Replacement Theology – Part 2

The Formation of Replacement Theology Through Allegory

Ironically, it was the Jew Philo who was among the first to promote an allegorical interpretation of the Old Testament Scriptures, an interpretation that would later be used in an attempt to show that the newly-formed church had superseded or replaced the Jewish nation. Philo's allegorical approach greatly influenced post-Apostolic theologians such as Clement and Origen.

Clement became the leader of the Alexandrian school in AD 190. He saw the literal meaning of Scripture as being a "starting point" for interpretation. Although it was "suitable for the mass of Christians," God revealed himself to the spiritually advanced through the "deeper meaning" of Scripture. In every passage, a deeper or additional meaning existed beyond the primary or immediate sense. "The literal sense indicated what was said or done, while the allegorical showed what should be believed."[1]

Origen (A.D. 185-254) further developed this new approach to interpretation. Paul N. Benware writes, "He (Origen) seemed to have a consuming desire to find hidden and mystical meanings in the plain words of Scripture, and this led him away from the historical-grammatical method."[2] Origen may have been influenced in choosing the allegorical method by his anti-Semitic views. Origen expressed that the Jews suffered the destruction of Jerusalem, because they were a most wicked nation, especially because of sins "that were committed against our Jesus."[3] Origen applied this allegorical method to the word "Israel" in the Bible, although he did so selectively. According to Origen, every reference to Israel actually meant the church as long as that reference was favorable! Consequently, if any reference to the word Israel was critical of Israel, it applied to Jews. As Origen began to develop the allegorical interpretation, it was inevitable that he would also begin to question the premillennial view, adhered to by the early church, because

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[1] David S. Dockery, <u>Christian Scripture</u> (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995).

[2] Paul N. Benware, <u>Understanding End Times Prophecy</u>, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), p. 112.

[3] Origen, "Against Celsus," Anti-Nicene Fathers, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1944), 4:443 (Source: Dunlap, David, Replacement Theology, Gospel Folio Press, 2012).

that was the natural and only conclusion of an historical-grammatical approach to prophecy.

Like Origen, Augustine (354-430 AD) was greatly influenced by Greek philosophy and also by anti-Semitic views. Augustine became convinced that in order for the prophetic kingdom to be good, it had to be spiritual in nature, not earthly, because according to Greek philosophy, the physical and material were inherently evil. His strong anti-Semitic views prompted Augustine to reject millennialism, because in his mind, the concept of an earthly reign of Jesus Christ was Jewish. In the words of David Dunlap, "In allegory, the Old Testament could be transformed from a Jewish book into a 'Christian book.'"[4]

The church during the Middle Ages (5th to 15th centuries) was greatly influenced by Augustine's writings, including Augustine's "Tract Against the Jews." Ronald E. Diprose writes, "Because of the almost canonical status enjoyed by Augustine's writings during medieval church history, the dominant form of the anti-Jewish polemic during this period is commonly called "Augustinian."[5]

Augustine found that allegorical interpretation allowed him to circumvent the teachings of millennial passages that when understood literally could only attest to a one-thousand year reign of Jesus Christ on earth. Through allegory, Augustine taught that the catholic (universal) church is the Messianic Kingdom which began at Christ's first coming and will end at his second coming.

Although Origen is responsible for early development of the allegorical method, it was Augustine who used Origen's allegorical method of interpretation to formulate an eschatological view called Amillennialism, which undeniably was the end result of Augustine's adherence to Greek philosophy and his hostility and prejudice against the Jews.

The formation of Replacement Theology and Amillennialism was further aided by political events of the fourth century. In the year 312, Constantine who was a Roman military tribune at the time, was leading his troops to the battle of Milvian Bridge when he claimed to have seen a vision of a cross in the sun. Historians record that after he

[4] Dunlap, David, Replacement Theology, (Gospel Folio Press, 2012).
[5] Ronald E. Diprose, Israel and the Church – The Origin and Effects of Replacement Theology, (Authentic Media, 2004), p. 89.

prayed to the "Christian God" and put "Christian symbols" on his banners, he won a great victory over a much more seasoned general. After Constantine became the Roman Emperor in 313, he issued the Edict of Milan that legalized Christianity and brought Christianity under the protection and the authority of Rome. In eight years, Christianity became the official religion of Rome, and in 60 years, it became the official religion of the entire Roman Empire. Because Rome was the seat of political power, Rome also became the seat of religious power, and the Bishop of Rome became known as the Pope, making the Roman Catholic Church more powerful than the governments in Europe.

Constantine's Edict of Milan acted as a major paradigm shift in the church, resulting in 'Christianity persecuted to Christianity approved,' as well as an abandonment of literal interpretation of Scripture in favor of an allegorical interpretation of Scripture. The Roman Catholic Church, through an allegorical interpretation, believed the Jews were cursed and rejected of God and that "Christians," meaning people affiliated with the Roman Catholic Church, had replaced Israel as God's chosen people. This fed anti-Semitism and brought severe persecution of the Jews by the Roman Church. The protection of Rome eliminated the persecution of Christians, but the authority of Rome eliminated the autonomy of the Church.

The Effects of Replacement Theology on Israel

Down through the ages, the teaching of Replacement Theology has been used as justification for seeking to eradicate the Jewish people. Surely, the post-Apostolic church fathers did not have such a thing in mind, nor would Luther have ever imagined that centuries later, it would be debated whether or not his anti-Semitic writings influenced the horrors of the Nazi Holocaust. If Luther's writings did not prompt anti-Semitic events in Germany, they were certainly used opportunistically by the Nazi officials to justify their inhuman treatment of the Jews.

As Dr. Thomas Ice writes, "Replacement Theology has been the fuel that has energized Medieval anti-Semitism, Eastern European pogroms, the Holocaust and contemporary disdain for the modern state of Israel. Wherever Replacement Theology has flourished, the Jews have had to run for cover."[6]

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[6] Dr. Thomas Ice, "What is Replacement Theology?" PreTrib Research Center, http://www.pre-trib.org/articles/view/what-is-replacement-theology

Although a high percentage of evangelicals support the Jewish State of Israel, some denominations actually oppose Israel's right to the land. In 2016, the Methodist Church blocked five Israeli banks from its investment portfolio. The church said the move is meant to remove companies from its portfolio which "profit from abuse of human rights." In 2015, the United Church of Christ announced that it was divesting in companies which conduct business in Judea and Samaria, and in 2014, the Presbyterian Church, USA, made a similar move.[7]

A number of influential Christian leaders have given voice to the error of Replacement Theology. John Piper has concluded, "The promises made to Abraham, including the promises of the land, will be inherited as an everlasting gift only by true spiritual Israel, not disobedient, unbelieving Israel."[8]

It is extremely concerning that Christian teachers in the church have decided to turn their backs on Israel when God has not!

Conclusion

A great event occurred in this century that should remind us of the truth of the words of the Apostle Paul, "Has God cast away His people? Certainly not!"[9] "On May 14, 1948, in Tel Aviv, Jewish Agency Chairman David Ben-Gurion proclaims the State of Israel, establishing the first Jewish state in 2,000 years. In an afternoon ceremony at the Tel Aviv Art Museum, Ben-Gurion pronounced the words 'We hereby proclaim the establishment of the Jewish state in Palestine, to be called Israel,' prompting applause and tears from the crowd gathered at the museum. Ben-Gurion became Israel's first premier."[10]

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[7]Abra Forman, "In Rejection of Genesis 12:3, Methodist Church Divests from Israel," https://www.breakingisraelnews.com (January 13, 2016).

[8] www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/israel-palestine-and-the-middle-east, (March7, 2004).

[9] Romans 11:1, NKJV

[10] This Day in History, http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/state-of-israel-proclaimed

Lesson 7: The Hermeneutics of Covenant Theology

Introduction

Before looking at the faulty hermeneutics of Covenant Theology, we will begin by briefly tracing the history of allegorical interpretation. The allegorical method of interpretation has paved the way to doctrinal error among Covenant Theologians.

Allegorical Interpretation and the Pre-Reformation Writers

Within the first two centuries of church history several theories of Bible interpretation were proposed. Some of the Church Fathers borrowed the allegorical method of interpretation from pagan Greek philosophers. Two of these Bible scholars were Clement and Origen. They helped establish the first Christian institution of higher learning in the mid-2nd century in Alexandria, Egypt. It was known as the School of Alexandria and became a leading center of the allegorical method of biblical interpretation.

Opposing the School of Alexandria was the School of Antioch, which emphasized the literal interpretation of the Bible. The School of Antioch produced several significant theologians, including John Chrysostom. This school taught the principle of single meaning in Scripture. They believed that meaning is discovered by using the literal, historical-grammatical method of interpretation. The School of Antioch ran into trouble when one of its students was pronounced a heretic. The school never recovered and by default the Alexandrian school rose in prominence.

Augustine was the most influential theologian of the Middle Ages. In his early years he believed in a literal millennial kingdom. Later he used the allegorical method of interpretation to explain away the literal return of Christ. As a result of his influence, allegorical interpretation became the dominant method of interpretation during the Middle Ages.

During the Middle Ages, the Roman Catholic Church continued to advocate the allegorical method of interpretation. Interestingly, the Middle Ages are often referred to as the Dark Ages. It could be argued that when the light of God's Word is obscured by faulty methods of interpretation, the result is darkness. That darkness continued to dominate much of church history until the Reformation.

Allegorical Interpretation and the First-Generation Reformers

The Middle Ages (or Dark Ages) were followed by a period of time known as the Renaissance (1450-1600). At that time, there was a revival of interest in the classical writings. This gave rise to the study of the classical languages, including Hebrew and Greek. Martin Luther and John Calvin, who were first-generation reformers, were born into this setting.

Martin Luther, who has been called the Father of the Reformation, was a Roman Catholic monk. God used various means to bring Luther to part ways with the Roman Catholic Church. One reason for Luther's break from the Catholic Church was his commitment to the literal, historical-grammatical method of interpretation. Luther opposed the Roman Catholic Church's use of allegorical interpretation to support their false teachings.

John Calvin's opinions about the proper methods for interpreting God's Word were similar to Luther's. He also rejected the allegorical interpretations of the Catholic Church. Calvin believed that Scripture interprets Scripture. He placed a strong emphasis on the literal, historical-grammatical method of interpretation. He saw the need to examine the context of each passage of Scripture to arrive at a proper interpretation.

While the first-generation reformers made great advancements in the area of Bible interpretation, they were not always consistent in applying their methods. Though they did part ways with the Roman Catholic Church, unfortunately they carried some Roman Catholic baggage with them as they went their own way.

Calvin and Luther desired to let the Scriptures speak for themselves. Unfortunately, their desire was influenced by the Roman Catholic tradition in which they had been trained. One of Augustine's key hermeneutical principles was that the Old Testament is a "Christian" document. Luther, who was a former Augustinian monk, stated that a sound hermeneutic recognized, "the Christological principle" in all of Scripture. Like Augustine, Luther felt that literal interpretation of Scripture was not necessarily the only correct principle of hermeneutics. He believed that the goal of interpretation was to find Christ in all of Scripture. If the Old Testament were a "Christian" document, like Augustine proposed, then Christ should be seen throughout all of its pages. In order to accomplish this, some allowance had to be made for allegorical interpretation. Calvin

also stressed "the Christological principle" in all of Scripture. The result was that Calvin and Luther opened the door for a "double" hermeneutic. Literal interpretation was allowed to be supplemented with allegorical interpretation. This paved the way for the second-generation reformers, as well as Covenant Theologians following in their steps, to bypass the literal, (plain or normal) understanding of Scripture. This double hermeneutic which allowed for the allegorical method of interpretation was "left over baggage" that the first-generation reformers brought with them from their Roman Catholic heritage.

Covenant Theology and the Second-Generation Reformers

It was actually the second-generation reformers who invented Covenant Theology. Dr. Charles Ryrie explains:

> Covenant theology does not appear in the writings of Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, or Melanchthon, even though they discussed at length the related doctrines of sin, depravity, redemption, and so on. They had every opportunity to incorporate the covenant idea, but they did not. There were no references to covenant theology in any of the great confessions of faith until the Westminster Confession in 1647, and even then, covenant theology was not as fully developed as it was later by Reformed theologians.[11]

Dr. Renald Showers adds:

> Moreover, according to Louis Berkhof, a prominent Covenant Theologian, Kaspar Olevianus who lived from A.D. 1536–1587, was the first person to demonstrate a theological system based upon the theological covenants. While this new theological system began within the Reformed Churches of Switzerland and Germany, it was the publications of Johannes Cocceius, that made Covenant Theology known and accepted.[12]

If you listen to defenders of Covenant Theology, you would almost get the impression that it was developed in the Early Church. The fact is that it was not until the second-generation reformers came on the scene, that Covenant Theology was invented.

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[11] Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism* (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 185.
[12] Showers, R. E. (1990). *There Really Is A Difference! A Comparison of Covenant and Dispensational Theology*. Bellmawr, NJ: The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry.

Covenant Theology and Their Theological Covenants

The word "covenant" is a biblical word. A covenant is an agreement that binds two parties together. God made covenants with Noah, Abraham, David and the nation of Israel. However, Covenant Theology uses the word "covenant" in a theological sense. They are not referring to actual biblical covenants. Covenant Theology depicts all of history as being covered by two or three "theological covenants." The Covenant of Works, the Covenant of Grace, and (sometimes) the Covenant of Redemption are used to explain all relationships between God and man from the beginning of creation to the end of time.

These "theological covenants" were developed as a result of the reformer's double hermeneutic. Covenant Theologians proposed that there was a unifying principle which would tie all of God's Word together. They reasoned that if the person of Christ could be seen on every page of Scripture, then certainly the work of Christ must also be seen throughout the pages of God's Word. Therefore, they proposed that soteriology (the work of Christ to save the lost) must be that unifying principle that ties all of Scripture together. The unifying principle of soteriology is explained in their "theological covenants."

These "theological covenants" have many problems. First and foremost, is that they lack Biblical support. Covenant Theology begins by assuming two or three covenants that are never mentioned in Scripture. Oswald T. Allis, a covenant theologian, speaks of the *covenant of grace* as being "cryptic" in Genesis 3:15. The word "cryptic" means hidden, secret or obscure. Yet the Biblical covenants that God made with Abraham, Israel, and David are clearly spelled out in Scripture. The whole foundation of Covenant Theology is based on two or three covenants that cannot be found in God's Word.

Another problem with these "theological covenants" is that they were developed by using a double hermeneutic. In order to develop their system, Covenant Theologians do not consistently use the literal, historical-grammatical method of interpretation. Covenant theologians use the literal method of interpretation for parts of Scripture and the allegorical method for other parts of Scripture.

Both Calvin and Luther stressed "the Christological principle" in all of Scripture. They bought into Augustine's proposal that the Old Testament is a "Christian" document. As a result, Covenant Theologians have an unhealthy obsession with trying to harmonize everything in Scripture. For example, they do not see a distinction between the Church and Israel. They claim that there is only one people of God and that the Church began in the Old Testament. Covenant Theology attempts to minimize Biblical distinctions found in Scripture. Covenant Theologians also deny distinctions between law & grace. Covenant Theology attempts to unify Scripture by saying that Biblical distinctions are merely different phases of the same Covenant of Grace. For example, one of the leading proponents of Covenant Theology, Louis Berkhof, insisted that the Mosaic Covenant was essentially the same as the Abrahamic Covenant. However, even a cursory reading of these two Biblical covenants reveals that the Abrahamic Covenant was unconditional whereas the Mosaic Covenant was conditional. Even the apostle Paul asserted the distinctiveness of these two covenants in Galatians 3:18.

Covenant Theology's obsession with harmonizing Scripture is evident in their view of God's purpose in history. They see soteriology as the unifying principle that ties all of Scripture together. The work of Christ to save the lost is that unifying principle which is the basis for their "theological covenants." These "theological covenants" become the lens through which they interpret the Word of God. Covenant Theology limits the purposes of God in history. As important as the salvation of mankind is, God's purposes in history are not that narrow. He has plans for fallen angels as well as those angels who remained faithful to Him. He also has plans for the lost as well as the saved. He has plans for Israel and for all the nations. God's purposes are much broader than simply the salvation of lost men. In fact, James Orr, who was a covenant theologian, once said that Covenant Theology puts God into a soteriological straightjacket. Orr saw the fallacy of his own system in that it imposes limitations on the purposes of God. When God's Word is viewed through the lens of these "theological covenants" which cannot be found in Scripture, then the interpreter ends up with a distorted view of the Bible.

Another problem is that the "covenant of works" is contrary to salvation by grace. Louis Berkhof explains this so-called "covenant of works":

> The covenant is an agreement between God and Adam that he would obey the
> Lord in regard to not eating of the tree of good and evil. This obedience
> incumbent upon Adam shows that it is a covenant, though sovereignly initiated by
> God alone. In a sense, this was a salvation by works. Covenant theologians argue
> as to whether this covenant has been revoked and annulled or not.[13]

In God's Word, human works are never presented as a condition for salvation. Yet
according to Covenant Theology, Adam and his descendants would have eternal life if
they obeyed God perfectly. Before the fall, Adam did not have a sin nature. He was
already rightly related to God. Adam came from the hands of the Creator perfect. The
command of God to obey Him was not designed to produce eternal life in him or to relate
him rightly to God. He already enjoyed a state of sinlessness and he was in a proper
relationship with his Creator.

To say that Adam could be saved by works is a problem for Covenant Theology. But to
make matters worse, Berkhof acknowledges that Covenant theologians argue as to
whether or not this "covenant of works" is still valid for today. In other words, he is
admitting that some Covenant Theologians claim that this so-called "covenant of works"
is still in effect today. If that were true, then not only could Adam have been saved by
works prior to the fall, but theoretically people who are living today, after the fall of
Adam and Eve, could also be saved by works. Viewing the Bible through the lens of the
"covenant of works" results in doctrines contrary to Scripture. Covenant Theology
distorts God's Word so that the scriptural doctrine of salvation by grace alone is
compromised.

Covenant Theology also fails to recognize progressive revelation in Scripture. The
Covenant Theologian, James Orr, admitted that Covenant Theology "failed to seize the
true idea of development, and by an artificial system of typology, and allegorizing
interpretation; sought to read back practically the whole of the New Testament into the
Old."[14]

Mal Couch explains Covenant Theology's problem of failing to see progressive
revelation in God's Word:

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[13] Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eedrmans, n.d.) p. 217.
[14] James Orr, *The Progress of Dogma* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, n.d.), 303.

A further error made by covenant advocates is that of reading New Testament truths back into the Old Testament. That is, they interpret the Old Testament by the New Testament. Instead, the New Testament should be seen as a fulfillment of, or progressing from, the Old Testament.[15]

Conclusion

Calvin and Luther should be commended for their desire to distance themselves from the faulty doctrines and hermeneutics of the Roman Catholic Church. Unfortunately, the Catholic baggage that they brought with them paved the way to Covenant Theology's faulty system of hermeneutics. By using the allegorical method of interpretation and by reading God's Word through the lens of "theological covenants", which do not exist in Scripture, Covenant Theology became entangled in a snare of doctrinal errors.

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[15] Mal Couch, *An Introduction to Classical Evangelical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2000), p. 188.