



## Jesus the Shepherd Leader: New Covenant hermeneutics and issues for Christian leadership

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Fundamentalism holds to the letter of scripture and can be somewhat pharisaic. Legalistic prescriptions are applied to Paul's passages on leadership in Timothy.<sup>1</sup> Neo orthodoxy, on the other hand, treats scripture as non-propositional, not normative for us today. It treats theology as progressive and "God's word" as prone to be subjective meanings.<sup>2</sup>

Dispensationalism sees the prophetic texts concerning Christ's leadership as yet to be fulfilled when He returns, in the period it calls the millennium.<sup>3</sup> Reformed theology sees the Old Testament pointing to and fulfilled in the current reign of Christ through the Church, in which He shows forth His pastoral leadership.<sup>4</sup>

African hermeneutics is often more pragmatic and less literal than Western, and many times more akin to the Hebrew background culture in which the texts were written. We will consider this when we come to look at Paul's leadership instructions to Timothy.

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<sup>1</sup> D. William Faupel in *The Everlasting Gospel*, (Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 50, describes the rise of fundamentalism in nineteenth century America: "This common sense philosophy held that all truth was a single unified order...the universe, religion and history were all governed by a rational system of laws...advance was made by science whose purpose was to discover these laws." See also William Loader, *Jesus and the Fundamentalism of His Day* (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 2001) in which he showed Jesus more interested in people than a legal code. See also G. M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth Century Evangelicalism, 1870-1925*, (Oxford Press, New York, 1980)

<sup>2</sup> See Ray Anderson, *The Soul of Ministry*, (John Knox Press, Louisville, 1997), where theology is portrayed as that which derives from mission, rather than pre-established and defining our mission. Anderson claimed that because the revelation of God at Sinai followed his acts in delivering Israel from Egypt, theology today is revealed in and through what God does in culture and mission. He defined the Spirit's work today more in terms of the *social-prophet* than a proclamation of a normative gospel, leaving us to question the Reformed basis of this work.

<sup>3</sup> For a critique of dispensational premillennialism see Anthony Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1979), 194-222

<sup>4</sup> See *The Works of Richard Sibbes Vol. 7* (Banner of Truth, Edinburgh) for a classic example: The lion lying down with the lamb and the child playing at the hole of the asp are shown to be the renewing of the fallen human nature (depicted by the animal killer instinct), portrayed in New Testament as putting off the old and putting on the new man.

In this paper we look at Jesus Christ' shepherd leadership as depicted in the prophets and fulfilled in his ongoing life. We then look at the implications of Jesus' model in helping us to understand Paul's instructions in Timothy regarding his appointment of leaders in Ephesus and finally how we can relate Paul to the church of today.

### Understanding the Old Testament

We need to review the pictorial or typological intent of the prophets when they spoke of Christ's coming redemption. This is central to our hermeneutic and to our understanding of the New Covenant.

And I will set up one shepherd over them and he shall feed them, even my servant David, he shall feed them and he shall be their shepherd. And I the Lord will be their God and my servant David a prince among them; I the Lord have spoken it. (Ezek 34:23-24).<sup>5</sup>

The prophet used metaphorical language to represent the New Covenant: *David* His chosen, *Israel* His flock, the *land* His redemption and the *temple* His body. The verse is not speaking literally of David, but of David's seed, Jesus Christ. In this prophetic language David, Israel, the Land and the temple are figurative, types and shadows of the eternal bride redeemed by the shepherd who came to give his life. The children that God has given him (the ecclesia or called out ones) are the fulfilment and eternal purpose (Gen 49:10, Is 8:18 & Heb 2:13, Is 54:13 & Jn 6:45).

In Jn 10 Jesus said this prophecy was fulfilled: "And when He puts forth His own sheep, He goes before them and the sheep follow Him...I am the good shepherd." (Jn 10:4). Identifying Christ with Old Testament personages as types is key to our hermeneutics. In Hag 2:23 Zerubbabel is Christ, which imagery harkens back to Coniah in Jer 22:24. In Zech 3:1-10 the high priest Joshua is used to represent Christ. In Ezek 44:15 Zadok stands for Christ. David's kingly seed is fulfilled in Christ and the priests in David's Mt. Zion tabernacle represent Christ's priestly fulfilment.

### He Leads us Out of Sin

In this section we look at two verses in Micah that depict Christ the shepherd leader and his church.

I will surely assemble, O Jacob, all of thee; I will surely gather the remnant of Israel; I will put them together as the sheep of Bozrah, as the flock in the midst of their fold: they shall make great noise by the reason of the multitude of them. (Mic 2:12)

This verse is speaking of Messiah coming to save the remnant of Israel through his death, burial and resurrection. It is fulfilled in the New Covenant. He came to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, not to

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<sup>5</sup> This article uses the KJV of the scripture, but modifies the Elizabethan English.

save the whole nation, but the remnant he saves out of it. But Israel, or *Jacob* here, refers also to the whole of God’s redeemed company, or elect, or remnant, as the text puts it. The gentile believers are also grafted in and become joint heirs and inheritors with the seed of Abraham. We are all called Israel or Jacob, in Christ, meaning the elect called out ones. Together we are a great multitude.

And if you are Christ’s then are you Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to promise. (Gal 3:2)

So the inheritance of Christ is not made good by the flesh (racial descent), or by the law, as dispensationalism claims, but by the promise, that is by faith to all and upon all who believe. Now we return to our text in Micah, the next verse:

The breaker is come up before them: they have broken up, and have passed through the gate, and are gone out by it: and their king shall pass before them, and the Lord on the head of them. (Mic 2:13)

This is using the image of the shepherd’s sheepfold. He keeps his sheep in a walled area at night to protect them against wolves, etc. In the morning he rises and leads his sheep out to the pastures and water. In this parable the fenced in area represents the law, or the Old Covenant, which was a school master, a governor, to keep us until faith should come (Gal 4:1-12). Christ leads us out to the pastures and water of the New Covenant: “I am the bread of life...”

It is instructive to see this verse in Micah in light of the rabbis’ teaching in the days of Jesus’ ministry. Rabbi David Kimchi (Radak) reflected a common understanding of Mic 2:13: “In the words of our teachers of blessed memory and in the Midrash it is taught that “the breaker” is Elijah and “their king” is the branch of the son of David.”<sup>6</sup>

In other words, this verse is similar to Is 40:3, with one who goes before the Lord, “The voice of him that cries in the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God” and Mal 3:1, “Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom you seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant...” and Mal 4:5, “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of that great and terrible day of the Lord..”

Jesus said this Elijah was John the Baptist (Matt 11:14). The great and terrible day of the Lord is not the second coming of Jesus, but the day of judgement and destruction of Jerusalem, according to all the prophets; Daniel, Joel, Zechariah and Jesus in Matt 24, fulfilled by 70AD.<sup>7</sup> Before this Jesus would suddenly

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<sup>6</sup> In *Mikraot Gedalot* (New York: Schocken, 1938) 417b

<sup>7</sup> Brent Sandy, *Plowshares & Pruning Hooks, Rethinking the Language of Biblical Prophecy and Apocalyptic*, (InterVarsity, Nottingham, 2002). For an old but thorough treatment of the use of Judaic literature in understanding biblical apocalyptic see John Lightfoot, *Horae Hebraicae et Talmudicae: Hebrew and Talmudical Exercitations upon the Gospels*, A New Edition by Robert Gandell, (Bibliolife, Oxford, 1859)

come to his temple, as he did, but was not generally received. This is not a literal Elijah, but one who goes before the Lord, just as Elijah did in the revival of his day.

The hermeneutics of dispensationalism still expects a literal Elijah to come, claiming he is one of the two witnesses of Rev 11.<sup>8</sup> The two witnesses are not two specific people, but the law and the prophets in general, which testified of Jesus, but which were rejected and trampled down in the streets of Jerusalem, but whose testimony was fulfilled in Christ's resurrection (Rom 3:21).<sup>9</sup> This is the symbolic intent of the Revelation: it shows the gospel and Jesus as the fulfilment of the law and the prophets.

By interpretation then, Mic 2:13 states that John the Baptist will go before the Lord, when there is a breaking out of the shepherd and his flock. They break out through the redemptive work of Christ, out from their captivity in sin and law under the Old Covenant, into the glorious liberty of sons of God. "For where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty" (from sin - 2 Cor 3:17).

Jesus was referring to texts including Mic 2:13 when he said concerning John the Baptist, "For this is he of whom it is written, Behold I send my messenger before my face, which shall prepare your way before you... And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence and the violent take it by force" (Matt 11:10, 12).

Citing early Judaic texts (e.g. Pesikta Rabbati), Brad Young shows Jesus claimed to be the fulfilment of the Pharisees' Messianic expectations in Mic 2:13.<sup>10</sup> According to Young, an accurate translation of Jesus is, "From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven breaks forth and everyone (all the seed) breaks forth with it." The good shepherd Jesus Christ brings the dawn of the kingdom and leads his people into it.

As the leader shepherd, Jesus lays down his life to bring his people out of the sheep gate into his pasture, eternal life. He leads by giving his life, first for us on the cross and then to us at Pentecost. (Jn 6:51) His leadership changes our life as he becomes our bread of life. His does not lead us by law, giving us "seven steps" to live by, or by a doctrine or theology alone, but by laying down his life to take it again, to then live it within us. By new birth (Spirit baptism) he changes our nature and we live by his Spirit.

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<sup>8</sup> See Stanley Gundry (series ed.), *Three Views of the Rapture*, (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1996), 199, where the witnesses are seen as part of a chronology of the Lord's second coming, rather than pointing to Christ's gospel. In this hermeneutic Revelation is read as a precise forecast of end-times events.

<sup>9</sup> Possibly represented by Moses and Elijah: see Rev 11:6, where the plagues (of Egypt?) and the withholding of rain (Elijah's ministry?) symbolise the law and the prophets and their testimonies against Jerusalem and the murder of them throughout Israel's history (Matt 21:33-41), possibly also represented by the priests and prophets (the two anointed) in Zech 4:14.

<sup>10</sup> Brad Young, *Jesus the Jewish Theologian*, (Hendrickson, Peabody, 1995). Young also uses the earlier work of Edward Pococke, *A Commentary on the Prophecy of Micah* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1676) and David Flusser, *Jesus*, 38-40 [Ger], 40 [ET] in support of his conclusions.

Here we derive *baptism* from the Greek, or *merge* from the Latin *mergo*. In law *merge* means, "The drowning, sinking, absorption, or extinguishment of one estate into another."<sup>11</sup> This one Spirit baptism answers a cancellation of our debt, a regenerated nature, sanctification, holiness, empowerment, anointing, sealing, eternal security and the laying down of our life to be raised up in His life, plan, purpose, will and blessing. "He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit." (1 Cor 6:17)

### The Prophets

The prophets show us the essence of biblical leadership. As every revelation is seen through the image of Jesus Christ, leadership also has its point of reference in him. This steers us away from a fundamentalist view of scripture. Scripture is about Jesus Christ and his work in our nature. It is not a set of rules. He comes to transform us into his own image.

And I will raise me up a faithful priest, that shall do according to all that is in my heart and in my mind; and I will build him a sure house; and he shall walk before mine Anointed forever. (1 Sam 2:35)

This prophecy from Samuel shows the nature of the true temple of the Lord. It is not a building in earthly Jerusalem, but the church of Jesus Christ, the household of faith, of living stones in Christ. (2 Sam 7:13, 1 Pet 2:5) The Holy Spirit in Samuel was referring to Jesus Christ, saviour and redeemer. This salvation of Israel is not something Jesus does in his second coming, but what he did in his gospel, through his death, resurrection and ascension. In this God has fulfilled (not delayed) his promises to Israel and included the gentiles in these sure (unfailing) mercies promised to David. (Is 55:1-3)

Ezekiel revealed the problem with the shepherds of Israel and the same point remains the main issue for shepherds of the church today. They served themselves and did not serve the flock. Their heart orientation was wrong. They were hirelings.

Woe be to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flock? You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool, you kill them that are fed: but you feed not the flock. (Ezek 34:2-3)

This was the issue with the teachers of the law in Jesus' time. They kept back the keys of the kingdom (the free gift of God's redemption) and manipulated the flock for their own benefit. Is this done today when pastors tell the flock they must give to receive: they must give offerings to get healed or to get a promotion at their work place? And if they do not give they are told misfortune will happen to them. Jesus has the same woes for these pastors as he did for those of his day. (Matt 23) We give out of a transformed heart,

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<sup>11</sup> *Burrill's Law Dictionary*, (BiblioBazaar, Charlestown, 2008)

because Jesus freely gave his life for us. His redemption and healing are free, by the merits of his own blood, not by the merits of our sacrifice. This blood of Christ and his faith are the keys of the kingdom.

The answer of God for the sinners of the Old Covenant was to raise up his own shepherd. He put aside those shepherds. This was the purpose of Jesus' proclamations in Matt 22-24. He was putting aside those keepers of the vineyard and raising up a new people in himself: "I have broken the bands of their yoke, and delivered them (the sheep) out of the hand of those that served themselves on them." (Ezek 34:27)

And I will set up one shepherd over them, even my servant David, he shall feed them... (Ezek 34:23)

Jesus said this was fulfilled in Jn 10:

I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd gives his life for the sheep...As the Father knows me even so I know the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep...My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give to them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. (Jn 10:11, 15, 27-29)

This is the DNA of leadership. He came to do the Father's will. The Father's will is that he lay down his life for all those the Father has given him. He did not come to chose himself whom to save, but to receive all the Father gave him. This shows Gods sovereignty in the matter of our salvation – he is the one who keeps us in Christ and from sin. The DNA of biblical leadership concerns what is in our heart: what our heart orientation is. Do we come to go give our lives for the church, as Jesus Christ did? Or have we come for ourselves?

Husbands love your wives, as Christ also loved the church and gave himself for it. (Eph 5:25)

Our leadership in the home is to be the same: loving and giving to nurture the family over which God has placed us. This is the nature of our service in the church. Leadership is a service, not lording it over others.

Christ's headship in Colossians is shown in the context of his redeeming service. He is the head of the church that he laid his life down to redeem and save. He now nurtures it through his life that we might be saved to the uttermost.

And he is the head of the body...having made peace through the blood of his cross... (Col 1:18, 20)

### Paul to Timothy

Paul left Timothy in Ephesus to set in order certain things that were needed. One of these was to do with the schisms in the church caused by false teachers. A careful look at the time in which this epistle was

written shows us the nature of these teachings and the task Timothy faced. Paul's instructions here are not meant as a constitution for church governance. Paul was directing Timothy in his particular situation.<sup>12</sup>

Paul gave Timothy a list of qualities that Timothy should look for in replacing and choosing elders. They were to be the husband of one wife, not given to much wine, not greedy for gain, etc. We have certain options in interpreting this list. The fundamentalist would say, "That's it! Tom and Ann have both transgressed one of these in their past and so are disqualified." This is the way the Pharisees used the scripture. This manner of interpreting is against the gospel, where God has redeemed us, male and female, and placed us in a new community by His Spirit.

Gordon Fee goes some way in correcting the same issues in fundamentalism that Karl Barth addressed. Fee noted the interpretation of scripture in community, scripture's humanity in cultural context, its Christ centeredness and main point – directing us to the salvation and nature change in the gospel of faith and grace. (2 Tim 3:15) African writers have gone the same way in trying to reconcile Christ with culture. The danger here is universalism, where "Christ" is anthropogenic.<sup>13</sup> We retain the unique inspiration of scripture in theology – *sola scriptura*.<sup>14</sup> We see in African cultures a way of addressing some of these concerns. John Pobee notes the holism present in African hermeneutics.<sup>15</sup> He shows the African concept of truth as story and a poetic mixture of experience and faith.<sup>16</sup> African insights help us to understand the tribal and community context in which Hebrew scripture was written, often alien to the Western mind. The literalist approach of fundamentalism can lead us both to misread scripture and to think that our own culture is part of the gospel message.

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<sup>12</sup> See Gordon Fee in *Listening to the Spirit in the Text* (Eerdmans, 2000) and *Gospel and Spirit* (Hendrickson, 1991) for hermeneutical principles in Timothy and Kroeger in *I Suffer Not a Women* (Baker Academic, 1998) for the historical situation Paul was addressing.

<sup>13</sup> See Peter Jensen, *The Revelation of God, Contours of Christian Theology*, (IVP, Nottingham, 2002). [www.worldinchrist.com](http://www.worldinchrist.com) reviews Jensen: "In modern times the Christian faiths claim to possess a unique revelation of God has faced numerous challenges. A central issue has been the role of the Bible. While some have continued to defend the view that the Bible, inspired by God, is God's self-revelation in a direct way, others, have argued that God's self-revelation is to be found primarily in divine action or in the person of Jesus Christ...In a fresh approach, Peter Jensen argues that it is better to follow the biblical categories of the knowledge of God and the gospel than to start from revelation as an abstract concept."

<sup>14</sup> See David Gibson and Daniel Strange (eds.), *Engaging with Barth, Contemporary Evangelical Critiques*, (APOLLOS, Nottingham, 2008). Contributing to this book with his article *Karl Barth and Covenant Theology*, A. McGowan concludes Barth departed from Reformed teaching in his concept of group rather than individual election and by seeing Christ salvifically as federal head of all mankind. Barth's assessment that "The Bible is God's word as it bears witness to revelation, and proclamation is God's word as it really promises revelation" is correct. (Cited in Gibson (ed.), Mark Thompson, *Witness to the Word: On Barth's Doctrine of Scripture*.) This again steers us away from the mere mental assent possible in fundamentalism (the word without the Spirit). Christ is the only word of God that is salvific. However, Thompson found Barth was too uncritical in accepting scripture to be errant.

<sup>15</sup> John Pobee, *Gospel and Cultures (Pamphlet 9), West Africa, Christ Would be African Too*, (WCC, Switzerland, 1996) 23

<sup>16</sup> Pobee, 50

Several twentieth century African authors were to some extent products of their neo-orthodox age, where Christ is seen as *the word of God* manifested in culture.<sup>17</sup> Kwame Bediako reviewed several authors, advocating Africanizing the gospel in the way early Church Fathers Hellenized it.<sup>18</sup> Bolaji Idowu claimed early mission did not express the gospel as a continuation of Africa’s past.<sup>19</sup> John Mbiti saw “Christ” in African culture preparing it for the gospel and now contributing to our understanding of the gospel.<sup>20</sup>

Byang Kato remained faithful to Evangelical positions.<sup>21</sup> It appears from literature and experience in mission that either syncretism or failing to connect the faith to the culture both impair transformation. Traditional mission has too often failed to relate to or learn from the common grace found in cultures, but our aim in any mission must be an interpretation of scripture in its own original meaning.<sup>22</sup> As Christians we seek this meaning, to then live it out through the Spirit in our local setting. There is a dependence on the Holy Spirit in two aspects of our hermeneutics. He shows us Christ in the scripture and shows us how he is “incarnated” in us in our location.

We see this incarnation of Christ in Paul and in the values he passed onto Timothy. We therefore propose that in reading Paul in Timothy we take note of the DNA of Christ in the text. Paul followed Jesus and like Jesus he laid down his life to serve the church through the gospel. Paul was saying, “Timothy, you are looking for servants: those who have the heart for God and for his people, to put the flock before their own lives. These are the characteristics that will show you the people you need. If they live this way in their homes and families, they will also live that way in the church. They will care for the sheep.”

Paul was giving Timothy guidelines for identifying the right people, not a law for judging them. When we go by law we cancel out the work of the Spirit as he redeems God’s community through Christ. This hermeneutic also answers the need Bediako perceives in African secular leadership, where the church can display “the way of Jesus, the way of a non dominating power”.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> See Kwame Bediako, *Jesus and the Gospel in Africa*, (Orbis, New York, 2004) 44

<sup>18</sup> Kwame Bediako, *Theology and Identity, The Impact of Culture upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and in Modern Africa*, (Regnum, Oxford, 1992). Marvin Wilson in *Our Father Abraham, Jewish Roots of the Christian Faith*, (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1989), shows that this *Hellenization* hindered Western faith rather than helped it.

<sup>19</sup> C. G. Baeta (ed.), *Christianity in Tropical Africa*, (paper presented at the International Africa Seminar, University of Ghana, April 1965: publisher Oxford University Press, 1968), 417-440

<sup>20</sup> See John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, (Heinemann, London, 1969)

<sup>21</sup> Byang Kato, *Theological Pitfalls in Africa*, (Evangelical Publishing, Kisumu, 1975) needs to be heeded. The *Africa Bible Commentary* (Tokunboh Adeyemo ed., Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 2006) is an excellent example of relating Evangelical faith in Africa, but may lack in learning from African concepts.

<sup>22</sup> By common grace we mean either the knowledge of God corrupted in fallen man or even God’s ministry to cultures in his kindness, but not a salvific grace.

<sup>23</sup> Bediako, (*Jesus and the Gospel in Africa*), 105



## Conclusions

In this article we have seen several hermeneutical options to help us assess biblical leadership. While neo-orthodoxy discounts the inerrancy of scripture, fundamentalism is harsh and misses the heart of God in the prophets: God sets forth his Son Jesus Christ as the image for our hermeneutics. Today we live by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, not the letter. He manifests himself among us and leads his church.

But go and learn what that means, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance... But if you had known what this means, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, you would not have condemned the guiltless. (Matt 9:13, 12:7)

We have also seen that dispensationalism misses the central theme of scripture. It depicts Christ's saving and redeeming leadership of Israel as being fulfilled racially and in the second coming. Texts such as, "On that day a fountain will be opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity" (Zech 13:1) are seen as fulfilled in the second coming, not in the resurrection/Pentecost. It sees the church age as only a parenthesis and not as the culmination of the prophets. It sees the Temple/Land as geopolitical and not as Jesus Christ and his church. (Jn 4:21, Heb 12:22) N. T. Wright and R. C Sproul place prophetic fulfilment in the context of Jesus' ministry and the church.<sup>24</sup>

God's redemption and transformation of our lives and cultures is depicted in scripture. Here we have a present reality in Christ, which proceeds into eternity when all enemies are placed under his feet:

And I John saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away... And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it. (Rev 21:2-4, 22)

We conclude by saying that the hermeneutics often seen in African culture is more akin to biblical intent than is Western literalism. African culture sees meaning in images, in stories, in examples and in symbols. Western culture sees meaning rigidly in exact scientific measurements. Seeing God in the image of Christ and not in the letter of the law is the biblical intent. As we see him we are transformed into the same image. We lay down ourselves and we serve his body in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ lives in us and expresses the same love to his church through us as he expressed in his own flesh.

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<sup>24</sup> N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, (SPCK, London, 1996) and R. C. Sproul, *The Last Days According to Jesus*, (Baker Books, Grand Rapids, 1998)

