

# ESCHATOLOGY: DOCTRINE OF LAST THINGS

## PART 39

### REPLACEMENT THEOLOGY, PART 3

The next proof text used to justify Replacement Theology is Romans 2:28-29.

Romans 2:28–29 <sup>28</sup>For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. <sup>29</sup>But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God.

Assigning Replacement Theology to this Scripture is a classic example of completely unwarranted imposition of theology onto the text.

Barnhouse is an example. “For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, and true circumcision is not merely cut flesh. The true Israel is the one who is a Jew inwardly: one who like Moses, was saved because Aaron shed the blood of a lamb to atone for his sin, and who yielded his life to God. Today the true Jew—I believe that I, though born a Gentile, have the right to call myself such—is one who has seen his own sin, who has turned to Israel’s Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, and who, moved by such love, has yielded his heart to God that the foreskin of the heart might be circumcised, and that he might live for righteousness and true holiness.” [Donald Grey Barnhouse, *Romans: Chapters 1:1-5:11*, p. 1:140]. Whatever truth Barnhouse has managed to stumble across here is not found in this verse. Putting Gentiles and the Christian Church in this verse is unsupported by the text.

Dr. McClain has a much better understanding of this Scripture. “Paul shows that there is such a thing as being a Jew merely in outward form. But God demands an inward reality and would not recognize any man as a Jew unless he has that. Some people think this statement teaches that every Christian is a Jew, but what it really teaches is that every Jew is not a Jew. No man can be a Jew unless he is born outwardly as a son of Abraham, and also inwardly in spirit; therefore, a man born only outwardly of Abraham is not a true Jew. Notice these contrasting word pairs: outwardly—inwardly; flesh—heart; spirit—the letter; man—God. Those two verses are similar to the words of the Lord Jesus Christ to Nicodemus. He was a Jew outwardly. He had everything outwardly. The Lord Jesus Christ said to him, ‘Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God’ (Jn. 3:3). That matter of heart circumcision was not anything new; the Old Testament is full of it. No Jew could deny that Paul was on safe ground when he talked about circumcision of heart (see Jer 4:4). By the way, these two verses solve a difficult question raised later (see 11:26), where Paul says that all Israel shall be saved. People ask, ‘Is it possible that every Jew from the beginning of time is going to be saved?’ Yes, every one of them, but ‘he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, but he is

a Jew who is one inwardly.' The Jew, in order to be a real Jew had to be born of God. The new birth is not a distinctively Christian doctrine. It belonged to the Jew as an Old Testament revelation. Nicodemus should have known it. Christ said, 'Art thou a teacher of Israel, and understandest not these things?' (Jn 3:10, ASV). God demanded the inward reality, not merely the outward shell of profession that the Jew had." [Alva J. McClain, *Romans: The Gospel of God's Grace*, p. 86].

Dr. McClain has this exactly right. Paul was dealing with the Jewish people in this Scripture; he was not dealing with Gentile believers. Every Jew who has ever lived in history will be saved because every true Jew has experienced the new birth. Millions upon millions of Jews throughout history have been eternally lost because they were not and, in the future, will not be true Jews, that is, those who are both outwardly, physically Jews as well as inwardly, spiritual Jews. Jews who are Jews only by means of physical birth are lost. Replacement theologians have absolutely no comprehension of what this Scripture is actually revealing. To put Christian, Gentile believers into this Scripture as Barnhouse does is simply biblical ignorance fortified by theological arrogance. The sad fact is that Barnhouse was one of the mid-twentieth centuries' most well-known, well-respected, widely heard Bible teachers and he led millions of Christians away from the truth of the Scriptures and away from properly understanding Israel and God's Kingdom program. This is not insignificant error; it is very serious because it goes to the very heart of understanding the Bible and God's program for history. Barnhouse apparently held to a doctrinal mix of dispensationalist, Calvinist, and fundamentalist theologies, but if this Scripture is any indication, his Calvinism for the most part governed his interpretation of the Bible. He really didn't have a good overall grasp of what the Bible was trying to say and things such as we just read show that. The sad part is, he influenced millions of American Christians during the middle part of the twentieth century.

Another Romans verse, 9:6, is one more verse used by Replacement theologians. Once again, Israel and not the church is the context.

Romans 9:6 <sup>6</sup>But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel;

Replacement theologians view this as a distinction between ethnic Jews and all those who believe including Gentiles, but this Scripture is not about believing Gentiles. It is only about the Jewish people. It is easy to see how putting the church into Scriptures where it is not in the context compromises the truth of that Scripture and serves to conceal the very truth God is revealing. That is one of the most significant dangers of Replacement Theology. Concealed truth is lost truth and people who have lost the truth are not enjoying the full counsel of God and they are not understanding all that God revealed to them.

“While most interpreters today acknowledge that Paul is not going beyond natural Israel in the distinction made in Romans 9:6, it is important to recognize that the entire context of this passage deals with the problem of Israel and not Gentiles.... Here in 9:6-13 the only point he makes is that claims cannot be made on the basis of physical descent, since descendants of the patriarchs with exactly the same claims were allotted different destinies.... The point of this entire passage is that while the promises of God to Israel may appear to have failed in that Israel is predominantly unbelieving, there is a remnant within Israel.” [Robert L. Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism: The Interface Between Dispensational & Non-Dispensational Theology*, pp. 196-197].

It is noteworthy that Saucy tries to downplay the obvious truth of this passage as nondispensationalists see it by saying, “most interpreters today acknowledge Paul is not going beyond natural Israel” but that is not correct. Replacement theologians consistently use this verse to replace Israel with the church. Because Saucy is trying to move closer to Replacement theologians, he downplays the obvious abuse of the Scripture he knows they make in this verse. Michael Horton, who is as contemporary a Replacement theologian as there is, certainly uses this Scripture as a Replacement proof text. “The notion of Israel being saved through a remnant is hardly a New Testament innovation. God’s prerogative in election has always been upheld in redemptive history, separating not only Cain from Seth, but Ishmael from Isaac and Esau from Jacob. Therefore, it is important not to confuse national election of Israel (conditional) with the personal election of Israelites (unconditional). This, it seems to me, is the backbone of Paul’s arguments in Romans 9-11. Thus, the designation ‘people of God’ refers to a visible community identified by baptism, the proclamation of the gospel, and the Supper. It has formal offices for the administration of God’s covenantal blessings. And yet, ‘not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel’ (Ro 9:6), and not all who belong outwardly to the people of God actually belong to God.” [Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims On the Way*, p. 722]. Horton holds to an incorrect understanding of election here and that not only negatively impacts his interpretation, it incorrectly impacts it. To him, God’s entire purpose in history is redemptive, that is, the salvation of some people is the total of His program for history. For dispensationalists, the purpose of God in history is much larger than that and the end purpose is the glory of God. He also has it exactly backwards concerning God’s program with Israel and with individual Jewish people. He says God’s plan with Israel is conditional when it is unconditional. Horton apparently uses the Mosaic Covenant as God’s primary covenant in His dealings with Israel, but that is incorrect. The Abrahamic Covenant, which guarantees national Israel’s existence, is the primary covenant. His dealings with individual Jews are conditional in that each one must come to faith in order to be born again and enter the Kingdom of Heaven. For Horton, God chose in eternity past which Jews He would save and which ones He would not save which, in his mind, makes the situation involving individual Jews unconditional. It’s unconditional according to his theology because God chooses them; they do not exercise faith in choosing God.

Philippians 3:3 is used as a Replacement Theology proof text.

Philippians 3:3 <sup>3</sup>for we are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh,

This verse is not about the church replacing national Israel; that isn't an issue here. It is contrasting the misplaced trust Jews put in the mutilation of their flesh as opposed to individual believers, Jews and Gentiles, who undergo the new birth which is an internal spiritual renewal, a circumcision of the heart. Paul has just warned the Philippians against the legalistic externals of Judaism. "The confidence of the Jews lies in their legalistic trust in their ethnic identity. This is symbolized by circumcision. But since this trust is misplaced, circumcision is little more than cosmetic surgical mutilation of the flesh.... In contrast, the hope of true believers is their spiritual relationship with the person of Christ. Circumcision is a matter of the heart, not the flesh...." [Gregory P. Sapaugh, "Philippians" in *The Grace New Testament Commentary*, p. 2:903].

It is very telling to note that some replacement theologians are honest enough to admit that a literal method of interpretation does, in fact, confirm the premillennial dispensational understanding of God's plan for Israel as presented in the Bible. The problem for them is they willingly reject literal hermeneutics because their theology would have to change if they simply accepted what God wrote to be true.

O. T. Allis wrote, "...the Old Testament prophecies if literally interpreted cannot be regarded as having been yet fulfilled or as being capable of fulfillment in this present age." [O. T. Allis, *Prophecy and the Church*, p. 238]. Notice the qualifying "if" Allis uses in conjunction with a literal interpretation. He does not, in fact, believe a literal method of interpretation is proper to use for as yet unfulfilled prophecy because the church has replaced Israel, there is no pretribulation Rapture of the church, and Christ simply returns at the end of history to conduct one general judgment for all people, saved and unsaved, and eternity begins. He believes fulfilled prophecy such as the first advent and the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A. D. must be literally interpreted but unfulfilled future prophecies must not be literally interpreted. Allis believes Old Testament prophecy has been fulfilled because he has abandoned literal hermeneutics and replaced that method of interpretation with spiritual and theological hermeneutics, and he believes the church has replaced Israel in God's Kingdom program. Since Allis must uphold his theology, he imposes it into and onto the text rather than simply allowing God to speak for Himself in a plain, clear, communicable manner. Allis doesn't declare himself to be amillennial or postmillennial but he is definitely anti-Chiliasm and his main focus in this particular book was defeating premillennial dispensational theology.

It is interesting to note how Allis, who is a good representative of Replacement thought, explains his understanding of how and why the church has replaced Israel. Notice the denigration of literal hermeneutics and, in his book, the use of typology and spiritual

hermeneutics instead. He uses the New Testament to reinterpret the Old Testament and he believes the Kingdom is now in existence. He completely fails to understand God's Kingdom program and the covenants as they pertain to Israel and to the establishment of the Kingdom. He egregiously misrepresents what dispensational theology teaches concerning these issues and at the same time his theological presuppositions prevent him from understanding what the Bible is actually teaching concerning the Kingdom and Israel even though he admits it literally says what dispensationalists claim it says.

"This Dispensational system of interpreting Scripture is very popular today. The reasons are not far to seek. Literal interpretation seems to make Bible study easy. It also seems reverent. It argues on this wise: 'God must have said just what He means, and must mean just what He has said; and what He has said is to be taken just as He said it, *i.e., literally.*' But the New Testament makes it plain that literal interpretation was a stumbling block to the Jews. It concealed from them the most precious truths of Scripture. The temple and its worship were typical of the high priestly work of Christ (Jn. ii. 19). But the Jews failed to understand His application of it to Himself, and used His words to encompass His destruction (Matt. xxvi. 61). Moses, Aaron, and David were types of Christ as Prophet, Priest, and King. He came to fulfil the law and the prophets. But the fulfilment which He offered the Jews was so different from their literal and carnal desires and expectations that they sent their King to Calvary. The Kingdom which He preached and which He declared to be 'at hand,' to be already 'come,' corresponds to that spiritual Church which He said that He would build; and the gospel of the kingdom as proclaimed by His followers led to the founding of Christian churches throughout the length and breadth of the Roman world. The church is not a mystery in the sense that it is an unexpected and temporary interruption of the prophetic program for Israel. It does not interrupt: it unfolds and fulfils that program. The Great Commission is not reserved for a Jewish remnant of the end-time. It has been the marching orders of the Church for nigh two thousand years. It authorizes and requires the offering of salvation to all men. The wall of separation between Jew and Gentile has been broken down. The limitations and peculiarities of Judaism have been done away. They have been done away not for the time being only, but for ever. They are never to be restored. There is a great and glorious future for the Jews. But that future is to be found in and through the Christian Church. For there is but one true olive tree. All the true seed of Abraham (both Jew and Gentile) are or will be in it and partake of its fatness. Unbelieving Israelites were cast off; believing Gentiles were grafted in; they will remain in it unless they fall away through unbelief; and finally 'all Israel' will be saved by being grafted back into the one and only true olive tree. There is no distinctly Jewish age for the Jew to look forward to. Salvation is of the Jews. But the blessing of Abraham is now fully come; and the Gentiles are 'blessed with faithful Abraham.' Old things are become new; and the old passed away for ever. Whether the Jews are to return to the earthly Canaan is a matter of relatively little importance. That they may become citizens of the holy city, the New Jerusalem, is the only thing that really matters.... One thing we believe to be clearly revealed. The task of saving sinners and edifying saints is to be accomplished through the proclamation of the gospel of the grace of God, which concerns the kingdom of

God. This glorious task has been committed to the Church. It must be accomplished by the Church. It is not to pass *at any moment* to a *Jewish remnant* which will preach *another* gospel which is not another gospel. The hope of the world is not in the restoration of Judaism." [Oswald T. Allis, *Prophecy & the Church*, pp. 258-261].

Many Replacement theologians such as Allis and Horton attempt to downplay their Replacement Theology by claiming the church does not replace Israel, the church completes Israel. The church is the culmination and fulfillment of what Israel was created to be; the church therefore is the new Israel because the church completes Israel.

Floyd E. Hamilton wrote, "Now we must frankly admit that a literal interpretation of the Old Testament prophecies gives us just such a picture of an earthly reign of the Messiah as the premillennialist pictures." [Floyd E. Hamilton, *The Basis of the Millennial Faith*, p. 38]. Hamilton denies that there will be a literal Millennial Kingdom on earth with Christ ruling from the Davidic throne in Jerusalem and during which the covenant promises to Israel will be fulfilled. Yet, he admits a literal interpretation of the Bible proves those things will happen. He rejects literal hermeneutics in regards to Israel and the Kingdom.

Loraine Boettner wrote, "It is generally agreed that if the prophecies are taken literally, they do foretell a restoration of the nation of Israel in the land of Palestine with the Jews having a prominent place in that kingdom and ruling over the other nations." [Loraine Boettner, "Postmillennialism" in *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views*, ed. Robert G. Clouse, p. 95.]. Boettner doesn't interpret the Bible according to literal hermeneutics and he does not believe Israel is back in the land as a result of fulfilled prophecy.

A Reformed theologian named Philip A. F. Church also denigrates a literal method of interpretation and he, like Allis, is very condescending in his attitude towards those who do use literal hermeneutics. "The shortcomings of this approach [literal hermeneutics/interpretation] will be readily apparent to anyone with the most basic acquaintance with the study of pragmatics [the branch of linguistics dealing with languages in use and the contexts in which it is used] and semiotics [the study of signs and symbols and their use or interpretation]. The exclusion of the presuppositions and the context of the reader from the reading process and the assumption that the author's intention is readily apparent are utterly simplistic..." but he goes on to admit that a literal method of interpretation leads to normative dispensational theology that recognizes Israel/church distinctions. [Philip A. F. Church, "Dispensational Christian Zionism: A Strange but Acceptable Aberration or a Deviant Heresy?" in *Westminster Theological Journal* 71, no. 2 (Fall 2009), page 383]. He believes the interpreter must impose himself and his current context onto the biblical text prior to determining its meaning. The reader becomes the controlling interpretive authority. Church claims that those who use literal hermeneutics are naïve and unsophisticated when it comes to doing the work of interpretation. Dispensationalists do not understand how languages work and they do not understand the use of signs and symbols. Apparently, he thinks

literal hermeneutics fails to even understand the context in which the Scriptures were written. According to the title of his article, he considers Zionism to be dangerous and the article indicates that he is clearly pro-Muslim and anti-Israel.

Herman Bavinck, writing in the nineteenth or early twentieth century, admitted that Romans 11 seems to teach a future for Israel but, according to him, it really doesn't mean what it says. "The chiliast expectation that a converted nation of Israel, restored to the land of Palestine, under Christ will rule over the nations is without biblical foundation. Whatever the political future of Israel as a nation, the real *ekklesia*, the people of God, transcends ethnic boundaries. The kingdom of God in the teaching of Jesus is not a political reality but a religious-ethical dominion born of water and the Spirit. The salvation rejected by Israel is shared by the Gentiles, and the community of Christ-believers has in all respects replaced national Israel. New Testament passages, such as Romans 11, which initially seem to teach to the contrary, in fact confirm the teaching that God's promises are fulfilled in the spiritual offspring of Abraham, even though they may be only a remnant. Furthermore, the New Testament nowhere suggests that the church of Christ will ever achieve earthly power and dominion such as that of Old Testament Israel.... Revelation 20, in analogy with the rest of Scripture, confirms this conclusion rather than lending support to chiliast dreams of a world rule. Also, Revelation 20 does not teach the chiliast doctrine of a twofold resurrection; the 'first' resurrection simply refers to those faithful who die and immediately live and reign with Christ in heaven." [Herman Bavinck, *The Last Things: Hope for This World and the Next*, p. 99]. Didn't Jesus teach that the people in the Jewish nation during the Kingdom will be a people born of water and spirit? It is easy to see this understanding of the Scriptures concerning Israel and the church is completely based on Reformed Theology and not on the biblical text.

All of these men, Allis, Hamilton, Boettner, Church, and Bavinck, deny that Israel has any place in God's plan and purpose for the future, yet all of them admit the Bible teaches exactly that when literally interpreted. They also deny that literal hermeneutics are the proper vehicle through which the Bible is to be understood and they denigrate those who understand it that way. This is an egregious and rebellious imposition of theological presuppositions into and upon the biblical text that are completely unwarranted. If the Bible literally presents any doctrine contrary to our theology and our theology is thereby proven to be in error, then it is our theology that must change! Anything less is rebellion. We either admit the Bible is in fact the inspired, inerrant Word of God or we don't; either way we interpret the Bible according to that presupposition. Our presupposition must be that the Bible is, in fact, the inspired, inerrant Word of God.

We have to be really discerning when reading anything because, like Bavinck, they can make these faulty doctrines sound so biblical when they are not at all in accordance with literal hermeneutics. It is noteworthy that they frequently don't prove their assertions; they simply state them as fact. That makes it vitally important that each

one of us knows the Bible and understands dispensational distinctions so we can spot these things when they pop up in whatever form of media with which we are engaged.

Dennis Waltemeyer  
Fredericksburg Bible Church