

Rules of Affinity (Part 3)

The Negative Application

These guidelines test the “distance” between a given theological proposal and the actual textual references alleged to lend them authority. As already mentioned in previous posts, all the major non-negotiable doctrines of the Christian Faith have a strong affinity with the wording of the biblical text. Under the “Grid of Category Formulations” of these “Rules of Affinity” all these first level doctrines are **C1** and **C2** doctrines. Doctrinal propositions which are arrived at by the consent of several converging biblical texts to bring about an “inference to the best explanation” are **C3**'s. **C3**'s are open to revision if better scriptural conclusions from clear texts are forthcoming.

The two other categories in the Grid which reveal little or no affinity between the words of Scripture and the doctrines supposed to be borne out of it are **C4**'s or **C5**'s. These categories are heavy on inference and light on affinity. They are chock full of human reason and empty of clear, definable connection to the verses which are being unfairly summoned to support them.

Bad Features of C4's and C5's

1. Another feature of **C4**'s and **C5**'s is that they often come into contention with clearer verses which contradict them (**C1**'s & **C2**'s). Why then, are they allowed to stand? It is because of our faith in our own rational faculties.
2. Yet another interesting fact about doctrines based on **C4**'s and **C5**'s is that they usually command large areas of systematic theology. For example, “the covenant of grace,” which as defined by covenant theologians (or the limp “Edenic covenant” of Confessional dispensationalists like Scofield and Chafer), enjoys no **C1** – **C3** support. Moreover, the texts used in support of it are not talking about it at all, but about biblical covenants like those with Abraham or David.
3. This brings up the third interesting feature of **C4** and **C5** formulations; because they are formulated by human reason they are already believed before the search is made for scriptural support-texts. That is to say, the doctrine is already in hand and cherished so the Bible must be ransacked for any verse which might give the impression that it supports the cherished teaching.
4. A fourth negative characteristic is that **C4** and **C5** formulations highlight the fact that doctrines have been manufactured not unusually from other doctrines. Although this may lend them a certain logical coherence, which can in itself be deceptive, it does nothing to show that the doctrine in question is built up from the clear statements of Scripture (**C1**'s – **C3**'s) which the fundamental doctrines are.

Still another item of notice is that even fundamental doctrines can be supported by texts with weak affinity to the proposition under scrutiny. This does not invalidate the doctrine. It does,

however, encourage the theologian to look for better and clearer passages. But we shall consider this aspect in another post.

Here are some important theological propositions which, in fact, lack affinity with the Scriptures used to validate them:

The Covenant of Grace: The supposed covenant made between God and all the elect from Adam to the New Creation which assumes the one people of God in both Testaments, thereby making it impossible for Israel's covenants to be fulfilled literally, but demanding they be re-interpreted by the NT. The covenants found in Scripture are viewed as manifestations of this inferred but overarching covenant.

Scriptures employed to prove it: Gen. 3:15 - **C4** - *there is no mention of any covenant till the Noahic covenant. Although a thing can be present without being named, there are too many disconnects and too much scholarly dissension in this case.*

Heb. 8:6; 9:15; 12:24 - **C4** – *these are references to the New Covenant (which it is often falsely equated with), not to any covenant of grace as defined above. **There are no C1-C3 references to this covenant in the Bible.*** It is an inferred covenant which rests upon non-covenantal and covenantal texts (e.g. Gen. 12:1–3; 17:1–14; 22:17-18; Exod. 20-24; Jer. 31:31f.) which appear to be speaking of other things.

The Covenant of Works: “The way for innocent Adam and all his posterity to remain in a state of well-being and to be confirmed in happiness (to eliminate the possibility of losing happiness) was based entirely on what man would do.” – Walter Chantry citing Gen. 2:8,9 and 2:16-17. Both references are **C4's** since no covenant is mentioned in either text.

Scriptures employed to prove it: the main one, after Gen. 2:16-17 (**C4**) is Hosea 6:7, which says,

But like Adam they have transgressed the covenant; There they have dealt treacherously against Me. (Hos 6:7 NAS)

The trouble is this translation “like Adam” is heavily disputed, and in any case is not decisive. Even if one allows the disputed translation “like Adam” instead of the more widely accepted “like men” one is still left to infer a covenant of works as defined by covenant theologians (or Adamic covenant by some dispensationalists) from this text. Did the prophet mean to say that Israel (Ephraim) had transgressed the covenant of works? Did Adam? Where does the text specify that? Therefore, owing to its tendentious pedigree as a proof-text for the covenant of works we cannot but assign this anything but a **C4**. If someone wants to make it a **C3** and look around (a la Robert Reymond) for corroborating passages let him try. As it stands, once again **there are no C1-C3 references to this covenant in the Bible.**

Chantry writes in *The Covenants of Works and of Grace*, 6:

In the entirety of Scripture there are only two divinely instituted arrangements by which man could be blessed: The Covenant of Works for innocent

man, the Covenant of Grace for fallen man. Both covenants are referred to in God's first communication to man after the Fall in Genesis 3.

When stood up against our Rules of Affinity this bold statement receives rather less than a strong endorsement. Indeed, it is contradicted by the explicit (C1-C2) covenant statements in Gen. 8-9; 12-22; Exod. 20-24; Num. 25; Deut. 29-30; Psa. 89; 105; Jer. 31, 33, etc. Yet out of these two covenants arises a whole system of Theology, including some of the following theological propositions. The persuasive power of these teachings do not come from the biblical texts they employ.

Infant baptism: This teaching depends upon the covenant of grace and teaches that those children of covenant parents are “in the one covenant [of grace]” and are, therefore, elect in some sense. All the passages it employs (like Gen. 17:5-7) are not speaking of the covenant of grace with all the elect but of the Abrahamic Covenant with those who, as the next verse plainly says, will be given the land of Canaan as an everlasting possession (Gen 17:8. Cf. Psa. 105:6-11)! Hence, not only is this doctrine an inference based upon another inference, but it also undermines clearer C1 and C2 promises to Israel in the process. Notice, infant baptism is nowhere in view in any OT or NT covenant text. This is a C5 formulation.

Scriptures employed to prove it: Acts 2:38-39; 16:31-34 – C4 – both contexts make it clear that the person's present were able to understand and respond in belief (or unbelief) to the message they heard, as would their children and those afar off. If Acts 2:39 is pushed to include infants it says too much; for surely “all who are afar off” could then be used to support a universalistic doctrine of infant salvation for every child, which is clearly not the case. **There are no C1-C3 references to infant baptism in the Bible. Because it is an inference based on another inference I assign it a C5 rating.**

In all contexts where the Gospel is proclaimed (including those in Acts 2 & 16) comprehension and belief are required. E.g., Jn. 3:16, 36; 5:24; 20:29-31; Rom. 1:16-17; 4:1ff.; etc. And let it not be forgotten that all the references to undergoing baptism (as either immersion or effusion; never sprinkling) picture adult baptism after belief.

The Church = Israel: This has been expressed in different ways, but the basic idea is that the covenant promises made to the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, especially the national and ethnic promises, including “the Holy Land”, have been “transformed” or “spiritualized” and applied to the NT Church. If ethnic Israelites are to enjoy the promises they must be part of the Church, “the New Israel”, in which the promises are fulfilled.

Scriptures employed to prove it: Rom. 2:28-29 – which addresses Jews in the context (e.g. v. 24f.), and can easily be construed as distinguishing believing from unbelieving Israelites (hence C4 especially because nothing is said in support of the proposition under consideration).

Rom. 9:6-7 – which is speaking directly about Israelites “according to the flesh” in the context and can again easily be confined to believing versus unbelieving Jews. The context also says that the promises (still) pertain to Israel. It is a C4 at least because supercessionism is inferred from the passage even though Paul says nothing about such a proposition.

Phil. 3:3 – in which Paul calls Christians “the circumcision” because they worship in the Spirit, not because they are really circumcised Jews. He writes figuratively and does not address the subject of Israel and the Church. Where he does address it in Romans 11 he distinguishes them and reiterates the irrevocability of Israel’s covenants.

The last verse used to teach this proposition is Galatians 6:16.

And as many as walk according to this rule [i.e. *boasting in Christ's cross instead of Jewish fleshly circumcision* - cf. 6:11-15], peace and mercy be upon them, and [*kai*] upon the Israel of God.

The usual translation of “kai” is “and.” That translation fits perfectly well in Paul’s sentence and in his larger argument. There is no reason to translate it with the far more infrequent “even” unless it threatens one’s theological assumptions. Even many who reject the Israel/Church eschatological distinction agree with this conclusion. If Paul had wanted to equate those in the first part of the verse with the “Israel of God” in the second part he could simply have omitted the conjunction and the point would have been clear enough. But he didn’t. The “kai” is there and there is no good reason, especially in the context, that it should not be translated normally as “and.” Therefore, this verse cannot even qualify as a **C3** for the reason that it ought to read “*and* the Israel of God.” We therefore assign it a **C4** to identify the intrusion of human reasoning into and indeed prior to the exegesis. Once more, **there are no C1-C3 references to this theological idea in the Bible! It is a C4 doctrine.**

Further interactions:

1. From here I want to continue to match up more theological beliefs with these “Rules of Affinity” in order to show the negative use of those rules. I have tried to find respected sources to interact with so as not to be accused of soft-targeting. This is from G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology*, 32:

Adam was to be God’s obedient servant in maintaining both the physical and spiritual welfare of the garden abode, which included dutifully *keeping evil influences* from invading the arboreal sanctuary...(my emphasis)

Beale gives Adam a responsibility to guard the original creation from “evil influences.” But there is nothing in Genesis 2 or 3 which encourages this (the verb *shamar* in 2:15 can mean “guard” or “protect” and could have the serpent in mind, but nothing is said about “influences” plural). Certainly, God allowed the serpent into the Garden, but the only warning given to the man is the prohibition in Gen. 2:16-17. The serpent tempts Eve and Eve tempts Adam. It is Adam’s capitulation to his wife which is given as the reason he disobeyed God’s command (see Gen. 3:17. cf. 1 Tim. 2:14). Could Adam have ejected Satan out of Eden? Where is that indicated? And what of this talk of a plurality of “evil influences”? One will look in vain for such things in the texts Beale employs. We thus give the statement above a **C4** rating.

Accordingly, essential to Adam and Eve’s raising of their children was spiritual instruction in God’s word that the parents themselves were to remember and pass on. (33)

Beale is writing about Adam and Eve before the Fall. Where does he get this “essential” teaching from? From inferring it on the basis of the inferred proposition above. (Notice that if this were true it would strongly imply that if they didn’t pass on their remembrances each generation would be threatened with spiritual death and the curse!). This adds a condition that God did not command. This is a **C5** inferential statement.

Just as God had achieved heavenly rest after overcoming the creational chaos...

Neither the text of Genesis 1 and 2, nor any other Bible text, speaks even indirectly of God having to achieve “heavenly rest” by “overcoming...creational chaos.” The “rest” of Genesis 2:4 simply indicates the cessation (*shabbat* – “to make an end,” etc), “of all the work which He had done.” That is, the work of the previous six days. This “overcoming chaos” language comes from pagan creation myths being read back onto the Genesis narrative. **C5**

...and constructing the beginning of his creational temple...

There is no text of Scripture which even comes close to describing the pristine creation as a “creational temple.” It may be argued that the aggregate testimony of several other passages leads to such an inference, which would make it a **C3**. But it is better to speak in terms of the Tabernacle, and especially the Temple, as “remembrances” of Eden (see Allen P. Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory*, chs. 4 & 5. Ross is far less speculative than Beale), in which case this statement could well qualify as a **C3**. In the “Rules” we are putting forth, a **C3** is not strong enough to build upon, even if it may well be true.

...so Adam presumably would achieve unending rest after overcoming the opposition of the serpent and the opposing temptation to sin and extending the boundaries of the glorious Eden temple around the entire earth. (40)

Beale is trying to parallel Adam’s function with one he thinks he sees in God at creation. But God is nowhere said to be “overcoming creational chaos.” Indeed, this way of wording it makes it appear that the amorphous world of Gen. 1:2 was somehow not good. Beale’s presumption, which is common in covenant theology, is just that – a presumption: another instance of tying one inference to another without solid biblical evidence. **C5!** Later on in the book he has two whole chapters on the church being Israel which are based almost entirely on inferences drawn from other inferences, and with no engagement with contrary views. As we have shown, this is not the way fundamental doctrines are formulated and supported (see the second article).

2. Moving in a different direction, let us examine a typical assertion by someone who professes to speak in tongues. It usually goes something like this: “God has given me a prayer-language through which I draw closer to Him. This is not a human language, but like an angelic tongue.”

Then the scriptures are produced for each assertion: **For one who speaks in a tongue [meaning "language," as in the phrase "he speaks in his native tongue"] does not speak to men, but to God; for no one understands, but in his spirit he speaks mysteries. 3 But one who prophesies speaks to men for edification and exhortation and consolation. 4 One who speaks in a tongue edifies himself; but one who prophesies edifies the church. (1Co 14:1-4 NAS)**

The reason the tongue-speaker speaks not to men, but to God is not here a good reason. It is because “no man understands him.” This becomes more acute once 14:21 is read: **So then tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe, but to unbelievers; but prophecy is for a sign, not to unbelievers, but to those who believe. (1Co 14:22)**

Unless one is going to cause a major contradiction with this plain declarative **C1** text (the only one which explicitly tells us what tongues were for) it is not possible to hold that God has bestowed a private “unknown” prayer-language. The negative connotation of verses 2 and 4 plus this statement in verse 22 make the “prayer-language” assertion look heavy on special-pleading.

This is only compounded by 1 Corinthians 13: 1-3.

If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 And if I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. 3 And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing.

Each of these “ifs” are not actualities but exaggerated hypotheticals. Paul is not saying he speaks a supposed “angelic language.” All angels in scripture appear to speak human languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek). Hence “the tongues of men *and* of angels.” Paul did not give his body to be burned (v.3b). He did not understand “all mysteries and knowledge.” (v.2). Therefore, the proposition above does not hold water. It is a case of an experience searching for a biblical excuse. Given the number of inferences needed to produce it, it must be assigned a **C5** in this system.

3. Consider this statement:

From the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ, God appointed the seventh day of the week to be the weekly sabbath; and the first day of the week ever since, to continue to the end of the world, which is the Christian sabbath. – *Westminster Shorter Catechism, Answer to Q.59. “Which day of the seven hath God appointed to be the weekly sabbath?”*

The scriptural backing for this answer is Gen. 2:2-3; 1 Cor. 16:1-2, and Acts 20:7. The first clause appeals to Genesis 2, which does say that “**God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.**” It does not say anything about a “weekly sabbath” or the length of its observation. As it stands, therefore, there is a large “propositional distance” between the verse and the teaching it is being used to bolster. Thus, the clause is loaded with unsupported human inference and cannot get more than a **C4**. Exodus 20:11 might have been drafted in to help; in which case the clause, though requiring more corroboration, could scrape a **C3** ranking (Of course, old-earthers who believe the “day” in Gen. 2:2-3 was millions of years long, and/or is still in continuance, would have more explaining to do and would thus weaken the link between the two passages!).

As proof for the proposition that the first day of the week is the “Christian sabbath” which will “continue till the end of the world” we get 1 Corinthians 16:1-2 which says nothing about the

sabbath and is about “the collection for the saints,” which was to be done “on the first day of the week” – presumably because that is when the saints met. Acts 20:7 refers to Paul and others coming together to break bread on the first day of the week at Troas. Again, there is nothing in the verse to support any teaching about a Christian sabbath to be observed till world’s end. As the 1 Corinthians passage is speaking about something totally different than what the Westminster Divines use it for their use of it ranks a **C5**. It is an inference based on another inference which goes in search of a biblical pretext. The Acts 20 usage gets a **C4** since it does at least refer to coming together to break bread and hear the teaching of the Word.

It could be that there are better texts with closer affinity to the “Answer” to Q.59 which could be called upon. The negative application of the Rules of Affinity help one to reexamine this question. Utilizing the Grid this way can stop over-confident announcements that “this is what the Bible says.”

4. But what about a verse like 1 Corinthians 15:29?

Otherwise, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why then are they baptized for them?

This is a proof-text used by Mormons for their practice of baptism by proxy for dead relatives and such. Such baptisms were also practiced by Gnostic leaning groups, at least in the second century (See Craig L. Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, NIVAC, 299). The fact is we simply have no idea what this baptism was about. The Apostle does not approve of it, but he does argue from its current use, whether inside or outside of the Church we cannot tell. Because of this vagueness the best initial rating for the statement “some people, whether Christians or not, we cannot tell, were baptized for those who had died, and Paul argues that the practice would be pointless if the resurrection was not physical” would be a **C2**. Any assertion that people today ought to follow this practice would push the confines of Paul’s statement and could not rise above a **C3**. Once any doctrinal explanation is introduced for baptism by proxy such an “explanation” would rank a **C4**. Therefore, any practical use this verse could be put to would rate at **C4** and would thus be very doubtful.

5. I have been asked about how the seven dispensations common in Dispensationalism fair under these rules. I tend to agree with Charles Ryrie’s view in his book *Dispensationalism* (1995) that those stewardships called (whether properly or not) “Law,” “Church,” “Millennium” can be arrived at easily enough (see especially chapter 3 of Ryrie’s book). I would give them a **C2** or **C3**. The same can be said for some “dispensation,” rather minimally defined, before the Fall in Eden and before the Flood. Each of the proposed seven dispensations would merit at least a **C3**. *Of course, what use they are for composing a system of theology is another point altogether!*