

David Chilton on Full Preterism
Oklahoma City Conference 1997

If you don't know what happened to me 3 years ago you will find out in a while. Or you will discern it while I speak. Because I talk funny now.

Some of you know my sort of gradual movement into the full preterist position. I recently ran across a passage in Paradise Restored that now I look at and think: That should have pushed me over the cliff! 12 years ago into full preterism. I don't know why it didn't. I don't know what I would have done if somebody had come to me and said, "David Chilton, look at what you said". But anyway, that is another story.

What I am getting at is, here I am as a Full Preterist. Many of you wonder how I can be a Full Preterist and still be a Theonomist – in which case I must still be half brain dead. But bear with me for this point.

At least one reason why the Reformed, especially the Theonomic Biblical Law oriented (Rushdoony, Gary North) that camp, feels that they can't come into Preterism is because of this very clear issue. Because much of Theonomy, of the arguments for Theonomy, is based upon a certain interpretation of Matthew 5:17-19.

NAS Mat 5:

17 ¶ "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill.

18 "For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished.

19 "Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

That is a crucial text. It is very important. And how you interpret that text determines an awful lot about a lot of things.

But let me quote first from Greg Bahnsen's book. Greg Bahnsen died last year. But he was, until then, people considered at least the premier theologian for the Theonomic world view. Except half the Theonomists did not believe that. But at least he did. And his followers did.

But Bahnsen makes this statement on page 213 of *Theonomy and Christian Ethics*. He makes 5 points. The five points of Bahnsenism.

His main argument is this:

1. The Christian is morally obligated to observe every jot and tittle of the Older Testamental Law. To disobey any point is to violate the whole law (James 2:10).
2. There is a system or interrelated set of Ceremonial Laws
3. The observation of this system of ordinances (redemptive ceremonies) was intended to be superceded. It was a foreshadow of Christ's saving economy, and has become obsolete with

His historical work.

We all would agree with that, right? I think. Boy, if you don't agree with that, maybe you are in the wrong church. Let me say it again.

3. The observation of this system of ordinances (redemptive ceremonies) was intended to be superceded. It was a foreshadow of Christ's saving economy, and has become obsolete with His historical work.

So this system of ceremonies in the Old Covenant has become obsolete now in the New Covenant. You don't feel under any obligation to go and perform a sacrifice. If you did feel under obligation to go and perform a sacrifice you are in more than hot water. Because you can't. The most dedicated, Pharisical Jew in the world can not perform the sacrifices. The temple is gone. For almost 2,000 years it has been gone. So, as we say in California, they are in deep guacamole.

So, anyway, the Old Covenant, the Old System of ceremonies has become obsolete with Christ's saving work. And, I think, almost every Christian would agree with that statement. Thus:

4. The continued observation of this system of shadows is to miss the true import, is diametrically opposed to Christian Faith, and evidences condemning bondage (Gal 4 - 5).
5. Therefore, in order to walk righteously before our God, and not violate His requirements at any point, we must identify and distinguish *ceremonial observance* from *moral observance*.

What Bahnsen is saying is, Look: God gave us a system of laws. There are *ceremonial laws* and there are *moral laws*. The ceremonial laws are gone with the passing of the Old Covenant. The moral laws still exist.

Now, you may have ways in which you want to finesse that, but the fact is that almost every Christian would agree with that statement as it stands. That is the basic theonomic argument.

Let me summarize:

1. The OT Law consists of *ceremonial law* and *moral law*.
2. OT *ceremonial laws* were typological of Christ, and He brought a change in the Law.
3. OT *moral laws* are confirmed in the NT as still binding.

God is still God. God says, "I am the Lord I change not" James 1:17: there is no variation in God or shadow of turning. So God does not change His standards of what He thinks right and wrong are. You may not agree with God's opinion. But good [news](#): God is God and you are not!

So God says that certain things are right and wrong. The moral law is still there.

A recent writer, William Einwechter has written a little book, *Ethics in God's Law an Introduction to Theonomy*, which is a good summary statement of the basic theonomic argument. Let me quote from what he says (page 29)

“Secondly, Jesus Christ Himself emphatically taught the continuing authority of the moral precepts of the OT Law for His kingdom when He said, [Mat 5:17-19] Think not that I am come to destroy the Law and the Prophets. I am not come to destroy but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, ‘til heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the Law until all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments and shall teach men so he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven. But whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven”

Einwechter continues with this significant summary statement:

Jesus here declares that his disciples are responsible to do and teach the ethical and moral principles contained in the law and the prophets.”

NOT TRUE! That is NOT what Jesus said. That is NOT what Jesus said. Let me read that statement again:

“Jesus here declares that his disciples [*he means us, modern day Christians*] are responsible to do and teach ***the ethical and moral principles*** contained in the law and the prophets.”

That is NOT what He said. He said JOT & TITTLE. Unless you observe all the JOT & TITTLES. The JOT & TITTLES don’t pass away until all is fulfilled.

Now let me get some quotations from Greg Bahnsen.

I know what Einwechter says, and what Bahnsen says – that our duty now is to observe the ethical and moral principles of the OT law. Amen. I agree with that. I don’t know where you are on all that, but I agree with that. But that is not what the text says.

Bahnsen says more than that. Let me quote from *Theonomy and Christian Ethics* page 73 & 74.

“It is the point of slightness that Jesus brings forcefully before us. Not even the very least extensive number of the very least significant aspect of the Old Testament Law will become invalid until heaven and earth pass away. It is hard to imagine how Jesus could of more intensely affirmed ***every bit*** of the Old Law remains binding in the gospel age.”

Back to Einwechter – what did Einwechter say?

Jesus here declares that his disciples are responsible to do and teach ***the ethical and moral principles*** contained in the law and the prophets.”

That is not what Bahnsen says. Bahnsen says, ***EVERY BIT!***

That means that, for one thing, the JOT & TITTLE are NOT broad based principles. As a

matter of fact, let me quote that from Bahsen's book. Page 74 of *Theonomy and Christian Ethics* says,

“JOT & TITTLE are NOT broad based principles...”

They are jots & tittles. They are every little, insignificant, picayune, Pharisaical legalistic detail – getting down to the jots & tittles. That is really ALL the teensy weensy bits of the OT Law are fully valid in this age.

I wrote a letter to a friend recently and said, As Hamlet says,

“’tis the sport to have the engineer Hoist with his own petard”

That sounds almost obscene but it is not. Look it up. What it means is that, if what Bahnsen says is true, then the entire Christian Church has been violating God's Law for almost 2,000 years.

When push comes to shove he cheats at a crucial point. And the crucial point is Hebrews 8:13.

NAS Heb 8:

13 When He said, "A new covenant," He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old **is ready to** disappear.

KJV Heb 8

13 In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old **is ready to** vanish away.

NIV Heb 8

13 By calling this covenant "new," he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging **will soon** disappear.

NRSV Heb 8

13 In speaking of "a new covenant," he has made the first one obsolete. And what is obsolete and growing old **will soon** disappear.

NLT Heb 8:

13 When God speaks of a new covenant, it means he has made the first one obsolete. It is now out of date and **ready to be put** aside.

WEY Heb 8:

13 By using the words, "a new Covenant," He has made the first one obsolete; but whatever is decaying and showing signs of old age is **not far from** disappearing altogether.

Bahnsen, in his book *Theonomy and Christian Ethics*, **CITES** Heb 8:13. He does not QUOTE it. Quote means you quote the whole thing, word for word. Cite means you put the reference there (i.e. Heb 8:13) – but you don't quote it. You just leave people on their own responsibility to look up the reference.

The kind of sneaky thing about doing that is, you can cite all you want to, and, as a writer, I know that more than half the people are going to bother to look it up. You know, I met in Australia last year an 80 year old woman who read through *Days of Vengeance* twice, and looked up all the references. It probably took her almost 80 years to do that. But she is the only person I ever met besides me who looked up all the references.

I mean, nobody looks up the references. You just read the statement and if you agree with it, OK – and you go on.

But Hebrews 8:13 is a crucial text. Written about AD 67. I am assuming Paul wrote it. People have all kinds of theories about who wrote it. My mom thinks Priscilla wrote it.

But in AD 67, shortly before 70 AD, Hebrews 8:1 is a classic verse. I mean, is the book of Hebrews so difficult? Wow. I mean, all of this symbolism and ceremony and all this old stuff. How do I figure this out? I mean, I wish he had put this in the beginning (that is, as verse 1 in chapter 1) but he waits til you get halfway through the book to say this.

NAS Heb 8:

1 ¶ **Now the main point in what has been said is this:** we have such a high priest, who has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, ...

So he waits until chapter 8 to tell you the main point. And verse 13 is a crucial verse:

OK, in Hebrews 8 he quotes Jeremiah 31 on the change between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant.

By the way, I went to school with a guy in the late 70's early 80's named Dawson McCalister. He is a semi-famous Pre-Mil Dispensational speaker who goes around the country speaking to youth groups. And my sons went to his conference a couple of years ago. And, like everybody, halfway through he has to jump into Eschatology and start preaching about the Millennium. And when my sons came home and told me what my old friend Dawson McCalister had done, I got visibly upset. They came home and said that Dawson quoted from Jeremiah 31 and said, "Boy, this is what it is going to be like in the Millennium."

And I almost blew a gasket. Cause, "Hello". You don't dare quote Hebrews. Hebrews quotes Jeremiah 31 and says that it is fulfilled. But he wants to put it in the Millennium so he doesn't, he shields from his youthful audience the fact that Hebrews 8 says that it is a New Covenant reality. And he wants to shove it off into some far distant future.

Anyway, Paul says, summarizing his argument from Jeremiah 31, Paul says in Hebrews 8:13:

NAS Heb 8:

13 When He said, "A new covenant," He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old **is ready to** disappear.

Jeremiah is looking forward to a New Covenant. The New Covenant that is going to come. He is in the Old Covenant centuries before the coming of Christ – and Jeremiah is looking forward to the coming of this New Covenant.

So Paul summarizes it and says, "Look, he says new". ... He has made the first obsolete. Now,

that is real easy. So there was the Old Covenant. And the New Covenant. We are in the New Covenant now. The first covenant is obsolete. Everybody agree with that? I mean, please, you gotta agree with me on that one. The first covenant is obsolete. It says so in the Bible. I know it is not red letters (Jesus did not say it). But still, it is in the Bible.

So Paul says,

NAS Heb 8:

13 When He said, "A new covenant," He **has made** the first obsolete.

That is PAST TENSE. He **HAS MADE** the first covenant obsolete.

But notice what he says:

NAS Heb 8:

13 When He said, "A new covenant," He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old **is ready to** disappear

There is a change of tense there. And the fact is, what he was pointing to was the TRANSITION between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. What he is saying is that the Old Covenant ceremonies are almost, but not quite, gone. Because people were still, in 67 AD, performing sacrifices. They were still obligated to do all the Old Covenant rituals. They were still in force.

But what he says is:

But whatever is	becoming obsolete
and	growing old
<u>is ready to</u>	disappear

So, back then, in the last days of the Old Covenant, the old covenant ceremonies were passing away, but they had not quite passed yet.

In F. F. Bruce commentary on Hebrews, he says,

“If the earlier covenant, with all that accompanied it, is antiquated – it is ready to vanish away. Anything that is old and aging *will shortly disappear* (NEB I think).

And he points out that this was written while the Old Temple was still standing. That is, about 67 AD or so.

If, in fact, the Jerusalem temple was still standing, if the priests of Aaron’s line were still discharging their sacrificial duties there – then our authors words were all the more telling. Jesus and, shortly after Him, Stephen, had foretold the downfall of the temple. If the end of the temple and its ministry had been immanent 30 years before (*as Jesus and Stephen were saying*) it was more immanent now that the 40 years of probation were more than 3/4 way toward their end.”

So Jesus and Stephen were pointing to the destruction of the temple almost 40 years before. Now, he

was saying, it is more immanent. So it is all the more pressing on the readers of the Hebrews epistle.

Back to Bahnsen.

Remember, I said that 4 times Greg Bahnsen refers to (he cites but does not quote) Hebrews 8:13. Let me read it again:

NAS Heb 8:

**13 When He said, "A new covenant,"
He has made the first obsolete.**

It sounds like he contradicts that last statement by what he says next.

But whatever is becoming obsolete

Now Paul, or whoever, is it obsolete or isn't it? It is one or the other, right? And what he says there is that it is BECOMING obsolete, but it was not quite obsolete yet.

and growing old is ready to disappear

He is not here now. I don't want to speak evil of the dead. So I won't say he cheated, but it looks like he is cheating.

On page 194 of *Theonomy and Christian Ethics* Bahnsen says,

Hebrews 8:13 says that the Old Age is past, but that the age of the Son is here to stay.

See, here we are living in 1997, and we read that and say, "Yeah. Yeah. That is true. The Old Age is past. The New Age is here to stay". But the problem is that that is NOT what Hebrews 8:13 is saying. What Heb 8:13 is saying is that IT IS PASSING AWAY – it has not quite gone yet.

Page 209: *Theonomy and Christian Ethics*

The ineffective priesthood has been superceded by the better hope. Hence, the ceremonial system is now antiquated. The perfect has come, thus making the sacrificial prestly temple irrelevant (Heb 8:13). The ceremonial system of the Old Covenant has become obsolete and grown old. It is (*quotes the Greek word meaning "disappearing"*), which, in its verbal form, is used of legislation which has become inoperative, because it is no longer relevant to changes circumstance."

But the trouble is, he doesn't dare quote the actual verse. Oh, he will quote it in Greek, because his readers aren't reading Greek. OK? But it has not quite disappeared yet. So what he is

doing is, he is saying, “Look, the Old Covenant is gone. Are we all agreed that the Old Covenant is gone?” If you people were Charismatic you would raise your hand. We all agree that the Old Covenant is gone. And that is the trick.

I don’t mean to downgrade him. But the fact is that he is pulling a theological trick by getting you to agree to something, and you don’t realize the tremendous theological import of what you just gave away. Because Hebrews 8:13 DOES NOT SAY that the Old Covenant IS obsolete. It says that it is GROWING obsolete, BECOMING old, READY TO vanish away.

It is obsolete now in 1997. So we think, hey cool. Nothing wrong with that.

Let me go on and quote Bahnsen again.

On page 213 of *Theonomy and Christian Ethics* . I quoted that before (those 5 points). I will quote number 3 again.

3. The observation of this system of ordinances (redemptive ceremonies) was intended to be superceded. It was a foreshadow of Christ’s saving economy, and **has become** obsolete with His historical work (Heb 8:13).

No it doesn’t. It says that it is BECOMING obsolete. It is becoming obsolete as Paul was writing it. But it was not quite obsolete yet. Otherwise, if it was completely obsolete, it would have said so. But it was not yet.

It certainly is obsolete now for us. So that is why we don’t even think about the sort of psychological trick that has been conveyed in this.

One more quote from Bahnsen (page 227 of *Theonomy and Christian Ethics*)

The period of the Old Testament is now followed by the New. The kingdom has superceded the time of expectation of the Older Testamental era. The age of the Law of prophets is past. The age of the Son and its fuller revelation is here to stay. [What does he quote?] (Heb 8:13)

The thing is, what he is doing is, he is getting us to impute to Hebrews 8:13 something that Hebrews 8:13 never intended to mean. It does not mean that it is past. It is past now for us. Because we are past 70 AD. But it was not past yet. It was almost past. It was like a hair’s breath of being past. But it was not quite past.

An actual quotation would show that, from the NT or Last Days perspective, it had not quite passed yet. Bahnsen was, perhaps unknowingly, playing a theological sleight of hand trick.

And on this point let me make a little suggestion. Let me give you a hint. If you are having trouble with Preterism, look at it through the New Testamental transitional language. For instance,

NAS Eph 2:

19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of

God's household,

20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone,

21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord,

22 in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.

It had not been completely built yet. It was growing. There is a transition going on in the NT that we often fail to recognize because we are so much past it now. It was a transition that was going on then but is not going on now. It has been completed.

Now let me quote from John Brown (1754-1858), a commentator from the last century. He wrote a book in 3 volumes, *Discourses and Sayings of our Lord*. He says something significant on page 171-2. He talks about the passing away of the heavens and the earth in Matthew 5:17-19. And he takes the position that the passing of heaven and earth is past. We are not waiting for it to pass away someday. He takes the position that it is passed. He is almost a Preterist, isn't he? Listen to this.

If the words are carefully examined (*that is, of Mat 5:17-19*) there will be found to contain in them NOT an indefinite declaration of the inviolable authority of the Law, but a declaration of its inviolable authority until a certain period, until certain events had taken place, until heaven and earth pass, 'til all things be fulfilled. Heaven and earth passing away, understood literally, is a disillusion of the present system of the universe. And the period when that is to take place is called the end of the world. But ...

He is saying, "I don't agree with that. That is what people think it means."

But a person at all familiar with the phraseology of the Old Testament Scriptures knows that the dissolution of the Mosaic Economy and the establishment of the Christian [*Economy*] is often spoken of as a removal of the old earth and heavens and the creation of the new earth and heavens. For example,

KJV Isa 65 ;17 ¶ For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth:
and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. ...

Isa 66:22 For, as the new heavens and the new earth that I am
making, Are standing before Me, An affirmation of Jehovah! So remain
doth your seed and your name.

The period of the close of one dispensation and the commencement of the other is spoken of as "the last days" and "the end of the world". And is described as the shaking of the earth and heaven as should lead to the removal of the things which were shaken.

Notice that he is quoting from Hag 2 and Heb 12. So far that is excellent Preterist exposition.

The phrase at the end of the verse, "til all things be fulfilled" seem to refer to the typically prophetic character of the law, and to be equivalent to "until all things figured in it BE, TAKE PLACE, REALLY EXIST – until the true priest, the true altar, and the true

sacrifice come.” In these words there is an allusion to the language in the previous verse. Christ says, “I am not come to destroy” (that is, to invalidate the OT Scriptures) ... “but to complete them”.

Now, the period referred to is the period when the Divine Revelation was completed by the Son of God.

Stop. So far he is preterist. He is preterist up to the hilt. Let me say that again.

Now, the period referred to is the period when the Divine Revelation was completed by the Son of God.

That period, I apprehend, would be ... WHAT? What would it be? If not 70 AD, when was Scripture finished? Remember, he says “the period when the Divine Revelation was completed by the Son of God”. When was Divine Revelation completed? He says,

That period, I apprehend, was the pouring out of the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost.

OOPS! Wait a minute. He had just quoted a verse written 30 years after Pentecost. I mean Pentecost happened 35 years before Paul wrote in Hebrews, saying that it IS PASSING AWAY. And he even quotes Hebrews 12:26-27 [in his footnote]. Which was written over 30 years **AFTER** he says that Revelation had stopped being given. If Revelation stopped on the Day of Pentecost, none of the New Testament would exist.

But the New Testament was written during the period of Transition. In the last days period of transition from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant.

Let me get back to where I am going here.

So, what I am saying is that John Brown says that Divine Revelation was completed at Pentecost. But the fact is that Divine Revelation was not even written yet (at Pentecost). And it is important ... like I said, he quotes Heb 12:26-27 (which was written over 30 years after Pentecost).

What I am trying to say, though, is that his point is valid. John Brown’s point is valid. He just had it off by a few years. As applied to the closing of the canon in AD 70, when the temple was destroyed by God’s own judgment, his point is valid.

Now, Let me quote from Paradise Restored (Chilton’s book). One of my favorite statements in Paradise Restored on page 103 ff.

I preached for a pastor recently who had read Paradise Restored ... in fact he kept it under his pillow. He memorized portions of it and quoted it copiously to people. All the time while I was visiting. It seems like he was dedicated to Paradise Restored. And when I pointed out some of the mistakes in Paradise Restored, and that I don’t agree with my own writing at this point ...

But this statement on page 103 and following I think is just wonderful.

The Gathering of the Elect

Finally, the result of Jerusalem's destruction will be Christ's sending forth of his "angels" to gather the elect. Isn't this the Rapture? No. The word angels simply means messengers (cf. James 2:25), regardless of whether their origin is heavenly or earthly; it is the context which determines whether these are heavenly creatures being spoken of. The word often means preachers of the gospel (see Matt. 11:10; Luke 7:24; 9:52; Rev. 1-3). In context, there is every reason to assume that Jesus is speaking of the worldwide evangelism and conversion of the nations which will follow upon the destruction of Israel.

Christ's use of the word gather is significant in this regard. The word, literally, is a verb meaning to synagogue; the meaning is that with the destruction of the Temple and of the Old Covenant system, the Lord sends out His messengers to gather His elect people into His New Synagogue. Jesus is actually quoting from Moses, who had promised: "If your outcasts are at the ends of heaven, from there the LORD your God will synagogue you, and from there he will take you" (Deut. 30:4, Septuagint). Neither text has anything to do with the Rapture; both are concerned with the restoration and establishment of God's House, the organized congregation of His covenant people. This becomes even more pointed when we remember what Jesus had said just before this discourse:

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to synagogue your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling. Behold, your House is being left to you desolate! (Matt. 23:37-38).

Because Jerusalem apostatized and refused to be synagogued under Christ, her Temple would be destroyed, and a New Synagogue and Temple would be formed: the Church. The New Temple was created, of course, on the Day of Pentecost, when the Spirit came to indwell the Church. But the fact of the new Temple's existence would only be made obvious when the scaffolding of the Old Temple and the Old Covenant system was

taken away. The Christian congregations immediately began calling themselves "synagogues" (that is the word used in James 2:2), while calling the Jewish gatherings "synagogues of Satan" (Rev. 2:9; 3:9). Yet they lived in anticipation of the Day of Judgment upon Jerusalem and the Old Temple, **when the Church would be revealed as the true Temple and Synagogue of God.** Because the Old Covenant system was "obsolete" and "ready to disappear" (Heb. 8:13), the writer to the Hebrews urged them to have hope, "not forsaking the synagoguing of ourselves together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the Day approaching" (Heb. 10:25; cf. 2 Thess. 2:1-2).

The Old Testament promise that God would "synagogue" His people undergoes one major change in the New Testament. Instead of the simple form of the word, the term used by Jesus has the Greek preposition *epi* prefixed to it. This is a favorite New Covenant expression, which intensifies the original word. What Jesus is saying, therefore, is that the destruction of the Temple in A.D. 70 will reveal Himself as having come with clouds to receive His Kingdom; and it will display His Church before the world **as the full, the true, the super-Synagogue.**

Now, that stands as an almost complete Preterist Statement. And I wrote at the beginning of the front page of my book a quotation from Alexander Pope,

“A man should never be ashamed to own that he had been in the wrong, which is but saying in other words that he is wiser today than he was yesterday”.

Now, let me get to the point, let me cut to the chase here.

The literalist-Theonomist dilemma is that Bahnsens says EVERY BIT of the OT Law is binding until heaven and earth are literally gone. That means the OT ceremonies, too. That means the dietary laws, too. And I happen to know that Bahnsen loved pork and shellfish. He also like Jello. Ever read the ingredients of Jello? Geletin. That tells me a lot. Geletin = boiled animal skin, bones and tissue. As Bill Cosby would say, “There is always room for horses hoofs”.

My point is that the dietary rules are a major issue in the NT. In the New Covenant you still go to heaven if you eat pork. You might go a little quicker. But more to the point: the detailed elements of the Old Covenant were still binding until AD 70. The sacrifices and ceremonies were not passed for Paul’s readers – they were passing away. Mat. 5:17-19 looks like it would happen in one fell swoop. In reality, it was a transition.

Paul rebukes the Galatians for their OC legalism in Gal 4:3, 9-10.

NAS Gal 4:

- 3 So also we, while we were children, were held in bondage under the elemental things of the world.
4 But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law,
5 so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.
6 Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"
7 Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God.
8 ¶ However at that time, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those which by nature are no gods.
9 But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again?
10 You observe days and months and seasons and years.

And in Col 2:8, 20-21

- 8 See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.
...
20 If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as,
21 "Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!"

And Heb 5:12-14

- 12 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food.
13 For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant.
14 But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.

... In those texts, Paul specifically talks about the elements of the Old Covenant (stoichea), the elements of the Old Covenant system that were passing away. That were becoming obsolete. He is rebuking them for following the elements of the OC Legalism instead of going into NC freedom.

The same Greek word, Stoichea, is found in 2 Peter 3 (translated elements). The Dispensationalists there think that means (going back to the ancient Greeks) what the earth is made of. Elements. As in elemental table. The physical elements of the earthly world. ...