical theist and normative Christian position holds that God’s standard for normative human behavior is not dependent upon time or culture, rather, this standard is *objective*. However, this philosophical understanding of objective morality does not actually fit cohesively with typical Christian theology as most Christian theology explicitly proclaims that Israel (and Christ) were subjected to a list of 613 commands that were the standard of human behavior since

⁴⁹² C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2001).83-101.; William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 80; Baggett and Walls, *God and Cosmos*, 243-269.; Francis A. Schaeffer, *A Christian Manifesto* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1981), 45.

⁴⁹³ J.P. Moreland, *Love Your God with all Your Mind: The Role of Reason in the Life of the Soul* (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 2012), 31-32.

the time of Moses. Before Moses, that set of morality did not exist, and since Christ, that set of moral demands has been abolished or superseded. This conclusion technically means that the normative standard of human behavior (i.e. Christologically, human moral perfection is found in the incarnate Christ who lived, according to the Torah) is decidedly *not objective* at all, nor normative for behavior *today*.⁴⁹⁴ This leads one to the conclusion that normative moral perception for the Christian is technically based on the Bible, but to be more accurate, the normative behavioral standards are based on a mixture of what *parts of the Bible* say (or more realistically what people *think/believe* those parts says) and a more nebulous feeling of guilt, but cast in terms of “conviction.”

Sin and Immorality Are Synonyms: Possible Interpretive and Perception Errors Regarding the Standard of Human Behavior

If the standard for human behavior is *truly* objective, morality and sin, at least to a large degree, must be *always applicable to all people in human history*.⁴⁹⁵ But it is this application where theologians begin to separate from the apologists’ philosophical God. For instance, if dispensational theology is correct, during the dispensation of the Law (and the future Millennial dispensation – see Is. 66 and Ez. 34-48), it was/will be immoral, and thus, sinful to not observe the Sabbath, *mo’edim*, food purity laws, etc.⁴⁹⁶ Belaboring the point further on the opposite side

⁴⁹⁴ If Christ is the standard of normative human behavior, how is that standard understood without the very laws by which he lived? The only time humanity has ever seen God in the flesh, he followed Torah. The majority theology however, now claims that standard non-binding.

⁴⁹⁵ Moral apologists often account for perception to be in degrees and not necessarily equal across the whole spectrum of human existence (i.e., the existence of sociopaths and psychopaths), due to some physical or genetic impairment or mutation, or via the searing of the conscience in which it becomes easier to kill if you dehumanize your victim. Not to mention fallibility and its epistemic ramifications which obviously taint human perception of sin and immoral acts.

⁴⁹⁶ Inherent in dispensational thought is the contention that God *dealt differently* with man during the various dispensations. As in, God created various standards and modes of punishments at various times in history and for particular peoples (Jews and Gentiles). To deny this is to deny dispensational thought. In this theology rules

of the coin, do people *today* feel as if or recognize that they acted immorally or sinful for eating pork or shrimp or profaning the Sabbath? The question that has to be asked is this: is not violating a commandment of God in the Torah immoral and sinful *today*, when it was a sin in the past and will be a sin again in the future?⁴⁹⁷

The answer to that is complicated and a theological minefield, as demonstrated in the literature review. So, for instance, the command “You shall not murder” is generally accepted as a universal truth. The same is true for “You shall not steal.” These *basic* moral laws contained in the Torah are commands of God, generally universally perceived, and generally all admit they are not abolished.⁴⁹⁸ However, there are laws contained in the Torah where strong and universal human perception simply does not exist. For example, things like circumcision, food purity, the Sabbath (including the *mo’edim*), laws on economics, indentured servanthood, homosexuality,

and commands from one dispensation are not necessarily continued between the other various dispensations, but rather can be abrogated or superseded. However, dispensational theology asserts that although the laws of the past dispensations are abolished or superseded, this does not actually apply to the promises given to Israel, rather, those promises are unconditional (e.g., the promises to Noah, or to that of Israel). Those continued promises are not superseded by the “Church” in the dispensation of Grace, however, during this dispensation the fulfillment of the promises are currently paused (i.e., prophetic postponement). Dispensationalists also claim that physical descendants of Jacob are the only ones partaking in the physical New Jerusalem for the 1000 years. Thus, Jews are the only ones required to do the *moedim* and sacrifices of the millennial temple. The Gentile church is in heaven during this time and does not participate in said rules and only rejoins the Jews after the Millennial Dispensation into the eschaton. What is not explained by dispensational theology, and the point of this dissertation’s chapter, is how this is not time-based moral relativism or cultural moral relativism. See J. Randal Price, “Prophetic Postponement in Daniel 9 and Other Texts, in *Issues in Dispensationalism*, eds. Wesley R. Willis and John R. Master (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1994), 133-159. For an overview of the differing regulations and dispensations see Renald E. Showers, *There Really is a Difference: A Comparison of Covenant and Dispensational Theology* (Bellmawr, NJ: The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, 2017), 33-53.

⁴⁹⁷ An addition charge of over-complexity where it need not exist could be raised here by Ockham’s Razor. Simpler explanations render this type of dispensational thought of on, then off, then on again commandments unlikely when solutions such as continuity explain the data with less complexity.

⁴⁹⁸ The dispensationalist remaining true to their theology should affirm that the only Laws enforced today are contained within this dispensation’s “Law of Christ.” Thus, the *Mosaic* commands, say of not murdering or stealing are *technically* abolished, but are superseded by the new Laws of Christ which just happens to contain a law for not murdering and not stealing. Although they are *technically* the same, they are radically new. The Reformed on the other hand, would say that the Law of Christ is simply the “Moral Laws” of the Torah. They are not abolished or abrogated in any way; however, the Ceremonial Laws and Civil Laws are abolished from the Torah. Because according to that theology they do not impart moral obligation. Both positions, of course, run into Euthyphro’s dilemma, and run counter to the apologetic answer of a false dilemma.

and the sacrificial system. For instance, the majority of people *perceive* no moral guilt by eating what is “tasty food.” (Just ask a majority of people in the American South if they think eating pull pork or fried Gulf shrimp is wrong.)⁴⁹⁹ They neither perceive the eating of pork or shrimp or working on Saturday as immoral or sinful.

But why do some things in the Bible evoke strong, almost universal, convictions and some do not? If conviction of these commandments is not being derived from innate morality or strong conviction from biblical correction, is this a sign of Torah abolition?

It seems to me that the lack of conviction might be caused by two types of errors, the Perceptive Error and Interpretive Error.

Guilt Perception: Epistemological Castles Made of Sand

Firstly, the perception error. To an unbeliever, and even to professing believers, it should not be a surprise that there many people feel no explicit perception of wrongdoing when violating some of the commands of the Torah.⁵⁰⁰ However, just because one does not perceive that a wrong has been committed, does not mean that the thing done is good or righteous. Rather, that action could indeed be very wrong! To say that human perception of sin and morality is the

⁴⁹⁹ A commonly overlooked distinction is a difference between edible things and biblically defined food. Just because something tastes good does not make it food. Of course, it would not be the first-time humanity has mistaken edible things for food (Gen. 2:9). By comparison, in the same way sex feels and is good, it does not follow that all sex is created equal or that all sex is good, because this is most certainly not the case (homosexuality, incest, bestiality). In other words, the Scriptures are what define proper sexual relations. The assumption that Adonai is not concerned with food is far from the truth considering that Adonai equates eating clean meats to being holy as he is holy (Lev. 11:44). Lev. 11 is the biblical guideline for food and the foundational knowledge that must not be forgotten. From this insight, a Pronomian *a priori* argument from Mk. 7:19 can be made (contextually the argument is about unwashed hands, Jewish halacha, and Pharisaical hypocrisy, but setting that aside for a moment). Historically and contextually the question should be asked: What was food to a 1st Century Jew and more importantly to the Messiah who lived by the Torah? Food, for them, are meats defined by Lev. 11, vegetables, and fruit. So, in Mk. 7:19, when it says foods that are declared clean, the only things that are actually considered good for food are the foods delineated by the Torah. Historically and contextually speaking, this rules out swine and other unclean meats. Therefore, biblically there is a difference between edible things and human food. Christologically, if Christ broke the Torah here, he would be a sinner and subsequently not the Messiah (Deut. 13:1-4).

⁵⁰⁰ Rom. 1:32; 8:7; Ps. 147:20.

arbiter, definer, or final authority on what is right and wrong is to accept postmodernism and autonomous standards, based only on what one feels. In short, this means that postmodernism is true and there is no objective moral standard outside of culture, coercion, and/or consensus. It should be no question, that although humans have moral perception, that perception is fallible, and *a priori* the theologian and philosopher can rightly say that perhaps humans may not perceive *all* moral commands. In short, there are universal requirements that are not universally perceived. Therefore, it should not surprise anyone that unbelievers would recognize only the standards of human behavior that contribute to societal functioning and mere restraint, for it is only these laws which are universally known.⁵⁰¹ In short, morality exists, and at least a modicum of moral requirements are seemingly universally perceived. But of course, there are other commands in the Bible which impart requirements onto those who read it, the foremost being believing in the risen Messiah, but many of the other Torah commands, as well. But these too, in the Post-Torah era, are not being perceived or followed, why is this?

The Interpretative Error: Presuppositional Epistemology

On the other hand, should a Christian who is familiar with the Torah (particularly things like the food laws) violate those commands, most do not feel any impartation of guilt nor feel the need of repentance of sin, because they *believe or understand* that those laws are not valid or applicable today.⁵⁰² Instead of an objective standard, their sources of guilt seem to stem from theological (mis)understanding, the tradition in which they were brought up, and personal

⁵⁰¹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Louisville, KY: WJK 2006), Book2.7ff. Basic moral commands (not to steal, not to murder, not to destroy other's property, and even perhaps even a general law of beneficence).

⁵⁰² Although this dissertation has already shown this position to faulty in the scriptural pillar, this section is assuming, for the sake of argument, that the position remains. Among the Reformed theologians, Rushdoony endorses the continued validity of the food laws.

conviction.⁵⁰³ All of the pillars of theological method are fallible. In other words, just because one thinks or believes something, perhaps even with some evidence, does not necessarily make it correct (it also does not mean they are wrong entirely). Although the attempt to use the Scriptures is a step in the correct direction, it can still lead to false conclusions (how many Protestant denominations are there again?), and thus, the lack of reading or *interpretation induced* guilt perception could be caused by *hermeneutic fallibility*, possibly self-delusion, and even divine concealment.⁵⁰⁴ In essence, what most Christians are, in fact, relying on or waiting on is a *feeling* or perception of conviction that stemming from their understanding of scripture!⁵⁰⁵ The point is, how likely is it that one will feel conviction should one have *already decided* that the Mosaic corpus is *a priori* abolished because that is what they have been taught.⁵⁰⁶ So, in both cases, neither basic universal perception nor theological perception provide any solid guide, and like a castle made of sand, the epistemic castle is destroyed when the tide comes.⁵⁰⁷

⁵⁰³ This is not to deny the Holy Spirit's role in interpretation which most Christian's would readily claim is needed, but ultimately, considering the plethora of Protestant denominations alone, it seems that the "Holy Spirit" is anecdotally a fideistic and autonomous insulator to criticism for most. Invoking the Holy Spirit is an argumentative "trump card" that marks the end of reasoning between people and is ultimately a non-falsifiable claim. I contend that all claims of the Holy Spirit must actually refer back to all of the Word of God to test the claims (Deut. 13:1-4; 1 Jn. 4:1). A relevant question here is can the Spirit deny what was already inspired and inscriptured by the Spirit without denying himself? On this topic, I will return later in this chapter.

⁵⁰⁴ For surely all Christians have experienced "a-ha" moments when reading the Scriptures. Perhaps more tellingly, one simply did not read carefully enough, missing key words, misplacing an antecedent, or assuming what a pronoun meant. One should never assume that they are immune to divine veiling (2 Cor. 3:15).

⁵⁰⁵ Autonomous sanctification. If one is "not convicted" then it does not apply.

⁵⁰⁶ Mt. 5:19. Given the profound impact that teachers have on their students, or pastors have on their congregants, I suggest the likelihood of true conviction is quite small. Most, frankly, are easily satiated with answers that may or may not have real explanatory power and this is why teachers are judged more harshly than non-teachers.

⁵⁰⁷ This stance is potentially a double-edged sword in that it can also be used against the stance taken in this dissertation. However, it is the details that matter and is resolved via methodology. Should this dissertation and its truth claims exhibit greater comprehensiveness, cohesiveness, correspondence, and comeliness than the other systems, its truth claims are more likely to be correct. As the case may be, fallible epistemological approaches, like this dissertation, instead of leading to postmodern relativism, can be overcome by abduction and the inference to the best explanation of the data. Secondly, this method, should it be wrong only prescribes things that are found in the Bible. As such, it seems that a version of Pascal's wager could be employed, for no one is ever condemned for being

The Inference of Cultural Moral Relativism and Epochal Relativism

In addition to the perception error and the interpretive errors above, the two major Evangelical theological systems proclaim that the commands of God can be abolished or put aside in some form or fashion, which implies that these systems believe that, at least in some point in history (either past or future), *these commands were/will be morally obligatory* and that it was/would be considered sin if violated. The results of this line of reasoning leads to the conclusion, however, that morals and sin can change at any point of God's choosing! Therefore, there is no such thing as *objective* truth. Most Christians believe that time of God's (the Father) choosing was Christ's resurrection or during the various dispensations. Thus, they are forced to concede point number one in Euthyphro's dilemma (certain laws being good because God wills it).⁵⁰⁸ In this case, things like circumcision, the *mo'edim*, and food purity laws were only good because God commanded them for a certain time or for a certain people or for a certain purpose.⁵⁰⁹ Thus, these morally obligatory commands were not truly objective, but rather are culturally relative (for the Hebrews or Israelites or Jews or Christians) and epochally relative (during the applicable dispensation or in Covenant theology after the Resurrection of Christ).

obedient to the Words of God, provided they have faith in Messiah. To that end, it is better to perform the commandments and be wrong, than to not perform the commandments and be wrong. Provided one has faith in the Messiah, one has no risk of loss even if the Pronomian paradigm is wrong. Should the Pronomian Paradigm be correct, one would receive exceptional accolades. On the other hand, should antinomian theologies be incorrect they will suffer loss, being at best "least in the kingdom." So, the prudent man, would follow the commandments. See Gregory McKenzie, "Pascal's Pronomian Play," <https://thepromian.com/pronomian-hermeneutics/pascals-pronomian-play> (Accessed Dec 20, 2023).

⁵⁰⁸ A relevant question is, how would Christians know if God suddenly decided to change his commands right now. This, of course, hypothetically speaking, would require that new scripture could be written today by the new prophets God would send to herald the age of the abolished New Covenant. But the possibility is real and should cause a bit of existential dread as to the eternal security of the individual, for God could simply change his mind at any time.

⁵⁰⁹ The answer to the purpose or teleological reason will be pursued later in this chapter. Should the Law be for a certain people only, then cultural moral relativism is true.

Therefore, according to both major theological systems there are some basic universal laws which consists of “moral truth,” but theologically, there are also moral commands (because all commands of God are morally obligatory to follow) which are culturally relative, to Israel, the Jews, and to the Church respectively, or other laws that are epochally relative (Dispensations or Before/After Christ’s resurrection).

Is the Law of God Objective and Relative Simultaneously?

Therefore, according to the majority view(s) there are some universal and perpetual sins and “moral” commands (not lying, cheating, stealing, murdering, etc.), but also that sin *and* morality can be culturally or epochally relative because the Law of God is abrogated or abolished.⁵¹⁰ The majority belief is that *formerly* God did consider those now abrogated things good/bad and moral/immoral, but the distinction for those things is no longer a logical category. Thus, sin and universal morality are somehow both objective and relative, simultaneously. This, of course, concedes Euthyphro’s point and also implicitly accepts a theological form of cultural and epochal moral relativism. Since *all* commands of God impart a moral obligation to follow them, then the obligations of the Law, for the majority view, imply cultural relativism and epochal relativism because they were for certain people or for certain times. These conclusions are not good for Christian truth claims, as they require being poisoned by Euthyphro’s insistence of a capricious God and admit that morality can change over time and between cultures. This, for all intents and purposes, is postmodernism hidden within Christian theology.

⁵¹⁰ Dispensationalism cannot *technically* accept the true sense of objective universal moral truth, as moral truth, governance, and the way God deals with man ultimately changes between dispensations.

It is here, however, that the attempt to separate the Law of God between truly objective morals and also culturally and epochally relative morals would be fraught with apologetic, theological, and philosophical nightmares!

The Nightmares

The Cosmic Sadist. Firstly, any abrogation of any command of God automatically concedes and accepts the poison of Euthyphro's dilemma (primarily point 1). But worse than this, the concession of arbitrary commands ultimately makes God an evil tyrant. As shown above, both major theological systems must accept that all abrogated commands are *ultimately* capricious commands of God. What this also means is that since God issued capricious temporary commands, those commands were not a necessary and direct reflection of himself (immutable, good, and loving). How is this the case? Well, primarily because God issued punishments when these capricious commands were violated. For, these now abrogated commands came with curses and the story of Israel is witness to the sadism of temporary commands.⁵¹¹

The Heavy Yoke Purpose. A common theological reply to this issue could be that these temporary commands were precisely to show the descendants of Father Abraham (including all the adopted sons of Abraham – i.e., the believing Gentiles), that they could not actually keep the Law. One might call it the “Heavy Yoke Purpose.” Thus, the whole point of these laws, and the whole Torah in general, was to overburden Israel (or anyone who would dare interact with them) with an unbearably heavy yoke and to give the Law only to condemn, which is similar, but not quite as bad as the sadist. The problem with this theological statement is that it goes against the

⁵¹¹ Mt. Ebal – Deut. 11:29.

very words of Moses (Deut. 30:14) and the very promise of the New Covenant (writing the Torah on the heart: Jer. 31:31-34; Ez: 36:26-27), and, should Christ actually be God (which he is), the insistence that the Word of God is too difficult violates the Word of God because God's own burdens are easy and light (Mt. 11:33).⁵¹² This dissertation has already shown that Peter's words at the First Jerusalem Council were not speaking of the Law of Moses, but rather halacha, as the heavy yoke. But furthermore, and equally importantly, this assertion violates the very crux of personal obligation to obey any command—*ought implies can*. Only a very bad god, one like the other Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) gods, would issue commands and a workload that they knew could not be kept, much like Pharaoh's slavery in Egypt.⁵¹³ Asking someone to do something impossible is tyranny.⁵¹⁴ Therefore, it does not make much sense that the Lord would bring Israel out of slavery to put them back into tyrannical bondage. Should Adonai put Israel back under slavery and unbearable yokes, then perhaps those who were grumbling against Moses and wanting to return to Egypt would be in the right! It would be better to be under a finite human tyrant, than to be exposed to a seemingly omnipotent tyrant. Therefore, this theological assertion would create the very definition of an evil sadistic tyrant, instead of alleviating the problem.⁵¹⁵ If Adonai did such a thing, that would be our heavenly father driving his children to

⁵¹² Circumcision of the Heart is also required in the Torah Deut. 10:16; 30:6.; One could in theory say that Jesus is not God, thus falling into Arianism. Or that the Jesus is set against the Father's commands, thereby falling into a form of Marcionism.

⁵¹³ John N. Oswalt, *The Bible Among the Myths* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 59-61.

⁵¹⁴ This does not mean that God cannot ask us to do something impossible. In fact, much Christian theology is dedicated to the fact that God often works the impossible through humans. Therein lies the connection, however. We indeed can accomplish things which could be impossible with the power of God in us and through us. The loving and gracious patron continually bestowing this power for our benefit. In fact, it is a complete misunderstanding of anthropology that neglects *a priori* God's continual interaction and empowerment of individuals.

⁵¹⁵ This result confirms our hermeneutics from Acts 15.

anger or the Father giving his children a snake when they ask for a fish, would it not?⁵¹⁶ A good and just God does not issue impossible commands, and furthermore, *impossible commands are not obligatory to follow*⁵¹⁷ Making matters worse, should Dispensationalism be true, these burdensome and unfollowable commands are then *reinstated* during the Millennial Dispensation!⁵¹⁸ These enforced, abrogated, and then reinforced tyrannical requirements from God make the nightmare into a night terror in which God frees from bondage through Christ's death and resurrection, only to reinstate bondage with Christ as the chief tyrant, upon his return. Christ thus enforces the temporary and heavy, unbearable yoke of capricious edicts, but only for a thousand years. Theological insistence, in this case, instead of being a remedy to the venom of Euthyphro, is more like the serpent of Asclepius, that carries the venom of Euthyphro directly to the bloodstream, and has poisoned a rather significant part of Christian moral thought and theology about the Law of God. This set of circumstances unfortunately makes this theological

⁵¹⁶ Mt. 7:10; Lk. 11:11; Eph. 6:4.

⁵¹⁷ This does not mean that the Law of God is able to be followed under *all* conditions. See Rom. 8:7. Rather, the Law is only really able to be followed when certain conditions are met (i.e., faith). Although one can follow the righteous ordinances without faith, their benefits will only be temporally beneficial, if at all. Most importantly, this would mean that the Law *was never made for a soteriological function*, but rather function as the rules for abiding in a marriage covenant with Adonai, becoming like Christ and walking as he walked, overcoming the human evil inclination, and restoring the image of God. This was covered above in discussing the Transitory and Conciliatory Theories. Considering the foundation of love, this also makes the word "obligation" used in this section as not quite accurate either, as when one follows the Law in this state, it is done out of love as opposed to mere external obligation. The regenerate heart will exhibit an orthopathy of authentic obedience as opposed to coerced obligation.

⁵¹⁸ Some Dispensational theologians (but by no means all) say that the Law of Moses is not reinstated, but that it is *like* the Law of Moses. This position, however, seems a bit disingenuous, considering that theology's penchant for holding a strict literal-grammatical-historical hermeneutic. For, the prophets use the exact terminology of the Mosaic Law when describing the laws of the future earthly reign of Christ. The Sabbath, Food laws, *mo'edim*, the exact nature of the temple/*mishkan* structures, and sacrifices all have the *same names and requirements* in the Millennium as they do in the Mosaic Law. Therefore, considering that these laws have the *same names and the same requirements*, there is no real reason to say they are not the same thing (A is A). I believe that the attempt at making them somehow radically different, is simply an unconvincing theological ploy to get around apparent Mosaic continuity in the Millennium, which is something that their theology cannot allow.

insistence indefensible. Consequently, this has created an existential theological crisis and apologetic nightmare; using the Asclepius metaphor, the nightmare is an omen of death.

The Hypocrite. The third nightmare is that our apologetic and philosophical God (α) and the God of the scriptures (β) are no longer the same. In short, abrogation theology contradicts its own apologetics. Since abrogation theology mandates that God issue commands that are not necessary and direct reflections of his just, good, and holy attributes, the Philosophical God and Adonai are not the same ($\alpha \neq \beta$). Should theologians employ the false dilemma argument, they are violating the law of contradiction, because they do not believe the answer to Euthyphro in their own theology. In short, they deny themselves. The likelihood that this is done intentionally is very small, but it is the result of not testing theological thought and apologetics together. The test of Euthyphro's dilemma has made both the apologetic and the theology inconsistent, not as cohesive, not corresponding to reality, and ultimately not as appealing as other systems.

The Trifecta Nightmare. Abrogation theology means a necessary defenestration of ancient philosophy, the death of biblical inspiration by the Spirit, and postmodern hermeneutics. Firstly, given the fact that all the foundation of Greco-Roman philosophical thought about morality, ethics, politics, and metaphysics was developed during the era of the prophets and into the "intertestamental period" (e.g., the Dispensation of the Law) it stands to reason that their logic, perception, and knowledge of God and morality are actually no longer relevant.⁵¹⁹ If God *deals differently* with men in each dispensation, then human morality must change in each

⁵¹⁹ One need not only appeal to Greco-Roman thought, but also to all legal and philosophical thoughts on morality. Hammurabi's Code, Ancient Egyptian or eastern thoughts on the matter of morality are based on moral principles which have to be objective. I am using Greco-Roman as the primary example because most moral philosophy goes back to the Ancient Greeks, and most thought on the matter is a footnote to Plato (like this chapter which stems from Platonic writing). It was C.S. Lewis who sufficiently made this case in the *Abolition of Man* when he references the "Tao." Although I think the choice of word is unfortunate in its reference and possible confusion with the religion of Taoism, the "Tao" serves to demonstrate moral principles that *all* men have had in all epochs of time. See C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2001).

dispensation. Since the basis of moral epistemology comes by God's commands, the only logical result of God changing his commands is that the standard of human behavior changed during those times. The unintended consequence of this is that all moral philosophy must be thrown out the window because *that world* (that time) was governed under a different moral and epistemological system, which has been radically changed by God's fiat. In short, it seems that changes in supposedly objective moral knowledge seem to create the need for philosophically different worlds that have different humanities, primarily due to the epistemic quandary of dispensational change. This seems to be the case, for if God changes the most fundamental realities of the mind and humanity (morals), then God is radically recreating the human world in each dispensation, not to mention radically changing himself. If all demands of God are a necessary and direct reflection of God, the changing of precepts means that God is changing. Thus, this theology creates a problem much more severe than merely changing humanity.⁵²⁰ Remember, according to this theology, God deals differently with all of mankind in each dispensation *and* man would have to know and perceive these changes either through logic via perception (natural law) or revelation in its various forms. Unless, of course, God simply changed the rules of the game or that God himself changed *without informing* his creation, both of which make him an evil God. So, in the case at hand, the thinking of all the ancients must necessarily be directed toward the moral epistemology dictated by God in *that dispensation alone and cannot be continuous to the next*.⁵²¹ Therefore, since the edifice of man's knowledge

⁵²⁰ This is Process Theology and the changing "God" of postmodernism and liberal theology.

⁵²¹ The matter becomes even more severe should Heiser's theory of Dispensationalism be true, in that the various cultures of the ANE would have been governed by various *elohim* in the divine council, and each culture had their own *elohim* who was the foundation of their moral laws and regulations. Although the existence of the Divine Council and their possible rule over the various nations is not necessarily precluded, it still ultimately mandates that this council actually have and enforce a standard of behavior (i.e., Adonai's standard or a standard above Adonai in "natural law"), which is simply Euthyphro's dilemma in an ANE context. Michel S. Heiser, "The

of morality, whether by natural law or by divine command, is epochally dependent, there can be no objective overlap of the conclusions of that thinking to the other epochs.

The only thing that might continue between epochs or dispensations is *history*. People might remember a time when there was a different morality, however, its components or tenets are no longer known nor relevant.⁵²² But alas, there are no known epistemological dispensations recorded in history. These ideas are only found in the annals of theological schools. In any case, if God defenestrated their moral laws, moral logic, and understanding of human morality, so should we. But then, there is no such thing as objective morality, but only time-based relativism. What is shown in historical and philosophical reality is that at least all basic moral principles and principles of human knowledge and logic are known by humanity and continuous at all times and in all cultures.⁵²³ There is no historical evidence, other than Christian theological *inference*, stemming *from* abolition theology, that God has changed any form of moral knowledge, or that humans perceived a change in dispensations.⁵²⁴ It does seem, however, that human and cultural history are guided by epochs whose books-ends are societal cataclysms. The cataclysms and what caused them, however, are judged by a continuous morality and ethical guide. In other words, humans can learn from past mistakes and moral failure going *all the way back to Adam*. Empires rise and fall, and we can judge why they fell whether by moral decadence, economic decay through debt and inflation, military defeat, social disruption, or by the very judgment of

Divine Council in the Late Canonical and Non-Canonical Second Temple Jewish Literature,” Ph.D. Dissertation (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2004).

⁵²² It begs the question as to whether God erased the moral memory of all living beings at dispensational changes or destroyed all life on earth. The first has never been recorded, and even after the flood, there were still at least 8 people.

⁵²³ Again see C.S. Lewis’s “Tao.” The Bible records the earliest promises of God to humanity, that being a Messiah.

⁵²⁴ Progressive revelation is a different topic which will be covered later in this chapter.

God (Sodom and Gomorrah). Moral judgements are and have always been because there were sources of moral epistemology found in the Garden. Those being the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

To that end, the notion that God has dealt differently with man and that man's perception of moral requirements is somehow epistemically different at different points in history does not conform to reality, any serious historical anthropology, all moral philosophy, and theological reference to a perfect and unchanging God. Therefore, this theological inference should be rejected for its blatant cultural and epochal moral relativism and the theological and apologetic nightmare that it has precipitated. This type of theology is neither consistent, comprehensive, cohesive, nor, based on the nightmares thus far, comely in the least.

The Pneumatological Problem. Taking the argument to its logical conclusion, in the current dispensation, the radical change and judgment of humanity is claimed to be led by those with the Holy Spirit, which has given man the Law of Christ, "taught" by Paul. But this theological conclusion manifests relativistic and subjective problems already detailed above. Firstly, technically, only those with the Holy Spirit have access to God's standard of human behavior and the ability to correctly interpret the scriptures. While this is a true statement it is only really partially true. Given the fact that many people have access to at least part of God's Law, and through general moral reflection, all peoples have demonstrated general commonality in terms of moral agreement, living "by the Spirit" does not seem to be the *only* basis of moral epistemology.⁵²⁵ Furthermore, and not discounting the Spirit's role in hermeneutics, it should be abundantly clear by this point in history that a *human* claim of Spirit indwelling is no guarantee

⁵²⁵ Rom.1:31. Eph. 4:18-32.

of accurately handling the word of God, nor being able to navigate moral dilemmas in ethics.⁵²⁶

This argument is essentially the same a divine right of kings and that of Papal infallibility, ultimately, the claim is epistemically vacuous. However, if “by the Spirit” means that *all* the components human morality become potentially known (say the weightier matters, and the writing of the Torah on the heart), then perhaps one is moved from one glory (basic morality) to another glory (Christlikeness). Moving from a mere basic moral law to the full and concrete Law of Christ. Given that all men have access to an *incomplete* Law of God, the Pneumatological nightmare is somewhat tempered by the difference between conviction, justification, and sanctification. Thus, the Spirit can be at work in all men at all times, but in terms of moral epistemology, there seems to be a disconnect between the claims of theologians, moral reality, and ascertaining the Truth of the Word.⁵²⁷

But therein lies a deeper problem. Digging deeper one finds the much more difficult position of the *pneumatological nightmare* and its found in the realm of biblical inspiration. The nightmare is that the standards of the Mosaic Law, which were concretely in the written Word of God, and were by the insistence of essentially all Christian theology, inspired by the Spirit. But now, according to the majority view, the same Spirit is inspiring a Word of God that runs counter to the Spirit’s previous inspiration.⁵²⁸ As in, the Spirit inspired Moses at the command of the Father, then inspired the supposedly antinomian Paul at the command of the Father, all the while,

⁵²⁶ 2 Tim. 2:15.; Sam Harris, *The Moral Landscape: How Science Can Determine Human Values* (New York, NY: Free Press, 2010), 146-147.; Harris cites, Pyysiäinen, I. and Hauser, M. “The Origins of Religion: Evolved Adaptation or By-Product? *Trends in Cognitive Science* 14 no. 3 (2010), 104-109.

⁵²⁷ Gen. 6:3. In Gen. 6:3 the Spirit of God is contenting/striving with men. Some ancient manuscripts even have abiding. In this situation, considering the evil in the Noahic age, the Holy Spirit is indeed moving among men contending with their fleshly desires and continually evil deeds. Adonai sets a time limit until the judgment (120 years).

⁵²⁸ See transitory theory.

His son proclaiming that not a stroke of the Law would pass and that he did not come to abolish the Law. So then, the spoken/written standard which came before the current dispensation is inspired by the Spirit, but also, the Spirit, through the Father, has now made that previous word defunct, or at least suspended for the time being. Even so, according to most theology, it is still vital to read the words of the Spirit that are now void and abolished, for as it is written, they are God breathed, and one must live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God, and one cannot actually understand what the Spirit says now without what the Spirit previously *said*.⁵²⁹ The point is, if the Spirit inspiring a new word of God or Law today, the Tanakh can no longer carry the *original* literal meaning of the Spirit when it is interpreted *today*. The theology of abrogation by necessity, requires new interpretations of the Spirit's original words. For example, what is clean and unclean is now mere spiritual allegory. There is in fact *no* such thing as clean and unclean things any longer.⁵³⁰ So, what was true in 29AD (the existence of clean and unclean) is no longer true in 30AD.⁵³¹ Likewise, physical promises get *transferred* to new people. What was true in 29AD (the existence of eternal promises and Laws) is no longer true in 30AD. Physical commands and promises get *replaced* by ethereal injunctions and a new spiritual Israel. In other words, the words of the Tanakh are there, but their meaning and significance have totally changed or have been *replaced* or *paused* either by time (dispensationalism) or by culture (reformed). All of this is supposedly predicated on a Holy Spirit who while unchangeable, has in fact radically changed the message to mankind, radically changed eternal promises, radically altered what God himself said.

⁵²⁹ 2 Tim. 3:16; Mt. 4:4; Lk. 4:4. Of course there are some Andy Stanley who are fully consistent in their antinomianism and call for a complete unhitching from the Old.

⁵³⁰ This makes verses like Rev.18:2 uninterpretable. For, if there is no such thing as unclean beasts, how can John make a reference to unclean beasts when speaking of future events?

⁵³¹ Job asks in 14:4, "Who can make the clean out of the unclean? No one!"

The *Pneumatological Nightmare* is really where the Euthyphro Dilemma becomes significantly clear. The Commands of the Torah, inspired by the Spirit, are good only because God commanded them for a certain time, to a certain people, or radically transformed the meaning of “goodness” from physical to *purely* spiritual.⁵³² Thus, the definition of “good” has actually changed, so the Spirit must now inspire a message of the “new” good. This either makes God a God of fiat (point 1 of Euthyphro) or that God has now finally started adhering to the *true* standard of good that always existed outside of himself (point 2 of Euthyphro) and the Law of Christ is the transfer to the higher, and correct Moral standard. Of course, this seems to be scripturally impossible because He cannot deny himself. The Spirit of God, the Father, and the Son must necessarily proclaim the same message, in all times, otherwise they are different Gods opposed to one another, or opposed to one another in time. Another option is that they could be evolving in understanding of themselves (finally discovering the true moral Law) or changing in light of human understanding (Process Theology). In short, Pneumatology and Theology Proper suffer irreparable harm with this line of theological thinking. Again, it’s the problem of temporary and capricious demands that impart a moral obligation for men to follow or having a “good” in and of itself.

The theological problem of capricious commands, and the *supersession* of meaning deals a death blow to Bibliology and scriptural revelation because certain biblical texts seemingly become unintelligible. In other words, the words are there but, ultimately, they are meaningless

⁵³² The insertion of neo-Platonic views in the Alexandrian school are well known as the foundation of replacement theology in addition to the social-political alliances that begin to form in the 2nd and 3rd century in Rome. Additionally, it seems that much of the anti-Judaic literature, of the early apologists is indicative of a reinterpretation (a.k.a. revisionist history) of Jewish history. See. Bacchiocchi, *Sabbath to Sunday*, 183.; Walter Kaiser, “An Assessment of Replacement Theology,” 9

and most concerningly false if one reads them *literally* and within their genre.⁵³³ For instance, instead of seeing the Messiah in the Psalms, it seems that only Derrida's face shines. One is only left with signposts and allegory, resulting in a tumultuous sea of meaning. This is so for the same reason the Greco-Roman philosophers are now abrogated, as David and the other authors of the Psalms and other books have had their entire moral edifice decimated, changed, and replaced. For instance, Psalms that describe the Torah are ultimately meaningless. The prime examples are Ps. 1, 19, and 119. Abrogation theology explicitly requires that one *not* delight in the literal Law of the Lord and one ought not to meditate on how to do it and why it should be done. (Why meditate on something that is abolished, for it holds nothing).⁵³⁴ If Christ is the Torah made Flesh, and the Torah is abrogated, should we then not delight in Christ? Besides this, one could meditate on the Torah in an attempt to find meaning via allegory or transformed truth, but how would one know when they arrived at the new true meaning and how does that new allegorical or spiritual interpretation negate the original meaning? For even Christ says not to neglect the physical matters of the Law when establishing the weightier matters.⁵³⁵

⁵³³ This is not to say that everything is literal. This is far from the truth. Rather, contextually, texts that require literal meaning should be read literally. Even if they can be applied typologically or allegorically, the literal text must *remain true* in order for the typological to be true. Typology loses truth if the grounding becomes false.

⁵³⁴ Ps. 1:2

⁵³⁵ Mt. 23:23. Even if one applies the four methods of interpretation (literal, moral, allegorical, anagogical), the latter cannot negate the former. In essence, the allegorical can never negate the literal. Truth cannot negate truth (A=A). It seems that Christian theology, beginning with the early Church fathers, was trying to synthesize what *they thought* were discrepancies between the "old" and the New. What should be blatantly clear by this point is that those results were *theological* as opposed to being scriptural (much like the mistakes of the Pharisees and Sadducees). The fact is, that even in typology, the literal meaning can and must still remain and be in force. For even Philip said that both Moses and the Prophets wrote about Yeshua (Jn. 1:45). What the transfer of meaning is really indicative of is eisegesis and the insertion of *dualism* as a hermeneutical *a priori*, which negates physical truth and replaces with ethereal truth axioms. In the process, however, this line of reasoning is poisoned by the venom of Euthyphro. We are embodied and require embodied rules (the inner man and the outer man must be in alignment). We should not try to be more spiritual than God. For he created bodies and made rules and truth for them that point to the spiritual truths!

What is more, abrogation mandates that the Torah is *not* perfect nor is it able to make wise the simple, that there is no reward in keeping it, and not desirable like much fine gold.⁵³⁶ In fact, the message about the Torah in much theology is that the Torah is decidedly imperfect. Of course, this makes the God that inspired the Torah not perfect. In addition, this makes the physical perfect image of that Torah, that being Christ, as imperfect as well. For if Christ is the Word of God made flesh, then Christ is imperfect.⁵³⁷ Therefore, abrogation theology means that the Torah is not truth *as it stands*.⁵³⁸ Perhaps, a bitter remedy is that one could claim that the Torah was true (past tense truth) or only true for the Jews, right? But the Laws of the Torah are now only “true” in a foreign allegorical sense and that the truth of the “Old Covenant” is now completely different. Tellingly, the Law is not the *faithful way* today and that the ordinances are not *good* as they stand today.⁵³⁹ One quickly sees that David’s moral perception, definition of righteousness and sin, and truth was obviously mistaken at worst, or time-based at best. This of course, makes the Holy Spirit who inspired David’s writing a participant in the creation of moral relativism as well. The truth of the past is no longer literally true as the genre mandates. The *full* Truth of the Lord has not endured forever. For the truth for David and the truth for the Messiah, is not the same truth for Augustine (A≠B). The literal and physical truth of the Torah has been divorced from its meaning, for it is *not true* that one should abide by Lev. 11, *today*. It is not true that one should rest on the seventh day Sabbath, *today*. It is not true that one should observe Passover or the other feasts, *today*. Rather, all these truths of commandments are now

⁵³⁶ Ps. 19:7, 10.

⁵³⁷ Historically speaking, the only word of God that existed when Christ was incarnated, was the Torah and the Prophets.

⁵³⁸ Ps. 119:142. Surely, the truth of the Lord endures forever.

⁵³⁹ Ps. 119:30, 39, 142.

transformed into “new” truth, *transitioned* through Christ, and abolished and/or terminated for a specific time period to be reintroduced during another dispensation. Recall from earlier that there is a difference between *transition* and *reorientation*. The transition of truth suffers the nightmares of changed meanings, while reorientation to truth ensures that the intent and meaning of the commandments is returned to its original state. In short, abrogation theology causes many more nightmares than it is worth. It makes God sadistic punishing people for temporary and capricious Laws. It makes epistemology a useless endeavor, defenestrating moral perception based on time. It causes inconsistent theology and apologetics. It favors postmodernism and transient truth claims. It discredits biblical inspiration. It makes God changeable, capricious, and possibly a liar.

Objective Moral Truth (Restraint and Sanctifying): Natural Law and Revealed Law Come from the Same Source

But perhaps, instead of these dreadful nightmares above, there is a better and simpler interpretation. The answer to Euthyphro’s dilemma is that it is a false dilemma. God is not a cosmic sadist nor a tyrant. Adonai is good, just, loving, immutable, and perfect. The standard for human behavior exists and is objective, changed neither by epoch nor culture. The scope of Theology Proper, Christology, Bibliology, and Pneumatology are not wrecked. The recourse to avoid all of these nightmares, bypassing both Psylla and Charybdis, is that Adonai has bestowed to all men objective *restraining* laws (found via the moral argument *and* found in the Law of God) and objective righteous and *sanctifying* laws (found alone in the Law of God).⁵⁴⁰ The

⁵⁴⁰ This resolves the paradox between Paul’s insistence that the unregenerate know the righteous ordinances (*dikaioma*) of God (Rom 1:32) and Ps. 147:20 which insists that the nations have not known the ordinances (*mishpatim*) of the Lord. Furthermore, it settles the notion of a Law that has a soteriological function: following the Law is not, and has never been, the basis of salvation, rather, the Law is the outworking of salvation already granted by grace, through faith.

restraining function of the Law (a.k.a. the commonly accepted morality) is not separate from all of God's commands, rather, the basic moral perceptions of men are a gracious minimum standard by which one could find God via moral perception and inquiry.⁵⁴¹ In other words, Adonai made man upright, but man has made many schemes.⁵⁴² The mirror within man is still there, but it has been distorted and muddied. This is how Paul can say in Rom. 1:32 that even the Gentiles know the ordinances of God.⁵⁴³ One need not be a believer to have this moral law. But this Law is seemingly *incomplete* based on the biblical evidence. If humanity has moral knowledge, why then would God issue further commands found in the Scriptures? C.S. Lewis, touching on this topic said,

God may be more than moral goodness: He is not less. The road to the promised land runs past Sinai. The Moral law may exist to be transcended: but there is no transcending it for those who have not first admitted its claims upon them...⁵⁴⁴

Christianity, as such, tells people to repent of their sins (their moral failures), but that is very different than *knowing* that one has something to repent of (e.g., sins). C.S. Lewis goes on saying, "It is after you have realized there is a real Moral Law, and a Power behind the law, and

⁵⁴¹ Rom 1:32. Simply ideas like without God and Immortality, there is not value, meaning or purpose, and that, following Dostoevsky, "All is permitted!" Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov* (New York, NY: Barnes and Nobel Classics, 2004), 219-228.

⁵⁴² Ecc. 7:29.

⁵⁴³ *Dikaioma* is "that which has been deemed right so as to have the force of law." These ordinances are those that have been established and ordained by law and typically point to the divine precepts of the Mosaic Law. See Deut. 30:16; 1 Kings 2:3 (LXX). In the LXX, *dikaioma* is used for Hebrew words like *mishpat* and *mitzvah*. Here Paul is showing that even the Gentiles have had knowledge of at least the basics of Torah and have turned those instructions aside.

⁵⁴⁴ C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2001), 59-60. The distinction of "transcendence" however, needs to be resolved. As why the need for transcendence of the moral law when Sinai and the "moral law" are given by the same person? In this Lewis also shows his stance on the Euthyphro dilemma, in that "That God commands certain things because they are right". See *Problem of Pain*, 99. The answer is that for those who feel the basic moral law, there is a need to transcend its basic requirements, as in getting to know the lawgiver and *any other commands* that lawgiver may have issued.

that you have broken that law and put yourself wrong with that Power – it is after all this, and not a moment sooner, that Christianity begins to talk.”⁵⁴⁵ Thus, the recognition of *sin* is the necessary result of moral inquiry.⁵⁴⁶ The Laws (basic and sanctifying) really have to be of the same Law, as they come from the same person and ultimately for the same purpose (recognizing one is a sinner in need of salvation, and then for sanctification and righteousness). Finding Adonai and all of his commands (e.g., knowing sin), is thus an *a posteriori* realization after *general* moral or theological reflection. This would be *transcending* the restraining laws and being sanctified into the greater Law (thus fully understanding sinfulness and righteousness). Reiterating Lewis, that is the point when Christianity begins to talk. Therefore, if the result of our moral inquiry leads to Adonai, then our philosophical “moral law” God (α) and Adonai “lawgiver” (α) are always indeed the same. The so-called moral law cannot be different than the righteous requirements, otherwise there would be competing standards of righteousness. This is precisely one of the reasons God gave the *written* Torah to Israel, so that other nations would see their righteousness and how lacking their own systems were.⁵⁴⁷ This raises the question as to why God would want to induce human questioning and awe among the other nations if the intent was not to bring them into conformity to it, and if the Law was only for the Jews. For it makes no sense for Adonai to inspire the nations with the Torah if they were not meant to replicate it. In other words, the nations were to be sanctified by it and redeemed by the God who wrote it. It seems the best

⁵⁴⁵ Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2001), 31.

⁵⁴⁶ For the deductive moral argument see William Lane Craig’s work and debates. The abductive approach is best developed and expounded by David Baggett and Jerry Wells, *God and the Cosmos: Moral Truth and Human Meaning* (New York, NY: Oxford, 2016).

⁵⁴⁷ Deut. 4:6-8.

explanation is that when the nations would see this better system and its source in Adonai they would be drawn toward repentance and faithfulness!

In addition to this, as shown above, the imperception of certain laws does not mean that the laws do not exist. It seems that all are born with this general morality, that needs to be completed, made whole, and sanctified. Thus, this general restraining morality is a *starting* point, not the end of righteousness.⁵⁴⁸ The appropriate question which should be raised is, What is the definition of righteousness by an objective standard? This general morality must become conformed (*summorphos*) to the image of and full morality of Christ (Adonai). For becoming like Christ is the hope and goal.⁵⁴⁹ This is why Christ is the goal of the Law and the target of all human normative behavior.⁵⁵⁰ Of course, one could simply succumb to the poison of Euthyphro at this point, but considering the results above, that option does not seem really appealing. The logical alternative to the Euthyphro dilemma is that God has bestowed upon all a *basic* objective morality that is a necessary and direct reflection of himself, but also that he has issued objective righteous commandments in the Scripture which are also not arbitrary but necessary and direct reflections of his good, just, and immutable nature. The commands of the Torah are Christ ontologically and point exclusively to Christ. As humans we are to imitate Christ as a human

⁵⁴⁸ The nations do have a general and basic moral knowledge, but were not fully given the oracles of God. For the sake of ease, I will call this morality (Alpha - A). If one is a Jew, the argument could be made that they start off with all the righteous ordinances of God as a moral starting point. Their job was to evangelize the nations and be a light unto them, thus bringing them into alignment with all of God's Commandments (Deut. 4:6, 8; Is. 42:6; 49:6) Paul, Steven, and the author of Hebrews say that the physical descendants of Abraham were entrusted with the oracles of God (see Acts 7:38; Rom. 3:2; Heb. 5:12). I will call this Mosaic starting point (Omega - Ω). In any case, both moral starting points need Christ *a priori* who is both ΑΩ and the Ontological Law of God. Those under Alpha are saved and sanctified through Christ who is the perfect embodiment of Torah, and those under Omega are saved and sanctified in Christ, thus Christ is all in all. To that end, Christ is the Word of God made flesh. Thus, Christ is the ontological Torah (John 1:14). John Douglas Morrison, *Has God Said? Scripture, the Word of God, and the Crisis of Theological Authority* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2006), locations, 210, 4859, 5343 Kindle.; Richard Longenecker, *The Christology of Early Jewish Christianity*, 39-41.

⁵⁴⁹ Rom. 8:29.

⁵⁵⁰ Rom. 10:4. Christ being the Word and the Written Word being the standard of human behavior (A is A).

teleological imperative. The logical conclusion is that since both the Law of God as recorded by Moses and the restraining laws felt by all men are from the same God, then A is A. The restraining basic Laws are contained within the greater corpus of God's Commands, and all his commands are necessary and direct reflections of his immutable, good, just, and eternal nature.

The Word of Adonai, The Hand of Moses: Writing Preexisting Morality and Pleasant Commands

At this point, it seems that the most common objection to continuity is that the Law came at a specific time and place in history, and that none of the previous covenant holders (Adam, Noah, Abraham), nor humanity in general, were aware of all the commandments with all their specificity (e.g., the ornate and aesthetic instructions of the *mishkan*, the rules and duties of the Levites, the Jubilee year, or scores of other commandments which might have been instituted by Moses and possibly unknown beforehand).

To answer this objection, it should firstly be noted that there are manifold examples of laws and commands found in the Torah that can be found in Genesis and the history of the Patriarchs. For example, in the very creation story, the sun, moon and stars are created so that humanity would know the seasons (*mo'edim*). Thus, according to Moses, the very purpose of the heavenly bodies was for us to know the timing of the feasts of God.⁵⁵¹ Interestingly enough, Cain and Abel bring what appear to be a first fruits offering which comes "in the course of time."⁵⁵² Abel only kept clean animals (sheep and goats) as flocks, as indicated by the Hebrew *so'n*. This

⁵⁵¹ It is common to hear people describe the feasts of God as "Jewish feasts." As opposed to more appropriate terms like, "biblical feasts" or the "feasts of God." As the *mo'edim* are not described as "Jewish" *per se* rather the Bible describes them as the appointed feasts of Adonai – Lev. 23:2. In John, the feasts are contextually referred to as Jewish feasts, possibly to differentiate them from pagan feasts of the nations surrounding Israel.

⁵⁵² Gen. 4:3. Time of course can only be contextually determined by the heavenly bodies, and the offering is described as from "The fruit of the ground."

also indicates a knowledge of sacrificial practice and how to present oneself before the Lord (not empty and without faith).⁵⁵³ Cain was told that “Sin was crouching at the door” precisely because he was coming before the Lord in a manner in violation of Ex. 23:15. *El Shaddai*’s words to Cain are very instructive, as it tells us that there was a standard of sin by which Cain was held accountable. Again, if the doctrine of immutability is to be consistent, that must mean that since Adonai is immutable, *his* standard of sin is the same yesterday, today, and forever. In short, since God advises Cain of sin, there obviously was the knowledge of sin, which I contend was given by both the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. What is even more interesting is that these trees are given *before* man was placed in the garden.⁵⁵⁴ This also means the standard of sin today must be the same as it was for Adam since he had knowledge of it at the beginning! An action cannot be sinful in one era and righteous or neutral in another. Sin is sin, objectively, yesterday, today, and forevermore because God is the same, yesterday, today, and forevermore, and the Messiah died to save everyone in all times from sin.

⁵⁵³ Exodus 23:15. The Hebrew in this sentence is *lo ra’a panim reqam*. Many English translations add “handed” but that is not in the text. The Hebrew, although contextually requiring a physical thing be brought, seems to be indicating something much more significant than bringing a physical sacrifice. Rather *reqam* has the notion of vainly, without effect, rashly, or without cause. And so, the requirement is much more than a mere external gift to the Lord, rather, the imperative is upon the heart and the faith of the individual. Yes, the external gift is commanded, but it is worthless and rash without real faith and repentance (Is. 1:11-15, Jer. 6:20; Amos 5:21-23; 1 Sam. 15:22; Heb. 10:4-10)

⁵⁵⁴ (Gen 2:8,9). What this seems to mean is that Adam and Chavah knew what sin was and that it incurred punishment. As for the trees in the garden, they can either be literal or metaphorical trees, or better still that they were both. The physical shows the deeper significance. Here it is shown that knowledge is epistemology. The tree of life is obedience to the Word of God (the Law/Christ), and the tree of the knowledge of Good and Evil is knowledge of condemnation. Since this trees existed in the garden before Adam, the standard of sin existed before human creation and this standard was known by the Creator. Another option is that the tree is figurative, and Adam and Chavah ate the “fruit of unrighteousness.” Whatever the case may be, the Torah presents a parallel between the two trees in the garden and the mountains of Gerizim and Ebal as the introduction and conclusion to the theme of two paths in the Torah. In short, humanity was always presented with two choices: live by the ways of the Lord or die. There are only two options and one moral epistemology, eat from the tree of life or eat from the tree of death. Therefore, choose life (Deut. 30:19).

Many more examples of Lawful obedience bound. One sees that Enoch walked with God. This can only imply that he lived a life of devotion and piety as *prescribed* by God.⁵⁵⁵ Noah knew the difference between clean and unclean animals, having been instructed to bring seven pairs of clean animals onto the ark.⁵⁵⁶ He also built an altar and sacrificed when the ground was dry, thus possessing an understanding of the sacrificial system and the method of *covenant initiation*. Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed for blatant disregard of the laws concerning proper sexual relations, unrestrained lifestyles, and a lack of hospitality. Melchizedek “was a priest of God Most High” (Gen. 14:18). Although not in the Levitical line, this surely represents knowledge of offerings and priestly duties, prior to the Levites. This priestly line is still in operation today because it is everlasting.⁵⁵⁷ In regard to Melchizedek, an interesting conclusion about the *Mishkan* can also be deduced. Since, the earthly tent of meeting was a *copy* of that which was in heaven, a literal interpretation would indicate that God already dwelled in an indestructible heavenly structure.⁵⁵⁸ This also means that the instructions (pattern) for the Tent of Meeting and priestly service of Melchizedek *predate* Moses and the Levites (and still continue despite no earthly Temple/*Mishkan*).⁵⁵⁹ In addition, the duty of tithing predates Moses, as

⁵⁵⁵ Gen. 5:22.

⁵⁵⁶ Gen. 7:2.

⁵⁵⁷ Heb. 7:3.

⁵⁵⁸ Ex. 25:9; Heb. 8:5; 9:24. The continued existence of a heavenly *mishkan* structure renders Preterism and much of Covenantal/Reformed eschatology and supersessionist ecclesiology as invalid. For how can that heavenly tabernacle be destroyed, especially when it seems that the very same structure returns on the mountain of the Lord?

⁵⁵⁹ It seems, according to the prophetic literature in Ezekiel (chap. 40-48), that when Christ returns and the heavenly temple is brought down, both priesthoods will be functioning simultaneously, with the Levites performing their ministerial role unto the Lord and bringing the people to the Throne of God – who is Christ – the highest priest. There is no reason why the Levitical service be abolished by Christ, quite the contrary, it continues for Christ and because of Christ. In order for one to be present before the Lord Christ in a ceremonial fashion, as a physical creature, it will require physical purity, the instructions for which are given in the Torah.

Abraham gave a tenth of all to Melchizedek.⁵⁶⁰ How did Abraham know that a tenth was required? The answer is that, as Moses records, Abraham obeyed God's commands, statutes, and Laws (*Torah*).⁵⁶¹

But what about other peoples and nations? They would have to have knowledge as well for it to be objective. The biblical narrative of the flood and then subsequent dispersing after Babel (Gen 11:9) show that *everyone comes from a single source*, and everyone before that came from a single source in Adam.⁵⁶² In other words, *everyone started off with the same knowledge*. Post-diluvian, the source was Noah and his sons. The vast *similarity* in the various codes of law (Sumerian, Babylonian, Egyptian, Ugaritic, and later Greco-Roman) demonstrate a similarity to many Torah commands like circumcision, sacrificial requirements, and even distinction between clean and unclean animals.⁵⁶³ To ignore that shared understanding would be absurd, as shown

⁵⁶⁰ Gen. 14:20.

⁵⁶¹ Gen. 26:5. To this one may ask, what commands, statutes, and Laws (Heb. *Torah*)? Some Rabbinic views conclude that Abraham was filled with the whole Mosaic Law before it was given at Sinai (See m. *Qiddushin* 4:14). I find this rabbinic conclusion highly likely, considering that Abraham *also* saw Messiah's Day and was glad (Jn. 8:56). There is no reason to doubt Moses's anachronistic use of the word *Torah* in relationship to Abraham to mean anything other than what Moses himself compiled and wrote by his hand. Abraham, as the father of the faith, knew the righteous requirements of the Law *and* he knew the Messiah. Interestingly, John says in Revelation, "Here is the perseverance of the saints who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus." Which, of course would be a life just as Abraham lived, and he is the father of us all.

⁵⁶² Should the life spans of the antediluvian people be literal, then the generations surely had access to the "ancient" knowledge of Adam, as Enos, who probably knew both Adam and Seth, was alive in the time of Noah. There are thus three reliable means of transmission of information among the earliest generations: 1) the oral history and Laws of these earliest peoples, 2) the stars - see E.W. Bullinger, *The Witness of the Stars* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1967), or 3) Adonai himself in Theophanic revelation (as He met with Cain, Abel, Noah, Enoch, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, *postlapsarian*). See Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, ed. Samuel G. Craig (Phillipsburg, NJ: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1948), 83.

⁵⁶³ The Egyptians were animal worshipers, which of course means they had an understanding, albeit false, of animals worthy of worship, and there is some evidence (through Celsus and Plutarch) that the Egyptian priests did have some prohibitions for food. Secondly, among Greco-Roman classical authors, the prohibition of swine from God/Moses was viewed with contempt as swine was so plentiful in Greco-Roman diets and was used widely in pagan worship. Although these food purity lists and understandings are obviously a perversion from the list given by Adonai through the hand of Moses, what it necessarily demonstrates is that even before the law was given there was knowledge of animals fit for human consumption and for sacrifice. It is to be expected that nations under the influence of demon gods would mirror, in some cases very closely, many of the commandments of God, as is the

above. Lewis again shows the universal understanding of *some* of the requirements that God demands.⁵⁶⁴ This would only be possible via a single source and shared history of all nations (i.e., all the laws of God as handed down by Adam and Noah). However, in disobedience, and under the sway of demon gods, the nations were either deceived or willingly strayed away from or altered the required ordinances (for none seek after him and all have gone astray, and they suppress the truth in unrighteousness – Ps. 14:3; Rom. 1:18; 3:12). This is why Paul stresses that the Gentiles knew the *ordinance* of God.⁵⁶⁵ In that the Gentiles, to one degree or another had access to the righteous decrees of God. That does not mean that Gentiles had access to *all* the Torah, thus they needed to be brought into alignment with the Torah, which was given to Israel. To that end, it was only through God’s grace that he corrects the lawless or deceived and brings them back, in faith, to all of his Laws and shows them the consequences of their rebellion. For justice, mercy, and faith are written into the same everlasting code of Adonai, which is why the story of Abraham exists, so that *all nations* of the earth could be blessed.

The knowledge of God’s Law before Moses demonstrates that Adonai did not come up with laws by fiat at Sinai, but rather they are likely *pre-existing ordinances*. This seems to be the case as the Word of God is forever settled in Heaven, that scripture cannot be broken, and that the Word of God was there in the beginning.⁵⁶⁶ It follows that since Christ *is* the Torah made flesh, it is a necessary and direct reflection of himself. For if the Christ is the Word of God then

case with the sons of Ishmael and Esau through Mohammed (with the Halal laws), but not follow the actual instructions from the Creator, which are a necessary and *direct* reflection of his righteousness.

⁵⁶⁴ C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2001), 83-101.

⁵⁶⁵ Rom. 1:32.

⁵⁶⁶ Ps. 119:89; Jn. 10:35; Jn. 1:1.

he is the Law and the Lawgiver, and is the image and standard by which all men are judged. He is the standard of righteousness and conversely the standard of sin.⁵⁶⁷

This knowledge is confirmed by Paul who says in Rom. 5:12-14.

So then, just as sin entered the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all people because all sinned – for before the law was given, sin was in the world, but there is no accounting for sin when there is no law. Yet death reigned from Adam until Moses even over those who did not sin in the same way that Adam (who is a type of the coming one) transgressed.

It is obvious that people violated God’s commands (i.e., sinned) from Adam until Moses. If there were no commands, then Paul should not have written that they sinned differently than Adam did, for what commands or laws were they sinning against? All people were punished because of sin, and all people sin because death reigned. To that end, we know that sin was the precipitator of the flood judgment. Furthermore, Paul tells us elsewhere that “for the Law brings about wrath, but where there is no law, there also is no violation.”⁵⁶⁸ It seems that those in the flood (before Moses) were subjected to the wrath of God, so this has to mean that in order for them to be punished, they had to have known the Law, or at least parts of it. For God cannot punish a people or person without knowledge of the Law.⁵⁶⁹ Additionally, Paul tells us he would

⁵⁶⁷ Evil is dependent upon good.

⁵⁶⁸ Rom. 4:15.

⁵⁶⁹ Another, albeit universalist leaning interpretation, could also be that, these punished are not *eternally* punished. Meaning perhaps God did not hold the victims of his wrath eternally accountable because they did not have adequate knowledge of right and wrong (sinning in ignorance). But, if sin was indeed a logical category that brought about the wrath of God *before* Moses, then surely a standard was in place and known, because according to Paul, there is no violation if there is no law, so why the punishment then? The universalist approach might be that *physical punishment* (death) is required by God’s law, but *eternal* imputation need not necessarily follow because grace and mercy are also a logical category established *in the same law*. In essence, the physical death was a light beating, having sinned in ignorance (Lk. 12:47-48), but the death of the soul need not follow. This is similar to the ecumenical understanding from the Romists about the “unevangelized.” But ultimately, this universalism need not follow, for understanding seems unlikely as the Law itself contains provisions for sins performed in ignorance (the very reason for the Day of Atonement) and surely has grace built in since history does show that the Oracles of God (all of his righteous requirements) were significantly geographically contained until after the resurrection of Christ. At the end of the day, all cultures at all times have had knowledge of gross moral failure. In these cases, it seems that eternal punishment could indeed be issued for unrepentant intentional moral failure, as all knew the ordinances

not have known sin except through the Law.⁵⁷⁰ Logic dictates that if there is no accounting for sin without the Law, then there is no way that Paul can say that these people sinned. For sin cannot be a logical category without a standard to fall short of! Yet we see everyone from Adam to Moses being held accountable by death because they sinned. Although they did not sin in the same way as Adam, they sinned, nonetheless. It seems Paul is pointing us to the fact that righteousness and grace were always present (even before the written Law was given – Rom 4:3). What is righteousness if there is no standard? What is sin if there is no standard? If Adonai is immutable, then his standard of righteousness must be the same at the beginning as it is now, because Christ is the Word and savior of the world from the beginning of creation. The bottom line is that if there is the law of sin and death that *began with Adam* (Rom. 8:2), there must be a standard by which one can identify what sin is. For without a law there is no sin, yet we see *law enforcement* (from the beginning, since Adam) taking place because all sinned, and death reigned through them all.

Progressive Revelation is Not a Content Change

Some might say at this point, that since the Law was not given until Moses, that means that those before the Law were under a different law. Although Abraham knew the Torah of Adonai and the Messiah, that does not necessarily mean subsequent generations or heathen nations until Moses had an accurate transmission of the laws and traditions of *El Shaddai*.⁵⁷¹

of God and have seen his power. Finally, absolution rests only in the hands of God. Surely, the God of grace and mercy can distribute the same to those who were unevangelized at all points in history. To whom much is given, much is required.

⁵⁷⁰ Rom. 7:7.

⁵⁷¹ Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob did not know the name YHWH, and knew God only as El Shaddai (Ex. 6:3). Moses's anachronistic use of the tetragrammaton in the historical narrative is interesting considering that the patriarchs did not know Adonai as *Adonai*. I suspect that Moses used the tetragrammaton simply to show that they

Because Moses received a progressive revelation of the Lord's name, the name of the Lord must necessarily have been in existence before the revelation was given. Thus, progressive revelation is merely an anthropological phenomenon. The fact that humans may not have known *all* the commandments or the *fullness* of the commandments in no way means the commandments were not in existence. They most certainly were in existence because God was in existence. The whole notion of progressive revelation mandates that a standard exists *beforehand* and then is revealed to man. In the same way that Christ died at the right time, so too does full manifestation of the Law come at the right time. In short, progressive revelation, unlike dispensations, does not change human epistemology, but rather makes God and his commands *more explicit* and more concrete, similar to that of a father making his commands clearer to his children. The ultimate expression and concrete existential reality is Adonai in the flesh.⁵⁷² Christ is the apex of progressive revelation to which both the inscriptured Word of God and the Spirit attest.⁵⁷³ Moses, the prophets after him, and ultimately the Messiah himself, followed by the apostles are all such instances of explicit revelation of God who is eternal and immutable (e.g., concretely existential and revealing of an eternal righteous standard). In the case of Moses, he recorded the righteous commandments that Abraham seemed to know. The Mosaic Covenant built upon and clarified that which was *preexisting*. Furthermore, the New Covenant builds upon the *preexisting* Mosaic Covenant. Anthropological progression never changes God's original intent (which is

are one and the same. What this means is that Moses, should he have used various sources to create the historical narrative, redacted and edited the texts, inserting the tetragrammaton for clarification. Divine concealment to man need not mandate that God changes in any way. In this case, El Shaddai is Adonai who is El Elyon (e.g., Gen. 14:22, which contains the tetragrammaton and El Elyon).

⁵⁷² Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985), 302.

⁵⁷³ Interestingly, Vos views much of the early church's polemic against the Sabbath as seemingly short sighted. Rather, Vos views the Sabbath as an instrumental eschatological marker that has been in existence since the beginning of time and a pattern of God that man should imitate. *Ibid.*, 140. See, Morrison, *Has God Said?*, 5343 of 7394 kindle.

Christ), rather it makes the subjects receiving the concrete revelation *without excuse* because the revelation has become more concrete and in the world. Therefore, ignorance decreases, thus intentional sin increases, but with that increase, grace increases all the more.⁵⁷⁴ Therefore, the Law and its requirements, since they predate Moses, are miraculously the *written* (concrete) account of the pre-existing Torah of Adonai. The Messiah, likewise, is the concrete and perfect manifestation and goal of the Torah of Adonai. He showed the fullness of the Torah, its true functions, and also its *limitations*. Christ exhibited and *was* the necessary and direct reflection of the commands of Adonai and the only way to initiate the New Covenant.

Christ as Teleology for Abolition

This brings up a last possible objection, that if Christ was the goal of the Law, then the Law was created only for Christ to follow, and when it was “fulfilled” it became null and void. At first glance, the thrust of the teleological argument hinges upon Christ fulfilling and abolishing the law. Walter Kaiser notes,

The case for the single, monolithic law that refuses to recognize Jesus’ ranking moral law above all other laws as being of greater weight, significance, and importance must now be scrapped. Indeed, the claim that the law of the Lord, in all its parts, has now ceased to be valid because of Christ’s perfect fulfillment of the ceremonial part of the law...must itself also be abandoned in light of the teaching of Moses, Jesus and Paul.⁵⁷⁵

However, as was covered above, when Christ returns those same commandments are then reinstated.⁵⁷⁶ Given these eschatological realities, the teleological abolition of the Law in Christ

⁵⁷⁴ Rom. 5:20-21. But as it is written by Paul, shall we sin so grace will abound? By no means!

⁵⁷⁵ Walter Kaiser, Jr., “The Law as God’s Guidance for the Promotion of Holiness,” in *The Law, The Gospel and the Modern Christian: Five Views* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1993), 198.

⁵⁷⁶ See Page 139 of this dissertation.

is a *non sequitur* and opens Christ up to being the cosmic sadist when he reinstates the heavy burden he himself abolished (even though he said he did not come to abolish the Law). Again, temporary commands are not a direct and necessary reflection of God's immutable character, falling into Euthyphro's trap. But more importantly, given that Christ is Adonai and the Word of God made flesh, if the Law was merely teleological to be abolished when Christ fulfilled it, then Christ's purpose was to abolish himself. But this cannot be because he cannot deny himself! Thus, the idea of planned obsolescence of God's commands through Christ's fulfillment runs into serious Christological ramifications because he *is* the inscriptured Torah made flesh and Christ is the direct and necessary reflection of God's commandments. Christ cannot abolish himself and scripture cannot be broken.

Adonai is the Immutable Standard: The Standard is Christ

This leaves the believer with only one option. That Adonai himself is the standard bearer and *goal* for normative human behavior. His statutes for human behavior are necessary and direct reflections of himself, fully revealed, lived out, and brought to fullness in the Messiah. The true concrete Law and Lawgiver in one (*echad*). The fearful thing is that we are commanded to be holy as he is holy and perfect as he is perfect. We are to reflect his righteousness physically and spiritually (in spirit and in truth). Surely this is the true meaning of being a disciple of Christ, reflecting, showing devotion to, memorizing, and imitating the Laws of the Lawgiver, who is Christ, then teaching others to do the same.⁵⁷⁷

⁵⁷⁷ Darren N. Huckey, *The Four Responsibilities of a Disciple* (Macon, GA: Emet HaTorah, 2013).

Adonai and Euthyphro

In conclusion, one must ask the question about the commands, statutes, and laws of God in regard to his nature. Here is the test, using Euthyphro.

- 1) Are the commandments holy because they are commanded by Adonai?
- 2) Is Adonai holy because he keeps the commandments which are good in and of themselves?
- 3) Are the commandments holy because they are a necessary, direct, and permanent reflection of the Law giver? (The false dilemma)

The Scriptures tell us that God is holy. Since the Law of God has proceeded from God and is in keeping with his own nature, the Laws must necessarily be a direct and necessary reflection of God's eternal holiness. God is eternal (Is. 40:8), therefore, all of his commands are eternal. His laws, all of them, are holy and good (Rom. 7:12). The Law is able to discern the thoughts of men (Heb. 4:12) because it alone judges them. The Law can sustain life (Mt 4:4; Ez. 20:11). The Law is immutable (Lk. 16:17). The Law is righteous (Deut. 4:8). Lastly and most importantly, the Law is grounded in Love (Rom. 13:10).⁵⁷⁸

In closing, this chapter has been an attempt to show that the apologetic answer to the Euthyphro dilemma, while it removes an intellectual barrier to belief, unintentionally creates a host of doctrinal problems for most of Christian theology because of their inherent antinomian stance. In the process of using apologetics, contemporary theologies have relegated themselves to be poisoned by the venom of Euthyphro. Not only that, but these theologies also run into problems explaining immutability, eternal holiness, and objective moral truth. The Euthyphro dilemma is nothing that we should fear, but in its wake, there is a labyrinth of confusion that results if the same logic is not applied consistently, cohesively, and comprehensively. The end result is that most contemporary theologies lack comeliness because of all the issues outlined

⁵⁷⁸ Roger Hadad, *Apologia for the Law and the Sabbath* (Voir Dire Publishing, 2019), 29.

above. There is no reason to be poisoned by Euthyphro's dilemma, when all of God's commandments found in the Torah are a necessary, direct, and eternal reflection of himself, concretely manifested, explained, and commanded by Christ, who is the standard and goal of normative human behavior.⁵⁷⁹ He is man *par excellence*. The ultimate reality is that Christ is Adonai, who came to remove the function of *condemnation* contained in the Law and freed us, not from the Law's loving obligations as a perfect and just standard of human behavior, but, from its penalties which were a result of our disobedience to that loving and perfect standard. What is more, he provides the Spirit to assist us in keeping his righteous ordinances, writing the Law on our hearts, so that we can do them with a clean conscience.

⁵⁷⁹ Rom. 10:4.

Chapter 4

Conclusion

In the introduction, I mentioned that much of Christian theology has been dominated by what Hegg calls the “Post-Torah” worldview.⁵⁸⁰ This Post-Torah worldview has been one of the primary drivers of theological discourse and *assumptions* beginning quite early, sometime in the early to middle 2nd Century. This dissertation has sought to question this Post-Torah Paradigm and show why it is mistaken and how a Pronomian Paradigm has better explanatory power, has greater plausibility, is less ad hoc, and provides illumination for other problems in Christian theology. To that end, a primary aim of this dissertation was to show that despite the early formation of the Post-Torah worldview, the Pronomian Paradigm decisively predates the theological conclusions of the 2nd Century. This was accomplished through a reexamination of Acts 21 and its related texts of Acts 15, Acts 10-11, simultaneously addressing potential objections from the Pauline epistles, the Epistle to the Hebrews, and Church history. The story that emerges, therefore, is that the *earliest* Church was a Christ-centered, Torah observant community that consists of both Jews and Gentiles with a single orthopraxy. It is my contention that the earliest orthodoxy and orthopraxy is the best orthodoxy and orthopraxy and that it is our duty to emulate it. Secondly, this dissertation sought to expand this scriptural conclusion with a philosophical defense of continuity of the Law of God via *Euthyphro’s* Dilemma, primarily to show that, for Christian moral philosophy and theology to be consistent, the Law of God must continue to be in operation for believers today, otherwise the implications are acceptance of

⁵⁸⁰ Hegg, “All Things to All Men: Paul and the Torah in 1 Cor. 9:19-23, *Torah Resource*. <https://tr-pdf.s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/articles/all-things-to-all-men.pdf> (Date Accessed July 23, 2023).

moral relativism and significant damage to a wide swath of Christian truth claims. To that end, both the scriptural and philosophical methods conclude that the Law of the God, as written by Moses, is a direct and necessary reflection of Christ, who is the Torah made flesh.

The implications of these findings are quite significant, for the impacts on personal behavior could be quite dramatic, but radical transformations are par for the course in biblical theology. To that end, it is the work of the Spirit and the Word of God having its purposed effects on our lives to bring about this change, and not through religious or civil coercion. One of the gravest errors in 1st Century Judaism was the idea that one could be saved by ethnicity and in order to achieve that salvation, force other people to be righteous through circumcision. It was this issue, that I believe, is crux of the Pauline letters. Unfortunately, as Peter says, these letters have become severely misunderstood, in fact the misunderstanding was quite early, hence the reason for Acts 21. Unfortunately, this misunderstanding has continued and spurred many grave errors in the history of Christianity: Replacement Theology, creedal coercion through the ecclesiastical-civil magistrate, early anti-Jewish literature's seeming polemic against the Word of God, written by Moses, because it was "Jewish."

It is my hope that this dissertation can reinvigorate the process of radical reconciliation between Jew and Gentile and that both groups can be totally reconciled to God, through Jesus Christ, becoming one new man, and loving Adonai the way he defines how he wants to be loved. As it is written, "If you love me, keep my commandments."⁵⁸¹ As such, future study and application of this dissertation could be useful in reaching unbelieving Jews and combating the counter-missionaries within unbelieving Judaism, for my unbelieving Jewish brethren have had

⁵⁸¹ Ex. 20:3-6; Deut. 5:8-10; 7:9-11; 10:12-13; 11:1, 13-14, 22-23; 19:8-9; 30:16; Josh. 22:5; Dan. 9:4; Neh. 1:5-6; Jn. 14:15, 21; 1 Jn. 5:2-3; 2 Jn. 1:6.

the oracles of God, but they lack Christ. This dissertation shows that the insurmountable barrier of Torah abolition is actually not there at all, that Paul's writings do not contradict the words of Yeshua from Nazareth, that the promises of God are eternal, and that Yeshua is the prophesied Messiah of Israel, and he has risen from the dead according to the Scriptures and will come again to instate his physical, glorious, Lawful kingdom in Jerusalem. Another potential avenue of future inquiry is the social-economic-political nexus. As there has been a resurgence, at least in the United States, of "Christian Nationalism," the Pronomian paradigm, and its emphasis on non-coercive obedience, has the potential to serve as a distinctive and traditionalist model in the ever-fracturing and multi-polar, hypermodern, digital world.⁵⁸²

The conclusion, when all has been heard is: fear God and keep his commandments, because this applies to *every person*.⁵⁸³

Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments and teaches others the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.⁵⁸⁴

⁵⁸² James Poulos. *Human, Forever: The Digital Politics of Spiritual War*. Los Angeles, CA, 2021.; Steven Wolfe, *The Case for Christian Nationalism* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2022); Alexander Dugin, *The Fourth Political Theory*, trans. Mark Sleboda and Michael Millerman (United Kingdom: Arktos Media, 2012).

⁵⁸³ Ecc. 12:13. (Italics for emphasis)

⁵⁸⁴ Mt. 5:17-19.

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Genesis:

1:27-28
4:3
5:22
6:3
7:2
12:3
14: 13,18, 20, 22
18:18
26: 4, 5

Exodus:

4:25
6:3
12:49
19:8
20:3-6
22:21
23:9, 15
24:12
25:9
30:11-16
33:23
34:34-35

Leviticus:

3:16
4:2, 22, 27
10:16-20
11:44
13
14
17:2
19:3, 15, 18, 19, 33, 34
23:2, 12
24:22
25:35
26:41

Numbers:

9:14
15:16
29:8

Deuteronomy:

4:6-8
5:8-10
6:1
8:10
7:9-11
10:12-13; 16
11:1; 13-14; 22-23; 29
12:21
13:1-4, 5
14:24
16:11, 14
17:7
19:8-9, 19
21:21
22:21, 22, 24
24:27
25:4
26:12
30:6, 16, 19

Joshua:

Ch. 6
22:5
24:20

Judges:

20:13

1 Samuel:

15:22
16:7

2 Samuel:

22:45-46

1 Kings:

2:3
8:41-43
11:1

2 Kings:

12

2 Chronicles:

6:32, 33

Ezra:

10:2

Nehemiah:

1:5-6
9:2
13:30

Job:

1:20
14:4

Psalms:

1:2
Ch. 8
14:3
19:7, 10
Ch. 29
94:6
119: 30, 39, 45, 89, 105,
142
147:20

Proverbs:

2:16
5:20
6:23
7:5
12:10
23:27

Ecclesiastes:

7:29
12:13

Isaiah:

1:11-15
2:1, 2-4
40:8
42:6
49:6
52:11
56:3, 6-7
58:6-14
60:10
61:1, 5
66:20-2

Jeremiah:

2:19
3:1-10; 17
5:19
4:4
6:20
8:19
9:25-26
17:19-22
31:31-34
22:3

Ezekiel:

4:12
11:19
14:13
15:8.
18:17
20:11, 13, 16
36:24, 26, 27-38
44:7, 9, 24

Daniel:

1:8
3:12
9:4

Hosea:

1:10
14:4

Amos:

5:22-23

Micah:

4:1-5

Habakkuk:

2:4

Zechariah:

7:10
14:18

Malachi:

2:11
Ch. 3-4

Matthew:

1:19
4:4
5:17-20, 48
6:1-24
7:10, 16, 20
9:15-15
10:24
11:30, 33
12:5, 8, 12
15:1, 36
17:24-27
18:15-20
22:23, 40
23:2-3, 4, 15
24:20
26:20
27:6, 46, 62
28:19, 20.

Mark:

2:28
3:4
7:6, 7, 8, 10-13, 19
15:33, 34, 42

Luke:

4:4
6:5, 9, 40
11:11, 44
12:47-48
14:27-33
16:17
18:12
21:1-2
22:20
23:54
24:12, 18, 32, 33, 34, 53

John:

1:1, 45, 47
2:4
4:23, 24
7:51
8:38, 39, 56
9:5
10:35
13:27
14:6, 15
15:10
18:38
19:14

Acts:

1:12
6:1
10:34-35
11
13:43, 47
14:1, 15, 21
15:1, 9-11, 19-21, 28
16:3, 4, 5
17:11, 17
19:9
20:7-12, 28.
Ch. 21

Romans:

1:18, 20, 32
3:2, 12, 22, 23, 31
4:10, 11, 12, 15
5:12-14
6:1-2
7:6, 7, 12, 13
8:1, 2, 7, 28, 29
9:3, 25, 27
10:3, 4, 8, 12
11:4-5
12:3, 6
13:10
Ch. 14
15:8

1 Corinthians:

3:17
5:5, 11
9:9, 15, 19-23
10:21, 28
13:12
11: 2, 33
15:7; 33
16:1-3

2 Corinthians:

2:13-14
3:7, 10, 13, 15, 17, 18
4:9
6:16
11:13, 24, 28

Galatians:

1:17-19
2:3, 4, 6, 8, 10
3:8, 10, 15-17, 19
5:18
6:12

Ephesians:

2:11, 12, 14, 15
4:1, 17-32
6:4

Philippians:

1:27
3:2, 5

Colossians:

1:10
2:8, 10, 15-17, 20, 21
3:11

1 Thessalonians:

Ch. 1-5

2 Thessalonians:

1:8
2:3, 4, 15

1 Timothy:

1:19, 20
4:3, 5
5:18
6:16

2 Timothy:

2:15
3:16
4:10

Hebrews:

1:2
2:5-8
4:12, 22
5:12
6:4-6
7:3
8:5, 13
9:1, 2, 24
10:4-10, 26-31
11: 8-19, 23-29, 32-33
13:5

James:

1:23, 24, 25

1 Peter:

1:14-16

2 Peter:

2:21
3:16

1 John:

1:5
2:3, 6
3:4
4:1
5:2-3

2 John:

1:6

Revelation:

1:16
12:10
14:12
18:2
21:1
22:2

**Apocrypha and
Pseudepigrapha**

1 Esdras:

1:54

2 Esdras:

7:118-128

1 Maccabees:

7:5;

9:23, 58, 69;

11:25;

14:14

2 Maccabees:

2:5, 7

3 Maccabees:

1:3

Sirach (Ecclesiasticus):

Prologue, v. 10

Jubilees:

1:23

2:2

Dead Sea Scrolls

1QM 10.11-12

1QP Hab 11.13

1QS 21, 23, 10:6, 8, 11.

4Q434 Frag. 1 1.4

4Q521

4QFlor. i.7

4QMMT

4QShirShabb

Talmud/Mishna

b. *Avodah Zerah* 2b; 8a;
17a

b. *Baba Bathra* 60b

b. *B'rachot* 5a

b. *Berachot* 58b, 63a

b. *Erubin* 4.5, 41a

b. *Hullin* 89b; 100b

b. *Ketubot* 110b

b. *Nidah* 5a

b. *Rosh HaShanah* 12a,
19a

b. *Sanhedrin* 90a

b. *Shabbat* 13b-14a; 31a;
68a; 132b

b. *Sukkah* 25b

b. *Ta'anit* 10a

b. *Temurah* 32a-33b

b. *Yoma* 83b; 87a

m. *Chagigah* 1.8; 2.5

m. *Kellim* 1:6

m. *Maasarot* 1.1

m. *Nedarim* 1.3, 4

m. *Oholot* 16.1, 2

m. *Pasachim* 7.2; 8.8; 10.1

m. *Pirkei Avot* 1.1, 4.1

m. *Sanhedrin* 10.1

m. *Shabbat* 22.5

m. *Ta'anit* 2.4

t. *Berachot* 2.10

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Hilchot Melachim

8.11

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