

Salvation - Sin & Repentance

Is There a Different Way of Salvation for Jews?

By Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Although this view has recently been touted by leading figures who are popular among conservative Evangelicals, it is completely contrary to Scripture.

Two Wrong Kinds of Covenant Theology

Today, two false brands of covenant theology are leading some conservative Evangelicals to teach false ways of salvation that the Holy Spirit condemns in Galatians chapter one. The false doctrine of dual-covenant theology teaches that Jews are saved by their observance of the Old Testament law, while Gentiles are saved by faith in Jesus Christ. Another aberrant teaching called One Law Theology, embraced by Messianic Jews and tolerated by growing numbers of Evangelicals, teaches that Gentiles in effect must become Jews in order to be saved.

Dual-Covenant Theology

Televangelist John Hagee's dual-covenant statements have been reported in a Houston newspaper. Hagee said, "I believe that every Jewish person who lives in the light of the Torah, which is the word of God, has a relationship with God and will come to redemption," and "I'm not trying to convert the Jewish people to the Christian faith." The news article went on to report: "In fact, trying to convert Jews is a 'waste of time,' [Hagee] said. 'The Jewish person who has his roots in Judaism is not going to convert to Christianity. There is no form of Christian evangelism that has failed so miserably as evangelizing the Jewish people. They [already] have a faith structure.' Everyone else, whether Buddhist or Baha'i, needs to believe in Jesus, he says. But not Jews. Jews already have a covenant with God that has never been replaced by

Christianity, he says". ("San Antonio Fundamentalist Battles Anti-Semitism," *Houston Chronicle*, April 30, 1988, section 6, page 1).

Hagee is not alone in this. Newspaper columnist Ann Coulter, a darling of many conservative Evangelicals, has proclaimed the same sort of belief, with many Evangelicals who should know better rallying to her defense. In an October 2007 television interview, Coulter stated that Christians are "perfected" Jews who have the "inside track" on salvation through Christ, and that Jews "have to obey the law" in order to be saved. Such theological confusion is, we suppose, not surprising, since Coulter describes herself as "half Catholic, half Protestant," although when she is at her home in New York City she reportedly often attends Redeemer Presbyterian Church (PCA).

Even some prominent Roman Catholic theologians are promoting the dual-covenant view. Cardinal Christoph Schönborn, archbishop of Vienna, has become a hero to some Evangelical creationists because he spoke out against Pope John Paul II's statements in support of Darwinian evolution. Schönborn is also a vocal exponent of the view that the "old covenant" is the way of salvation for Jews, and the "new covenant" is for Gentiles. But like all Roman Catholics, Schönborn improperly defines both covenants, thus denying the Biblical way of salvation for both Jew and Gentile.

One Law Theology

The movement called Messianic Judaism has gained increasing popularity among Evangelicals over the past forty years. Most Messianic Jews embrace what is called "One Law Theology." The main teaching of One Law Theology is that both Jews and Gentiles are required to observe the entirety of the Old Testament law. Messianic Jews define sin as any violation of any part of the first five books of the Old Testament. They insist – wrongly – that this is what the New Testament teaches. They even go so far as to teach that the Apostle Paul remained a law-keeping Pharisee to the end of his life!

One-Law Theology has many destructive consequences. Many Messianic Jews teach, for example, that a Gentile believer in Christ must be circumcised in order to be a member of the covenant. They also observe the Old Testament Jewish feast days. They hold their worship services on Friday evenings or Saturday mornings rather than on Sunday, the New Testament Lord's Day. And in their teachings they avoid the use of the term, "the cross" because they consider it to be a Gentile term, and they emphasize the use of Hebrew terminology in their teachings.

Many Evangelicals have taken a tolerant attitude toward these doctrinal deviancies, and some have adopted the position that any criticism of Messianic Judaism is anti-Semitic. This is not a legitimate charge. There is nothing anti-Semitic about honest, Biblical criticism of any theology that seeks to bring elements of the Jewish law back into the Christian faith, and this certainly applies to an honest and Biblical evaluation of the theology of Messianic Judaism. Anything that brings the Old Testament Jewish system back into the Christian faith is a denial of the Gospel.

Furthermore, we need to keep in mind two other things that are very important in any Biblical discussion of Israel.

The first is God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 12, which says in part, "I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you..." There are two different Hebrew words for "curse" in that passage. Literally, God is saying this: "I will bring down a curse upon anyone who calls you despicable." Dear friends, we as Christians many centuries later must believe this promise to Abraham. Furthermore, we must keep in mind that this promise of God to Abraham has two aspects. There is both a physical aspect and a spiritual aspect to God's promise.

When God made His covenant with Abraham in Genesis chapter fifteen, God promised Abraham a physical seed, the nation of Israel. They will go into captivity in Egypt, God

said, but afterward I will bring them into this Promised Land with great possessions. But God also promised Abraham, as we understand from the New Testament, a spiritual seed, and this spiritual seed is the elect of God in Christ, those who are saved, both Jew and Gentile.

In Romans chapter nine, the Apostle Paul says this: "For they are not all Israel who are of Israel, nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, 'In Isaac your seed shall be called.' That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed" (Romans 9:6-8).

Later in that same chapter, Paul says that God did this so "that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory, even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles" (Romans 9:23-24).

And Paul says this to the Galatian believers: "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And" – notice – "if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Galatians 3:26-29).

And so we take note of God's promise to Abraham: "I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you." That promise applies to both the physical seed of Abraham, the ethnic nation of Israel, and to the spiritual seed of Abraham, the eternal people of God in Christ, both Jew and Gentile, in all ages. This is an unending promise to the seed of Abraham, and it does not matter whether we are talking about Abraham's spiritual seed, the elect of God, or Abraham's physical seed, the Jews as nation. We have no right to curse either one.

But Messianic Judaism is not authentic Christianity. It is another gospel. In Galatians chapter one Paul tells us that God Himself has placed the spokesmen for such a false teaching under His curse:

I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed. (Galatians 1:6-9)

We did not bring down that curse upon them. God has done it. We must hear, and we must heed, such a pronouncement from God with fear.

Secondly, we must understand that God is not finished with Israel. A careful look at Romans chapters nine through eleven tells us that there will, in fact, be a future turning of all Israel as a people, as a nation, to the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation. Paul tells us in Romans 11:25 that this will occur "after the fullness of the Gentiles has come in." In the eternal plan of God, both the fullness of the Gentiles and the fullness of the Jews will come to faith in Christ. God the Father has given a people to His Son, and He will not lose any of them, Jew or Gentile.

Christians today, both Jew and Gentile alike, should be looking forward to that future in-gathering of Israel. But the legalistic way of Messianic Judaism and its One Law Theology is not the way in which that future in-gathering is going to occur. That future in-gathering will be in the same manner that Peter talked about in Acts chapter fifteen, at the council at Jerusalem which focused on this very issue. Peter said that God, who knows the heart, will give the Holy Spirit to both Jew and Gentile alike, purifying their hearts by grace through faith in Christ, apart from the bondage of the law:

Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us, and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they. (Acts 15:7-11)

Authentic Christianity in Contrast

Both the Old and New Testaments clearly teach that everyone who was ever saved, is presently saved, or ever will be saved, comes to the Father in only one Way — through the person and work of Jesus Christ.

The lynchpin of this doctrine is the first five chapters of the book of Romans. The Apostle Paul, directly quoting or alluding to the Old Testament fifty-four times, establishes these four transcendent truths: 1.) both Jews and Gentiles stand equally unrighteous before God; 2.) no one, Jew or Gentile, will be declared righteous by keeping the law; 3.) Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of all the types, symbols, and prophecies of the Redeemer who was to come, in whom the Old Testament saints believed by faith; and 4.) salvation for both Jew and Gentile always has been, is now, and ever will be, by grace alone, through faith alone, in Jesus Christ alone.

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