

FRIENDS OF THE NAZARENE©

An on-line Biblical Studies Magazine

“They Follow the Lamb No Matter Where He Goes”

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STATEMENT OF PURPOSE: Nazarene Saints Publishing© is a Bible research group for a better Scriptural understanding. We are dedicated to the preservation and publishing of Christian writings which aid *Friends of the Nazarene*© to "follow the Lamb no matter where he goes." (John 15:14; 3 John 14; Revelation 14:4) The *Friends of the Nazarene*© are a spiritual community of Messianic Christians. We are apologists dedicated to the defense of the truth that "God is One" and not three. The Bible is our creed. We view this "God-breathed" Book as inspired alone, while the thoughts of men about it are not. We wish to show respect for our multitude of Christian brethren. (1 Peter 3:15)

[Mark Miller / Senior Editor (California, USA); Ralph Slaney / Senior Spanish editor (Almeria, Spain); Luis Padilla / Associate Spanish Editor (Brooklyn, USA); Andy Weeks / Associate Editor [Webmaster] (Chicago, USA); Christian Gorny / German Editor (Wales, England); Andrew Foss / Hebrew editor (California, USA)]

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

- ?? **GOSPEL OF JOHN:** We are happy to announce the completion of the *Nazarene Commentary 2000*© on the Gospel of John. It is a fresh new rendering of the Greek language in a literal form with as little paraphrase as possible. It has been compared against four interlinears and two dozen other versions. It is 150 pages with over 1,100 footnotes. Every major phrase has a number of alternative renderings from other translations. Each key Greek word is referenced. There is a brief commentary on most verses. Cross references have been checked by computer, as well as key words as they are used throughout the Bible and the Gospel of John. Each chapter and paragraph has a topical heading. Each paragraph has review questions to make the whole work a Bible study aid as a teaching tool for individuals and churches. It will be available in the future on the *Friends* web page and in a new CD-ROM *Nazarene Commentary 2000*©.
- ?? **THE LETTER TO THE GALATIANS:** The work on *Galatians* in *Nazarene Commentary 2000*© has been completed. It features two versions in the *Revised Standard Version* and the *Weymouth Translation*. With 31 pages the work has 163 footnotes. As other works in *Nazarene Commentary 2000*© there are many features include topical outline and review questions to make it a fine tool for personal and church studies. The overall theme – *Walk by the Spirit in Freedom* – is important for

every Christian who wishes to understand the relationship of the Law of Moses to the Christian Church.

- ?? **THE LETTER TO THE PHILIPPIANS:** The *Nazarene Commentary 2000*© on Philipians has been completed. It is based three versions: *Nazarene Saints Rendering* as the footnoted version and the *Revised Standard Version* and the *Weymouth Translation*. With 37 pages it has 215 footnotes of commentary. The overall theme – *Keep the Mind of Christ* – is important for every Christian to understand how to behave after the manner of Christ Jesus.
- ?? **THE LETTER TO THE COLOSSIANS:** The *Nazarene Commentary 2000*© on Colossians has been completed. Like Galatians above it is based on the same two versions in 30 pages with 201 footnotes. The overall theme – *Walking in Wisdom* – is important to every Christian who wishes to understand how to apply godly knowledge in a wise manner. The epistle to the Colossians warns against Jewish-Gnosticism and Greek philosophy.
- ?? **SECOND CORINTHIANS:** The *Nazarene Commentary 2000*© on 2 Corinthians has been completed. It is 65 pages with 348 footnotes. It contains two versions: the new version *Nazarene Saints Rendering* as the footnoted version, and for comparison, the *Weymouth Translation*. The overall theme – *Keep Testing the Faith* – is important for every Christian who wishes to preserve Church unity and how to identify those who as satanic ministers have infiltrated the Nazarene community throughout the Gospel Age.
- ?? **PRESENT WORK:** The current work in *Nazarene Commentary 2000*© is the Book of Acts. Things are moving along on the *Nazarene Commentary 2000*© CD-ROM and we hope a version will be available by this summer. It will include over a half dozen books, more than 100 Biblical Articles, and most of the commentary on the Christian Bible. It is estimated to be over two million words on Biblical studies and we hope to include some colorful and thematic photos.

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FAITH PERSPECTIVES

[An Open Forum for Expression]

Words of Encouragement

I LOVE YOUR PAGE...

I am currently on a search for truth. I no longer believe in the trinity. And I can't seem to find any denominations that agree with my beliefs. Thank God for a site that explains the truth. Though I don't claim to agree with all your doctrines, I promise I will research them, since we agree on the most important. (OSAS) (resurrection). Please put me on the list for any publications you send out... THANKS AGAIN, Your brother in Christ,
Tony.

>>>>>>>

Please send by email attachment the Gospel of John, 1 Corinthians and Galatians. I'm really enjoying the "daily Bible thoughts" and hope you can continue. Your counsel has been appreciated. IMHO, you are one of Christ's "gifts in men"--and a phenomenon to boot! Doug [Canada]

>>>>>>>

Thank you dear brother Mark for this up date and all of the hours, hard work, you have spent on the Commentaries. I feel free to say and speak for the rest of us when I say that all of it is greatly appreciated by us all. Your sister in Christ, Sheila

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I have not had a chance to read all of your material but I did get to read some. I think it is very good. You certainly have done your homework. Keep up the good work. I will write more later. Thank you so much for your kindness and dedication to the Lord.
Lynnford

>>>>>>>>>>

Dear Friends in Christ,

I dropped by your website today after receiving my first issue of "The New Creation" published by the Christian Millennial Fellowship as they had your site listed in the links page. I just wanted to take a moment to tell you how much I appreciated your web site. I took the time to read several issues of your online magazine and then I downloaded all the publications in .rtf for viewing and sharing with my friends later.

I was originally a Seventh-Day Adventist and then became interested in the beliefs of the Jehovah's Witnesses. I never joined them but became interested in the ABS movement. However, I've always had problems with dates that these various groups have set. But now I've come into contact with the Free Bible Students (online only) and here I've found someone who holds the same beliefs as myself without all these conflicting dates. Thank the Lord! So it's a relief to see that I'm not the only one holding to these doctrinal beliefs.

I wish to thank you for the great ministry that you are doing and I wanted to let you know that the message has touched my heart. May Jehovah richly bless you in his bountiful mercies.

Yours in Christ,

James Edgar McCarthy, Sr. [Maine]

>>>>>>>>

Dear believers in the faith,
I read your article against the trinity with great interest. I have now taken this doctrine to the highest authority in the SDA church. It is increasingly agitated among the laity. We are now printing much material on the subject too especially for the lay "gentiles" etc. Thought you would be encouraged to hear this. Tony

>>>>>>>>

Dear Brother Miller,

I hope that I am not bothering you with my missives. It is not my custom to do so. But I have been spending the entire day (since around 8:30am now 4:45pm) reading this manuscript "Messianic Confessions". I wished I were as fast a reader as yourself. But alas, with my strokes and subsequent brain damage it usually takes re-reading a line several times before the full gist of it settles in.

This work that you have written is an absolute masterpiece. Once again I express how I wished that it could be printed in book form. Unfortunately I do not have the monetary means to back such an endeavour. But I sit here reading and all I can keep saying is, "WOW!". It is too bad that those of us who would like to see this work published and distributed couldn't in some way contribute to a fund just for this very purpose. Many of us wouldn't be able to donate much--but several dollars here and there spread out over thousands would mount up. Of course, much prayer would be needed that this would be the Hand of the Lord, and if He so desire then the work would be carried through.

My main thrust of this email was to once again say how much I am thoroughly enjoying this electronic book, that I wish to express my desire again that it could be published, and that I am anxiously awaiting when I finish this so I can delve into the other written material that was enclosed in the zipped .exe file found on your site.

Once again Brother Miller I apologize for inundating you with so much email and taking up your time. I also would like to thank you for your kindness and understanding. You have endured so much more than I shall ever be asked to endure in my lifetime, and to read of your experiences has been such an uplifting experience to me. "Praise God from Whom all blessings flow!"

Yours in Christ,
James McCarthy, Sr.
"jimmymac" [Maine]

>>>>>>>

I just finished reading Phillipians
including all the footnotes. Great Work.
God Bless in Christ... George [New York]

==== END ====

BIBLE THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

A new feature that regularly appears on the Nazarene-Friends one-list [or eGroup] is a Bible thought for each day. These are largely drawn from notes in Nazarene Commentary 2000© on Bible books with some added remarks. Here we present some examples for those who may have missed them on the talk-list or are not subscribed to it. [If you wish to subscribe you may do so from the *Friends of the Nazarene* web page.]

Did Jesus exist in heaven before his human birth?

JN8:26 *There are many things I have to say and judge about you [Jews]. However, the One who sent me is real, and what I have heard 'alongside Him,' [Proverbs 8:30 LXX] these things I am speaking to the world.* [Nazarene Saints Rendering 2000 AD]

The phrase "alongside Him" is PAR AUTO in Greek. The phrase also occurs at John 8:38, 40. In John chapter 8 Jesus refers to his pre-existence "alongside" the Father before he came into the world. What proves to be interesting that PAR AUTO also occurs at Proverbs 8:30 in the context of a created son who was begotten before the creation of the earth. Proverbs 8:22, 30 reads from the 3rd Century BC Jewish Greek *Septuagint*: "YHWH created me [the] beginning of His way for His works. ... I was alongside Him [PAR AUTO] arranging everything. I was His delight, and daily I rejoiced in His presence continually." Jesus makes the same reference again in his Passover Prayer at John 17:5, "**And now glorify me, Father, alongside Yourself [PARA] with the glory that I had alongside You [PARA SOI] before the cosmos existed.**" [NSR] The word "before" [PRO] is also a word which occurs four times in Proverbs

8:23-25. John 1:1 also uses a word from Proverbs 8:23, EN ARCHE [in a beginning]. There seems reasonable material in Jesus' own words that both he and John allude to Proverbs 8:22-30.

How are “genuine disciples” known?

JN8:31 *As a result, the Jesus spoke toward those Jews who had believed in him: “As long as you remain in my Word you are my genuine disciples.”* [Nazarene Saints Rendering 2000 AD]

The phrase “genuine disciples” is also rendered by Goodspeed as “really disciples of mine.” In his parable of the Sower, Jesus foretold the time when his field would be sown with both wheat and weeds. [Matthew 13:36-43] The Nazarene's words above indicate something about “genuine disciples” and at the same time suggest there are not so genuine or real disciples. The “genuine disciples” are identified as those Christians who “remain in [Christ's] Word.” At the very least such would first have to know and be familiar with the teachings of Jesus Christ as found in the Gospels. Then, they would need to “remain” in his Word. The word “remain” is also rendered: continue, abide, live in, faithful to, hold fast to, dwell within. Does this not move all with a desire to become more acquainted with the Lord's teachings? This can be done by making those red letters in the Gospels a regular source of personal Bible reading and study. Though all of the Scriptures are God-breathed [2 Timothy 3:16] we note Hebrews 1:1, 2, “*On many occasions, and in a variety of ways in ancient times, The God spoke to our [Hebrew] forefathers by means of the Prophets. In these last days He spoke to us [Hebrews] by means of a Son.*” [Nazarene Saints Rendering 2000 AD] If we find ourselves losing our godly joy, perhaps it is due in part because we have ceased remaining in his Word? Nothing heals the inner person more than letting that Christine “living waters” flood through our heart and mind. No other portion of Scripture is more filled with God's Power than the Words of our Lord Christ. [Nazarene Commentary 2000©]

How important is daily meditation on the Bible?

Psalm 1:2 “*[Their] greatest pleasure is in the law of Yehowah, and in His law they study day and night.*” [ModVer] The phrase “study” here is also rendered: reads in an undertone, talk with himself, meditate, recites, pouring over it. Since most ancient Hebrew worshippers did not possess a copy of the Scriptures, it was vital they learned to remember and recite portions. The psalmist David encourages the godly person to utter these in recitation, as in prayerful meditations, both during the day and during the night. Such sincere efforts will be a source of blessings, or happiness, to the one who has become so familiar with His Word. This kind of person is characterized by several observable things mentioned in Psalm 1:1, 3 – a] they do not walk in ungodly advice; b] walk the road sinners tread; c] join the company of scoffers; and, d] produce fruitage at the proper time. A little meditation on these characteristics and the sincere worshipper can see these things surrounding us in the modern world. Nothing can protect us more than remaining close to the Word. It should be the goal of every Christian disciple to make familiarity with the Word a life-long pleasure so that as years advance more and more perfect gems from God's Law will be on our tongue as we meditate day and night. [Nazarene Commentary 2000©]

What will happen at the *parousia*-judgment?

MT13:41 *The Son of Humankind will send forth his angels and they will cull out of his Realm everything that causes scandal and those doing lawlessness.* [Nazarene Saints Rendering]

When the Lord Messiah returns in his foretold visible Parousia he sends out “his angels” [compare “his angels” Revelation 12:7] to cull out – or gather, collect out – all those unrighteous undesirables within the Church throughout its history, living and dead. Jesus mentions these angels in both Matthew 24:31 and Matthew 25:31. Those so removed at the time of Christ's visible manifestation are described as those

who cause “scandal” and are “lawless.” The Greek word for “scandal” is SCANDALA and is also rendered: things that offend, causes stumbling, all who are hindrances, spoiling, those who lead others to do wrong. The history of the Church has been filled with such “scandal.” Such persons who stand before “the judgment-seat of Christ” will meet their professed King in shame. [2 Corinthians 5:10; 1 John 2:28]

The other word used to describe these “sons of the Evil One” is “lawlessness.” Lawlessness may be defined as the transgression of God’s commandments. The apostle John describes “lawlessness” in this manner: *“Anybody habitually sinning is a law-breaker. Therefore law-breaking is sin.”* [1 John 3:4 NSR Paraphrase] In John’s context there are two major “commandments” or laws: *“Now this is His commandment: first, we believe and trust in the name of His Son Jesus Christ; and, second, love one another just as he commanded.”* [1 John 3:23 NSR Paraphrase] One of the examples John gives in the same chapter is the failure to come to the aid of a brother or sister in need: *“For example: if any of us has this world’s resources for maintaining life and is aware that another Christian is in need and yet slams shut the doors of his tender affections – how is it possible that God still loves that person?”* [1 John 3:17 NSR Paraphrase] He actually compares such non-action and disinterest to hatred and murder.

It is interesting to note that “lawlessness” [the breaking of God’s commandments of freedom] is also mentioned in Matthew 7:21-23, ***“Many will say to me in The Day: ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name? And, in your name cast out demons? And, in your name did many dynamic works?’ And then I shall confess to them: ‘I never knew you! Get away from me, those working unlawfully!’”*** [NSR] Or, those who were doing “lawlessness.” Yes, they pointed to great works done “in the name of Jesus” but likely these failed the requirement of 1 John 3:23. These “lawless” ones are the “goats” who see the need of even “one of the most humble of [His] brothers” and yet refuse to come to their assistance. Such negative, disinterested persons are not fit for the heavenly Kingdom of God. [Matthew 25:31-46] [Nazarene Commentary 2000©]

Who are the “other sheep”?

JN10:16 ***“I have ‘other sheep’ [Isaiah 49:12; 56:8] that do not belong to this sheep-fold. Those [sheep] I must lead also, and they will listen to my voice, and they will become one flock, ‘one Shepherd.’ [Ezekiel 34:23] [Nazarene Saints Rendering]***

When Jesus mentions these “other sheep” he may echo or allude to a combination of Isaiah 49:12 and Isaiah 56:8. These verses read: *“Look! These [sheep] will come even from far away. ... The utterance of the Sovereign Lord Jehovah, who is collecting together the dispersed ones of Israel, is: ‘I shall collect together to him others besides those already collected together of his.’”* [NWT] Jesus came to call “the lost sheep of the House of Israel” [Matthew 10:6; 15:24] and with but rare exceptions he does not witness to non-Jews. Later some Greeks wanted an audience with Jesus but he does not arrange for such. [Compare John 12:20] It is likely these Greeks were included in Jesus’ words at John 12:32 that after his ascension to heaven he would draw people of all kinds. It is these who are the “other sheep” who are not naturally part of the Jewish sheepfold. Compare these two groups becoming one in Ephesians 2:11-22. Some arbitrarily, and without any support, apply these “other sheep” to another class of Christians, the American Indians, and even homosexuals.

These Jews and non-Jews would become on fold, or flock under a single Shepherd, just as Paul describes them in Ephesians 2:11-22. The phrase “one shepherd” is straight out of Ezekiel 33:22-24 where the Messiah-type David is the parallel: *“And I will save my sheep, and they will no longer become something for plunder [as Jesus mentioned in John 10:8]; and I will judge between a sheep and a sheep. And I will raise up over them one shepherd, and he must feed them, even my servant David. He himself will feed*

them, and he himself will become their shepherd. And I myself, Jehovah, will become their God, and my servant David a chieftain in the midst of them. I myself, Jehovah, have spoken.” [NWT] [Compare 1 Peter 5:4] [Nazarene Commentary 2000©]

What was Christ “installed” as King?

Psalm 2:6, 7 *“I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill. I will proclaim of Yehowah: He said to me, ‘You are my Son. Today I have become your Father.’”*

When is this prophetic Psalm fulfilled? Some apply the verses to an invisible return of Christ in 1914 or some other day. Some think it yet future. How can we know for sure? Happily we do not have to speculate, for we have two inspired application of the Psalm with a specific application. Both of these inspired interpretations provide an application of the Second Psalm to the 1st Century in the year 33 AD. First, for example, Peter quotes Psalm 2:1, 2 in a prayer with a group of Christians. Note this in Acts 4:25-28: “... and who through holy spirit said by the mouth of our forefather David, your servant, ‘Why did nations become tumultuous and peoples meditate upon empty things? The kings of the earth took their stand and the rulers massed together as one against Jehovah and against his anointed one.’ Even so, both Herod and Pontius Pilate with [men of] nations and with peoples of Israel were in actuality gathered together in this city against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, in order to do what things your hand and counsel had foreordained to occur.” [NWT] Thus, Peter believed that the first two verses of Psalm 2 were fulfilled upon the Nazarene’s execution.

Paul quotes Acts 2:7 in a Jewish synagogue and applies the fulfillment to the resurrection of Jesus Christ in the year 33 AD. Compare his words at Acts 13:33-37, “... that God has entirely fulfilled it to us their children in that he resurrected Jesus; even as it is written in the second psalm, ‘You are my son, I have become your Father this day.’ And that fact that he resurrected him from the dead destined no more to return to corruption, he has stated in this way, ‘I will give YOU people the loving-kindnesses to David that are faithful.’ Hence he also says in another psalm, ‘You will not allow your loyal one to see corruption.’ For David, on the one hand, served the express will of God in his own generation and fell asleep [in death] and was laid with his forefathers and did see corruption. On the other hand, he whom God raised up did not see corruption.” [NWT] Paul makes it clear he believes the Second Psalm was fulfilled with the resurrection of Jesus. He made again allude to this Psalm at Romans 1:3, 4 when he says, “He promised by means of His prophets in sacred writings – concerning His Son ... [who was] declared God’s Son (our Lord Jesus Christ) by a resurrection from the dead through a spirit of holiness.” [Nazarene Saints Rendering]

Having these inspired interpretations by the apostles Peter and Paul, we can speak with a surety that Psalm 2:6, regarding the enthronement of Messiah as King, was fulfilled upon the resurrection and ascension of Jesus to heaven, just as Daniel 7:13 foretold. [Nazarene Commentary 2000©]

Who are these that have such angels in heaven?

Matthew 18:10 *Watch that you never despise one of these 'little ones'. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always look upon the face of my heavenly Father.* [Nazarene Saints Rendering]

This verse comes after a context which begins back with Matthew 18:1, "*Who is the greatest in the Realm of the heavens?*" As explained elsewhere the phrase "Realm of the heavens" is generally used by Jesus of his own domain or territory over which he rules. [Compare notes on Matthew 13:40-43.] So, when Jesus first answers this question his address is to his disciples, and more likely to his twelve apostles. They seemed to have an ongoing concern over who was the greatest. It amazes us that they would even ask this question. However, though some today may not ask the question, attitudes and conduct expose a similar bent of mind: political ambition within the church. This is the first time the subject comes up among the disciples, but it is not the last. [Compare Matthew 23:11; Luke 9:46; Luke 22:24, 26.] There was a petty struggle among the disciples about their position in relation to one another, even, unfortunately, as among church elders and deacons today. It is unlikely the problem will not disappear. However, all those men who have been appointed to a position of authority need to heed the warning of the Nazarene that follows: the awesome matter of stumbling the humblest of the flock.

So, though the object lesson was a small child, it is possible "one of these least ones" is the humblest, or most seemingly insignificant, within the Nazarene community. [Compare Matthew 25:40] Our attitude toward others in the spiritual association bears on our own everlasting welfare. Thus, when the Nazarene says "their angels in heaven" he likely has in mind those child-like, humble disciples within the Realm of the Son. It is at once frightening, and again comforting, to know powerful angelic creatures are aware of the treatment -- or, even the attitude toward -- on the part of the politically ambitious toward the humblest member of the Christian faith. [Compare Psalm 34:7 and Hebrews 1:14.] Note, it is the "little ones" who have angels in heaven who always behold the Father's face. It is possible that the attitude among some of the apostles was in danger of becoming a stumbling-block to the more humble in their midst. Certainly, many a Christian has been turned off by the struggle for power among church elders. [Nazarene Commentary 2000©]

Who are the righteous "wheat" and when is the "harvest"?

Matthew 13:43 *Then the righteous will 'shine forth like the sun' in the Realm of their Father. Let the one with ears, hear.* [Nazarene Saints Rendering]

The "righteous" here are those wheat-Christians raised to the *parousia*-Judgment. 1 John 2:28 and 4:17 describes this judgment of the Church: "*Now, little children, continue to abide in (Jesus) so when the time comes for him to be made visible we all might speak openly and freely at his Arrival and not experience embarrassment while standing before him ... in the day of judgment.*" [NSR Paraphrase; 2 Corinthians 5:10] They are the same as the sheep-Christians at Matthew 25:37. The "righteous" are contrasted to the "lawless," for righteousness is the same as being law-abiding. The key law is that of love expressed by charity and hospitality as the parable of Matthew 25:31-46 shows. [1 John 3:16-18, 23] Jesus borrows the phrase "shine forth like the sun" from Daniel 12:3 which describes both the end-time Saints rescued from the Great Oppression, as well as the "righteous" wheat awakened from the sleep of death. The "sons of the kingdom" have now become part of the Father's Kingdom in heaven. Note this verse in Daniel follows upon the foretold "oppression" associated with the appearing of Michael. (Daniel 12:1, 2 JBS; compare Matthew 24:30) Surely there is good reason for the Nazarene to give the closing warning: "*Let the one with ears, hear.*" [Matthew 13:43; compare Matthew 13:9] [Nazarene Commentary 2000©]

What is the "dragnet" and when are the "fish" separated?

Matthew 13:47 *"Again the Realm of Heaven may be compared to a dragnet thrown into the sea and gathering together every kind of (fish). Matthew 13:48* *When the net is filled it is hauled onto the*

beach. Then the (fishermen) sit down and collect the good fish into vessels; but, the rotten (fish) they throw away. [Nazarene Saints Rendering]

There is something about the Christian Church [the Realm of Profession] that resembles a fisherman's dragnet lowered into the world to "catch men alive." [Matthew 4:19; Luke 5:10] Some call this the 'Gospel Net'. Jesus called his first disciples and told them they would "become fishers of men." He commissioned his apostles to "Go and make disciples of people of all nations." (Matthew 28:18, 19) Beginning with Jesus the gospel preaching "dragnet" -- the greatest evangelical effort of all time -- has been fishing earth's waters. This occurs at the Return (or, Parousia; see notes on MATTHEW 24:3) of Christ and the beginning of the *parousia*-judgment. This is parallel to the parable of the wheat and weeds in the field of the Lord. (MATTHEW 13:37) as well as those sheep and goats at Matthew 24:45-25:46. At the judgment the dragnet will be filled with all those who professed Jesus as Lord as Christians throughout the Gospel or Church Age (Period). Happily there will be 'good fish'. But, sadly there are 'rotten' fish even today within the Church. The Greek *sapros* is rendered rotten or corrupt and often applied to the bad fruit of a tree. (Matthew 7:17, 18; Luke 6:43) These 'rotten' fish are the same as the "workers of lawlessness" of Matthew 7:21, 22, the weeds of Matthew 13:38, and the "goats" of Matthew 25:40-46. [Nazarene Commentary 2000©]

How does one settle difficulties between Christians?

Matthew 18:15 *"However, if your brother should sin go to him privately and offer reproof. You gain your brother if he listens to you.* [Nazarene Saints Rendering]

When most people are offended, or in some other way have a complaint against another, the majority of them go to others and begin to spread rumors with a degree of exaggeration. Here Jesus offers a principle to avoid stumbling others -- the previous them. In this verse the word "brother" indicates a spiritual or religious relationship. The subject or theme is still that of stumbling a little one. Jesus now deals with how to handle such a matter personally. What the "sin" is we are not told. We do not know whether this is a personal offense, or another type of sin which has been observed. If the theme and subject above continue, this may be something scandalous or offensive done to a little one so as to cause stumbling. Such a person -- in danger of Gehenna -- needs to be cautioned and corrected so that no further harm come to others. Jesus was well aware of this personal responsibility under the Law of Moses: *"You must not hate your brother in your heart. You should by all means reprove your associate, that you may not bear sin along with him."* [Leviticus 19:17; Proverbs 25:9]

Other versions render this: *"Go and have it out with him in private."* [RIEU] Or, *"Make clear to him his error between you and him in private."* [BAS] The original question from the disciples was, "Who is greatest?" [Matthew 18:1] This is a subject that has been discussed among the disciples. Is it possible this is the kind of thinking which is called a sin here? Is there a need among the disciples for one of them to go to another and offer reproof regarding this political ambition?

Jesus said -- not to spread this matter by slanderous gossip -- but "reprove" the erring Christian. The Greek for "reprove" here is ELEGZON. Strong's Exhaustive Concordance provides the following: "reprove, rebuke, convince, tell (one's) fault, or refute. Generally there is a suggestion of shaming of the person convicted 1b) by conviction to bring to the light, to expose 2) to find fault with, correct 2a) by word 2a1) to reprehend severely, chide, admonish, reprove 2a2) to call to account, show one his fault, demand an explanation 2b) by deed 2b1) to chasten, to punish."

This is to be done privately, between the witness to the sin and the sinning fellow Christian. Unfortunately, this Christian method is seldom applied, and some of those self-righteous prefer to spread damaging gossip that may ruin the Christian reputation of the sinning brother. How much more loving to always go first to the erring person and as kindly as possible try to gain such. O, that more Christians would listen to the Nazarene! [Nazarene Commentary 2000©]

Who were authorized to bind and release on earth?

Matthew 18:18 *"I tell you (apostles) this truth: Whatever you (apostles) bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you release on earth will be released in heaven.* [Nazarene Saints Rendering]

It is often overlooked in these portions that Jesus is speaking directly to his apostles. [Matthew 18:1] The "you" is plural and indicates Jesus is speaking to the apostles. What follows is directed to these disciples and not necessarily a blanket statement regarding all Christians. For example, the phrase may involve the sin of the brother under discussion. If two or three (of the apostles) agree on a certain action against a wrongdoer, then it becomes so. An example of binding something on earth might be the appointment of Matthias to take the office of Judas. [Acts 1:23-26] The Greek grammar may allow, "already bound .. already loosed." Compare a binding matter in the case of Ananias and Sapphira. [Acts 5:1ff.]

The Greek for "release" is LYSETE and may be rendered "loose." The idea may infer forgiveness. [Compare notes on Matthew 16:19 IN Nazarene Commentary 2000©.] There the context deals with the Peter's keys. If these be viewed as three -- and relate to the Jews, Samaritans, and Gentiles -- then as long as the door to the Samaritans and Gentiles remains closed and locked, it is so in heaven. Jesus authorized his apostles to forgive sins. [John 20:23] Later Paul writes that the Corinthian congregation "forgive" the incestuous sinner. [2 Corinthians 2:7] Since these words are addressed only to the apostles, it should not be assumed that any two or three Christians today may release or bind something and that Heaven must agree with that. [Nazarene Commentary 2000©]

Who are the "two" who might agree?

Matthew 18:19 *Again, I tell you (apostles) this truth: If two of you might agree about a matter on earth it will occur just as you request because of my heavenly Father.* [Nazarene Saints Rendering]

This verse has been much abused, and one hears the use of "agree" among some Christians in general, as though Jesus was here talking to all Christians. The Greek "you" is plural and is directed to the twelve apostles. [Matthew 18:1] If "two" of these apostles agreed upon a certain matter they could have the assurance -- as the foundation stones of the Holy Temple [Ephesians 2:19-21] -- that such inspired decision would take place. In other words it is if two apostles agree. [The words "might agree" are from the Greek **SYMPHONESOSIN**.] An example of this may be seen in Acts 8:14-17 where the two apostles Peter and John agreed to pray for the Samaritans to "receive the holy spirit." The above does not mean that any two Christians today who "agree about a matter on earth" can automatically expect the Father to act on their request. [Nazarene Commentary 2000©]

Who are the "two or three" gathered in Jesus' name?

Matthew 18:20 *For where ever two or three of you [apostles] are gathered together in my name, there I am among them.* [Nazarene Saints Rendering]

This is a verse often cited in application to any two or three Christians who might meet together. As seen above the plural "you" speaks directly of the apostles. This is "two or three" of the apostles met in important matters of the Church. The words "gathered together" are from a word related to "synagogue." These may be official synods or congregational meetings. [Compare 1 Corinthians 5:4; James 2:2.] Note how Peter and John go to Samaria to request they receive the holy Pneuma. [Acts 8:14, 15] Note it is in the name of "Jesus" and not the name of his Father "Jehovah" that this promise occurs. The phrase may also mean something authorized by the person so named. So, Jesus has in mind "two or three" of the apostles who meet in matters of Church order and authority. They could count on the invisible spiritual headship of the Lord in their midst. The above is not a blanket statement that Jesus would be among any gathering of any two or three disciples. [Nazarene Commentary 2000©]

How often must one forgive another?

Matthew 18:21 *Then Peter approached Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times must my brother sin against me and I must still forgive him? As many as seven times?"* **Matthew 18:22** *Jesus answered Peter, "I tell you, not as many as seven times, but as much as seventy times seven."* [Nazarene Saints Rendering]

We may assume the previous discussion has moved Peter to ask this. [Matthew 18:15-17] It is very likely that much of this discussion was prompted by the original issue of who was the greatest. [Matthew 18:1] This debate no doubt involved Peter judging, from Matthew 16:18, 19, and possibly there was some criticism of him. We can only speculate on Judas' attitude regarding all of this. The Jewish rabbis taught that it was enough to forgive three times, so surely Peter thought he was being very generous. Regarding this suggested amount see Genesis 4:24 where Cain is revenged seven times, but Lamech seventy-seven times. That is a total of 490 sins! In other words, our Lord taught there is no end, or limit, to forgiveness of sins against one's person. [See notes on Matthew 6:12] Luke 17:4 has Jesus adding, "Even if he sins seven times a day against you and he comes back to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' you must forgive him." There is a need to learn to say, "I am sorry." [Nazarene Commentary 2000©]

How important is forgiveness?

Matthew 18:35 *Just so my heavenly Father will do to you if ever you do not forgive from your hearts every one of your brothers!"* [Nazarene Saints Rendering]

Forgiveness is a most serious matter. Those who refuse to forgive will learn a side to the Almighty they will not like. It is a mistaken notion that the Nazarene and his Father were all-forgiving all the time. This matter of forgiveness is one in which the individual chooses his own destiny. [See notes on Matthew 6:14, 15] The lesson is simple and straightforward: we have acquired a debt so great it is impossible to repay; therefore, we ought to reflect our appreciation in forgiving our fellows. The Knox version says to forgive "with all his heart." Paul echoes the Nazarene in Ephesians 4:23, "Do not let the sun set while you are still provoked to anger. Do not let the Devil have a place among you." [NSR Paraphrase] And again in Colossians 3:13, "Bearing with one another and readily forgiving each other, if any one has a grievance against another. Just as the Lord has forgiven you, you also must forgive." [Weymouth Translation] Jesus taught at Matthew 7:1, 2, "Do not condemn others, and you will not be condemned. For the condemnations you give are the condemnations you will receive. And, the standard you use will be the standard used for you." [ModVer] Realizing that we will be judged by the same measuring tape we judged others, every disciple of Jesus ought to be characterized by a forgiving character. [Nazarene Commentary 2000©]

What are the grounds for divorce?

Matthew 19:9 *I tell you this: that whoever divorces his woman not for the reason of fornication and marries another, commits adultery."* [Nazarene Saints Rendering]

Jesus gives only one reason for divorce --fornication. The Greek here is *porneia* and is worthy of considerable research. The root of *porneia* is from "to buy" as in the purchase price of a prostitute, and so "fornication" first became synonymous with "prostitution." (Genesis 38:24; Exodus 34:16; Hosea 1:2; Leviticus 19:29) The word occurs about 65 times in the Bible. Most often in Hosea (17) and secondly in 1 Corinthians (11). In the Christian Bible fornication is incest (1 Corinthians 5:1), adultery (1 Thessalonians 4:3), and "unnatural" sex (Jude 7). Paul alludes to Numbers 25:1f and the fornication of Israelite men with Moabite women, possibly temple harlots as religious worship is associated.

B. F. Westcott, *Saint Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians* (1906, p. 76) defines *porneia*: "This is a general term for all unlawful intercourse, (1) adultery: Hos. ii. 2, 4 (LXX.); Matt. v. 32; xix. 9; (2) unlawful marriage, 1 Cor. v. 1; (3) fornication, the common sense as here [Eph 5:3]." Bauer's *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (revised by F. W. Gingrich and F. Danker, 1979, p. 693) defines *por-nei'a* as "prostitution, unchastity, fornication, of every kind of unlawful sexual intercourse." "Fornication" is generally related to adultery, rape, and prostitution. (Genesis 34:1, 2, 6, 7, 31; Genesis 38:24-26; Genesis 39:7-9)

The question may be raised whether sexual intercourse between two consenting persons **who intend to marry** is “fornication.” Some would state that it is. However, we are unable to find a single case where sex between engaged persons is considered “fornication.” Virtually every occurrence of “fornication” is limited to rape, adultery, incest, homosexuality, or prostitution. Indeed, the word “prostitution” could replace “fornication” in the Prophet Hosea and most of the cases elsewhere. While adulterous persons were stoned under the Law, couples (engaged or not) who had sexual intercourse were not stoned but required to marry, the male giving up divorce rights and had to pay a fine to the father of the woman. (Exodus 22:16, 17; Deuteronomy 22:28, 29)

If one divorces and does not remarry adultery is not committed. Compare Mark 10:11, *“Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her.”* Luke 16:18, *“Everyone that divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he that marries a woman divorced from a husband commits adultery.”* [Nazarene Commentary 2000©]

What is “a different Gospel”?

Galatians 1:6 I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and turning to a different gospel – Galatians 1:7 not that there is another gospel, but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. [Revised Standard Version]

Paul is concerned that so many have been removed, steadily deserting, quickly tuning away, shifting your ground, or, moving away from God. Paul will explain how they have deserted God. They have been “turning to a different Gospel.” Paul had similarly warned at 2 Corinthians 11:4, *“If someone arrives and begins to preach another Jesus—other than the one we preached – or you Corinthians accept an ‘inspiration’ other than the one you all accepted – or a Gospel other than the one you accepted – you all tolerate such a person.”* [NSR] These false teachers were unsettling, upsetting, or harassing the Galatians. These were the Judaizers mentioned at Acts 15:1, 2, 24. [Note the word “trouble.”] These were pseudo Christians who wanted to force the Church into a Jewish mold that continued to observe Jewish festivals and circumcision. This “evil influence” continued throughout the history of the early Church and has persisted to this day. [Nazarene Commentary 2000©]

What are things upon which a Christian should meditate?

Philippians 4:8 Finally, brothers, continue to consider these things: everything true, everything serious, everything righteous, everything chaste, everything affectionate, everything reputable – anything virtuous, anything praise-worthy. [Nazarene Saints Rendering]

Paul counsels the Philippians to think on certain things, to take into account certain qualities, to make their thoughts dwell on key attributes of character. Paul is to now list eight things worthy of meditating on. If one examines these in the light of difficulties between the two Christian women mentioned above -- as well as the two different attitudes in Philippians 1:15-17 – it can be seen that some of these things are the way we ought to think of others.

First, “everything true.” Pay no attention to what is untruthful about another. Ignore slander and gossip, particularly if you know it is untrue. **Second, “everything serious.”** Or, honest, honorable, dignified. Some people make big issues over matters of no consequence. They make mountains out of molehills, particularly when they wish to

exalt themselves and belittle another. Do not chase after silly matters of no consequence. Rather, cultivate a high degree of Christian seriousness about those matters that involve worship and Christian character. Both men and women are counseled to be “serious.” [1 Timothy 3:8, 11; Titus 2:2] **Third, “everything righteous.”** Do not meditate on unrighteous matters concerning others. Nor, those things that are not fair and just. Learn God’s righteous standards and walk in these virtues and principles. [Compare Philippians 1:11.] **Fourth, “everything chaste.”** Do not listen to things about others that are impure. When the mind and heart drift to matters unchaste, learn to mentally say “No!” and change the thinking to godly matters. [2 Corinthians 11:3; 1 Timothy 4:12; 5:2; 1 Peter 3:2] **Fifth, “everything affectionate.”** Or, lovely, endearing, amiable, lovable. Do not harbor hateful, unloving thoughts. Such come from pride and jealousy. Learn, not only to love others, but to “like” them. Search for their better qualities and ignore those that irritate. [Compare Philippians 1:8. (Romans 12:10)] **Sixth, “everything reputable.”** Or, of good report, kindly spoken, gracious, well spoken of. Pay no attention, and give no consideration to, speech that destroys reputation and character. Say nothing that will taint your own reputation. When people think of you, or hear your name, they know or sure that here is a reputable person who would never harm another. Elders particularly must have a good report from worldly persons. [1 Timothy 3:7] **Seventh, “anything virtuous.”** Or, morally excellent. Pay not attention to that which is not virtuous in thought and action. If it is suspect to public decency, run for your lives. The Latin word VIRTUS means strength of moral character, manliness, value. Cultivate those virtues human generally praise. Think no thought about another that is not virtuous. [Compare notes on 2 Peter 1:5.] **Eighth, “anything praise-worthy.”** Or, honorable. If you hear something not praise-worthy of another suspect the motives. If you easily believe the worst of people, examine your own heart in prayer, for pride and jealousy may have you in their grip. Think and behave in a manner that others will praise for your kindness, good manners, thoughtfulness, forgiving nature, and godly example. [Nazarene Commentary 2000©]

Who are the “last” and the “first”?

Matthew 20:16 *So, those last will be first and those who were first, last.* [Nazarene Saints Rendering]

This is the Nazarene’s moral to his parable of the 11th hour workers. No matter how long, how hard, or under what conditions -- the “workers” in the harvest receive the same wage: celestial glory. [2 Corinthians 5:1] Mark 9:35 helps us understand what it means to be either first, or last: *“So Jesus sat down and beckoned the twelve to him and then told them: “Any person who wants to be ‘first’ must be the ‘last’ and the servant to all.”* [NSR] (Mark 10:31) Some labor under self-righteous superiority because they have labored longer, and possibly harder, than newer members within the realm of profession. Some view themselves as ‘first’ or, foremost, chief, greatest, premier. The Jewish hierarchy were of such a mind. Some in the modern Church also have this self-perspective. They view others as ‘last’ -- least, insignificant, unnecessary, bothersome, and a waste of their time. In the judgment many that thought themselves ‘first’ will be the last to inherit God’s Kingdom. [Matthew 7:21-23] Others viewed as the ‘last’ will be “the greatest in the Kingdom of God.” [Nazarene Commentary 2000©]

Who are the “great” within the Christian Congregation?

Matthew 20:25 *But Jesus asked the disciples to present themselves, then he told them: “You are aware that the Gentile rulers lord it over their subjects; and, the ‘greats’ wield authority over others.*

Matthew 20:26 *Not so among you. Rather, whoever wishes to be 'great' must be your slave.*
Matthew 20:27 *Whoever wishes to be prominent must be your slave.* [Nazarene Saints Rendering]

Both the Jewish and the non-Jewish rulers or lords exercised dominion – despotic powers, high-handed tyranny – over their subjects. Jesus instructed his twelve apostles it was not to be this way among the Nazarene community. This is a command from the Lord that authoritarian tyranny will be absent from genuine disciples of Jesus. We find in Jesus the perfect example of a true leader within the Christian framework: a humble and loving model who asks nothing of his fellows that he himself will not do. Not once does the Nazarene take advantage of his followers by living a life-style better, or easier, than they. This kind of humble, self-sacrificing servant will actually have the “first place” from the King’s standpoint. [Philippians 2:5-7] [Nazarene Commentary 2000©]

Is Christ’s reconciliation conditional?

Colossians 1:22 *He has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him, Colossians 1:23 provided that you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel which you heard.* [Revised Standard Version]

It was the literal, fleshly body of Jesus the Nazarene – not some god-man phantasm – that brings about this reconciliation. In part this reconciliation includes the hope of being presented before God’s Throne of Grace in a holy, blameless, and irreproachable manner. The phrase “before him” is in Greek KAT-ENOPION, or down in front, that is, in His presence. [Compare notes on 1 John 2:28 and 2 Corinthians 5:10.] There is a qualification to this, however – “*Provided that you continue in the faith*” – that is, reconciliation is condition on conviction and endurance in The Faith. [Revelation 2:10] That is, not just the conviction alone, but also “stable and steadfast” in such faith. That is, grounded and settled, firm and unmovable. Philips Modern English paraphrases this: “*This reconciliation assumes, of course, that you maintain a firm position in the faith.*” [Ephesians 3:17; 1 Corinthians 15:58] Never “*shifting from the hope of the gospel.*” The Evangel has a particular and unique hope – spirit existence in the celestial realms. [John 8:23; 1 Corinthians 15:44-51; 2 Corinthians 5:1] [Nazarene Commentary 2000©]

What “clothing” should Christians put on?

Colossians 3:12 *Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, and patience, Colossians 3:13 forbearing one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.* [Revised Standard Version]

That is, “put on the garments.” Like brand new clothing put on the same old person, the New Person in Christ must be characterized by completely new attitudes and qualities. Paul lists some of these in the following phrases. **First, compassion.** Or, tenderness of heart, heart of pity, tender affections of compassion, merciful in action. The New Person is compassionate – humane, gracious, forgiving, sympathetic. [Philippians 2:1] **Second, kindness.** The New Person in Christ is known to be kind toward others and this is manifest in empathy and charity. Kindness is also marked by good manners and courtesy. This kindness is not limited to just other Christians, for God is “*kind toward the unthankful and wicked.*” [Luke 6:35] **Third, lowliness.** Or, self-humiliation, humble in mind. One knows they are meeting a New Person in Christ when humility is manifest – arrogance and egotism completely lacking. [Romans 12:16] **Fourth, meekness.** Or,

gentleness, mildness. The adversarial, confrontational, aggressive person has not become a New Person in Christ. Nor have the opinionated or self-righteous. The New Person in Christ is known by his willingness to yield on matters of no great import, to be reasonable in sharing convictions with others. Most of all, the meek New Person in Christ is willing to learn, and indeed, receive rebuke and reproof when that is necessary. **Fifth, patience.** Or, forbearance, longsuffering, tolerance. The New Person in Christ is known as a patient Christian who is not easily upset, but is willing to suffer long with the weak and immature. [See notes on Ephesians 4:2.] This is true even if there is a legitimate “cause of complaint against another.” Paul provides a specific example of this patience as it is displayed in a forgiving disposition even when there is a legitimate “complaint” against another. His words are a virtual commentary on the Lord’s Prayer at Matthew 6:12 and the Lord’s own commentary at Matthew 6:14. [Compare notes on Ephesians 4:32.] [*Nazarene Commentary 2000*©]

What “freedom” did Paul have in mind?

Galatians 5:1 *For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.* [Revised Standard Version]

By writing about such freedom, what did Paul mean? Did he mean absolute freedom or liberty within the Christian Church? That is, did he mean everyone in the Body of Christ was free to determine what each individual member believed no matter what that might be? Or was this “freedom” some qualified and with limitations? The Galatians who had been formerly Jews – having been observers of the Law of Moses and the many Jewish rituals [Galatians 4:8-10] – had been in slavery like Hagar. [Galatians 4:25] However, Jesus Christ had “fulfilled” the Law by perfect love. [Matthew 5:17; Galatians 5:14] By becoming a “curse” in his death on the Tree [Galatians 3:13] Christ released the Jews from that kind of slavery. So, the Jewish Christian was “no longer under the Law” [Galatians 3:25] Indeed, any Jewish Christian who insisted on circumcision was separated from Christ. [Galatians 5:4, 6] Thus, Jewish Christians were not free to force others under the burden of the Law. Such were introducing “another gospel” and were anathema. [Galatians 1:6-9] Also, Christians were not free to have their own moral standards rather than be led by God’s holy Pneuma. [Galatians 5:13, 16-21] [*Nazarene Commentary 2000*©]

Was the Kingdom taken away from Israel?

Matthew 21:43 *Because of this I tell you: the Kingdom of The God will be removed from you and given to a nation producing (Kingdom) fruitage. Matthew 21:44* *And the person who falls upon this Stone will be shattered; but whoever (the Stone) falls on will be smashed.* [Nazarene Saints Rendering]

Jesus foretold that fleshly Israel would lose the “kingdom” promised to them based on their obedience to the Law of Moses: “*And now if you [Israelites] will strictly obey my voice and will indeed keep my covenant, then you will certainly become my special property out of all [other] peoples, because the whole earth belongs to me. And you [Israelites] yourselves will become to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.*” (Exodus 19:5, 6 NWT) That kingdom would be given to another nation producing royal fruitage. There is another “nation” who will receive the “kingdom.” Peter describe this as the Christian Church: “*Also, you [non-Jews] very ones are being constructed as living stones into a spiritual house, a holy priesthood [Exodus 19:6] to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God [Isaiah 56:7] through Jesus Christ. ... But, you, are ‘a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a special treasure of a people’ [Exodus 19:5, 6] -- having been called out of darkness into his awesome illumination – ‘that you might declare’ his virtues.* [Exodus 19:6] [You non-Jews] *who were once ‘not a people’ but now ‘God’s People’ –*

'those not shown mercy,' but now, 'those shown mercy.' [Hosea 1:6, 8]" [1 Peter 2:4-10 Nazarene Saints Rendering] Those who made up this new "nation" were mainly non-Jews. Indeed, only a few Jews throughout the Gospel Age would become part of such a "nation." The vast majority of Jews would experience what Jesus had predicted. *"Whoever [the Stone] falls on will be smashed!"* This "smashing" began between the years 66-73 AD during the Roman war with the Jews. However, the real "nation" – the Israel of God – survived to this day. [Galatians 6:16] [Nazarene Commentary 2000©]

Who is the "person without a wedding garment"?

Matthew 22:11 *"Now when the king arrived to view those reclining at the festival table he saw there a person without a wedding garment.* [Nazarene Saints Rendering]

In Matthew 22:1-14 the Nazarene gives a parable dealing with a marriage feast. Those guests "who had been invited" – that is the Jews in the nation of Israel – generally begged off and for this reason or that [most for materialistic reasons]. Because the Jews were "not worthy" the invitation went out to non-Jews, both wicked and good. After the wedding banquet became full, the King arrived. Jesus had taught that this was the Arrival of Messiah followed by the *parousia*-judgment as foretold in Daniel 7:22. [Compare related parables at Matthew 24:44-25:46.] When the King returns his entire Household is to be judged or inspected. [Daniel 12:1, 2; 2 Corinthians 5:10; 1 John 2:28; 1 John 4:17] In the banquet room there were some dressed inappropriately. Like all weddings the invited guests dress appropriately to the occasion. This person dresses in such a way to make it obvious he is out of place at these festivities. Our dress often reveals something about us and our attitudes. The metaphor of dress is often used of spiritual clothing, such as certain characteristics – love, forgiveness, mercy, humility, compassion, kindness, tolerance, gentleness. [Colossians 3:12] When we appear before the judgement-seat of the Messiah we will appear in the type of clothing we have chosen. [2 Corinthians 5:10; 1 John 2:28; Matthew 7:21-23] [Nazarene Commentary 2000©]

How can love be hypocritical?

Romans 12:9 *Show loving concern without hypocrisy.* [Nazarene Saints rendering]

Romans 12:9a reads in the *King James Version*: *"Let love (AGAPE) be without dissimulation."* Literally in Greek this is, *"The love unhyprocritical."* Fittingly this type of love is at the top of Paul's list in harmony with those teachings of the Nazarene. But, it is a special kind of AGAPE: it is not hypocritical or two-faced. True, Christian AGAPE must be lacking any agenda or motive other than the desire to see the very best take place for our neighbors. Paul's words show that AGAPE or "love" can be hypocritical. The word AGAPE is essentially "interest" or "concern" but with two driving engines: a) principle; and, b) motive. If the principle be right and the motive wrong it is hypocritical. If it be rightly motivated but on wrong principle, it is misplaced. This word "hypocrisy" occurs often in the Christian Bible. It is the combination of "under" + "judge" and is drawn from those fake faces actors wore which have become symbols for the theater itself: the one sad, the other happy. People lacking the Transformed Mind -- and any effort to perfect the Christian character -- often wear two faces and it becomes difficult to tell who they really are.

The Nazarene is described as "guileless" (Hebrews 7:26) and this is the way the Nazarene disciples ought to be. (Romans 16:18; 1 Corinthians 13:4; 1 Timothy 1:5; James 3:17; 1 Peter 1:22) True and pure AGAPE thinks only of another's interest in seeking the highest good of both neighbor and enemy. Paul describes this love without ever using the word: *"Seek not for self, but for others. ... Not looking after your own interests but those of others."* (1 Corinthians 10:24; Philippians 2:4 NSR) This must lack a selfish motive or hidden agendas. Ask: Is my love free of hypocrisy? Is my concern for another attached with hidden agendas? Is there a hidden motive behind my concern for another, perhaps what I may gain by this display of concern and interest? Dare I ever become two-faced so that my smile and warm embrace camouflages secret intent? Remember the kiss of Judas! (Matthew 26:48, 49) [Nazarene Commentary 2000©]

How may we honor one another?

Romans 12:10c *Show preference by honoring one another.* [Nazarene Saints Rendering]

Romans 12:10c reads in the King James Version: *“in honour preferring one another.”* We all enjoy respect from others. This is usually shown by speech in one form or another. It is also demonstrated in refraining from treating others disrespectfully. Particularly is this so with those who might be considered “inferiors.” Instead, your human decency should reflect that humility reflected in Christ himself. In the Scriptures there are certain relationships which call for particular respect. (Lamentations 2:6; Matthew 21:37; Ephesians 5:33; Hebrews 12:9; 1 Peter 3:2; 3 John 9, 10) There are some men, particularly those with authority, who respect no one. (Luke 18:2, 4)

There is an area of respect often ignored in religious contexts: when defending one's faith. Note how Peter encourages a respectful defense of one's belief: *“Hold the Lord Christ in reverence in your hearts. Be always ready with your defense whenever you are called to account for the hope that is in you with modesty and respect.”* (1 Peter 3:15 NEB) A lack of respect for others and honor for people of all kinds is demonstrated on the Internet. This shows up at those web sites which are either anti-something or x-something, often with language and manners uncharacteristic of any Christian.

In daily life this can manifest itself with family members, work mates, school associates, including, of course, Christian brethren, and those people met throughout the day. The tenderness in the previous point ought to move us in all our contacts to be respectful in honoring others. Ask: How do I respect and honor others? Do good manners characterize my dealings with others? Would anyone say of me, “Now there goes a well-mannered person”? [Nazarene Commentary 2000©]

What does it mean to be “aglow with the spirit”?

Romans 12:11b *Burn with spirituality.* [Nazarene Saints Rendering]

Romans 12:11b reads in the *King James Version*: *“fervent in spirit.”* The literal Greek (KIT) may be “to the spirit boiling” or “in spirit burning.” (UBS) Essentially this is telling us to be enthusiastic rather than walk around with a sour or saddened demeanor. Such a person was Apollos, a man “mighty in Scripture,” as the *King James* describes him. Acts 18:24, 25 reports: *“Now a certain Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, an eloquent man, arrived in Ephesus; and he was well versed in the Scriptures. This man had been orally instructed in the way of the Lord and, as he was aglow with the spirit, he went speaking and teaching with correctness the things about Jesus.”* (NWT)

Some persons have an introverted demeanor and others present themselves as overly serious. Many misinterpret this as arrogance. Some will have to make a concerted effort to manifest a happy outgoing disposition that seems always “up.” True, this takes more energy, but your neighbor is worth it. Ask: Am I an “up” person? Am I out-going and enthusiastic? If not, how can I reflect the real joy of Christ residing in my heart? Can I smile more? Can I strive to make uplifting and encouraging remarks? [Nazarene Commentary 2000©]

In what hope do Christians rejoice?

Romans 12:12a *Always rejoice in the hope.* [Nazarene Saints Rendering]

Romans 12:12a reads in the King James Version: *“rejoicing in hope.”* The Greek has the article and thus it is “the hope.” Paul had earlier described the condition of the human creation as, *“The (human) creation groans together and travails in pain together.”* (Romans 8:22 NSR) He continues to show that despite this groaning pain there is a sustaining hope: *“We groan eagerly awaiting the adoption (as children), the release by ransom of our Body. For to this hope we were saved. But, hope seen is no longer hope, for why hope for what you can see. But if we hope for the unseen we keep waiting by enduring.”* (Romans 8:23-25 NSR)

This hope is “one” and unique to the Body of Christ. (Ephesians 4:4) It is The Hope. It is the hope of

“partaking in the heavenly calling.” (Hebrews 3:1) This “hope” has two premier elements. The first is described by 1 John 3:2, “*Now we are children of God but when (the Son) is made visible we shall see him as he really is.*” [NSR] What a joyous part of our hope, seeing our Lord! But, if possible, there is another feature of the hope even more transcendental and it is recorded at Revelation 22:3, 4: “*His slaves will serve Him reverently and they will see His face.*” [NSR] The power of this “one hope” -- one day meeting both the Celestial Christ and his Father, God Almighty -- is beyond description. Such a hope, renewed daily in prayer and Scriptural meditations, will be characterized in our joy. When we find ourselves overcome by “the groaning pain of this human creation” we will prayerfully reflect on that “one hope” of viewing the Father and the Son within the golden walls of the Celestial New Jerusalem. (Revelation chapters 19, 22)

The Bible is a Book of joy and hope. The word groups “joy” and “happy” occur 650 times in one translation. These words appear most often in the Psalms (118 times) and so meditating on these will build the joy of this God-given hope. In the Christian Bible Luke has been called “the theologian of joy” with over 50 occurrences in the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts. The Bible is also a book of “hope” with this word occurring 240 times. By regularly reading God’s Word and prayerfully meditating on it, hope can be sustained and will manifest itself in a happy and joyful disposition. As in all matters of life, when things are particularly difficult, this joy may reside within instead of revealing itself by the countenance. But, it will be helpful and healthy to keep this hope alive like a burning coal which keeps the inner self warm while the outside may shiver in the cold. Ask: When I consider everything else what is my grandest hope? Did something material come to mind? If I was to make a list of those things which bring me the greatest joy what would be at the top? [Nazarene Commentary 2000©]

To what might the “living stones” be compared?

Ephesians 2:21 ... in whom all the building, jointed together, is growing into a sacred, lordly Divine Habitat, Ephesians 2:22 in whom you also are being built up together into a spiritual dwelling place of The God. [Nazarene Saints Rendering]

The stones in this spiritual Temple have been “jointed together.” The image is of finely chiseled stones carefully made to fit into the next. The Saints are compared to “living stones” by Peter. (Read 1 Peter 2:4-10; compare 1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19. Note 1 Kings 5:17; 7:9.) The stones in the quarry were so well chiseled that no improvements needed to be made when ‘jointed together’ in Solomon’s temple. 1 Kings 6:7 says, “*As for the house, while it was being built, it was of quarry stone already completed that it was built; and as for hammers and axes or any tools of iron, they were not heard in the house while it was being built.*” The test in the quarry is so perfect each Christian fits flawlessly into the celestial Temple. [Compare Colossians 2:19.] This hammering and chiseling involves a process of growth personally and as a Body. [Compare notes at Ephesians 4:13 and Ephesians 4:16.] [Nazarene Commentary 2000©]

How are satanic ministers identified?

2 Corinthians 11:19 For you, as sensible persons, gladly tolerate those who are senseless. 2 Corinthians 11:20 You [Corinthians] tolerate anyone who tries to enslave you, anyone who devours you, anyone who takes from you, anyone who exalts himself, anyone who strikes you in the face. [Nazarene Saints Rendering]

Paul will list five characteristics of the minister of Satan posing as a church representative, giving all the appearance of an angel of light or a minister of righteousness. [2 Corinthians 11:14, 15] First, some, even today, enslave their membership by organizational control. The Christian Judaizers would impose more and more rules and regulations from the Law of Moses to “enslave” the Corinthians. [Note the same language at Galatians 2:4; 4:9; 5:1.] Second, these attempt to “devour” the flock. [Or, plunders, prey upon, spends your money.] One characteristic consistent with

most of these ministers of Satan is – money. [1 Timothy 6:5] Third, these satanic ministers are takers and not givers. [Or, TCN: gets you into his power; KNX: vaunt their power over you; PME: if a man takes away your liberty, spends your money, takes advantage of you.] Any minister who attempts to control the lives of the flock, and who expects to live in luxury at the expense of the sheep, is a minister of Satan. Notice his wrist-watch, his car, his home, his clothing, his life-style – and you may find that lovely “angel of light.” Third, the satanic minister exalts himself. [Or, TCN: puts on airs of superiority; PME: puts on airs.] A minister of Satan can be no different than the one who sent him – filled with arrogance and pride. [Compare 1 Timothy 3:6.] Fifth, the satanic ministers “do not treat the flock with tenderness.” [Acts 20:29, 30] There is more than one way to do this: verbal accusations made in public from the pulpit. Satan’s ministers abuse the flock. [*Nazarene Commentary 2000*©]

==== END ====

THE “LOVE BOMB”

Hypocritical “Love” in the Christian Church

Christ said his disciples would be known by their love for one another. [John 13:35] One would think that love is love. But, it isn’t. Love may have both positive and negative forms. Though Paul describes “the Love” [AGAPE] in 1 Corinthians chapter 13, he also mentions a form of love characterized by hypocrisy. In Romans 12:9 he exhorts: “*Let your love be without hypocrisy.*” [Compare also 2 Corinthians 6:6.]

True and genuine love is marked by interest, concern, and positive action which seeks the highest good of another. [Philippians 2:1-4] It has no agenda or ill motive. On the other hand the negative form of AGAPE, that is hypocritical love, is identified by a wrong motive.

In recent times some who study what they call “cults” have mentioned the so-called “love bomb” as an identifying feature of such. However, do all Christian groups, no matter their designation, experience the “love bomb”? This is understood to be that initial great interest church members show toward a new person in their midst.

When a stranger enters a church or meeting hall, the “love bomb” explodes! Some will go out of their way to show great interest in welcoming this new person as a prospective member of their church, sect, or organization. It is, of course, only natural that all Christians would welcome someone new in their midst. However, the “love bomb” is exposed by several things in particular.

It does not last! Paul writes that true divine love endures and never gives up. So if an initial love does not continue it was not love to begin with. That is, it was love of a hypocritical variety – it had only one agenda: to gain membership and grow in numbers.

At first much interest is shown in this “newly interested person.” Each meeting they attend others will welcome them and show interest before and after the meetings or service. Some of the more zealous members of the sect will show some kind of hospitality, or even charity. As long as this person continues to attend the church services or meetings this “love bomb” will continue.

However, if for some reason the person withdraws or takes another course, the “love bomb” proves to be a dud. For example, the newly interested person may show some genuine evidence of joining the group. If the person is one in need, charity may be given to this person – AS LONG AS IT SEEMS HE/SHE WILL JOIN THEIR FOLLOWING. But, if this person chooses another path, the charity will cease. They may even now be treated almost as an enemy.

The Nazarene spoke at length of true, genuine love at Luke 6:31-36 ***“And behave to your fellow men just as you would have them behave to you. 32 If you love those who love you, what credit is it to you? Why, even bad men love those who love them. 33 And if you are kind to those who are kind to you, what credit is it to you? Even bad men act thus. 34 And if you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is it to you? Even bad men lend to their fellows so as to receive back an equal amount. 35 Nevertheless love your enemies, be beneficent; and lend without hoping for any repayment. Then your recompense shall be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. 36 Be compassionate just as your Father is compassionate.”*** [Weymouth Translation]

Jesus defines the Golden Rule as not just that love shown to those who love us. Jesus suggests there is no “credit” in that. Rather, perfect love – the Christ-like kind – is found in love to those who are not part of our membership, not our friends or family. The Nazarene clarifies that this AGAPE is manifest in two main things: a] kindness; and, b] giving without expecting anything in return. This makes it clear that from Christ’s standpoint love based on the possibility of gaining a new member is no love at all. It is love with an agenda – love that is hypocritical. The so-called “love bomb” was not love in the beginning because it did not endure. [1 Corinthians 13:7]

There are real and sad examples of this kind of “love bomb.” Consider the man who began to associate with one group of Christians. At first a degree of love and kindness were shown to him, but as time past, despite the fact he remained in the church membership, he was later found dead in his apartment. He had been dead for two months —and not one church member had called to check on him. Their love stopped when he stopped attending meetings – even if the reason was death.

Another example is that of the single mother with many children. As long as she attended meetings there was a degree of love shown to her. But when she was forced to not only care for her many children, but also support them – an exhausting effort – she could no longer attend meetings as before. Soon, no one cared any longer. Indeed, the elders agreed not to help her in any manner. Why? Because, to quote, “she was no longer attending meetings.”

And, consider the case of the man who attended meetings with a certain church group. They were charitable and hospitable during this period. But when for several reasons, he could no longer meet with them, their charity stopped. Had an agenda been attached to their former kindness?

Even those who remain members of the same church, the “love bomb” general collapses in time, and the new Christian finds his associations limited to just a few friends. The pastor has lost interest in them – unless they be large contributors. The elders and deacons no longer call. And most of the congregation has forsaken the love they shown in the beginning. These Christians have become like most other people who do not even attend church – isolated with just a handful of friends.

True love, patterned after God and the prime example He sent, Jesus Christ, is demonstrated to both believers and non-believers. Even if these should be actual enemies – the goodness, kindness, financial gifts without expecting anything in return will continue. This is the only way to spiritual perfection, as Jesus himself taught:

' 44 But I command you all, love your enemies, and pray for your persecutors; 45 that so you may become true sons of your Father in Heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the wicked as well as the good, and sends rain upon those who do right and those who do wrong. 46 For if you love only those who love you, what reward have you earned? Do not even the tax-gatherers do that? 47 And if you salute only your near relatives, what praise is due to you? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? 48 You however are to be complete in goodness, as your Heavenly Father is complete. [Matthew 5:44-48 Weymouth Translation]

==== END ====

“JEHOVAH IS OUR LAWGIVER”

There was a time when there was no law. And, then humankind was created and law came into being. The first commandment ever uttered to humankind by God was: *“Become fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.”*[Genesis 1:28] The second law with a sanction was: *“You must not eat from the Tree of the knowing of good and bad, for in the day you eat from it you will positively die.”* [Genesis 2:17] It was first then that it might be said as the prophet Isaiah later proclaimed: *“Yehowah is our Judge. Yehowah is our Lawgiver. Yehowah is our King.”* [Isaiah 33:22 NSR; James 4:12]

The word “law” may be defined as a rule of conduct for which there is a punishment if the law be broken or disobeyed. In Hebrew the word for “law” is generally TORAH though there are also synonyms, such as commandment, regulation, judicial decision. The word “law” occurs about 600 times in the Bible. The first occurrence is at Exodus 12:49 where it occurs in the context of the Passover meal of the enslaved Israelites in Egypt: *“A single law is to exist for both the [Israelite] and the stranger who resides among you.”*[NSR]

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF LAW?

It is not created for law-abiding persons, that is, righteous people who automatically do not violate any law. Law comes into existence because of law-breakers. So, a 1st Century Jewish rabbi wrote: *“Law does not exist for the righteous person, but rather for the lawless, rebellious, irreverent, sinners, unholy, profane, mother-killers, father-killers, murderers, prostitutes, bedders of males, kidnappers, liars, perjurers, and any other thing opposed to healthy teaching.”* [1 Timothy 1:9, 10 NSR] Thus, if all persons were righteous there would be no need for any kind of law. For example, if people – out of kindness and reason – naturally drove at safe speeds, there would be no need for speed limits enforced by police.

The words “law” and “commandment[s]” occur most often in what are called the Books of Moses – 170 times from Exodus to Deuteronomy, and most often in the later, a Bible book named after the Greek meaning for “Second Law.” After the Passover mentioned above, about the year 1512 BC, millions of Israelites entered into the Law Covenant with their God Yehowah at the foot of Mount Sinai. As a people they agreed to observe ALL of God's laws and commandments if they would become a “holy nation of royal priests.” Their agreement is expressed at Exodus 19:5-8,

*“And now if you [Israelites] will **strictly obey my voice** and will indeed keep my covenant, **then** you [Israelites] will certainly become my special property out of all [other] peoples, because the whole earth belongs to me. And you [Israelites] yourselves will become to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words that you are to say to the sons of Israel.’ So Moses came and called the older men of the people and **set before them all these words** that Jehovah had commanded him. After that all the people answered unanimously and said: **‘All that Jehovah has spoken we are willing to do.’**” [NWT]*

Thus, the Law Covenant was born. It was a law with a prime constitution of Ten Commandments as well as about 600 other regulations and commandments. They covered a wide spectrum from morals to rituals, from foods clean and unclean, to precise outlines for ceremonial worship.

Before his death the great leader of the Hebrews, Moses, under inspiration, established the blessings and cursings based on whether the Israelites obeyed ALL of these laws and commandments. Read these in Deuteronomy chapter 28. Deuteronomy 28:1, 2, 15 itself promised:

“And it must occur that if you [individual Israelites] will without fail listen to the voice of Jehovah your God by being careful to do all his commandments that I am commanding you today, Jehovah your God also will certainly put you high above all other nations of the earth. And all

these blessings must come upon you and overtake you, because you keep listening to the voice of Jehovah your God. ... And it must occur that if you [individual Israelites] will not listen to the voice of Jehovah your God by taking care to do all his commandments and his statutes that I am commanding you today, all these maledictions must also come upon you and overtake you.”
[NWT]

For over 1,500 years the Israelites – later called the Jews – professed to live according to these laws. The sad fact is that by far the majority throughout most of this period failed to observe all of these laws. Thus, it was destined that “curses” would befall the Jews. Indeed, it reached a point about the 7th Century BC that one of the Israelites’ greatest prophets said: “*We [Israelites] have for a long time become as those over whom You [Yehowah] do not rule.*” [Isaiah 63:19]

MOSES’ LAW REGARDING A NEW PROPHET

Among all of these hundreds of laws, there was one particular one that would prove to be a real curse to a particular generation of Jews, and, indeed, all those Jews to follow. It was the words of the greatest of all Hebrew lawgivers and prophets, Moses. Speaking for Yehowah the God of the Israelites, Moses said: “*A prophet I shall raise up for them from the midst of their brothers, like you [Moses]; and I shall indeed put my words in his mouth, and he will certainly speak to them all that I shall command him. And it must occur that the [Israelite] man who will not listen to my words that he will speak in my name, I shall myself require an account from him.*” [Deuteronomy 18:18, 19 NWT] Thus, a time would come when God would use a new prophet, greater than Moses, who would speak words other than those commandments in the Law of Moses.

Just so, at the beginning of the 1st Century AD that prophet greater than Moses showed up right on time in the person of Jesus the Nazarene. He was, of course, a Jew whose lineage stretched back through all the great Hebrews as his forefathers. Paul writes of this: “*When the time was fully come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born subject to Law.*” [Galatians 4:4 Weymouth Translation] As a man born to be “subject to the Law of Moses” we would expect that he would observe those original laws and commandments given through Moses. Thus, he kept all of the Ten Commandments and those other regulars among the 600 that applied to him.

What did Jesus the Nazarene have to say about this Law into which he was born? In his first public sermon to his fellow Jews, Jesus told them: “*Do not for a moment suppose that I have come to abrogate the Law or the Prophets: I have not come to abrogate them but to give them their completion. Solemnly I tell you that until Heaven and earth pass away, not one iota or smallest detail will pass away from the Law until all has taken place.*” [Matthew 5:17, 18 Weymouth Translation] What did the Nazarene mean?

The word “until” indicates a time when this Law of Moses will no longer exist. Jesus says that the purpose of his coming was not to destroy the TORAH, but rather to fulfill it. How did he do this? First, by keeping the TORAH perfectly, something no other Jew had ever done. In his mountain sermon the Nazarene rabbi gave commentaries on several portions of the TORAH. These included Exodus 20:13, Exodus 20:14, Deuteronomy 24:1, Numbers 30:3, Exodus 21:24, and Leviticus 19:18. In doing so, he went to the kernel or fundamental principles of these Laws. For example, on the law on murder, he discussed hate; on the law on adultery, he discussed passion.

Second, by fulfilling certain features of the Law of Moses, particularly as a sin-offering Sacrifice to whom all the Law pointed. [Luke 22:44] Such was foretold by Isaiah chapter 53 where Messiah is designated as a sin-offering or sacrifice. Jesus taught that the Law served a particular purpose only until the coming of John the Baptist. For example, the Nazarene says, “The TORAH and the Prophets were until John. ... Indeed, it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one particle of a letter of the Law to go unfulfilled.” [Luke 16:16, 17 NWT] In Jesus all the Law was fulfilled. [Romans 8:4; 13:8, 10]

When asked which was the greatest of the Laws of Moses, the Nazarene answered, citing two: “And one of [the Jews], versed in the Law [of Moses], asked, testing [Jesus]: “Teacher, which is the greatest

commandment in the Law?’ He said to him: ***‘You must love Jehovah your God with your whole heart and with your whole soul and with your whole mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. The second, like it, is this, ‘You must love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments the whole Law hangs, and the Prophets.***” [Matthew 22:35-40 NWT] Later one of the inspired disciples of the Nazarene was to explain that all the Law of Moses was “fulfilled” in one commandment: *“For the entire Law has been obeyed [or, “fulfilled”] when you have kept the single precept, which says, ‘You are to love your fellow man equally with yourself.’”* [Weymouth Translation]

WERE CHRISTIANS, JEWS AND NON-JEWS, UNDER THE LAW?

After the Messiah Jesus “fulfilled” the Law of Moses, how was it to be viewed by his disciples? It took the inspired Jewish rabbi Paul of Tarsus to discuss this subject in all its detail. For example, the word “law” occurs scores of times in just his letter to the Romans. But, first, when Paul speaks of “law” what does he mean? Though Paul uses the word “law” in several contexts, when he means the Law of Moses, he includes the Ten Commandments. [Romans 2:18-22; 7:7; 13:8, 9] So, Paul does not divide the Law of Moses into a moral and ceremonial law. Like his fellow Jew and Christian, James, he agrees, *“For whoever observes all the Law but stumbles in one point has become guilty of [breaking] all of them.”* [James 2:10 NSR] Or, as the Weymouth Translation puts it: *“A man who has kept the Law as a whole, but has failed to keep some one command, has become guilty of violating all.”* Thus, a person who breaks the Sabbath law just once is the same as a murderer or adulterer.

Paul writes that the Law of Moses is only for those who as Jews are under the Law: *“But it cannot be denied that all that the Law says is addressed to those who are living under the Law, in order that every mouth may be stopped, and that the whole world may await sentence from God. For on the ground of obedience to Law no man living will be declared righteous before Him. Law simply brings a sure knowledge of sin.”* [Romans 3:19, 20 Weymouth Translation] He also here states, as he does elsewhere, that by observance of the Law of Moses no one can be declared “not guilty” by God.

WHAT WAS THE PURPOSE OF THE LAW OF MOSES, THEN?

Its purpose could only relate to those who were related to those who had originally vowed to keep all the Law before Mount Sinai – Jews themselves. And this only up to that moment before Jesus the Nazarene fulfilled the Law. In Romans 5:20 Paul explains the Law’s purpose: *“Now Law was brought in later on, so that transgression might increase. But where sin increased, grace has overflowed.”* [Weymouth Translation] He does this again with a different approach at Galatians 3:19, *“Why then was the Law given? It was imposed later on [after the Abrahamic covenant] for the sake of defining sin, until the seed should come to whom God had made the promise; and its details were laid down by a mediator with the help of angels.”* [Weymouth Translation] The word “until” indicates a time when the Law would have served its purpose and no longer be binding. Paul continues in this vein: *“Before this faith came [in the year 29 AD], we Jews were perpetual prisoners under the Law, living under restraints and limitations in preparation for the faith which was soon to be revealed. So that the Law has acted the part of a tutor-slave to lead us [Jews] to Christ, in order that through faith we [Jews] may be declared to be free from guilt. But now that this faith has come, we [Jews] are no longer under a tutor-slave.”* [Weymouth Translation]

Thus, according to Paul, the Jews are no longer under the Law of Moses, and have been released from the curse of the Law. Note this in Galatians 3:13, 14: *“Christ has purchased our freedom from the curse of the Law by becoming accursed for us [Jews]—because ‘Cursed is every one who is hanged upon a tree.’ Our freedom has been thus purchased in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing belonging to Abraham may come upon the nations, so that through faith we [Jews] may receive the promised Spirit.”* [Weymouth Translation]

WHAT ABOUT JEWISH CHRISTIANS IN GENERAL?

Are they bound to observe the Law of Moses, including its Ten Commandments? Must they observe annual festivals such as the Passover, the Day of Atonement, or the Feast of Booths? Must they keep the Sabbath [Friday 6 PM to Saturday 6 PM]? Must their sons continue to be circumcised? Paul makes the answer clear in his letter to the Romans: *"For Sin shall not be lord over you [Jews], since you [Jews] are subjects not of Law, but of grace. Are we [Jews] therefore to sin because we [Jews] are no longer under the authority of Law, but under grace? No, indeed!"* [Romans 6:14, 15 Weymouth Translation] And again: *"Do you [Jews] not know, brethren -- for I am speaking to those [Jews] who know the law --that the law is binding on a [Jewish] person only during his life? ... Likewise, my brethren, you [Jews] have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead in order that we may bear fruit for God. ... But now we [Jews] are discharged from the law, dead to that which held us captive, so that we [Jews] serve not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit."* [Romans 7:1, 4, 6 Revised Standard Version] And still again: *"For Christ is the end of the law, that every one who has faith may be justified."* [Romans 10:4 Revised Standard Version]

Only the Jews were under the Law of Moses. After Messiah fulfilled the TORAH, Jews were no longer under the Law. It was no longer binding upon them. They were dead to it. The Messiah ended, completed, or fulfilled the Law so that it was as binding on a Jew as that "law of a husband" who had died. [Romans 7:1-4]

Elsewhere Paul writes in a consistent manner. At 1 Corinthians 9:20, he states: *"I myself am not under [the] Law [of Moses]."* Galatians 2:16, 19: *"[You Jews] know that it is not through obedience to Law that a man can be declared free from guilt, but only through faith in Jesus Christ. We [Jews] have therefore believed in Christ Jesus, for the purpose of being declared free from guilt, through faith in Christ and not through obedience to Law. For through obedience to Law no human being shall be declared free from guilt. ...For it is by the Law that I [as a Jew] have died to the Law, in order that I may live to God."* [Revised Standard Version] And finally in Ephesians 2:15-17, *"For he is our peace, the One who took down the fence [of the Law] walling us [non-Jews] off -- he made ineffectual this animosity [of the Law] by his flesh -- the dogmatic law of the commandments [of Moses] -- so that he might create the two [Jew and non-Jew] into one new person in himself, and he might completely pacify both into one body to The God through the stake, having killed the animosity [of the Law] himself."* [NSR Paraphrase]

At this point some will use the word "commandments" as applying to the Law of Moses in affect in the Christian Church. Let us examine also the word "commandments." It is true that Paul uses the word "commandment[s]" with regard to the Law of Moses. [Romans 7:8-12] In the context of Jewish circumcision, Paul also writes: *"The Circumcision is nothing, and the Uncircumcision is nothing, but observance of God's commandments [is something]."* [NSR] When Paul mentions "God's commandments" does he mean the Law of Moses? How could this be the case when Paul writes that such commandments are abolished or set aside? [Ephesians 2:15; Hebrews 7:18]

The apostle John helps us here to understand what "God's commandments" are within the Christian Church. Though the beloved apostle uses the word "commandment[s]" often in his first epistle [1 John 2:3, 4, 7, 8] he makes it clear these are new, and not the old Mosaic commandments. 1 John 3:23 summarizes these commandments of God: *"Now this is His commandment: first, we believe and trust in the name of His Son Jesus Christ; and, second, love one another just as He commanded us. Now the individual who observes His commandments abides with Him and He abides in them."* [NSR Paraphrase] Thus "God's commandments" within the Christian Church are not the abolished Laws of Moses, but rather the simple principles of faith and love taught by Jesus. [1 John 4:21; 5:2, 3]

What confuses most is this: how can the Laws of Moses, including the Ten Commandments, be abolished, so that a Christian is no longer bound by these, and yet continue to keep the very same principles of the Law? Jeremiah 31:31-33 foretold the reason: *"Look! There are days coming, is the utterance of Jehovah, and I will conclude with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah a new covenant; not one like the covenant that I concluded with their forefathers in the day of my taking hold of their hand to bring them forth out of the land of Egypt, which covenant of mine they themselves broke,*

although I myself had husbandly ownership of them,' is the utterance of Jehovah. 'For this is the covenant that I shall conclude with the house of Israel after those days,' is the utterance of Jehovah. 'I will put my law within them, and in their heart I shall write it.'" [NWT] A New Covenant was to be made with Israel, unlike the old Law covenant with its Ten Commandments and hundreds of other laws. This new law in the New Covenant would be written – not on stone tablets – but on hearts.

Paul alludes to the principle here at Romans 2:15, 16 with regard to the non-Jews who knew nothing of the Mosaic Law: *"For when Gentiles who have no Law[of Moses] obey by natural instinct the commands of the Law [of Moses], they, without having a Law, are a Law to themselves; since they exhibit proof that a knowledge of the conduct which the Law requires is engraven on their hearts, while their consciences also bear witness to the Law, and their thoughts, as if in mutual discussion, accuse them or perhaps maintain their innocence."* [Weymouth Translation] Here Paul alludes in passing to wording similar to Jeremiah 31:30, 31. The non-Jews who never heard of the Law of Moses possess what the Nuremberg Court called "the universal human conscience" and thus by nature obeyed the Law. Paul quotes Jeremiah 31:31-33 in his epistle to the Jews called *Hebrews*:

HE8:7 For if the first [covenant] was without fault, it is unlikely a second [covenant] would be sought. **HE8:8** Note how [God] finds fault with the people of [Israel] when He says, **"Behold! Days are coming,"** YHWH says, **'and I will conclude with the House of Israel and with the House of Judah a New Covenant** **HE8:9** **unlike the covenant which I made with their forefathers in that day when I took hold of their hand and led them out of Egypt. Because they did not remain in My covenant and so I showed no concern for them,'** says YHWH. **HE8:10** **'Because this is the [new] covenant which I will covenant with the House of Israel after those days,'** says YHWH, **'giving my laws into their understanding minds. And upon their hearts I will write [My laws]. Then I will be a God unto them, and they will be a people unto Me.** **HE8:11** **They will never teach each other's fellow-citizen, nor each other's brother by saying: "Know the LORD." Because they will all know Me from the smallest to the greatest.** **HE8:12** **For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins I will never remember."** [Jeremiah 31:31-34] **HE8:13** By the use of the word, "New," [God] had made the first [covenant] "old." Now, what is "old" is becoming older and is about to disappear." [NSR]

Thus, according to Paul, the New Covenant made the faulty Old Covenant "obsolete." [TCN; GDS; NWT]

Therefore, though the Law of Moses engraved on stone tablets was abolished and down away with, God has imprinted on the hearts of those in the new "Israel of God" two vital principles: faith in Christ, and love for one another. [1 John 3:23] With these two motivating forces no other law is necessary.

MUST JEWISH-CHRISTIAN BOYS BE CIRCUMCISED?

On this subject there is one final matter that needs some discussion – circumcision. There are those Christians who insist that either the Law of Moses needs to be observed by the Church; or, that circumcision and observance of the Law should be kept by Christians who claim to be fleshly Jews. What about these?

In the early Church of the 1st Century the first Christians between the years 29-36 AD were circumcised Jews. This was in fulfillment of God's covenant promise of a seven year period of Grace. [Daniel 9:25-27] This created a problem for some when the door to the non-Jews was opened when Peter used the "key of the kingdom" regarding the Gentile Corneilius. [Acts 10] Some Jewish Christians insisted that these non-Jews had to first get circumcised and observe the Law of Moses. [Acts 15:1, 2, 5] These had earlier been called that schism "the Circumcision." [Acts 11:2] These troublesome Judaic-Christian teachers would become a problem for decades in the early Church. [Acts 15:24; Galatians 1:7]

The problem was at least settled officially when the apostolic body in Jerusalem sent Church-wide letters indicating to the non-Jewish believers that such was not the case. The only imposition put on the non-Jews were stated in the letter recorded in Acts 15:23-29. We note nothing is mentioned about the

observance of the Law of Moses. Nor are these non-Jews told they must observe the Sabbath or any Jewish festivals.

But, what of Christian Jews themselves? Were they still bound to continue under the Law with its commandments on circumcision? The word “circumcision” occurs about 30 times in Paul’s letters. Never does he write that Jews should continue to be circumcised. Rather, he makes such statements regarding his inspired position: *“Circumcision is, in fact, of benefit only if you [Jews] practice law; but if you are a transgressor of law [which all Jews were (John 7:19)], your circumcision has become uncircumcision. If, therefore, an uncircumcised person keeps the righteous requirements of the Law, his uncircumcision will be counted as circumcision, will it not? And the uncircumcised [person] that is such by nature will, by carrying out the Law, judge you [the Jew] who with its written code and circumcision are a transgressor of law. For he is not a Jew who is one on the outside, nor is circumcision that which is on the outside upon the flesh. But he is a Jew who is one on the inside, and [his] circumcision is that of the heart by spirit, and not by a written code [of the Law of Moses]. The praise the meaning of the name “Jew”] of that one comes, not from men, but from God.”*[Romans 2:25-29 NWT]

At 1 Corinthians 7:19 Paul writes, *“The Circumcision [of the Jew] is nothing.”*[NSR] He continues this line of thought in his letter to the Galatians: *“For in Christ Jesus [there is] neither circumcision nor uncircumcision.”*[Galatians 5:6 RSV] As he has said in Galatians 3:27-29, the Church is neither Jewish or Greek. No Christian can insist on either circumcision or uncircumcision. There is no law or regulation regarding such within the Church, whether Jew or Greek. Those who insist on circumcision have parted from Christ and fallen from Grace. Galatians 5:11, *“But if I, brethren, still preach circumcision, why am I still persecuted?”* [RSV] Paul did not preach that Jewish babies had to be circumcised, otherwise he would not have been persecuted by the Jews and the Judaizing Christians. Galatians 6:15, *“For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision.”* If it were necessary that Jewish Christians continue the practice of circumcision he could not have said this, for to these Jews circumcision would count for something.

A RULE FOR THE ISRAEL OF GOD

Paul writes regarding a rule, or general principle, that applies to all the Israel of God – whether Jew or non-Jew. Note this in Galatians 6:13-16: *“For even those who receive circumcision do not themselves keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may glory in your flesh. But far be it from me to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. Peace and mercy be upon all who walk by this rule, upon the Israel of God.”* [Revised Standard Version]

First, Paul states that those who claim to keep the Law of Moses do not do so. Next, he points to the motive of these Christian Jews who wanted non-Jewish Galatians who became Christians to get circumcised – they wanted to boast in making another convert to Judaism in their Christian form. Third, when Paul says, *“by which the world has been crucified to me,”* he means the Jewish world with its Law of Moses and their rituals. He is now dead to the Law of Moses as a Jew and no longer must he observe it. Then fourth, as mentioned above, as a Jew he states that circumcision means nothing. Now, Paul mentions a certain rule in which the Israel of God should conduct themselves – *“all who walk by this rule.”* The Greek word here for “rule” is CANON and later was used of “church canon” or rule. What “rule” does Paul mean for every “new creation” in the “Israel of God”? “Circumcision is nothing,” would be at least part of that rule. For either Jew or non-Jew within the Israel of God circumcision is unnecessary as a requirement of God’s Covenant with Abraham or the Law of Moses. Peace [and thus unity and harmony] will come upon those who walk according to that principle – “circumcision is nothing ... but a new creation is.”

DID PAUL OBSERVE THE LAW OR OBEY JAMES?

Some who insist Christian Jews should continue to observe the Law of Moses point to the example in Acts chapter 21. Let us examine this account and see to where it leads.

Acts 21:20-25 gives the opening context: In Jerusalem Paul relates his experiences in the missionary field to the presiding officer James and the elders:

“After hearing this they **[James and the Elders]** began to glorify God, and they said to him: ‘You behold, brother, how many thousands of believers there are among the Jews; and they are all zealous for the Law. But they have heard it rumored about you that you have been teaching all the Jews among the nations an apostasy from Moses, telling them neither to circumcise their children nor to walk in the [solemn] customs. **[This is more or less exactly what Paul writes.]** What, then, is to be done about it? **[James authorizes his own decision which turns out to be a failure.]** In any case they are going to hear you have arrived. Therefore do this which we tell you: **[Paul responds to orders from James.]** We have four men with a vow upon themselves. **[See below on “vows.”]** Take these men along and cleanse yourself ceremonially with them and take care of their expenses, that they may have their heads shaved. **[See below on the Law’s requirement.]** And so everybody will know that there is nothing to the rumors they were told about you, but that you are walking orderly, you yourself also keeping the Law. **[See below.]** As for the believers from among the nations, we have sent out, rendering our decision that they should keep themselves from what is sacrificed to idols as well as from blood and what is strangled and from fornication.” [NWT]

We note that this decision was from James and not the original apostolic body mentioned in Acts 15. We will also note that the suggestion of James to calm the Jews is a failure and a riot results despite Paul’s efforts. The problem was the thousands of new Jewish converts and an element in the Church that wanted to continue with the observance of the Law of Moses. Paul is accused of “apostasy” through the mouth of James, and that he has told the non-Jews that it is not necessary for them to circumcise themselves or their children. Comparing what Paul has written, he has said, “Circumcision is nothing.” Paul has written that Christian Jews and non-Jews are “dead to the Law of Moses” and “no longer under the Law of Moses.” [See notes above.]

Paul does write that when trying to win Jews to Christ he is willing “to become a Jew” as though that were necessary since he was a Jew. He also wrote that “to those without law, I become as one without law.” If Paul choose to observe a certain law of Moses for the purposes of converting Jews, he does not sin.

Now James makes the decision that Paul take four Jewish men who have made a vow and have them purified or cleansed after the fulfillment of their vows. This vow, or oath, is based on Numbers 30:2, which says, *“In case a man makes a vow to Jehovah or swears an oath to bind a vow of abstinence upon his soul, he must not violate his word. According to all that has gone out of his mouth he should do.”* [NWT] There was also another vow in which a person became a Nazirite and pledged that during the time of keeping the vow he/she refrained from cutting the hair [as in the case of Samson] and also refrained from grapes or anything made from grapes. At the completion of the vow several requires were demanded by the Law of Moses.

In Numbers 6:14-18 we have the commands which James is directing Paul to do:

*“Now this is the law about the Naz’i-rite **[vow]**: On the day that the days of his Naziriteship **[vow]** come to the full, he will be brought to the entrance of the tent of meeting. And he must present as his offering to Jehovah one sound young ram in its first year as a burnt offering and one sound female lamb in its first year as a sin offering and one sound ram as a communion sacrifice, **[And thus the “expense” that Paul would have to cover in the case of the four Jews above.]** and a basket of unfermented ring-shaped cakes of fine flour, moistened with oil, and unfermented wafers smeared with oil, and their grain offering and their drink offerings. And the priest **[Paul must present the animals to the priest at the Temple.]** must present them before Jehovah and render up his sin offering and his burnt offering. And he will render up the ram as a communion sacrifice to Jehovah along with the basket of unfermented cakes; and the priest must render up*

its grain offering and its drink offering. And the Naz'i-rite must shave the head of his Naziriteship at the entrance of the tent of meeting, and he must take the hair of the head of his Naziriteship and put it upon the fire that is under the communion sacrifice."[NWT]

Now to those who insist Christian Jews should observe ALL the Law of Moses, we would ask: Would they fulfill this law exactly as it is stated above? Would they acquire the three animals and the other sacrificial items, go to some Jewish temple some where, and have a Jewish priest offer these up? Would such Christian Jews be required to shave their heads? If Christian Jews insist the Law of Moses be observed and cite this example, then they are bound to also observe the Law in all its details as required above.

There is a particular problem here: Jesus the Nazarene himself orders no making of vows at all! Consider what he says in his Mountain Teachings:

Again, you heard it said to the Ancients: "Break not your vows [See Numbers 30:3; Deuteronomy 23:33; Ecclesiastes 5:4. Note James 5:12 remembers well this Nazarene teaching.] but repay your vows to the Lord." But, I tell you: Never make vows! Not by heaven for it is the Throne of The God. Nor by earth for it is His footstool. Nor by Jerusalem for it is the city of the great King. Nor by your own head for you are unable to make one hair white or black. But, let your word be YES for YES and NO for NO. For any more is from the Wicked One." [Matthew 5:33-37 NSR]

Yes, Jesus says to Jews to make no such vows. James himself later writes that he understood this: *"But above all things, my brethren, do not swear, either by Heaven or by the earth, or with any other oath. Let your `yes' be simply `yes,' and your `no' be simply `no;' that you may not come under condemnation."*[James 5:12 Weymouth Translation] What are to include then? Was James in error in his decision? Does he, then, later write more in agreement with the Nazarene? Did Paul just go along with the whole affair – not committing any sin – to mollify James and the sensitive Jews? "Becoming a Jew to win Jews," as he writes?

So, in summary to this point: the decision by James flew in the face of the Nazarene, and James later writes so himself. It would be impossible for a modern Christian Jew to obey this Law of Moses for no such priesthood or temple with sacrificial provisions exists today. And, indeed, every time a Christian Jew – against the Nazarene's teachings – made a vow he/she would be bound to buy three animals, make the sacrifice, and then shave all their hair.

Paul obediently follows the directions of James and the Jewish elders, as the account continues: *"Then Paul took the men along the next day and cleansed himself ceremonially with them and went into the temple, to give notice of the days to be fulfilled for the ceremonial cleansing, until the offering should be presented for each one of them."*[Acts 21:26 NWT] Just as Numbers 6:14-17 required – something impossible for a modern Jewish Christian – Paul paid for all the animals needed, a considerable expense, and did as James directed. In doing so Paul committed no sin as there was no requirement to either obey the Law of Moses or not obey it. Paul evidently went along with the attempt to calm the Jewish feelings in Jerusalem at the time. That James' decision did not work is seen by what follows in Acts 21:27-32.

Despite this appearance in the Temple with the required dozen animals and the other requirements of the Law of Moses, the Jews still accused him of apostasy against Moses and a riot resulted. It seems clear to many that Paul's letters indicate that both Jews and non-Jews are "dead to the Law" and "no longer under the Law." From the standpoint of some Jewish interpretations Paul's teachings could be understood as something of an apostasy against Moses. This is not the way Paul puts it, but rather that "the Law is fulfilled by love."

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN TITUS AND TIMOTHY

Another argument present by some modern Jewish-Christians regards Titus and Timothy.

Galatians 2:3 records: *“Nevertheless, not even Titus, who was with me, was compelled to be circumcised, although he was a Greek.”* [NWT] The Greek uncircumcised Titus was not compelled by the apostolic body in Jerusalem to become circumcised. Why then does Paul have Timothy circumcised? Consider Acts 16:3, *“Paul expressed the desire for this man to go out with him, and he took him and circumcised him **because of the Jews** that were in those places, for one and all knew that his father was a Greek.”* [NWT] Timothy was half-Jew evidently, his mother being Jewish. Regardless, the reason for Paul’s step is “because of the Jews.” Not because it was required of Timothy be the Law of Moses, but “because of the Jews.” Had this not been a problem, then Timothy would have no need to get circumcised. Something similar is done in modern days where an uncircumcised Christian missionary from a Palestinian background is circumcised so that Jews do not think him a terrorist. Paul does not sin in circumcising Timothy, no more than many people do in the modern world who also circumcise their baby boys. “Neither circumcision or uncircumcision amount to anything,” Paul wrote to Galatian Jews and non-Jews. If parents wish to circumcise their children it is up to them. It makes no difference once way or the other.

BUT, WASN’T CIRCUMCISION AN ETERNAL COVENANT?

The original covenant between God and Abraham regarding circumcision stated according to the Jewish Publication Society’s *Tanakh* *“Thus shall My covenant be marked in your flesh as an everlasting pact.”* The 3rd Century BC Jewish Greek version reads: *“My covenant shall be on your flesh for an everlasting covenant.”* [Genesis 17:13 Bagster] Does this mean an eternal or unending covenant so that Jews throughout eternity would continue to circumcise their baby boys?

The Hebrew word translated “everlasting” in Genesis 17:13 is OLAM [Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance #5769] and though the word is used for eternal or everlasting, it is also used of an unknown or indefinite period of time. An example may be seen regarding the Levitical Priesthood which is also said to remain OLAM. Exodus 29:9 states: *“And so they shall have priesthood as their right for all time.”* [JPS] However, where is this “eternal” priesthood? It ceased when Jerusalem was destroyed! Even though some Jews continue to carry the name Cohen [priest] or Levi [after the Levitical priesthood] they do not serve as priests in any Jewish temple accepting burnt sacrifices. Paul also writes that such priesthood was “made obsolete” by the one great sacrifice of the High Priest Jesus Christ. In Hebrews 8:13 and Hebrews 10:9 Paul writes – in the context of the Mosaic tabernacle and its accompanying priesthood – *“By the use of the word, ‘New,’ [God] had made the first [covenant] ‘old.’ Now, what is ‘old’ is becoming older and is about to disappear. ... He removes the first [covenant] to establish the second [covenant].* [NSR]

Thus from Paul’s standpoint the Jewish priesthood would come to an end “and disappear” when replaced by the New Covenant. In view of this the Hebrew word OLAM, as well as the Greek word AIONION, at Genesis 17:13 may also be limited to their other meanings regarding something temporary but without a known period of time.

CONCLUSION

God is a God of law. He is, as Isaiah said ... “our Lawgiver.” Though Jews were enslaved to the Law for 1,500 years, no longer do Christians remain so. They are dead to the Law – whether Jew or non-Jew. However, God has engraved on the Christian heart the key principles of His law so that each disciple is motivated by two forces: faith and love. Exercising these as the royal standards, God is well-pleased. The Christian need not fret whether something breaks this or that law. Each Christian need only ask: Is it of faith? And, is it loving? Then all of God’s laws will be fulfilled perfectly.

==== END ====

“FOR FREEDOM CHRIST HAS SET US FREE!”

Paul wrote the above words at Galatians 5:1. The phrase has been used by some to prove that all are free in the Christian Church to believe whatever they wish, that doctrine is not essential, and that love is the sole engine moving the Church. What did Paul mean by this statement regarding freedom, or liberty?

DID PAUL TEACH UNLIMITED FREEDOM IN THE CHURCH?

We know from Paul's other writings that he did not tolerate for a moment "another gospel or "another Jesus" or "another spirit." [2 Corinthians 11:4] Indeed, right in Galatians he was quite firm, when he said: *"But if even we or an angel from Heaven should bring you a Good News different from that which we have already brought you, let him be accursed. What I have just said I repeat--if any one is preaching to you a Good News other than that which you originally received, **let him be accursed.**"* [Galatians 1:8, 9 Weymouth Translation] These do not sound like the words of a man who has little concern for what is taught in the Church.

Almost all of Paul's letters deal with the subject of what he calls "the Truth" and "healthy doctrine." [1 Timothy 1:10; 6:3; 2 Timothy 1:13; 4:3; Titus 1:9; 2:1] That he does not encourage a free and open atmosphere where just any teaching may blow in and out are his words to the Ephesians: *"... so that we may not remain babes, being tossed about by waves and borne around by **every wind of teaching**, by the slight of hand of persons always working toward methodical error, but rather maintaining truth in love, growing into him in everything, the one who is the head, Christ."* [Nazarene Saints Rendering] What Paul encouraged, was not the free movement of just any ideas and beliefs about Christianity, but what he calls "truth in love" that matures into the Head – Christ.

To discover what "truth" the Nazarene taught it is only a matter of reading the Gospels. Paul does give an abbreviated list of the "doctrine of Christ" and its fundamental principles at Hebrews 6:1, 2, *"Consequently, having left the basic teachings of the Christ, may we pass along to perfection, not laying a foundation again of [*elementary principles*"] -- repentance from dead works, faith toward God, teachings on baptisms, the laying on of hands, resurrection of the dead, and ageless condemnation."* [Nazarene Saints Rendering] Paul describes this "foundation" as include: repentance from dead works, faith in God, teachings on baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection, and everlasting judgment. On at least these primary teachings there could be no room for movement. No freedom to decide, for example, that there is no judgment because everyone will be saved. In Paul's list it is interesting to see what he omitted.

WHAT KIND OF "FREEDOM" DOES PAUL MEAN?

With this background we return to Paul's statement in Galatians 5:1, "For freedom Christ set us free." What "freedom" does Paul mean? Who are the "us" of the verse? Also, can we find examples in Galatians where this "freedom" is not absolute, but rather qualified and limited?

The word "freedom" stands in opposition to the word "slavery" in Paul's letter to the Galatians. If we back up from Galatians 5:1 we can see the context of Paul's words. He has been discussing two women – Sarah and Hagar. Hagar, Paul writes, is "in slavery with her children." He means the Jews under the confines of the Law of Moses. These Jews were enslaved to the multitude of commandments and regulations of the Law. Sarah on the other hand was not a slave, but a free woman married to Abraham, and her child Isaac was according to a divine promise. Therefore, those Jews who had become disciples of the Nazarene were released from the Law of Moses as the children of a free woman. So Paul's final verse in chapter four says: *"Therefore, brethren, since we are not the children of a slave-girl, but of the*

free woman — “[Weymouth Translation] When Paul says “we” he means, first, those Jews who could really trace their lineage back to Sarah.

This Sarah was something of a symbol of a celestial Woman, or what Paul calls, “*The Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother.*” [Galatians 4:26 Revised Standard Version] On the matter of this celestial Woman compare notes on Hebrews 12:22-24 and Revelation 12:1. Indeed, in Greek the word “freedom” [ELEUTHERIA] in Galatians 5:1 is feminine and may be rendered “her freedom.”

Paul continues his declaration in the rest of Galatians 5:1, “... *stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.*” [RSV] The word “again” indicates a former state of slavery to the Law of Moses as Jews. The area of Galatia had a large Jewish population and so the context of Paul’s epistle to the churches in that area was largely written to Jews first. When he says “stand fast” he indicates that any “freedom” is qualified. These former Jews had to now “stand fast” against that element in the Church, called Judaizers by some, who wanted the Church to remain subject to the Law of Moses. [Acts 15:1, 2] Thus, these Jewish Christians had been set free from the Law of Moses.

HOW WAS SUCH “FREEDOM” RESTRICTED?

We might ask: What were these Christians not free to do? First, there were not free to determine for themselves what the Gospel was as though there were many forms. [Galatians 1:8, 9] And, secondly there were not free to determine for themselves moral standards. Paul writes at Galatians 5:13, “*You however, brethren, were called to freedom. Only do not turn your freedom into an excuse for giving way to your lower natures; but become bondservants to one another in a spirit of love.*” [Weymouth Translation; compare also 1 Peter 2:16] For example, Paul lists what he calls the “works of the flesh” at Galatians 5:19-21, “*Now you know full well the doings of our lower natures. Fornication, impurity, indecency, idol-worship, sorcery; enmity, strife, jealousy, outbursts of passion, intrigues, dissensions, factions, envyings; hard drinking, riotous feasting, and the like. And as to these I forewarn you, as I have already forewarned you, that those who are guilty of such things will have no share in the Kingdom of God.*” [Weymouth Translation]

So, the Galatians were not free to introduce “dissensions” [or, divisions] and “factions” [or, Greek “heresies”]. They were not free to allow a little doctrinal and moral “leaven” to creep into the Church. For Paul also writes, “*You were running the race nobly! Who has interfered and caused you to swerve from the truth? No such teaching ever proceeded from Him who is calling you. A little yeast corrupts the whole of the dough.*” [Galatians 5:7-9 Weymouth Translation] When Jesus used the word “leaven” he meant Jewish doctrine or teachings. [Matthew 16:6, 11, 12] Such doctrines included observance of the Law of Moses, as well as certain Greek philosophies that had corrupted Judaism – soul immortality without the need for a resurrection, and a place of eternal torment.

Consequently, there is no such thing as absolute, unqualified freedom within the Church of Christ. For true “freedom” to exist several factors should be included. For example – there can be no freedom without Biblical truth. [John 8:32; 17:17] Also, there can be no freedom if God’s Spirit is not present. [2 Corinthians 3:17] There can be no freedom with certain Christian laws. On this matter James write: “*But he who looks closely into the perfect Law -- the Law of freedom -- and continues looking, he, being not a hearer who forgets, but an obedient doer, will as the result of his obedience be blessed. ... So, both speak and act as though you are about to be judged by a law of freedom.*” [James 1:25; 2:12 Weymouth Translation]

WARNINGS AGAINST UNBRIDLED “FREEDOM”

Both Paul and Peter warned that some within the Church would attempt to offer an unlimited freedom, but this was really another form of slavery: “*These men are waterless fountains and mists driven by a violent windstorm, for whom the gloom of darkness is reserved. They speak*

inflated and worthless things baiting with fleshly desires those with poor habits who have just escaped from those living in error, promising them freedom these false teachers exist as slaves to dissipation; for anyone who is overcome by another becomes the slave of that person.”[2 Peter 2:17-19 NSR; compare also Galatians 2:4] Thus, no one is free to corrupt the original teachings of Jesus and his inspired disciples: *“Therefore, let us keep the Feast, not with old leaven – nor with a leaven of malice and evil – but with the unleavened [bread] of sincerity and truth.”* [1 Corinthians 5:8 NSR]

Jesus had warned in several parables that the seed he sowed would be corrupted by a satanic enemy by means of “sons of the Wicked One.” [Matthew 13:24-30, 34-43] These would corrupt the whole of his Realm of believers. [Matthew 13:33] Paul calls this an “apostasy” and it would be marked by a departure from “the Truth.” [2 Thessalonians 2:3-12] Some false teachers would infiltrate the Church with the “teachings of demons.” [1 Timothy 4:1, 2; compare also 2 Timothy 3:5-8; 2 Peter chapter 2] In other cases, certain churches themselves would enlist their own teachers who would be willing to compromise truth so that everyone would be pleased with the results. [2 Timothy 4:3, 4]

An examination of the vast bulk of Christianity today – with its high churches, non-denominational sects, and religious organizations – is completely polluted by such an apostasy. There are only a “few persons” who have determined not to compromise either Nazarene truth or godly moral standards. [Revelation 3:4]

While enjoying that “freedom for which Christ set us free” we are determined to remain his slaves and to closely adhere to his teachings and those inspired disciples. We do not seek freedom from the Lord’s “doctrine” nor from the godly standard of right conduct. We rejoice in our freedom. No longer are we slaves to either Judaic or Greek “teachings of demons.” We desire to “proclaim [true] liberty” throughout the world. [Leviticus 25:10; Isaiah 61:1; Jeremiah 34:15, 17] While doing so, we continue to pray, *“Set me free!”* [Psalm 144:7]

==== END ====

MESSIAH’S PRE-EXISTENCE IN THE HEBREW BIBLE?

Recently a well-known Biblical scholar and professor of languages in the United States stated: “I am unable to find any evidence of the pre-existence of Christ in the Old Testament.” This Christian teacher is a Socian who believe Jesus Christ only came into existence at his human birth. The reason for their doctrine is a reaction to the Trinity, as they do not accept the plural God in three persons or modes as a doctrine.

DOES THE HEBREW BIBLE SUGGEST THE PRE-EXISTENCE OF CHRIST?

We suggest the pre-existence of Christ is mentioned in at least four places in the Old Testament. Indeed, two of these have inspired interpretations which confirm their application to the pre-existence of Christ.

Deuteronomy 30:12, 13 -- “WHO WILL ASCEND INTO HEAVEN”

Deuteronomy 30:12, 13 may seem obscure to some. However, according to at least one outstanding scholar of all time, it points to the pre-existence of Christ: “For this commandment that I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you, nor is it far away. It is not in the heavens, so as to result in saying, ‘*Who will ascend for us into the heavens and get it for us*, that he may let us hear it that we may do it?’ Neither is it on the other side of the sea, so as to result in saying, ‘Who will pass over for us to the other side of the sea and get it for us, that he may let us hear it that we may do it?’ For the word is very near you, in your own mouth and in your own heart, that you may do it.” [NWT]

Paul quotes this and applies into the pre-existence of Christ. Romans 10:6 reads: "In contrast, that righteousness resulting from conviction says, 'Do not state in your heart [Deuteronomy 9:4], **"Who will ascend into the heavens," [that is to bring Christ down].**" [NSR, Nazarene Commentary©] In Deuteronomy the context is the Saying or RHEMA in the LXX and Paul goes on to interpret this as the "Saying of Conviction." Later Jewish Targums viewed the phrase as trying to ascend to Sinai to bring Moses down (called the Christ at Hebrews 11:26); or, ascending into the sea to bring up Jonah, both Messiah-types. Beyond accepting Paul's interpretation we leave other views to speculations. Whatever the views of others it seems clear that Paul believed in the pre-existence of Christ based on his inspired interpretation of Deuteronomy 30:12, 13.

"WHEN HE ASCENDED ON HIGH"

Psalms 68:18 is also interpreted to allude to the pre-existence of Christ: *"You have ascended on high. You have carried away captives. You have taken gifts in the form of men."* [NWT]

Paul quotes this verse and applies it to the re-existence of Christ. Ephesians 4:8, 9 says: *"That is why David writes, 'When he ascended on high he led in procession captives as prisoners of war and these he gave as gifts to people.' Now what does, 'he ascended,' mean but that **Christ also descended** into the lowest places on earth? **The person who descended to the earth** is the same one who ascended above the entire celestialum. This was so that Christ might fulfill completely everything (purposed)."* [NSR (paraphrase), Nazarene Commentary 2000©] Paul references Psalm 68 and then gives his inspired application of the implications of the word "ascended." He argues this leads to the conclusion that Christ had to first descend to the earth, thus indicating a pre-existence.

"THE ANGEL OF YAHWEH"

Paul also draws on the Rock and the Angel of Yahweh in the Book of Exodus with an inspired application to Christ. 1 Corinthians 10:4 reads: *"All the Israelites were immersed into Moses. ... They all drank the same spiritual drink. Because they use to drink from the spiritual Rock that followed them. **And that Rock was the Christ.**"* [NSR, Nazarene Commentary 2000©] It is believed by some that Paul refers to the Angel of Yahweh who followed the Israelites in the wilderness and represented the Rock. This "angel of Yehowah" was the pre-existent Christ. [Exodus 3:2; 14:19; 23:20, 23; 32:34; 33:2] [See further notes in *Error of the Trinity*, Nazarene Commentary 2000© CD-ROM.]

"WHAT IS HIS SON'S NAME"

We would add two additional verses that would point to the pre-existence of Christ. The first is Proverbs 30:4: *"Who has ascended to heaven that he may descend? Who has gathered the wind in the hollow of both hands? Who has wrapped up the waters in a mantle? Who has made all the ends of the earth to rise? What is his name and **what the name of his son**, in case you know?"* [NWT]

In the very context of someone ascending to heaven so that he might descend has the question in it: "What is His Son's name?" Since this Son was already alive around the year 1,000 BC it would seem Christ had a pre-existence based on this text.

"BEFORE HE MADE THE EARTH ... I WAS IN HIS PRESENCE"

Though Trinitarians will disagree with the understanding of the following verses, they have been understood by both Jewish and Christian scholars from the 1st Century as applying to Christ. Proverbs 8:22-30 reads in part in the 3rd Century BC Jewish Greek Bible: *"The Lord created me a beginning of His ways for His works. He established me before the Age, in the beginning, before He made the earth. ... He gave birth to me. ... When He prepared the heaven, I was in His presence. ... And daily I rejoiced in His*

presence continually.” [LXX Bagster] The language is similar to that of Job 38:4, 7: “Where did you [Job] happen to be when I founded the earth? ... When the morning stars joyfully cried out together, and all the sons of God began shouting in applause?” [NWT] One of these rejoicing “sons of God” would have included the One begotten first [or, created] in Proverbs 8:22-30. That is, The Son – Christ.

So, though a biased person with a predisposed agenda might read the Old Testament and miss these proofs of Christ’s pre-existence, we see that Paul read these verses differently. Though those who reject the pre-existence of Christ will not accept these views, we must take Paul’s own inspired interpretations over any other. For details on the pre-existence of Christ as taught by Jesus, the apostle John, John the Baptist and Paul see the article “*Did Christ Have a Pre-existence?*” in the Biblical reference *Nazarene Commentary 2000*©.

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250 D SOUTH LYON #521 Hemet, CA 92543

www.nazarene-friends.org/