

FRIENDS OF THE NAZARENE©

An on-line Biblical Studies Magazine

“They Follow the Lamb No Matter Where He Goes”

Volume 3 – September 2000 (53 pages)

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)

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

- ?? **QUARTERLY CONFERENCE:** A meeting of like-minded disciples of the Nazarene is scheduled for Sunday 10 September in Hemet, California. Sessions are from 10-12 AM and 2-4 PM with a luncheon break. Some of the subjects and participants are: *God and Judgment* [Mark Miller]; *An Enthroned Messiah* [Luis Padilla]; *The Great Crowd Come Out of the Great Oppression* [Andrew Foss]; *Were Not Our Hearts Burning?* [Hart Ponder] *Unity and the Transformed Mind.* [Hart Ponder] Portions of the session include Q&A with audience participation on selected Bible chapters and concludes with an open forum of discussions on any questions. It is expected that tape recordings will be made for those interested.
- ?? **PSALMS.** We are happy to announce that work has begun on a *Nazarene Saints Rendering* of the Psalms, Book 1. Book 5 is actually completed but will be reformatted. This new rendering will have all the features of the work on the Christian Bible [NT]. Also, work has begun on Proverbs and some of the minor prophets.
- ?? **NC2000 EMAIL BIBLE CORRESPONDANCE COURSE:** We are pleased to announce that there has been a fine response to this email course. Besides the United States, brothers from England, Canada, and Belgium have begun the course.
- ?? **ZEPHANIAH, MALACHI AND HABAKKUK** have recently been completed as part of *Nazarene Commentary 2000*©.

==== END ====

FAITH PERSPECTIVES

[A forum for the free and open expression of beliefs without fear.]
[We welcome brief thoughts and articles on any appropriate subject addressed in a kind and respectful manner.]

WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT

This Bible correspondence course has my interest. I'd like to start whenever convenient for you, with an initial pace of one chapter per week. Since this will be a 5-year project, I might want to accelerate later on. The main reason for my interest is that it will allow me to get acquainted with the Nazarene Commentary and the Friends community. I also expect it will heighten my interest for God's Word even more.

I also want to express my gratitude for your loving way of handling all these 'hot' topics and messages still carrying some bitterness. The last few months I have participated in several debate forums, and it is like driving a car: I sometimes forget that there are persons behind the nicknames and am sometimes tempted

to get a bit sarcastic or to kick back when I get accusations all over me. I want to learn from you.

God's blessings from a brother in Belgium, [TM]

>>>>>

I can't tell you how much the course means to me. ... The Nazarene Commentary is excellent--an eye-opener in so many ways. [CD Canada]

>>>>>

As a gift to me for my birthday I asked my son to read the July 2000 *Friends* magazine. We stopped attending the Worldwide Church of God when he was very young. ... I didn't care for him to study with other groups. Now that so much of what I believe the Bible teaches is taught by the *Friends of the Nazarene* I want my son to enjoy the wonderful spiritual food each magazine offers for I am sure it will help him grow spiritually. [DD, Virginia]

>>>>>

It seems even professors and historians need to keep studying. I bought a book entitled "Revelation: Four Views--A Parallel Commentary." Have you ever tried reading in a dark cave? Nazarene Commentary is like reading in a room flooded with sunlight with a few not unpleasant shadows. [DC, Canada]

>>>>>

It has been refreshing to find your web site. I feel very blessed. ... I'm gonna start reading. :-) [DF]

>>>>>

I'm really enjoying studying the Bible with your NC 2000 versions. I don't know how you find time to do all the work. The footnotes are really helpful, especially the way they work on the computer. [RW, Long Beach]

>>>>>

THE "PURE LANGUAGE"

One religious denomination claims to be the only one who speaks the "pure language." [Zephaniah 3:9] Is not language recognized by two things – subject

and vocabulary? Would not the “pure language” be reflected in the Christian Bible? That is, the language used by Jesus and his inspired disciples?

I notice that some church organizations emphasize Jesus over God in a ratio of about 90% Jesus and 10% God. The one above in particular goes in the other direction: 80% Jehovah and 20% Jesus. This got me to thinking what actually was the ratio in the Christian Bible.

In one version of the New Testament which uses the divine name “Jehovah” I noted that “Jehovah” occurs 282 times. Jesus occurs in this same version 742 times. A ration of about 70/30 with the emphasis on Jesus. Neither of these includes other designations for God or Christ. The word “God” appears 1316 times in the Christian Bible. If these were added to the 282 these that would be at least 1024 times God is mention compared to the 742 times Jesus occurs.

Roughly, adding “Father” and “Son”, etc. the ratio is about 60/40 between God and Christ. If one were to speak the “pure language” after the model of the Christian Bible then God would be included 60% of the time, while Christ would be mentioned 40% of the time.

In the hymnal or song book used by this same group, “Jehovah” occurs 506 times compared to “Jesus” 87 times. Another group’s hymnal mentions Jesus Christ 90% of the time and God the Father very little.

If one claimed to speak the “pure language” would it not seem consistent that this language would compare to the example in the Christian Bible?

So both the emphasis of Jehovah over Christ, or Jesus over God are both not based on the model of the Christian Bible. There in the New Testament God receives the attention 55-60% of the time, while Jesus is referenced 40-45% of the time. This is a happy balance and must be what is truly reflected in the “pure language.”

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WHAT IF YOUR FACE WAS YOUR BUSINESS CARD?

What do people see or read in our faces? Some people have warm hearts, but seldom do their faces reflect this. Look in the mirror. View your face as your business card. Learn to smile at everyone. Learn to say “thank you” and “I care” and “I love you” by your facial expressions. Then your face will declare everything your business card claims.

==== END ====

ILLUMINATED FELLOWSHIP In a Community of Light

The idea of a human having a relationship with God is as ancient as humankind. [Genesis 4:3, 4; 8:20, 21] In one form or another religions of all kinds have developed complicated rituals to ensure this communion or fellowship with the Divine. At almost one hundred years of age, having experienced a vision of God in the holiest of light – a light described like a prismatic diamond with brilliant bursts of dark pigeon-blood red – the beloved apostle John writes of an illuminated fellowship with God in a community of Light. [Revelation 4:1-3]

What makes John's inspired epistle different is the concept of a fellowship with not only God the Father, but also with His Son. In language very similar to the introduction of his Gospel, John writes about the illuminated fellowship in which all Christians may communally share. Read his sublime words when introducing the first chapter of his first epistle.

A FELLOWSHIP WITH FATHER AND SON

The Word of Life -- he was from the beginning and we actually heard him! We actually saw him with our own eyes and our hands actually touched him! That Life was made manifest and what we saw we are relating to you. We are giving our own eyewitness evidence regarding that everlasting Life. That Life actually faced toward the Father! And he appeared to us! We are relating to you what we actually saw ourselves! We do this that you too may share with us. Now this common relationship is also with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. We relate these things to you so our own joy may be perfectly complete. [1 John 1:4 Nazarene Saints Paraphrased Rendering (NSR Paraphrase)]

Like his prologue to his Gospel, John writes of the Word or Logos who existed from the beginning, before the creation of the Cosmos. "He was from the beginning," John states. The Greek is ARCHES as it is in Genesis 1:1, Proverbs 8:22 (LXX), and John 1:1. The "beginning" here may be the beginning of earthly creation. Compare the prayer of Jesus at John 17:5, "... and now glorify me beside You with the glory I had beside You before the cosmos existed." [Colossians 1:15; Hebrews 1:1-3; Revelation 3:14]

Such a magnificent being as the pre-existent Word became a human being, a true ANTHROPOS or HOMINID that was tangible. For John relates his experience in being an eyewitness of the "Word manifest in the flesh." There was the auditory evidence of actually hearing the Word with their own ears. He had

visual evidence as he actually viewed the Word. And he had the evidence of feeling with his own hands this Word of Life, Jesus Christ the Nazarene. This is not a story resulting from hearsay or second hand tradition handed down.

That Word of Life had once been invisible like a spirit or angel. But during John's life time "that Life became visible." As a result of the experience John can write, "*We have seen and now we report back our testimony.*" In John 21:24 John says, "*His eyewitness testimony is true.*" The words being used are right out of a court testimony by a qualified witness in words from the legal profession. This testimonial evidence is a running theme throughout 1 John.

This Word was not a mere abstraction, but it was a celestial being "*which was facing toward the Father*" ready to receive instructions when he was given permission as God's creation agent, "*Let light come into existence.*" [Genesis 1:3] Or as one version renders John's words, "*which was face to face with the Father and was made visible to us.*" The Greek PROS here is the same in John 1:1, "*and the Word was facing toward The God.*" Yes, John says he and other eyewitnesses had seen and heard the Word who had become Jesus the Nazarene. As in John 1:14, "*... we viewed his glory, the glory of an only-begotten son.*"

John continues to write about this sharing by saying the fellowship of the Church "may commune with us." He uses the Greek **COINONIAN** which is the root of the English words common, commune, community, communion, communism. Some render this word as fellowship, partnership, or communion. This communion was not only with the Son, but also with the Father. Thus God, the Son, and the Nazarene community all shared in common this enlightened relationship.

The word "sharing" occurs 16 times, and only once in the Hebrew Bible at Psalm 50:18 regarding bad associations. In Acts 2:42 it is a very real commune of a community sharing in possessions at a common spiritual table. In 1 Corinthians 10:16 it is communion at the Lord's Supper. The idea of sharing is inferred by an often used word in 1 John and that is simply the Greek EN or "in". So there is the real "sharing" of Acts 2:42 which is encouraged by Jesus and Paul; and then there is that invisible mystic "sharing" enjoyed by the body members of The Christ. [1 Corinthians 12:12, 24, 25] There is the spiritual "communion" with the Father and the Son. Though 2 Corinthians 13:14 could point the way for a "communion with the holy Pneuma" John omits the holy spirit here, missing a fine opportunity for a Trinitarian -- if John was such.

John states his purpose in writing is that "*Our joy may be completely fulfilled.*" Happily we today at the beginning of the 3rd millennium may also share in this divine fellowship and spiritual communion. But now John is inspired to write of the illuminated nature of this communion.

FELLOWSHIP IN LIGHT

Now this is the communication we learned directly from Jesus himself. We proclaim to you: GOD IS LIGHT and there is no dark evil in Him. If anyone of us should ever claim, "I have a communal relationship with God," and continue to live a life in dark evil -- we are liars! However, if we live like we are in righteous illumination -- exactly as Jesus lived in righteous illumination -- then we are a community cleansed from sin sharing in the blood of God's Son, Jesus. [1 John 1:5-7 NSR Paraphrase]

John is now to restate a "message we heard from Jesus." This truth is stated simply: *"The God is Light and there is no darkness in Him."* That is, *"no darkness can find any place in Him"*[KNX] This is not a new revelation for such a truth is recognized in the Hebrew Bible, *"... the light of Yehowah."* [Isaiah 2:5] James also describes God as, *"... the Father of the celestial Lights."*[James 1:17]

It is impossible for God to reside in evil darkness. [Job 24:14-16; 2 Corinthians 6:14; 1 Thessalonians 5:7, 8] "God is light" -- what a simple message that would seem over-simplified or obvious to a modern reader; but, not so, among an idolatrous pagan people whose religious rites contained many dark initiations. When John sees The One in Revelation 4:3 it is "light" he describes. If the Revelation occurred before 1 John then John is now writing out of those memories.

Now John knows that some might claim to be part of this illuminated fellowship in this community of light. Some may assert, *"We have a communion with Him."* That is, these Christians believed they also enjoyed this communion -- inferring an intimate relationship with The God. It is hard to believe John had not read Paul at 2 Corinthians 6:14, *"What communion is there between light and darkness?"* For reasons John will make clear these pseudo Christians actually "walked in the Darkness." Thus, anyone who said that but *"continue to live a life in dark evil"* is lying.

In contrast, *"If we live like we are in righteous illumination -- exactly as Jesus lived in righteous illumination -- then we are a community cleansed from sin sharing in the blood of God's Son, Jesus."* This "walking in the light" is exactly the same as the life-course of Jesus -- a walk in righteousness, faith, love, and truth.. It is only when doing this that there is also a sharing or communion in the blood of the Lamb which cleanses from sin.

"Walk" is a way of saying "conduct" and here refers to that conduct which is the same as following the Nazarene's footsteps. True communion with God the Father is manifest by the life-style of the claimant. So, those who walk together in this enlightened relationship with God and His Son are "a communion together." This results in being part of a community cleansed by the blood of Jesus.

However, not all walk after Christ.

SELF-DECEIVED IF CLAIM NO SIN

Every time we make the claim, "I have never sinned," we deceive ourselves and prove we do not have the Truth. Every time we confess our sins God is trustworthy and just. As a result He releases us from our sins, purifies us from all our unrighteousness. Every time we make the claim: "I have never sinned," we accuse God of being a liar. Surely His Word no longer remains within us. [1 John 1:8-10 NSR Paraphrase]

There are those who are self-righteous and think they never do wrong. They may not actually make the statement, but their attitude is saying, "*I have never sinned!*" John says that is a mistake and evidence that such a person does not possess the Truth. On the other hand every time we confess our sins God is faithful and righteous so that He releases us from our sins. Thus we belong to a spiritual communion that is truly righteous. Those who are audacious enough to say they have never sinned are liars and God's Word never resided in their hearts.

How blessed we are to have these few verses in 1 John 1. We have the eyewitness testimony written down by those who actually saw, heard, and touched "the Word who became manifest in the flesh." This testimony by John results in our sharing in an illuminated fellowship, a real community of Light within the Church. Though some around us may prove to be false in their claims of never sinning, we may remain in this blessed community of fellow believers by walking exactly as our Lord walked – in righteousness and light – cleansed from those sins we confess.

==== END ====

THE CHRIST-MIND – THE RIGHT MENTAL ATTITUDE

*"Let the same disposition be in you which was in Christ Jesus."
[Philippians 2:5 Weymouth Translation]*

Few people would argue that the general attitude of many people throughout the world is anything but Christ-like, even among Christians. That is nothing new. Paul wrote a most loving appeal to the elders and deacons along with the whole congregation in Phillipi in ancient Turkey. He counsels those who have left a world of bad dispositions, selfish attitudes, and harmful inclinations. He encourages an attitude of humble obedience to God. In the process, Paul

provides four examples of this right mental attitude. Note how the great missionary introduces this appeal.

1 So if there is any encouragement incorporate within Christ, if any consolation of love, if any sharing of Pneuma, if any inner feelings and empathy, **2** you Philipians fill me with joy so that you may be minding the very same thing, having the same love, joined together in soul, minding the one thing -- **3** do nothing out of contentiousness nor from vainglory, but rather with lowly-mindedness be considerate of one another, **4** not just looking after your own selfish things, but also those things of others.
[Nazarene Saints Rendering]

What a tug at the heart Paul delivers! How could anyone not respond to such a loving approach. This is one of the most appealing paragraphs in the Christian Bible as he warmly reaches the hearts of the Philipians. Note the basis for this appeal: a) Love consoles, encourages, and gives incentive to a higher good; b) a sharing or communion with the spirit of God arouses a common human empathy among Christians; and, c) the inner feelings of compassion and empathy creates an atmosphere of affectionate tenderness.

Paul then lists what would make him truly joyful in Christ when he enumerates several personality characteristics. First, he encourages a likemindedness, or as one version puts it: *“by your mutual identity of purpose.”* [BER] In one form or another the word “mind” occurs several times, embedded in a number of Greek words. “Minding” – as in “minding” the store” – may mean pay attention, or keep a certain attitude or frame of mind.

Second, Paul encourages “the same love,” or as another version words it: *“fostering the same disposition of love.”* [WMS] Third, he exhorts they should be “joined together in soul.” That is, hearts beating in union. [Compare the “one soul” at Acts 4:32.]

Then in this same appeal Paul asks that they be “minding one thing.” That is, focus on this one thought. With the same interest and enthusiasm as that ancient congregation we wonder what this could be. He counsels us to “do nothing out of contentiousness.” What does that mean? It means not to be self-seeking, possessing no spirit of intrigue or hidden agenda, or never acting for private ends. [2 Corinthians 12:20; James 3:14] Contention, usually spawned by jealousy, will destroy a Christian group and divide it further. Ambition, a disgusting thought in the Church, has been at the root of many cases of strife as groups polarize around competing leaders. [Compare Galatians 5:25, 26.]

Rather, nothing should be done based on vainglory, vanity, petty ambition, pride, empty conceit, or egotism as many versions phrase it. Lowly-mindedness will produce true humility, modesty, and low thoughts of self. This very idea goes in the face of modern notions of self-esteem, another way of saying self-pride.

Such an attitude will cause all to “be considerate of one another.” It will cause each one to show regard for one another as though others were more important than self. A Christian is publicly identified by consideration for others accompanied with good manners and decency. This calls for love and empathy, and here Paul actually defines love without using the word: *“Not looking after your own selfish things, but instead those interests of others.”* He writes in a similar vein at 1 Corinthians 10:24, *“Let no one seek just self-concerns, but rather the concerns of others.”*[NSR]

However, can Paul produce real examples of all these wonderful ideas? Can he point to actual role models who may be copied or imitated in having the right mental attitude? Paul will now produce four examples of the correct disposition from the standpoint of God.

KEEP THE MIND OF CHRIST

5 You Philippians continue to have this mind that was also in Christ Jesus – **6** who though existing in a god’s form did not consider retaining things equal to divinity -- **7** but rather he emptied himself, and took a slave’s form, and became in the likeness of humans. **8** And, having discovered himself in a human frame, [he] made himself lowly and became obedient until a death, but death on a stake. **9** Because of this the God highly exalted him, and graciously gave to him the name over every name. **10** So that in the name of Jesus every knee should bend – of those in heaven and those on earth and those [buried] underground, **11** and every tongue should make a confession that Jesus Christ is Lord unto God’s glory – [the] Father. [NSR]

Of course, we could expect Paul would first point to the greatest human example of all – Christ Jesus himself. It is this “mind” [attitude, spirit, disposition] that every Christian strives to imitate, even though there will be failures and set backs. What characterized Christ’s basic thinking and attitude is now discussed by Paul.

Our purpose here is not to get side-tracked on portions of these verses dealing with the nature of Christ. We do not want to miss Paul’s purpose – cultivating the Christ-Mind. Before Jesus the Nazarene came to earth, born of the virgin, he existed as a spirit being, the first of God’s creations. As God’s only-begotten Son [or, god (John 1:18)] he was the preeminent of all creatures. [Colossians 1:15] In this realm he is called the Word [or, Spokesman] by John 1:1. When the opportunity was raised him to leave his celestial dwelling, with its position and privileges, he did not grasp to his breast his divinity, but was willing to empty himself.

What kind of attitude or frame of mind is conveyed by the fact Christ “emptied himself”? First, he left behind or emptied himself of his grand and awesome privileges and positions. This may be compared – though weakly so – if the President of the United States was willing to leave his office and become a medical missionary in the slums of India or Haiti after the manner of mother Theresa. The thought is impossible.

But not so with Christ. He was willing to “take a slave’s form.” He was willing to become not only a slave of God, but also a slave to other human beings. Thus, Christ “made himself lowly” exactly as Paul had made the appeal in the opening verses of chapter 2. But, how far did this attitude or disposition of a humble slave go? Paul writes that our Lord “became obedient until death.” And not just any death! Not a death in old age, slipping peacefully away during sleep. Not even an honorable death as some hero. Rather, he was executed as a condemned criminal that to many observers would be of the opinion that he brought reproach on God.

Because Christ had the right mental attitude – that of a humble, self-less and obedient slave – his God exalted him to a superior position than the one he had before coming to earth. “Raised to the very highest place,” one version paraphrases it. This exaltation also involved a new name or reputation, for Christ was given “a name over every name.” This is something he did not possess before. It was not merely the Hebrew name *Ye-shu’a`* or *Yehoh-shu’a`*, or even its Greek form, *Ieosus* and its anglicized form, Jesus. Though these may identify the carpenter from Nazarene who left his footprints on the seashore of Galilee, it was really the character, reputation and authority this name possessed by virtue of his attitude – his humble obedient unto death.

Though no other example could ever equal this, what other role model of a person with the right mental attitude does Paul point to? Himself!

HOW PAUL WORKED OUT HIS OWN SALVATION

12 And so, my beloved, just as you always obeyed -- not just in my presence only, but now much more in my absence – all of you continue to be working out your personal salvation with fear and trembling. 13 For God is the One working within you Philippians, both to will and to work within [His] good pleasure. 14 Continue doing everything apart from whisperings and criticisms, 15 so that all of you may become faultless and pure – *‘God’s unblemished children among a crooked and twisted generation,’* [Deuteronomy 32:5] in whom you all shine as luminaries to the world of humankind. 16 Get a firm grasp on Life’s Word leading to my boasting during Christ’s Day, proving that I did not run without purpose, nor *‘labor in vain.’* [Isaiah 49:4] 17 Despite that I am being poured out as a libation upon the sacrifice and public work of your faith, I continue to

rejoice – and I am rejoicing together with all of you Philippians. 18 In the same way all of you continue to rejoice and jointly rejoice together with me. [NSR]

Continuing on his theme of the right mental attitude, after considering the example of the obedience of Jesus, Paul mentions “obedience” again. He reminds how the Philippians had been obedient to Paul as an elder in the Christian Church. [Hebrews 13:7, 17] In this context Paul tells the elders, deacons, and fellow members of the congregation that they should “*Continue to be working out your personal salvation with fear and trembling.*” Other versions put this, “reverence and trepidation.”

If there is one verse in Paul many would wish to remove it is this one. Others try to “twist” Paul’s obvious meaning. [2 Peter 3:16] Though God does his part in our salvation [Philippians 2:13], we also must do our part – which requires works which reflect faith and love. The Nazarene taught such, and a review of the word “work” in the Gospels will prove this. [Matthew 5:16; 11:19; John 3:19-21; 6:28, 29; 14:12] And in Paul elsewhere. [Acts 26:20; Romans 2:6, 10; Ephesians 2:10; 1 Timothy 2:10; 5:25; Titus 3:8, 14] This right mental attitude is reflected again at 2 Corinthians 7:1, “*As a result, having these promises, beloved, we should cleanse ourselves from every fleshly and spiritual pollution, perfecting holiness in godly fear.*” [NSR]

Christ himself held such fear as part of his right mental attitude and was thus perfected by his own obedience. On this subject Paul writes: “*[Christ] was heard because he feared God and though he was a Son he learned obedience by the sufferings he endured. And having been made perfect he became responsible for everlasting salvation to those who obey him.*” [Hebrews 5:7, 8 ASV, ALF, KNX]

Happily Paul says we are not alone in this effort! We can never attain the Christ-Mind with its right mental attitude without God’s own energy. Paul says God “*gives you the energy [ENERGON] to do what He wants.*” [BEC] With God’s energizing assistance the Nazarene disciple can “*both possess the will as well as actually produce the work in harmony with His good pleasure.*” Not only must the desire to do God’s pleasure be present, but also the energy must be expended in order to accomplish this. God provides all the tools needed to accomplish this – His Word, His Church, His Pneuma, or holy spirit. [Ephesians 4:11-6; 1 Timothy 3:15-17]

This matter of working out one’s own salvation must be “apart from whisperings and criticisms of others” with a judgmental attitude. Grumbling and fault-finding are not part of the Christ-Mind. It is a terrible failing of most humans to express their judgments and criticism to friends. This is called “gossip” – a word in English traceable to that talk among friends. However, this often can develop a negative tone because of either egotism or jealousy. What results are contentions and slander, both works of the flesh.

This right mental attitude cannot be half-hearted but “faultless and pure.” As a result of this Christ-Mind all can become “*God’s unblemished children among a crooked and twisted generation.*” With such a perfected character each Saint may “shine as luminaries” or heavenly lights, standing out as a person who carries Christ in the heart into daily life.

There is something important here that Paul associates with the Christ-Mind. One must “get a firm grasp on Life’s Word.” One can only do this by continuous study and meditation of His Word. [Psalm 1:2; John 17:17]

Such will require a sacrifice. Now it is never a sacrifice unless one gives up something. Perhaps one of the most valuable things we possess is – time. Paul uses this analogy of sacrifice when he points to himself as an example of the right mental attitude, “*I am being poured out as a libation [that is, a drinking offering] upon the sacrifice and public work of your faith.*”

Can Paul provide further examples of this Christ-Mind with its right mental attitude? Indeed, he does. He points to two personal examples with whom he was very familiar.

TIMOTHY -- A UNIQUE DISPOSITION

19 Now, I am hoping in [the] Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you Philippians soon, so that I also may be a cheerful soul, knowing about those things pertaining to you. 20 For I have no one else of such equal soul who will genuinely care for your matters. 21 Because all of the others are continually seeking their own concerns and not those of Christ Jesus. 22 But you Philippians are aware of the proof he gave, that like a child to a father he slaved together with me regarding the Evangel. 23 For a certainty, then, this is the person I hope to send to you as soon as I know about my own matters at the moment. 24 However, I am confident in [the] Lord that I will also come soon. [NSR]

Paul points to his own missionary companion Timothy as a fine example of the right mental attitude, or model of humble, self-sacrifice. Paul said that Timothy was a person of “equal soul.” That is someone with a balanced and focused disposition, attitude, or inclination. This was reflected in his “genuine care” for matters of the Philippian church. For the young elder had a “genuine interest in your welfare.” Timothy was a model of what Paul had written about in Philippians 2:3, 4.

Timothy stood out even among other Christians. For Paul becomes somewhat critical of others who had been described in Philippians 1:15-17. Persons who were contentious and lacked pure and loving motives. He says of these, “*All the others are continually seeking their own concerns.*” James Moffatt puts it, “everybody is selfish.” Paul likely refers to those negative disciples of Philippians

1:15-17. This is a serious condemnation of selfishness that manifested itself within the Church in the 1st Century. We should not be surprised then, that despite all this fine counsel in Philippians, many today may also walk in self-focus, jealous ambition, slanderous talk that divides, and ego-centric persons who wear pride as a uniform.

It can be very discouraging when we are confronted by those who do not have the Christ-Mind though professing to follow Christ. Their attitudes, dispositions and inclinations contradict their claims. However, often there are fine examples among us who can be imitated as models of the right mental attitude. [3 John 11] Some of these may not be the older ones, though they can, but may be some very young in years. One example comes to mind of a young boy of ten who reads and speaks so fluently before audiences of various sizes. And yet his mind-set remains humble and obedient and brings praise and honor to his parents. One can look at this lad and see what Jesus meant when he said God's Kingdom belonged to such child-like persons.

But can Paul point to another example? One who struggles with sickness and depression and yet remains someone to look to for the Christ-Mind? Yes, and so let us consider the last case Paul gives.

THE EXAMPLE OF A SICK BROTHER

25 However, I consider it a necessity to send to you Philippians Epaphroditus – my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, but also an apostle and public worker for my needs -- **26** since he was longing to see all of you. He was so depressed when he knew you had heard he had fallen sick. **27** For he was sick and near death, but the God had mercy on him – and not only him but also on me – so that I should not have sadness upon sadness. **28** So then, I sent him sooner so that when you Philippians saw him again you would rejoice and I would be less saddened. **29** So now, you Philippians welcome him in [the] Lord with all joy, and continue to honor such persons. **30** Because he came near to death in behalf of the Lord's work, putting his soul in great danger, so that he might completely make up for your lack of public work in my behalf. [NSR]

Yes, Paul introduces us to a brother with a difficult name, Epaphroditus. He is called an "apostle" by Paul and by this he means a church messenger of representative, or a special envoy from Paul himself. He says the poor soul was "depressed" because of his worry over the Philippians. The Greek here is interesting, **ADEMONON**, and can mean full of heaviness, or distressed. Christians may become "depressed." [1 Thessalonians 5:14] Particularly this may be so if one is coping with a serious illness as was our brother here. Paul describe his condition as "sick and near death."

Paul says to “honor such persons” Disciples with the right mental attitude who have demonstrated self-sacrificing work on behalf of the Gospel and the Church, should be treated with respect and godly manners. [1 Corinthians 16:18; 1 Thessalonians 5:12] Hard-working elders are worthy of “double-honor.” [1 Timothy 5:17] “Honor” may include material assistance. [See Matthew 15:4, 5.]

Are we not happy and glad that Paul wrote such helpful words? Can we not see from the examples of Jesus, Paul, Timothy and Epaphroditus how we also can cultivate the right mental attitude? As we grow in Christian life and worship can others see how our attitude has changed? How our disposition and inclinations have been redirected after the example of our Lord? How they can see in us the Christ-Mind at work – not as a mere facade or veneer -- but as a living, breathing example of how Christ himself may have walked?

For a review of this material in Philippians chapter 2 consider these questions:

- ?? **Sum up Philippians chapter two in a short phrase**
- ?? **What are some key words?**
- ?? **What verse would you call the "theme verse"?**
- ?? **Who are three examples of the "mind of Christ"?**
- ?? **What mental attributes are you determined to demonstrate?**
- ?? **What kind of "mind" should we have? (Acts 4:32)**
- ?? **What are some characteristics we should have? (1 Corinthians 13:4-7)**
- ?? **What are some characteristics we should not have? (Galatians 5:25, 26)**
- ?? **In what way could verse 4 define AGAPE? (1 Corinthians 10:24)**
- ?? **Whose "mind" should we have? (1 Peter 2:21)**
- ?? **What three characteristics did Jesus have?**
- ?? **Who is another example of Christ's "mind"? (Philippians 3:8)**
- ?? **What helps us work out our own salvation? (2 Corinthians 7:1, 15)**
- ?? **To do this what must we hold fast? How? (2 Timothy 3:16; Hebrews 4:12)**
- ?? **Give another example of Christ's "mind" (Philippians 2:5)**
- ?? **How was Timothy like Christ? (1 Corinthians 4:17; 16:10)**
- ?? **Do all Christians "keep the mind of Christ"? (Philippians 1:15-17; 4:15)**
- ?? **Who is another example of Christ's "mind"? (Philippians 4:18)**
- ?? **What words are used to describe him?**
- ?? **How were such examples to be treated? (1 Corinthians 16:18; 1 Thessalonians 5:12)**

==== END ====

PSALM 2 ENTHRONED MESSIAH

The apostle Paul calls this the “second psalm” and Peter attributes it to David. The psalm is a powerful prophecy about Jesus the Nazarene as Christ, King, and Son. As a prediction it covers the life of Christ from the days of his ministry, through his resurrection and ascension, and into his Thousand Year reign. It paints an image quite different from the general view of many Christians.

Reading this psalm carefully and meditating on it will result in what the First Psalm calls a Blessed Reader. [The version below is from the *Nazarene Saints Rendering* of the Psalms. Blue letters indicate verses quoted in the Christian Bible.]

PS2:1

Why do the non-Jews gather in turmoil?
And the peoples plot an empty scheme?

PS2:2

Kings of the earth take their stand.
And officials meet to conspire plots.
They speak against Yehowah and His Messiah:

PS2:3

"Let us resist their constraints!
And cast off their restrictions!"

PS2:4

The One enthroned in the Celestialum will laugh.
Yehowah will mock them.

PS2:5

At that moment He will speak angrily to them.
And with great displeasure He will confound them:

PS2:6

"I install my King upon My holy mount of Zion!"

PS2:7

I will announce His decree:
"Yehowah told me:
'You are my Son, today I have given birth to you!

PS2:8

Ask Me and I will give you the non-Jews as an inheritance.
And as your own possession the most distant parts of the earth.

PS2:9

You will shepherd them with an iron sceptre.
And you will smash them to pieces like a clay pot!"

PS2:10

So act with wisdom, O kings!
And accept correction, you judges of the earth!

PS2:11

Serve Yehowah with awe and rejoice with trembling!

PS2:12

Bow and kiss the Son lest he becomes angry and you perish from the way!
For his anger becomes inflamed suddenly!
O how blessed those who seek refuge in him!

JEWS AND NON-JEWS OPPOSE GOD AND THE MESSIAH

The prophetic psalm begins with questions regarding non-Jews and Jews. Peoples from both racial groups have gathered in turmoil, or rage, tumult, uproar. Both the Hebrew GOY [Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #1471] and Greek ETHNOS came to mean all peoples who were not Jewish or Hebrew.

When was it that both the Jews and non-Jews assembled in a raging uproar? Peter quotes these two verses at Acts 4:25, 26 where he applies the prophecy to

the Roman and Jewish rulers. Consider his inspired prayer among a Christian fellowship:

“Sovereign Lord, the One who made the heaven, the earth, and the sea and everything in them -- **AC4:25** our Father, the One who by the holy Pneuma spoke by the mouth of David your servant, saying – *“Why do the non-Jews rage, and the people imagine empty things? AC4:26 The kings of the earth took their stand, and the rulers assembled together, against the LORD and against his Christ.”* [Psalm 2:1, 2 LXX] **AC4:27** For in truth, in this city both Herod, Pontius Pilate, along with the non-Jews and the people of Israel, gathered together against your servant-boy, Jesus. [NSR]

Peter names the Jewish ruler Herod and the Roman governor Pilate as particularly noted in the fulfillment of the Second Psalm. When that mixed crowd on Jews and non-Jews gathered in a riotous mob they screamed for the execution of Jesus the Nazarene. It doing so they demonstrated for all time their attitude toward God Himself.

In this prayer Peter calls Yehowah DESPOTA [or Absolute Lord| Sovereign Lord] in Acts 4:24. It is clear Jehovah is not the same person as Christ or Messiah. The Hebrew here is *we'al-MESHI-CHoh'* and the Greek KHRISTOU. [Compare also Isaiah 61:1 and Luke 4:16 where the Nazarene makes the same distinction.] This designation could only be given to the Nazarene upon his baptism in Jordan's waters in the year 29 AD. So, there are two persons mentioned here and the nations resist the law and commandments of both Yehowah and his Christ.

MESSIAH ENTHRONED ON HEAVENLY ZION

Yehowah reacts to this attack against his Messiah from his own realm – heaven, or the Celestialum. He promises to speak to these Jews and non-Jews in anger, or wrath and indignation. He says, *“I install my King!”* By “install” God means to established [NEB], or “enthroned a king of my choice.” [KNX] Though this verse is not quoted by Peter or Paul, the context is sandwiched between their inspired interpretations. [Acts 13:33] This would lead to the conclusion that verse 6 is fulfilled upon the ascension of Christ to heaven. [For details see notes in Nazarene Commentary 2000 on Ephesians 1:10-22.] Daniel 7:13 also foretells Messiah will ascend in clouds to his royal appointment. The Risen Lord states the same at Revelation 3:21. Note he is already king when Revelation 1:5 was written.

Regarding this placement or establishment as King in heavenly Zion the King now speaks. When the King says, “I will announce His decree,” he speaks here BEFORE he is installed as King. Thus, the Second Psalm points to the pre-existence of Christ. He says – over one thousand years before it came true – that Yehowah told him something. Though he may have existed among “all the sons of God” at creation [Job 38:7], the Christ is to become something more. The Anointed reports what is to be said to him on that day of heavenly enthronement:

“You are my Son, today I have given birth to you.” On what day did this process of re-birth occur?

Paul also quotes these words before a Jewish synagogue:

AC13:32 “And now we are proclaiming to you [Jews] the coming of the promise to the forefathers, **AC13:33** that all these things the God fulfilled to their children – to us – by raising Jesus, just as it has been written in the Second Psalm: *“You are My son! Today I have begotten you!”* [Psalm 2:7] **AC13:34** That [Christ] would be raised from the dead never to return to corruption, He has said: *“I give to you [people of Israel] the reliable covenant-loyalty of David.”* [Isaiah 55:3 LXX] **AC13:35** Also in another psalm, He says: *“You will not permit your Saint to experience decay.”* [Psalm 16:10 LXX] **AC13:36** For surely David, having served on behalf of God’s counsel in his own generation, fell asleep and *was added to those of his forefathers and did experience decay.* [1 Kings 2:10] **AC13:37** However, that One the God raised did not experience decay. [NSR]

Thus, Psalm 2:6, 7 were fulfilled upon the resurrection and ascension of Christ. Paul says something similar at Romans 1:4, *“[Jesus] was declared God’s Son ... by a resurrection from the dead.”* [Romans 1:4 NSR] Paul quotes this psalm again when he writes to the Jews. [Hebrews 1:5]

Daniel 7:13, 14 foretold, *“I continued to observe in my night visions, and, look! with the clouds of the Sky someone like a Son of Humankind was arriving. He was brought to the Ancient of Days. The angels brought him into the Presence of the One. And to this Son of Humankind there were given government and dignity and a realm, so that peoples, nations and languages should all serve him. His government is an everlasting government that will never pass away, and his realm one that will never be brought to ruin.”* [NSR] Thus, it would be on the occasion of this coronation that God’s Son the Messiah would receive the nations living on the earthly globe as an inheritance. These would become his subjects. [Psalm 72:8] All those who wish to dwell on earth forever will have to continually submit to Christ’s reign. [Philippians 2:9-12] Ultimately the earth will be returned to an Edenic paradise peopled by those who will obey God’s law and submit to his Christ. [Revelation 11:15-17] But, what kind of reign will this be?

It will surprise some that Messiah’s rule will be with an iron scepter, or a “rod of iron.” Psalm 2:9 is a verse paraphrased and referenced at Revelation 2:27 where the Saints share in this reign during the Thousand Years. [Revelation 20:4] The verse is also referenced at Revelation 12:5. Messiah’s reign will include the subjugation of the nations and all God’s enemies. [1 Corinthians 15:24-28] During the Thousand Years this iron scepter will still be used against sinners.

The prophets make this clear when they speak of matters during the Thousand Years. Consider how Messiah’s “rod of iron” will be used against sinners at that time: *“Look at me! I am creating new heavens and a new earth. ... From that time there will never be a nursing baby who only lives a few days. Nor an elderly man who does not finish all his days. Though dying at one-hundred years of age – he will be a mere youth. Though a sinner who lives to be one-hundred will be*

cursed.” [Isaiah 65:17, 20] Zechariah 14:16-19 also speaks of this period under Messiah’s reign with “a rod of iron” – “And so it will occur regarding every survivor from among the non-Jews who came against Jerusalem, they will approach from year to year to bow down to the King Yehowah of armies. However, it will occur that any of those from all the families of the earth who refuse to approach ... and bow down to the King Yehowah of armies – no rain will ever fall upon them. And if Egyptian families refuse to enter then the same plague Yehowah plagued the non-Jews will smite them.”[NSR]

This period of reigning with “a rod of iron” will continue until “the last enemy is destroyed” at the end of the Thousand Years. [1 Corinthians 15:24-28; Revelation 20:12-14]

HOW SHOULD ALL RESPOND TO GOD’S SON THE MESSIAH?

The second psalm ends with the powerful admonition for Jews and non-Jews to “act with wisdom” and “accept correction.” Not only should these repent but they also must “*serve Yehowah with awe and rejoice with trembling.*” They should also “kiss the Son.” What does this mean? The Aramaic is NASH-SHEQU-VAR’ and suggests the image of approaching the Messiah, King-Son, and “bow[ing] to the ground before him.” [HAR]

That this will occur is also stated elsewhere. Note Philippians 2:9-11, “*Because of this the God highly exalted him, and graciously gave to him the name over every name. So that in the name of Jesus every knee should bend – of those in heaven and those on earth and those [buried] underground, and every tongue should make a confession that Jesus Christ is Lord unto God’s glory – [the] Father.*” [NSR] Revelation 5:13 describes something similar: “*Then I heard every creature in ‘Heaven and on earth, and under the ground and on the sea’, [Philippians 2:10] and all that is in them, saying: “To the One enthroned and to the Lamb: the blessing and the honor and the ‘glory and the might into the Ages of the Ages’.*” [NSR]

But why take this action, either now as Christians, or humankind in general in the future? David gives his inspired reasons: “... *lest [the Son] becomes angry and you perish from the way! For his anger becomes inflamed suddenly.*” Neither Yehowah or his Messiah are all-forgiving and both are pictured in this psalm as angry and wrathful against those in opposition to them, particularly the rulers and judges. The Son is not a passive, effeminate person who is only loving to anyone all the time. No, David says he can become “inflamed suddenly” or “quickly provoked.” This image of the Son can be seen in Revelation 1:12-17 and it is not the picture most Christians want to hear:

RV1:12 And I turned around to look at the Voice that was speaking to me. And having turned around I saw 7 golden lamp-stands, **RV1:13** and among the lamp-stands ***‘someone like a Son of Humankind’***, clothed in a garment reaching his feet and girded

around the chest with a golden girdle. **RV1:14** *'His head and hair were white as white-wool like snow'* [Daniel 7:9] – and his eyes like a flame of fire -- **RV1:15** and his feet like fine copper as though in a fiery furnace. And his Voice was like the sound of great waters. **RV1:16** Now in his right hand he had 7 stars, and *'out of his mouth protruded a sharp double-edged sword'*. [Isaiah 49:2] His countenance was as the sun shining in its power. **RV1:17** And when I saw him I collapsed at his feet like a dead body. [NSR]

This journey through the “second psalm” has enlightened us on a prophecy referenced in the Christian Bible. We do not have to speculate about its fulfillment for we have the inspired interpretations of Peter, Paul, and John on what the psalm means. We learn from them that the “second psalm” of David was initially fulfilled when both Jews and non-Jews in a riotous mob screamed for the death of Yehowah’s Anointed. We learn when Jesus the Nazarene became messianic King and Son. We learn that Yehowah does not take lightly to those who oppose His Son. We learn that even the Son can rule with “a rod of iron” against those who refuse to submit to his reign. Are we not glad we have already “kissed the Son”? We have already showed our willingness to bow to the ground before the Son so that his anger is not kindled toward us. Are we not glad we have already begun to “accept correction” from Yehowah’s Anointed, King, and Son? May we all continue to submit to the Messiah and be blessed during his coming Thousand Year rule. [Based on information in *Nazarene Commentary 2000*©]

==== END ====

WHAT IS “BABYLON THE GREAT”?

In the book of Revelation there are two cities. One is called “the holy city” and is identified as the New Jerusalem. The second is called “the great city” and is named Babylon the Great. Both are also compared to women. One is the “mother of harlots” while the other is the “bride of the Lamb.” Much has been written during the last two thousand years about both. What is Babylon the Great?

Let us begin progressively from the first mention to the last. The word “Babylon” occurs 6 times. But the first reference to this city is in Revelation 11:8 –

“And their fallen body will be on the Broadway of the Great City. A ‘spiritual’ City called Sodom and Egypt where their Lord was impaled.”
[NSR]

Here is the first mention of “the great city” in a manner common in Revelation – introducing a subject that will be expanded later. The identity of the “two prophets” has been discussed elsewhere. [For details see notes in Nazarene

Commentary 2000 on Revelation 11:1-13.] These notes indicate the “two prophets” are the end-time Saints who experience a three and a half year period of Great Oppression or persecution just before the Return of Christ. Here in the vision the end-time Saints [= 144,000 or Large Crowd] their fallen “body” [singular], or corpse, are seen apparently slain on the “broadway of the Great City.” Evidently a sizable body of the Saints will be executed or killed in the persecution during the Great Oppression. [Daniel 7:25; Matthew 24:21, 22; Revelation 7:14; 13:5-7]

If the end-time Saints are “on the Broadway of the great city” then they are within it. Twice later these end-time Saints are seen rescued out of this “great city.” For example, a few verses later Revelation 11:12, 13 the end-time Saints are pictured as being raptured out of this city, likely from its Broadway –

And the 2 Witnesses heard a great voice out of Heaven, calling: “Come up here!” And the 2 Witnesses *ascended into Heaven in the cloud* [2 Kings 2:11; Daniel 7:13] and their enemies beheld them. In that hour *there occurred a great earthquake* [Ezekiel 38:19, 20] *A tenth of the (Great) City fell.* [Isaiah 6:13] *7,000 names of men* [1 Kings 19:2] were killed by the earthquake. The remaining became frightened and *they glorified The God of Heaven.* [Isaiah 66:5] [NSR]

God’s own people are still within Babylon. They are called out in Revelation 18:4 by a snatching to safety in the Rapture. [For details see notes in Nazarene Commentary 2000 on Revelation 18:4.] When this rapturous escape from the Great City occurs it is said 1/10th of the City fell and 7,000 were “killed” by the earthquake that shook the Great City. It is possible these allusions to Isaiah 6:13 and 1 Kings 19:2 are symbols of the end-time Saints who, though suffering during the Great Oppression, are now delivered as Daniel 12:1 foretells. Note also that when this happens those left behind “*became frightened and they glorified The God of Heaven.*” This would indicate that those left behind or abandoned were at least worshippers of the true God. The language is very similar to Isaiah 66:5 where such glorification of God is hypocritical.

The Great City is identified by three other name-places. First, Sodom. It is possible this is an allusion to some other Bible verses:

Isaiah 1:9 “*If Yehowah of Hosts Himself had let only a very small remnant survive, we would have become exactly as Sodom and we would have looked like Gomorrah.*” [NSR] [Note Paul quotes this verse at Romans 9:29.]

Isaiah 3:8, 9 “*Because Jerusalem has tripped, and Judah has collapsed, because both their words and actions were opposed to Yehowah. ... Their own expressions convict them and their Sodom-like sin exposes them.*” [NSR]

Deuteronomy 32:31, 32 “*For our Rock is not like their stone! Our*

enemies had judged us! For their vine is like the vine of Sodom.” [NSR]

It is interesting that in both the cases of Sodom and Egypt, Yehowah had people in those immoral and spiritually apostate places whom he delivered miraculously. So in both cases God’s own People had been within both Sodom and Egypt and would have never survived had God not virtually “raptured” them out of those places.

Both Sodom and Egypt were highly immoral and engaged in “gross immorality”. Egypt itself had a religious hierarchy and doctrine received from Babylon itself. Egypt is often the source of complicated theologies and cosmologies. Plato himself studied Egyptian religion and one can find echoes of triune gods and immortal souls in his own philosophies.

Lastly here, the Great City is said to be “*where their Lord was impaled.*” Literally speaking, Christ was not impaled within any city. [Hebrews 13:11, 12] But, generally the city of Jerusalem is highly associated with the death of Jesus Christ. Above Israel with its capitol city of Jerusalem are compared to Sodom. So in such a spiritual sense the Great City may be compared to elements of Sodom, the land of Egypt, and apostate Jerusalem of the 1st Century.

Jesus clearly condemned the Jewish inhabitants of his generation, calling them “an adulterous generation” – wicked, faithless, twisted -- whose religious hierarchy could not escape Gehenna. [Matthew 12:39-42, 45; 16:4; 17:17; 23:15, 33] Those Jews taught false doctrines which rendered their worship futile. [Matthew 15:6-9] Indeed, the body of Christ as a corpse fell in that city of Jerusalem – a city that could be identified with Sodom and Egypt – and with great similarities to the end-time Saints, Jesus was also caught away or received up in the clouds of the sky.

Jesus was a Jew within Israel and a frequent visitor to Jerusalem. He did not go along with the apostate Jewish rituals and doctrines. Though he was within that city he managed to remain separate from it. Just so, the end-time Saints are within a great city similar to Jerusalem. Evidently, these Saints share a similar identification as a “religion.”

There is something here that echoes the Nazarene’s parable of the Sower. There the Sower Jesus plants the seed of God’s Word. The “field is the world of humanity.” However, the enemy of Christ, Satan, sows another seed among the wheat. The harvester angels want to know if they should uproot the weeds, but the Sower says, “let them grow together.” So throughout the Gospel Age both wheat and weed grew together, often making it difficult to identify the wheat. [For details see notes in Nazarene Commentary 2000 on Matthew 13.]

There may well be something of a parallel here between the end-time Saints and the Great City. Like their Lord they find themselves part and parcel with the Great

City, perhaps sometimes indistinguishable from the majority of the inhabitants in that city like Sodom and Egypt. In God's own time the "wheat" will be separated from the weeds.

Any serious student of religion and history can trace much of modern Christianity to the plains of Shinar where the first great city was built – Babel. [Greek Babylon; Genesis 10:10] The roots of religion from the land of Shinar were circular or cyclic in theology, in contrast to the linear view of the Hebrews. While those who came from Babylon believed in an ever recycling of creation, the Hebrews believed God created all things with a purpose and this purpose would go directly forward to its finale. The citizens of Babylon believed in a variety of doctrines present today within what is called Christendom [as well as the Hindus and Buddhists] – a controlling religious hierarchy, a belief in a hell-fire torment, a belief in an immortal soul that may be recycled, a belief in triads and trinities, the worship of a heavenly woman, and a multitude of lesser rituals and concepts.

Historians acknowledge ancient Babylon as an influential religious empire. *The Bible As History* reports: "Altogether there are in Babylon 53 temples of the chief gods, 55 chapels of Marduk, 300 chapels for the earthly deities, 600 for the heavenly deities, 180 altars for the goddess Ishtar, 180 for the gods Nergal and Adad and 12 other altars for different gods." [W. Keller -- page 301]

The Encyclopedia Americana says: "Sumerian civilization [or, Babylonia] was dominated by priests; at the head of the state was the *lugal* (literally 'great man'), the representative of the gods." [(1977), Volume 3, page 9]

That the later world powers were influenced by Babylon is shown by M Jastrow Jr.: "Egypt, Persia, and Greece felt the influence of the Babylonian religion . . . The strong admixture of Semitic elements both in early Greek mythology and in Grecian cults is now so generally admitted by scholars as to require no further comment. These Semitic elements are to a large extent more specifically Babylonian." [*The Religion of Babylonia and Assyria*, pages 699, 700] Gods in triads and triune forms were also a hallmark of Babylonian religion: "The Platonic trinity, itself merely a rearrangement of older trinities dating back to earlier peoples, appears to be the rational philosophic trinity of attributes that gave birth to the three hypostases or divine persons taught by the Christian churches. . . . This Greek philosopher's [Plato's] conception of the divine trinity . . . can be found in all the ancient [pagan] religions." [*Nouveau Dictionnaire Universel* (Paris, 1865-1870), edited by M. Lachâtre, Volume 2, page 1467]

Thus, "Babylon the Great" of Revelation is just the most recent metamorphose of a long line of religious ceremony and doctrine dating back millennia. Though in its Christian form just before the Return of Christ, Babylon largely has maintained the primary doctrines of the Trinity, hell-fire torment, and soul immortality.

In Revelation this Babylon the Great is identified by several factors which establish it to be a religious kingdom:

- ?? The end-time Saints are within Babylon the Great [Revelation 11:8; 18:4]
- ?? Babylon the Great is closely associated with political powers controlling earth's inhabitants [Revelation 17:2; 18:9]
- ?? Babylon the Great will be sitting upon the wild Sea Beast [Revelation 17:3]
- ?? Babylon the Great is responsible for the martyrdom of the Saints [Revelation 17:6]
- ?? Babylon the Great is a residence of demons [Revelation 18:2]
- ?? Babylon the Great has commercial contacts with earth's merchants [Revelation 18:3, 11-19]
- ?? While much of humankind suffer in poverty Babylon the Great lives in shameless luxury [Revelation 18:7]
- ?? Babylon the Great is associated with music, artistic craftsmen, and weddings [Revelation 18:22, 23]
- ?? Babylon the Great is responsible for all the blood shed on earth [Revelation 18:24]

These identifying features lead some to the conclusion that Babylon the Great is primarily the sum total of what is also called "Christendom" the most influential religion on earth at the beginning of the 3rd millennium. It also includes many "harlots" of a multitude of other religions. From one perspective Babylon the Great is that whole lump of the Nazarene's parable at Matthew 13:33. Or, that resulting large tree with such small beginnings. [Matthew 13:31, 32] Also, that field in which the Lord first planted the Gospel seed where weeds planted by the Devil engulf the wheat. [Matthew 13:37-41]

Babylon the Great is that sum total of the great apostasy foretold by Paul:

3 Let no one in any way deceive you, for that day cannot come without the coming of the apostasy first, and the appearing of the man of sin, the son of perdition, who sets himself against, **4** and exalts himself above, every so-called 'god' or object of worship, and goes the length of taking his seat in the very temple of God, giving it out that he himself is God. The Lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will sweep away with the tempest of His anger, and utterly overwhelm by the awful splendour of His Coming. **9** The appearing of the Lawless one will be attended by various miracles and tokens and delusive marvels -- for so Satan works -- **10** and by every kind of wicked deception for those who are on the way to perdition because they did not welcome into their hearts the love of the truth, so that they might be saved. **11** And for this reason God sends them a misleading influence that they may believe the lie; **12** in order that all may come under judgement who have refused to believe the truth and have taken pleasure in unrighteousness. [Weymouth Translation]

COME OUT OF BABYLON THE GREAT

If the end-time Saints will find themselves within Babylon the Great at some future moment, how could they ever get out? By a rapture to heaven, is the answer given by Jesus Christ as he unseals the book of Revelation: "*And the*

Two Witnesses heard a great voice out of Heaven, calling: "Come up here!" And the Two Witnesses ascended into Heaven in the cloud and their enemies beheld them. [Revelation 11:12 NSR; compare also 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17] Thus the end-time Saints leave their enemies behind in Babylon the Great. It is in this manner they escape the coming plagues against Babylon the Great. This is the meaning of the heavenly call in Revelation 18:4, *"And I heard another heavenly voice, saying: "Come out, my People, so that you share not in her sins and that you receive not of her plagues."* [NSR]

The last Christian Saints on earth at this moment will rise "to meet the Lord in the air." [1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17] They will be safely in heaven enjoying the grand marriage feast of the Lamb. [Revelation 15:1, 2; 19:1-3, 7-9] However, below on earth Babylon the Great -- including all the weed-like "sons of the Wicked One" and all those "goats" who refused to be kind to the end-time Saints -- will suffer a period of great plagues. [Compare Matthew 13:38, 40; Matthew 25:41-46 Revelation chapter 16]

These plagues on Babylon the Great will culminate in her destruction at the hands of her former political friends. Revelation 17:15-18 predicts: *"And the Angel is saying to me: "The waters which you saw, where the Harlot [Babylon the Great] is sitting, are peoples, crowds, nations, and tongues. And the 10 Horns which you saw, and the wild Sea Beast will hate the Harlot. They will desolate the Harlot, stripping her naked, eating her flesh, and burning her in fire. The God will put into their hearts his opinion to give their kingdom to the wild Sea Beast, until the words of The God will be finished. And the Woman you saw is the Great City, the one reigning over the kings of the earth."* [NSR] [For details see notes in Nazarene Commentary 2000 on Revelation.]

Babylon the Great, after a reign of over four millennia, will be gone forever. Her great choirs, her famous artisans and their artworks, her grand weddings of princes and princesses and kings and queens will be gone forever. [Revelation 18:22, 23] Gone forever will be her countless inquisitions. Gone all religious control she held over the political powers of earth. Gone will be her "teachings of demons." [1 Timothy 4:1-3] Gone her control over the lives of sincere worshippers. Gone her religious hypocrisy and twisted moral standards. Gone her money-loving religious hierarchy.

How glad and happy we should be to have identified this religious system. With joy we look forward to God's thought or opinion being fulfilled against this bloodthirsty and materialistic Great City. How we long for those heavenly words: *"Come on up here!"* [Revelation 11:12]

==== END ====

“SOUND MINDS AND HEALTHFUL TEACHING”

Few would argue that a sound mind is something to possess. Few would argue that what one teaches ought to be healthy and not harmful. But who will determine what is “sound”, or who will set the standard of what is “healthy”? For those who are Christians, most would agree that the apostle Paul is representative of Biblical standards among the Nazarene’s disciples. Paul uses the words “sound” and “health” in a number of contexts, but particularly the thoughts and ideas occur in his epistle to Titus.

If anyone wanted to know about the 1st Century Christian Church the letter to Titus is an outstanding place to begin. For it is something of an official letter from an apostle to an elder left on the isle of Crete to, as Paul puts it, “correct the things that are defective” within the local churches on that island country. In the second chapter of the letter Paul encourages “sound minds” and “healthful teaching.” An examination of Paul’s words to Titus will give us an idea what was needed then within Christian congregations. As it turns out, the same things are needed nearly two thousand years later in the modern Church at the beginning of the 3rd millennium. Any Christian at these times who desires to know something about the beginnings of Christianity will find a consideration of Titus chapter 2 of great interest. Let us take a closer look at the inspired epistle.

KEEP SEEKING HEALTHFUL TEACHING

1 However, you [Titus], speak those things which are appropriate and suitable with healthy teaching. 2 Elderly men -- temperate, respectable, sound of mind, healthy in the Faith, in love, and in endurance. 3 Similarly, elderly women -- holy behavior, not slanderers, nor enslaved to a lot of wine, teachers of goodness, 4 so that they may encourage the young women to be fond of males, fond of their children, 5 sound of mind, pure, workers at home, good, subjecting themselves to their own husbands, lest the Word of The God be spoken about evilly. 6 Similarly, the younger men, exhort them to be sound of mind. [NSR]

First Paul begins by directing this lone appointee on Crete to speak things “suitable with healthy teaching.” The King James calls this “sound doctrine.” The early Church was not a loose conglomeration of independent churches with divergent opinions. [1 Corinthians 1:9-11; see notes on Ephesians 4:13, 14] But what does Paul include in this “healthy teaching”?

Appropriately the first counsel regards the Christian men, particularly the older men. The Greek is similar to that in Titus 1:5 but here most view these as older in years not in office. [1 Timothy 5:1] Paul now gives counsel to both sexes with a variety of ages. In those days some determined an older man to be over 40. As with older women, younger women, and young men, all are encouraged to be “sound in mind.” That is, to hold healthy thoughts in harmony with God’s own

thinking. What does this include?

OLDER, MATURE MEN

For the older men five things are associated with such a “sound mind.” These include, first, “temperance.” That is, sober-minded [ASV], dignified [NAS], serious [TCN]. The mature Christian men were not to be immoderate or unsteady in their general behavior. Seriousness should mark their character and disposition. They were to take their discipleship seriously. They were not men constantly joking and from whom one could never get a serious answer.

Second, these men were to be “respectable.” That is, dignified [NAS], high-principled [NEB], or decent [KNX]. We get a view into the high morality of the early Church. If we compile these characteristics and apply them to one person we get a good idea of the type of person this Christian was. Such were not disrespectful or unprincipled men of questionable character.

Third, these serious and respectable gentlemen were to also be “healthy in the Faith.” Surely this meant they continued in prayers, meeting with fellow Christians, sharing the Gospel with others, and a fruitful study of God’s Word. They were not men of weak or little faith. They were not men filled with constant doubt and question about God, His Word, or His People.

Fourth, they were to be loving or charitable to both the household of faith as well as those not inclined toward Christianity. These were not stingy, closefisted men who are never seen coming to the aid of those in need.

And, finally, they were to endure in all of this, remaining patient, persevering in steadfastness. What a fine gentleman this is. Not a man to embarrass the church, and known in his community as a godly man. In a similar manner the younger men were also to be “sound in mind” just as the older men.

OLDER, MATURE WOMEN

In a similar manner Paul gives instructions to Titus regarding the mature or older Christian ladies. In Biblical times this would have been a woman over 40. Like the men, Titus is to encourage several things among the elderly women. First, “holy behavior.” That is, “reverent in demeanor” [ASV], or with a “deportment which testifies of holiness.” [CON] She may be jolly, but everyone who knows such a lady realizes she takes her faith seriously and behaves in a manner recognized by all who know her as a pious woman. She is not a “material girl” given to worldly and fleshly thinking.

Next, such a Christian woman is not to be slanderous, or bring a false accusation against another Christian or neighbor. Some versions render this: “not scandal-mongers” [NEB], “not malicious gossips” [NAS], or “not given to intrigue.” One does not find this pious lady spreading vicious gossip or hurtful slander in the market square. She knows that when conversation takes a negative turn to

quietly depart. For one of the most destructive forces in a church is a group or clique of gossips. [1 Timothy 3:11] This is not a woman who is up on the “latest.” She is never heard speaking negatively of others. If she has an opinion she keeps it to herself. The woman who slanders another does not have a “sound mind” and knows nothing of “healthy teaching.”

Wine in Biblical times, and even today in the Middle East, was a common beverage at all meals. So, Paul goes on to caution becoming “enslaved” to it. [1 Timothy 3:11] The elderly Christian ladies are encouraged to be “teachers of goodness” which makes them examples of morality and virtue. The younger women have good role models to imitate. However, if these older Christian women are given to gossip and perhaps often tipsy, an unholy influence undermines the good done in the church. But what were they to teach to the younger women. Paul addresses that subject next.

YOUNGER CHRISTIAN WOMEN

Among the early Church, women of this age probably represented the majority of Christians even as is the case in many places today. So we find Paul spending more time here and recommending as part of being “sound of mind” six matters.

First, the young women were to be “fond of males.” The Greek is PHILANDROUS [5362] from which the English corruption “philanderer” comes with an opposite meaning – a man who cheats on his wife. Other versions render this: “love their husbands” [KJV], or to be “loving wives.” [CON] It does show that the older women should teach the younger to be fond of males and not hateful of them as if in a battle of the sexes. This is not a woman who is a hater of men, not identified as someone who constantly is critical of men in general.

Second, the younger Christian mothers were to be “fond of their children.” Cultures vary, but in most it is a natural thing for mothers to love their children. There may have been a particular problem on Crete requiring this encouragement. There can be no greater work in the Church than rearing the next generation. Certainly in both cases of their husbands and their children, this love or fondness is expressed by care for the well-being of hearth and home. What such a “capable woman” does in this regard is outlined beautifully in Proverbs 31:10-31. We can imagine such women reading this portion of Scripture and striving to follow such godly advice.

Third, the younger Christian women were to be “pure.” That is “chaste.” [KJV] Early Christian records extol the virtue of such women in contrast to their pagan surroundings where temple prostitution was still practiced. She is not a woman who is coarse or foul or obscene. She is not a woman who relates matters best left in private. Rather she is “pure” in thought, speech and action.

Fourth, these women were to be “workers at home.” That is, “homekeepers”

[WMS], or “domesticated.” [TCN] Paul encourages the young women to be home-bodies, expending their energies in caring for their own home and house. No where does he encourage women to follow a “career” or work outside the home. However, consider the good woman of Proverbs 31:10-31 and the wide range of latitude she had. She is a worker and not given to laziness. This is not a woman whose house is unclean or in disarray.

Fifth, she was to be “good.” Now “good” is a word with a wide range of meaning. In English here are just a few of the synonyms: moral, upright, virtuous, righteous, worthy, exemplary, conscientious, skillful, admirable, kind, reliable. If such a woman were to read Proverbs 31:10-31 she would find the word “good” a couple of times, as well as an excellent picture of such a “good” woman. So this is not a “bad” woman with a reputation in the community. Everyone knows this Christian woman is “good.”

Sixth, such young Christian women was to be “subjecting themselves to their own husbands.” Other versions render this: KJV: obedient to their own husbands; ASV: living in subjection to; ALF: submitting themselves; NEB: respecting the authority of; WMS: subordinate; PME: willing to adapt themselves to their husbands. A subject to repulse many modern Christian women! However, if the younger wives are to be taught to be in subjection, the older ladies must also set the example. [Genesis 3:16; 1 Corinthians 11:3; 14:34] Subjection is only necessary when the wife disagrees with a husband’s decision. Subjection is manifest often by speech. This woman does not contradict or criticize her husband in public. She is not one to “wear the pants in the family.” She is not bossy, pushy, or manipulative of her husband and other males.

What is the reason Paul gives for the above instructions? He continues by saying: “*Lest God’s Word be spoken of evilly.*” Or, KJV: not blasphemed; RHM: defamed; TCNT: maligned; BER: slandered; RSV: discredited; WMS: suffer reproach; MOF: scandal to the gospel. This is Paul’s main reason for the previous words of counsel from older women to the younger. Christian women were to be an example to the world of a godly mother and submissive wife. It may well be that the women of Crete acted in an atrocious way and those who became Christians had to make big changes.

So, Paul outlines by his own “healthy teaching” what a “sound mind” is from a Christian perspective. But what about Titus himself, as an elder, how was he to have a “sound mind” as a role model for all? Paul mentions that next.

KEEP EXHORTING SOUND MINDS

7 Above everything show yourself as a role model of good works. Regarding your teaching show integrity, seriousness, **8** healthy speech beyond reproach, so that those who oppose may be ashamed and having nothing bad to say about you. **9** Slaves need to continue subject to their own masters and to please them well in

everything -- not talking back, **10** not stealing, but rather demonstrating trustworthiness and goodness in everything -- so that they may adorn the teaching of our Savior God in everything. [NSR]

In everything Titus did he was to demonstrate himself “as a role model of good works.” That is a pattern [KJV], worthy example [WMS], an all-around example [BER], or the model of a life nobly lived [KNX]. Titus -- something of an “apostle” with powers to appoint -- must himself be an example to imitate. [1 Corinthians 11:1; 1 Timothy 6:18] This would also include what and how he taught.

Paul writes that his teaching – and every elder who imitated Titus as a role model – should demonstrate integrity. Teaching that features integrity would include: honesty, morality, principle, soundness. Judging from elsewhere in this same letter teaching would include only “sound doctrine.” As Paul puts it earlier, “*Holding to that teaching in harmony with [the] faithful Word.*” [Titus 1:9; 3:8] This doctrinally correct teaching was also to be “serious.” One version puts it: “... *teaching what is unadulterated and dignified.*” [BER] His teaching must be loyal to the original pattern and have a dignified presentation.

This speech or teaching must be “beyond reproach” Paul urges. Another version renders this: “your message should be true, your language correct and not open to criticism.” [NOR] No doubt this also involved the language of Titus on a conversational level. [Colossians 3:8] Paul’s reason for this advice is “so that those who oppose may be ashamed.” Even though a person may disagree, if speech and conduct are above reproach it becomes frustrating to opposers who are looking for a reason to criticize. [1 Peter 2:15]

However, the world in general would view anyone who expected Christ to Return to not be a person of “sound mind.” What does Paul say about such a hope?

LIVE WITH SOUNDNESS OF MIND

11 For the unmerited favor of The God -- which brings salvation to all humans -- has appeared. 12 Having rejected irreverence and worldly desires [He] is instructing us to live in soundness of mind and righteousness and reverence in this present period of time. 13 We continue to await that blessed hope of the glorious appearance of the great God and our Savior, Jesus Christ. 14 [Jesus Christ] gave himself on our behalf that he might redeem us from all lawlessness and also might cleanse for himself a people as his possession, zealous for good works. [NSR]

The Christian with a “sound mind” -- and who has been exposed to “healthy teaching” -- will hope for the fulfillment of God’s grace “which brings salvation to all humans.” This glory “has appeared” Paul says and so it is ever present among those who obey Christ Jesus. [Hebrews 5:9] The *New English Bible* puts it most beautifully: “... *has dawned upon the world with healing for all mankind.*” The message of salvation has been introduced to the world through the Church.

Christians who truly believe this have already “rejected irreverence and worldly desires.” Others render this phrase: “give up godless ways and worldly cravings” [WMS], “forego irreverent thoughts and worldly appetites” [KNX], or “irreligious ways and worldly ambition.” [TCN] God’s own teaching through Christ instructs “us to live in soundness of mind and righteousness and reverence in this present period of time.” Living with a sound Christian mind is greatly helped by remaining hopeful regarding the Return of Christ.

Paul puts it this way: “*We continue to await that blessed hope of the glorious appearance*” of Christ in his visible Return. It seems likely this is a reference to the future visible Return of Messiah. [See notes on Matthew 24:30.] That is, the revelation of Jesus Christ. [1 Peter 1:13; 1 John 2:28; 3:2] We do not have to wait for the Return of Christ to receive any benefits.

Paul states something we already know – Jesus “gave himself on our behalf.” [Or, NEB: sacrificed himself for us.] We already have been “redeemed from all lawlessness.” [Ephesians 1:7; Galatians 1:4; Colossians 1:14] Salvation has an early or first element: being saved out of this wicked world by faithful obedience. This has started a process in our case as God “cleanses for Himself a people as His possession.” That is, a clean people who belong to him. Clean physically, morally, and spiritually. It is clear from Paul’s letter that the Nazarene community was an example of such moral uprightness. [1 Thessalonians 4:3]

Such cleansed and pure persons are identified as being “zealous for good works.” Good works characterize the Nazarene community and include personal works of faith, kindness and empathy to all around you, and sharing the Good News with others. Thus God’s grace is not without tangible fruitage: the disciple of the Nazarene rejects ungodliness and worldly pleasure. Christ gave his sacrifice to save us from unrighteousness and impurity. The Christian Church is characterized by good works which are often manifest in charity.

No doubt Titus wondered how will such “healthy teaching” be received. Paul concludes this portion of Titus chapter 2 with direct counsel to him.

SPEAK, EXHORT, REPROVE

15 Continue to speak and encourage all these things. Also reprove with every command. Permit no one to disregard you. [NSR]

Titus was authorized by the apostle Paul to “continue to speak and encourage all these things.” That is “these things” stated above which identify the “sound mind.” If necessary Titus has apostolic orders to reprove or rebuke those who would resist such godly advice. If there were some present in the Christian community of a different mind, Titus was never to allow anyone to show disrespect for his authority.

We can read these words the same way today, because everything Paul advises was not just good for those people at that time. Note near the end of the letter to Titus what Paul says about all of these ideas: *“Concerning these [teachings] I counsel you [Titus] to make strong affirmations about them so that [the congregations] of those who believe God continue minding good works. These [teachings] are good and profitable to all humanity.”* [Titus 3:9] We will do well two thousand years later at the beginning of this 3rd millennium to walk in those “healthy teachings” with “soundness of mind.”

==== END ====

RICH OR POOR

What Does God Think?

No one wishes to be poor, unless they chose such a life-style for religious or philosophical reasons. Most of the world's billions are striving to be rich as the ultimate stamp of success and security.

WHAT IS RICH OR POOR?

Our Lord drew a parallel between the rich and the poor at Luke 21:1-4:

1 Now Jesus watched the rich putting money into the Temple treasury. *2* And he also saw a certain poor widow putting in two leptons, *3* so he said: *“I tell you [disciples] this truth that this widow put in more than everyone else, 4 because the rich put in from their surplus while this widow put in out of her need all her means of living.”* [NSR]

Thus Jesus defined someone who is rich as someone with a “surplus.” In the Bible the “poor” are those who do not have basic needs, or who must depend on others for subsistence. [Compare 2 Samuel 12:1]

This is the same idea given in Webster's Dictionary when defining the word “rich” and related words:

Rich is the general word for one who has more money or income-producing property that is necessary to satisfy his normal needs. **Wealthy** adds to this connotations of grand living, influence in the community, a tradition of richness. **Affluent** suggests a continuing increase of riches and a concomitant lavish spending. **Opulent** suggests the possession of great wealth as displayed in luxurious or ostentatious living. **Well-to-do** implies sufficient prosperity for easy living.” [1957 edition]

What does the Bible have to say about such “rich” persons?

THE RICH IN THE BIBLE

The word group “rich” occurs about 150 times in the Bible. The first rich person mentioned is Abraham. [Genesis 14:23] The word “rich” occurs only once in the Law of Moses at Exodus 30:15 when both rich and poor were equally taxed for tabernacle worship. Likely the richest person mentioned in the Bible was Solomon. [1 Kings 3:11; 10:23]

The rich have a tendency to trust in their wealth, but Psalm 49:6, 7, 16, 17 cautions: *“Now regarding those who trust in their wealth -- and their boasting in the abundance of their riches – they cannot redeem a single brother. ... Never fear when someone becomes rich – when the glory of his house increases – for he will take nothing with him when he dies.”* [NSR]

Of all the Bible books the rich with their riches are mentioned most often in the book of Proverbs. The wise sayings of the richest man who ever lived gives sound advice and warnings about riches.

To become rich one must be diligent and such view their riches like a fortified city. [Proverbs 10:4, 15] A person who trusts in riches will ultimately collapse. [Proverbs 11:28] The rich person may pretend to be poor in order to hide such wealth. [Proverbs 13:7] A rich person is often like an alcoholic in denial and millions in the Western world would never claim to be rich when in fact they are. The rich tend to have many more friends. [Proverbs 14:20] The possessions of the rich are imagined to be a source of security. [Proverbs 18:11] The rich tend to have a loud voice in many matters. [Proverbs 18:23] No matter how rich a person is they will one day meet their Maker. [Proverbs 22:1, 2] Proverbs 23:4 cautions: *“Do not toil to gain riches.”* [NSR] The rich tend to be wise in their own eyes. [Proverbs 28:11] Often the rich are discovered to be guilty of illegal dealings: *“The person who wants to get rich quick will not remain innocent.”* [NSR] Proverbs 30:7-9 actually suggests not praying for riches, for such material satisfactions may cause one to deny God. The rich are often never satisfied. [Ecclesiastes 4:8] Riches may cause one to worry so much sleep is ruined. [Ecclesiastes 5:12]

The prophet Jeremiah exposes some rich persons whose homes are “full of unrighteous gain” and it is because of this illegal income some become very wealthy. [Jeremiah 5:27] Jeremiah 9:23 says, *“The rich man should never glory in his riches.”* [NSR]

The subject of the rich and riches is high on the list of the Nazarene’s teachings. The subject occurs in one way or another in all the Gospels. Consider just some of the things Jesus taught about the rich and riches.

Matthew 6:24 *“No one can slave for two lords, for either he will hate one and love the other or embrace one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and Riches!”* [NSR]

Matthew 13:22 *“Now, the one sown among thorns -- this is the person who hears the message but the anxieties of that Period and deceptive riches choke the message and the person is unproductive.”* [NSR]

Matthew 19:23, 24 *“I tell you this truth: Rich people will only enter the Realm of Heaven with great difficulty. In addition I tell you this: It is easier for a camel to enter through a needle’s eye than for rich people to enter the Realm of Heaven.”* [NSR]

Luke 6:24 *“But, woe to you who are rich, for you are receiving your full consolation now.”* [NSR]

Luke 16:9 *“Also, I tell you [disciples], make friends for yourselves from your illegal riches, so that when riches fail they will welcome you into everlasting dwellings.”* [NSR]

Luke 18:24, 25 *“Only with great difficulty will those with money enter God’s Realm. For it is easier for a camel to crawl through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter God’s Realm.”* [NSR]

Paul also both warns about the danger of wealth, but also instructs Timothy to “give orders” to rich Christians. Compare his words in 1 Timothy 6:9, 17-19:

“However, those desiring to be rich fall into temptation and a trap as well as many foolish and harmful lusts, which plunge humans into ruin and destruction. ... Command the rich in the present age not to be high minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but [trust] in God -- the One granting us richly everything for our enjoyment -- to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous, willing to share, saving for themselves a good foundation for the Future, that they may lay hold on the Real Life.”

Perhaps it is the disciple James who has the harshest words for the rich:

“Because [the rich person] will pass away like a flower of the field. For the sun rises with its burning heat, and the field dries up and the flower’s petals fall off, and its beautiful appearance perishes. Just so, also, the rich person will fade away in his very way of life.” [James 1:10, 11 NSR]

“For you have dishonored the poor person. Do not the rich oppress you? Are not the rich those who drag you into law-courts?” [James 2:6 NSR]

“Come now, you rich men, weep, howling over your anguish coming upon you. Your wealth has rotted and your clothes have become moth-eaten. Your gold and silver have corroded and their corrosion will be a witness [against] you. Your flesh will be devoured. You have stored up fire as your treasure in the last days. Behold, the earnings of the laborers who mowed your fields has been withheld by you. And the cries of those crying out who reaped [your fields] have entered the ears of Yehowah Sabaoth. You lived indulgently and luxuriously upon the earth. You fattened your hearts for slaughter. You condemned, you killed the Righteous One. Does he not oppose you?” [James 5:1-5 NSR]

In summary, then, regarding what the Bible says about the rich: A few of God’s ancient servants were rich. The rich are warned throughout the Bible to use their wealth to help others and make friends with God. In the Christian Bible it is Jesus who warns of the difficulty of the very rich to gain entrance into God’s Kingdom.

Paul instructs “orders” be given to the rich to be liberal in their sharing, not to allow their riches to make them behave arrogantly, and to involve themselves in good works. But, what does the Bible say about the poor?

THE POOR IN THE BIBLE

The word “poor” is mentioned over 100 times in the Bible and “poverty” about a dozen times. The word is often associated with the needy and oppressed.

IN THE LAW OF MOSES

The first mention of a poor person is in the Law of Moses where a warning is given not to “pervert justice” in dealing with such persons. Also, the poor were permitted to glean from fields left fallow during the sabbath year of rest in the land. [Exodus 23:6, 11]

Leviticus 25:35-37 commands how the poor are to be treated:

*“And if your brother becomes poor, and cannot maintain himself with you, **you shall maintain him**; as a stranger and a sojourner he shall live with you. 36 Take no interest from him or increase, but fear your God; that your brother may live beside you. 37 **You shall not lend him your money at interest**, nor give him your food for profit. ... 39 And if your brother becomes poor beside you, and sells himself to you, you shall not make him serve as a slave.”*[Revised Standard Version]

Deuteronomy 15:3-11 has Moses teaching that if Israel obeys God as a nation there will never be poor among them. However, if there are poor they should be treated kindly and charitably. Read his words:

*“However, if there should be poor in their midst they are to look after them. 4 But there will be no poor among you (for the Lord will bless you in the land which the Lord your God gives you for an inheritance to possess), 5 if only you will obey the voice of the Lord your God, being careful to do all this commandment which I command you this day. 6 For the Lord your God will bless you, as he promised you, and you shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow; and you shall rule over many nations, but they shall not rule over you. 7 If there is among you a poor man, one of your brethren, in any of your towns within your land which the Lord your God gives you, **you shall not harden your heart or shut your hand against your poor brother**, 8 but you shall open your hand to him, and lend him sufficient for his need, whatever it may be. 9 Take heed lest there be a base thought in your heart, and you say, 'The seventh year, the year of release is near,' and your eye be hostile to your poor brother, and you give him nothing, and he cry to the Lord against you, and it be sin in you. 10 **You shall give to him freely, and your heart shall not be grudging when you give to him**; because for this the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in all that you undertake. 11 For the poor will never cease out of the land; therefore **I command you, You shall open wide your hand to your brother**, to the needy and to the poor, in the land.”*[Revised Standard Version]

Deuteronomy 24:14, 15 also commands the kindly treatment of the poor and the daily paying of their wages. [Compare James 5:4.]

*"You shall **not oppress** a hired servant who is poor and needy, whether he is one of your brethren or one of the sojourners who are in your land within your towns; 15 you shall give him his hire **on the day he earns it**, before the sun goes down (for he is poor, and sets his heart upon it); lest he cry against you to the Lord, and it be sin in you."*[Revised Standard Version]

Rich persons, particularly those who have lived around riches all their lives, are often oblivious to the needs of the poor having never been poor themselves. The poor live from day to day and often they cannot wait for a week or two to receive their just payment. It never dawns on the rich that just a little bit of money can greatly relieve the poor. It has been observed that some rich Christian employers have held off paying a poor worker while the rich person leaves on a luxury cruise and only pays the wages upon return. God will hear the cries of such poor individuals.

THE POOR IN THE PSALMS AND PROVERBS

The Psalms mention the poor more than any other Bible book and often associate them with the afflicted.

"For the needy is not forgotten for ever, nor for ever does the hope of the poor come to nothing." [Psalm 9:18] *"For the poor who are plundered, the needy who groan, now will I act," says Yahweh.*" [Psalms 12:5] *"Poor and needy as I am, the Lord has me in mind."* [Psalm 40:17] *"For God listens to the poor."* [Psalm 69:33]

The poor can be greatly discouraged by the rich: *"That is what the wicked are like, piling up wealth without any worries. Was it useless, then, to have kept my own heart clean, to have washed my hands in innocence?"* [Psalm 72:12, 13] The poor servant of God relies on Him: *"Listen to me, Yahweh, answer me, for I am poor and needy. Guard me, for I am faithful, save your servant who relies on You."* [Psalm 86:1] The poor have God on their side: *"[Yahweh] stands at the side of the poor, to save their lives from those who sit in judgment of them."* [Psalm 109:31]

The Proverbs also mention the poor. How the poor are treated bears on God's judgment: *"He who oppresses the poor insults his Maker; he who is generous to the needy honors Him."* [Proverbs 14:31 NEB] The godly woman cares for the poor: *"She opens her hand to the poor, and reaches out her hands to the needy."* [Revised Standard Version]

THE NAZARENE AND THE POOR

Jesus was a poor man himself. Of him Paul writes, evidently alluding to Christ's pre-existence: *"For you are aware of the charitable kindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, that in your behalf he became poor though he was rich, so that you might become rich through that One's poverty."* [2 Corinthians 8:9 NSR; compare

Philippians 2:5-7] On one occasion when Jesus illustrated the need to pay the Jewish Temple tax, he did not have the equivalent of 16 cents, so Peter became involved in a fishing miracle in order to pay this obligation. [Matthew 17:25-27]

Jesus mentioned the poor often. Indeed one of his great sermons begins, *"Blessed are the poor."* [Luke 6:20] The poor often composed his audiences. [Matthew 11:5] The way to spiritual perfection involves the poor: *"If you want to be perfect, leave, sell your possessions and give to the poor."* [Matthew 19:21] As long as the Christian Church exists there will be poor disciples: *"For you will always have the poor among you."* [Matthew 26:11] Jesus cautions his disciples to invite the poor to their homes for hospitality. [Luke 14:14]

THE EARLY CHURCH AND THE POOR

Based on the teachings of the Nazarene the 1st Century Church placed great emphasis on caring for the poor. In the first few years there was no one in need among the Nazarene community. The Acts of the Apostles records this accurately: *"And all those believing were gathered at the same place and they had everything in common. They would sell their possessions and went to distributing the money to everyone as each had a need. And daily they continued in harmonious devotions in the Temple area sharing their meals in private homes. They shared food with jubilation and sincerity of heart, praising the God and finding favor with all the people. ... Great charity [and a willingness to share] permeated the whole community. For there was no one needy among them, because anyone who owned lands or houses sold them, and they continued bringing the value of the things they sold, placing them before the feet of the apostles. The apostles then distributed to each person as they had need."* [Acts 2:44-47; 4:33-35 NSR]

The apostolic body in Jerusalem gave instructions to Paul: *"Only they urged that we should remember their poor -- a thing which was uppermost in my own mind."* [Galatians 2:10 Weymouth Translation] Several times Paul writes about the care of the poor. Churches with more material blessings helped those poor in the fellowship: *"For [the saints of] Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make some contribution to those poor saints in Jerusalem."* [Romans 15:26 NSR] Individual Christians were encouraged to save something for the poor: *"Regarding the collection for the Saints: just as I ordered the congregations of Galatia, so also I do you. On the first day of the week let each one of you save something as you may be prospering, so that whenever I arrive collections do not occur then."* [1 Corinthians 16:1, 2 NSR] A former thief who had now become a Friend of the Nazarene was encouraged to save for the poor. [Ephesians 4:28]

The disciple James also writes powerful words about the poor and how they were treated by some: *"For if a man in splendid clothing, with gold rings on his fingers,*

enters your synagogue -- and also at the same time a poor man in shabby clothing -- and you look on the one wearing the splendid clothing, and tell him, 'You sit here in this good seat,' and to the poor man you say, 'You stand in the back or squat here by my footstool' --- are you not making distinctions among yourselves and have become judges with evil thoughts?"[James 2:2-6 NSR] For this reason James writes that the failure to care for the poor renders faith dead: *"My brothers, what is the profit if anyone says, 'I have conviction,' but does not have works? Is just his conviction able to save him? [For example], if a brother or sister is living without adequate clothing and lacks daily food, and anyone of you says, 'Go in peace. Keep warm and well fed' -- but do not give them their bodily necessities -- what is the profit? Just so, conviction without works is dead by itself."*[James 2:14-17 NSR]

THE LIBERAL SHARING OF THE RICH

Paul tells Timothy to "give orders to the rich" to be "liberal and ready to share." [1 Timothy 6:18] But the difficult question has always been – How liberal? How much should I share? The famous British author C. S Lewis suggested an answer in his marvelous work, *Mere Christianity*. It boils down to this: the rich Christian should consider how much is spent on leisure and luxuries. If the same amount is not given to the poor, it is likely not enough is being given.

In other words, if someone rich buys a luxury yacht and does not give the same to charity, it is highly unlikely such a Christian is giving enough. If a rich Christian takes an expensive vacation on a luxury cruise ship and does not give the same to charity, it is unlikely such a person has found a friend in God.

Let the Christian woman with dozens of shoes and dresses sell some of them and give to the poor. If a Christian woman has drawers of jewelry, let her sell some and give to the poor. If a Christian household has five television sets, let them sell three and give to the poor. If a Christian drives luxury automobiles, sell them and drive a modest car, and give to the poor. If a Christian wears an expensive watch, let him sell it and give to the poor. If a Christian spends money on the lottery or gambling, let him instead give the money to the poor. If a Christian has a sudden windfall, let him first "keep the poor in mind."

With these thoughts about the rich and poor in mind how much more can we appreciate the promise of Proverbs 22:1, 2: *"A good reputation should be chosen over great riches, and self-esteem more than silver and gold. The rich and poor stand side by side but Yehowah is the Maker of both."* [NSR]

==== END ====

STARTING A BIBLE READING GROUP

The human being is a gregarious animal. One who generally craves association with its own kind. It is only natural then to long for fellowship among those of like mind. Throughout the ages true worshippers of the God have developed various forms of assembly to enjoy common encouragement and education.

Many inquire where they can find a “church” to meet with. For some any group or church will do, for to them beliefs are unimportant. In such a case there are scores of churches or sects in any given community. Thus it is just a matter of making the rounds, visiting different denominations, finding a minister you like, and then joining in their communion.

For others who view beliefs and doctrine as critical, then it is a matter of finding a group who shares these affirmations. Sometimes this is just impossible. What is the Christian to do?

Every Christian is an evangelist. That is, every disciple of the Nazarene will spread the Good News in their own community. How can a “genuine disciple” of Jesus Christ develop a Bible reading and devotional association?

First, if a Christian should cultivate a consistent and regular program of Bible reading. For example, every Wednesday evening, or Sunday morning, such a Christian family gathers for an hour of Bible reading and discussion. Even if a person is alone this can become a godly habit.

Second, invite other relatives or neighbors to this weekly Bible reading and devotions. View this as a circle beginning with your family and slowly widen this circle to include the city block or street where you live. Those who are diligent could print out an “invitation” with a brief message and distribute these to neighbors. These “invitations” can be left or posted wherever possible. This circle can widen further to include city blocks in each direction of the compass and continue to work outward. An advertisement could be placed in a local newspaper, posted on local Internet media, or anywhere an announcement board is available.

Third, conduct the Bible reading as your conscience directs. Some may find *Nazarene Commentary 2000*© of help. They may follow the weekly Bible reading schedule of the *Friends of the Nazarene* and use any number of Bibles as a comparison. What is important more than doctrine is WHAT DOES GOD WANT ME TO DO? Or, HOW DO I REALLY FOLLOW THE LAMB NO MATTER WHERE HE GOES?

Finally, patience and tolerance is vitally important for the person who is humble and obedient to the Lord Jesus. In this context it is important to understand that all people are different and there may be some who are harder to deal with than

others. Christian love and empathy will direct how each person is encouraged to mature in Christ.

How is the meeting to be conducted? Of course, that is up to the individual group. Those who wish to follow the *Friends of the Nazarene* model may use the *Nazarene Commentary 2000*© studies on each Bible book. Each of these has a fresh new rendering of every book of the Christian Bible as well as comparisons with other translations. Also, the questions at the end of each paragraph or chapter can be used to review the material. In order for every new member of the group to have a copy of the books of the New Testament it may be the joyous burden of the whole group to reproduce copies so that all may share and find themselves on the same page.

[For details on starting a group see notes in *Nazarene Commentary 2000* on *Nazarene Community*.]

==== END ====

HEALINGS COMPARED

Many who watch television witness supposed healings or cures by evangelists. Others have actually experience or witnessed cures in a revivalist tent meeting. These preachers often point to the example of Jesus and his first disciples as validation for their own activity. Is it fair then to compare the method and results of the Nazarene's healings with those of modern Christian "healers"?

How did Jesus heal?

The Gospels recount some of the healings of Jesus and allude to others, including those of his disciples. Scores of times in the Gospels Jesus and his chosen apostles are seen healing and curing. [Matthew 4:24; 8:5-13, 16; 10:1-8; 12:15; 15:21-28; Mark 1:34; 5:25-29, 34; Luke 5:17-21; 6:17-19; 7:7-10; 8:47, 48; 9:1, 2, 6; 14:1-4]

The method and manner of Jesus' healings are seen in several accounts. How might we characterize these? Simply, these cures were done without fanfare or preparation and generally with just a short phrase, "Go, your faith has made you well." The healings of Jesus were not partial but complete. Often he told those cured not to tell anyone else. In other words, the Nazarene did not make an attempt to advertise his cures.

What else do we see lacking in Jesus' cures? We seldom see prayer. We never hear hymns. We hear no screaming and ranting and threatening. We see no stomping about, or walking back in forth in a state of frenzy. We see no hypnotic

hyperventilating as he works his audience into a mesmerizing delirium. Other things are also lacking.

When he sent out his twelve apostles, and then later seventy other male disciples, Jesus gave them specific instructions:

“Cure those sick, raise those dead, cleanse lepers, exorcise demons. You received free, give free. Do not procure gold or silver or copper for your purses nor pouches for your trip – nor two undergarments, nor sandals, nor staff. For the worker is worthy of his food.” [Matthew 10:8-10 NSR]

Now Jesus called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all the demons and to heal diseases. Then he sent them out to preach about God's Realm and to heal the sick. And he said to them: *“Take nothing for the trip – not a staff, nor pouch, bread, silver money, not even two under garments.”* Then the apostles left and went throughout the villages preaching the Good News and healing everywhere. [Luke 9:1-3, 6 NSR]

Now after this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them out two by two before him into every village and area he was about to visit. And he told them: *“The harvest is truly large but the workers are few. So beg the Lord of the harvest so that He might send out workers into His harvest. Go! Behold I sent all of you out as lambs among wolves! Do not carry a wallet, nor a shoulder bag, or sandals. Do not greet anyone along the way.”* ... Now the seventy returned joyously, reporting: “Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name!” [Luke 10:1-4, 17 NSR]

These true apostolic healers were told not to accept any money, nor even to carry money with them. They were permitted to accept food and lodging from those who peaceably accepted their message.

This manner and method of healing continued with the apostles after the Lord returned to heaven. In the first example of healing without the presence of Jesus, Peter makes it clear he has no money. Note this in Acts 3:1-8,

1 Now Peter and John were ascending up to the Temple area at the 3 PM hour of prayer. 2 A man born lame from his mother's womb was carried daily and put at the gate of the Temple area. He was placed there at the Beautiful Gate to beg for alms from those entering the Temple area. 3 Now observing Peter and John approaching the Temple area, he began begging them to receive alms. 4 But Peter, and John with him, giving him their attention, said: “Look at us.” 5 Now the beggar, thinking he was about to receive something from them, gave them his attention. 6 Now Peter said: **“SILVER AND GOLD I DO NOT POSSESS**, but what I have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, rise and walk. 7 Peter took the beggar by the hand and raised him up. Immediately the beggar's feet and ankles became strong. 8 Then, jumping up, he stood there, and then began walking around. The beggar entered the Temple area with Peter and John, walking and jumping about, praising the God. [NSR]

In Acts we do not see the disciples performing healings in the context of a frenzied show. Nor do we find them accepting money, even contributions, for their curing work. What a contrast is the healing work of Jesus and his 1st Century disciples!

Modern Faith Healers

Men and women of all religions throughout the ages – pagan, Jewish, Christian, Islam – have all had their healers. At the beginning of this 3rd millennium there are healers in the news and on television.

How do some of these compare with Jesus and his first disciples? One has only to watch the television evangelists to know this. Large audiences must first be emotionally aroused by music and passionate prayers. Then a charismatic preacher begins his sermon. After a slow start his hyperventilated breathing fills his message and then he begins to shout and scream. He prances about the stage urging his audience to begin to respond to him. The fever pitch rises and rises as sweat pours off the evangelist and his screams become shrieks as if possessed. Finally persons who claim to be healed come to the stage and each of these is “slain in the spirit” and fall backward by the mere touch of the preacher. Some shake and tremble in semi-unconsciousness on the floor. One very famous evangelist with a hair-do that would feed the poor may cause numbers of people to fall backward. Even whole portions of the audience may be knocked backward, row upon row falling upon one another in shock.

No matter what one thinks of this, is it fair to conclude that none of this showmanship compares to the Nazarene and his disciples? Can any one of these TV evangelists with a straight face say as did Peter: “Gold and silver I do not possess?” When, in fact, everyone can see the Rolex watch and diamond ring on the preacher. Many of these men and women are self-confessed millionaires with multiple luxury residences, prestige automobiles, and personal jets. Some claim the Bible justifies such a life-style. But anyone who reads the Bible above can see that neither Jesus or ANY of his disciples lived so.

Not only is the method and manner of these rich televangelists false, but so are their doctrines. Most teach the triune godhead of the Almighty just as the ancient Egyptian magicians. They teach an eternal hell-fire torment for anyone who disagrees with their Trinity.

Most have witnessed how a hypnotist may play parlor tricks on willing participants. A group of people are put under hypnosis so that when a certain word is heard they will crow like chickens or waddle about like ducks. Medical professionals are able to assist smokers and obese persons with their problems. One famous Hollywood psychologist was able to implant false ideas in her hypnotic patients convincing them that they had all been sexually molested by a family member.

In a similar manner these so-called healers cause a mass hypnosis over a larger audience. Like a quiet group of people who are turned into a lynching mob by a charismatic leader, so thousands are controlled by a spirit or pneuma that is not

of God. Jesus himself warned that such “Christians” would make claims upon their judgment: “Lord, Lord, did we not do miracles in your name?” And yet the Lord says he will tell them: “I never had a relationship with you.” [Matthew 7:21-23] Jesus foretold that some of his own “genuine disciples” would be led astray by such false prophets. At Mark 13:22, 23, **“For pseudo-anointed and pseudo-prophets will arise and give signs and wonders to keep leading astray -- if that were even possible – the Elect. But, you [apostles], keep on the watch! I have foretold it all to you [apostles]!”** [NSR]

Paul also gives the same warning:

9 The appearing of the Lawless one will be attended by various miracles and tokens and delusive marvels -- for so Satan works -- **10** and by every kind of wicked deception for those who are on the way to perdition because they did not welcome into their hearts the love of the truth, so that they might be saved. **11** And for this reason God sends them a misleading influence that they may believe the lie; **12** in order that all may come under judgement who have refused to believe the truth and have taken pleasure in unrighteousness.” [2 Thessalonians 2:9-12 Weymouth Translation]

Taking Paul at his words those who perform these miraculous signs and wonders do so without a true “love of the Truth.” If such healers also teach the Trinity, hell-fire torment, predestination, soul immortality and other false doctrines – then any healings or wonders they perform are satanic. Those who are led along with these will receive God’s judgment for the very reason that “they did not welcome into their hearts a love the Truth.”

How Can One Know?

The beloved apostle writes: *“My dearly beloved friends, do not put your trust in every ‘inspiration’. Rather, test out these ‘inspirations’ to know whether they originate with God. The need for this is because many false prophets have proceeded from the world.”* [1 John 4:1 NSR Paraphrase] The basis for this judgment is “the Truth” Paul mentioned above. Paul did not fear a close examination of his own teachings, for his traveling companion Luke reports: *“These [Jews] were of a better race than those in Thessalonica and they accepted the Word with complete mental readiness. They would examine the Scriptures every day to see if these things were true.”* [Acts 17:11 NSR] The teachings of the Nazarene and his inspired disciples are the basis upon which all preachers and teachers should be examined.

A “love of the Truth” will move a sincere heart to read and study the words of Jesus first. Clearly our Lord did heal others. However, anyone can see the difference between the sweating, screaming, hyperventilating – money-loving – television “healer” with the ridiculous hairdo and the calm and simple manner of the Lord Jesus.

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KEEP YOURSELVES IN GOD'S GRACE

"Continue to grow in Grace and Knowledge"

The word "grace" occurs about 120 times in the Christian Bible [NT]. A form of the word occurs 170 times in 159 verses in the King James Version. Jesus NEVER uses the word though his beloved apostle John does. [John 1:14, 16, 17]

What is "grace"? The English word is from the old English via the French and then the Latin *gratia* which remains "gracia" in Latin-based languages. In those languages, like Spanish, it generally means "thanks" while one form refers to a gifted person. The English word has wide ranges of meaning: pleasing quality, favor, good will, thanks. In theology it is defined as: a] the unmerited love and favor of God toward man; b] divine influence acting in man to make him pure and morally strong; and, c] the condition of a person thus influenced.

The Greek word is CHARIS, CHARIN, CHARITOS, CHARISMA. From this word comes the English "charity" [an unmerited favor or gift] and "charismatic" [a gifted person]. Though generally most translators stick to the old English word some scholars render the word: unmerited favor, undeserved kindness, gift, blessing, favor, and others.

THE USE OF "GRACE" IN THE EARLY CHURCH

The word occurs less than a dozen times in the Acts of the Apostles. [Acts 4:23; 11:23; 14:3, 26; 15:40; 18:27; 20:24] There are several that help us to understand the use of CHARIS by the first disciples.

At Acts 13:43 the disciple Luke writes about Paul's activities: *"After the meeting was dissolved, many of the Jews, as well as those worshipping proselytes, kept following Paul and Barnabas, who had spoken to them, persuading them to remain [KJV: to continue; WEY: hold fast to] in the GRACE of the God."*[NSR] The word "remain" suggests one may lose God's unmerited favor or grace. How this can happen is explained in later uses of the word.

Peter uses the word when giving his own beliefs before the first Christian synod: *"We [Christian Jews] believe that we shall be saved by means of the unmerited favor of the Lord Jesus."*[Acts 15:11 NSR] Peter's context is whether the burden of the Law of Moses ought to be placed upon non-Jews. It is not the Law of Moses that will save, but the "grace" or unmerited favor [free charity] by means of Christ Jesus.

Paul exhorts Christian elders: *“Now I entrust you to the God and to the word of his GRACE which is able to strengthen you and give you the inheritance among all the those who have been sanctified.”* [Acts 20:32 NSR] Paul associates “the word” of the Christian message found in the Bible with “grace.” Both are factors resulting in spiritual strength and ultimately attaining the heavenly inheritance with the Saints.

PAUL’S USE OF “GRACE”

Indeed, the word “grace” is among Paul’s favorites, occurring over 100 times in all of his epistles. We note Peter uses the word about 9 times in his two epistles, and James twice in his, Jude once in his. The apostle John does not use “grace” in his first and third epistle. The word does occur once in 2 John. In Revelation “grace” occurs only twice.

Let us examine Paul’s use of CHARIS. It occurs most often in Romans and most often in passing. Several contexts express Paul’s inspired ideas on “grace” or divine unmerited charity. At Romans 3:24 Paul writes: *“As a gift given freely, by His unmerited favor [GRACE], they are pronounced innocent by the atonement in Christ Jesus.”* [NSR] Others render this: KJV: being justified freely by his grace; BAS: have righteousness put to their credit, freely, by His grace; WMS: anybody may have right standing with God as a free gift of His undeserved favor. It is God’s charity – a gift of kindness given without earning it – that results in the state of justification, or being declared righteous and non-guilty of inherited sin. [Romans 5:12] This gracious gift was given as an act of divine charity when God provided the “atonement in Christ Jesus.” The word “atonement” here comes from the Greek HILASTERION (from which comes the English “hilarity”) meaning “propitiation” as in “propitious.”

Paul writes that our ability to approach God in acceptable worship is based on Grace: *“It is by [Jesus] also we now enjoy an approach [to God] through His GRACE in which we now stand.”* [Romans 5:2 NSR] To benefit from God’s Grace one must remain standing in it. This Grace does not benefit everyone as in universal salvation. Paul writes: *“However, the charitable free gift was not also as the trespass. For if by the trespass of the one man [Adam] many died, how much more will the GRACE of The God abound to the many as an undeserved gift by the one human, Jesus Christ.”* [Romans 5:15 NSR] Paul agrees with the Nazarene himself who said his ransom would come to bless “many” – not all. [Matthew 20:28]

Paul contrasts the Law of Moses with that Grace through Christ: *“Now, however, the Law entered beside so that the trespass may be increased. But, where the sin increased, GRACE abounded super-abundantly. Therefore, just as the sin reigned as king resulting in death, so the GRACE may reign as king by means of righteousness [resulting in] ageless life by means of Jesus Christ our Lord.”*

[Romans 5:20, 21 NSR] The Law increased transgression by defining and punishing hundreds of offences. But, no matter how many sins increased because of the Law, the Grace of God by Christ abounded more by forgiving even more sins.

Some prefer the idea that Grace allows them the freedom to sin as they wish for no matter what they do God will be forced to forgive them because of his Grace. This thinking does not originate with Paul: *“What, then, shall we say? Shall we continue in sin so that [His] GRACE may abound? Never may that occur! [Since] we died to the sin how will we still live in it? Or, are you ignorant that every person baptized into Christ Jesus was baptized into his death? Therefore, we were buried with him by baptism into his death. So that, just as Christ was raised up from the dead, by the glory of the Father, so also, we should walk in a newness of life.”* [Romans 6:1-4 NSR] The person living in Grace no longer lives in sin. There is a difference in sinning and living in sin as Paul explains in chapter seven. It is an ignorant idea that a Christian can continue sinning and still remain in His Grace.

Rather than habitually walking in sin, the Christian blessed with God’s Grace “should walk in a newness of life.” Or, MOF: live and move in the new sphere of life; WEY: live an entirely new life; AMP: habitually live and behave in newness of life. We reach Paul’s main point. An old life has been left behind during baptism. When the disciple is raised out of the water of baptism a new life attitude and life-style begins. [Compare 2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 6:15; Ephesians 3:16; Colossians 3:10; 1 John 3:14.]

Paul insists that a Christian standing in Grace not let sin control their lives. Though no longer under the Law of Moses, does the fact one is not “under Grace” mean one may sin freely? No, for Paul writes: *“Because sin should not lord it over you, [GDS: no longer control you] for you are not under [the] Law but under GRACE. What then? Shall we continue to sin because we are not under [the] Law but rather under GRACE? May it never be so! Do you not realize that to whomever you present yourselves as slaves to be obedient, you are his slaves whom you obey. Either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness.”* Paul associates obedience to God as resulting in righteousness while under Grace.

One cannot disassociate obedience to God from God’s Grace. Paul continues: *“However, thanks to The God -- though you were once slaves of the sin [under the Law of Moses] -- you obeyed from the heart because you were committed to that type of teaching. But, having been freed from the sin you have [now] become enslaved to the righteousness.”* [Romans 6:14-18 NSR] Obedience to God arises out of a commitment to a certain form of teaching, that of the Nazarene. None of this can be removed from God’s Grace.

Thus Paul does not teach that works are unnecessary, for he exhorts to good works throughout his epistles. [1 Timothy 2:10; 5:10, 25; 6:18; Titus 2:7, 14; 3:8, 14; Hebrews 10:24] Indeed, all humanity will be judged by their works according to Paul's Gospel. For he quotes both David and Moses when he writes: *"However, in harmony with your hard and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in a day of wrath when the righteous judgment of The God is revealed. [The God] 'will reward each one in harmony with [their] works' [Psalm 62:12]. Indeed, to those who endure in good works -- glory, honor, and incorruption to those searching for ageless life. But, to those who out of selfishness disobey the truth, obeying rather unrighteousness --- wrath, anger, oppression and distress -- upon every human soul who persists in working harm to others -- first to the Jew, but also to the Greek. But, glory, honor, and peace to everyone who continues to work at good --- to the Jew first, but also to the Greek. 'For there is no partiality or favoritism of persons with The God. [Deuteronomy 10:17] ... According to my good news through Christ Jesus [this is how] it will be in the day The God judges the secret things of all humankind."* [Romans 2:5-11, 16 NSR]

Indeed, God's Grace is often associated with godly works. Those who possess God's Grace are characterized by works of a certain kind. [1 Corinthians 15:10; 2 Corinthians 6:1; 2 Corinthians 9:8; Ephesians 2:10; 3:7; 4:7, 11; 2 Thessalonians 2:16; Titus 2:11, 12]

Can one fall from God's Grace? His Grace is not absolute or unconditional. For Paul himself writes: *"Christ has become nothing to any of you who are seeking acceptance with God through the Law: you have fallen away from GRACE."* [Galatians 5:4 Weymouth Translation] Those who strive – and insist that others do the same – to gain God's favor by keeping the Law of Moses have "parted from Christ." Such are no longer under God's Grace.

A Christian may also by habitually sinning "scorn" God's Grace. For Paul writes fearsome words when he quotes Moses and Isaiah: *"For our sinning willingly after we receive the heightened knowledge of the Truth leaves no sacrifice regarding sins. But rather some fearful expectation of condemnation, 'a fiery zeal' [Isaiah 26:11 LXX] 'ready to consume the rebellious.' [Deuteronomy 17:6] Any person who disregards the Law of Moses dies without compassion upon 'the testimony of two or three.' [Deuteronomy 19:15] How much worse do you think the punishment will be upon the person who has trampled underfoot the Son of the God? Who has esteemed the 'blood of the covenant' [Exodus 24:8] -- in which he was sanctified -- as something common, [and thus] outrageously scorned the [spirit] of GRACE? For we realize the One who said: "Vengeance is mine. I will repay." [Deuteronomy 32:35] And, again: "Yehowah will judge His People." [Deuteronomy 32:26] It is a dreadful matter to fall into the hands of a Living God." [Hebrews 10:26-31 NSR] Indeed, Paul exhorts: *"Carefully watch that no one fall short of God's GRACE, nor any 'root of bitterness sprout up'**

[Deuteronomy 29:18 LXX] causing trouble and the defilement of many.”
[Hebrews 12:15 NSR]

Paul writes that it is impossible to restore or revive those who “have impaled the Son of the God all over again.” Note his caution: *“For it is impossible to restore to repentance those who have fallen away because they have been illuminated once for all time, have tasted the heavenly free gift, have become partakers of holy Pneuma, have tasted God’s excellent message as well as the powers of the New Age to come. Because they impale the Son of The God all over again for themselves and as a result expose him again to public reproach. For the ground, having received and swallowed the rain many times also gives birth to green vegetation for the proper use of those who cultivated it -- and this receiving again the blessing from The God. In contrast, if the ground produces thorns and thistles it is unacceptable and near cursing, resulting in a burning of the ground.”*
[Hebrews 6:4-8 NSR]

With this Peter agrees when he writes: *“These false teachers promise a certain liberty and freedom while they are really slaves to their own moral depravity. Remember that any person who is conquered by another person becomes a slave to that person. Because if these new Christians have so recently escaped worldly degradation by means of their intimate relationship with the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ -- but now become all wrapped up and conquered by the world -- the final circumstances become worse than what they were before. For it would have been much better never to know accurately known the righteous Way than to back slide from the Holy Commandment. In their case the inspired Proverb has been fulfilled: ‘The Dog has returned to eat its own vomit.’ ‘The Sow who was washed clean has wallowed in the filthy muck’.”*[2 Peter 2:19-22 NSR Paraphrase]

SAVED BY GRACE WITHOUT WORKS?

Some, like those mentioned above by Peter, present a Christian Gospel with absolute freedom, and argue that “once saved, always saved.” In this specious argument they quote Paul and try to prove that works are wholly unnecessary as though God could care less what one believed or did as long as they said, “Lord, Lord.” [Matthew 7:21-23; 25:44]

It should be understood when reading Paul in Romans that he is largely directing his thoughts to those Jews in Rome, particularly those Christian Jews who insisted on the observance of the Law of Moses. Consider what Paul writes: *“Because by works of the Law [of Moses] all [Jewish] flesh ‘in His sight are never pronounced innocent’ [Psalm 142:2]. ... As a gift given freely, by His GRACE, they are pronounced innocent by the atonement in Christ Jesus. [It is him] whom The God exhibited for a display -- as an atonement by believing in the blood [of Jesus] -- while in the past God tolerated the sins which previously occurred*

[under the law], exhibiting His righteousness. So, now at present, [God] is just in pronouncing innocent the person believing in Jesus. ... So, where is the boasting? It is completely stopped. By what principle? Works [of the Law of Moses]? Never! Rather, a principle of conviction. For we consider that a human may be pronounced innocent apart from [the] Law.” [Romans 3:20, 24, 27, 28 NSR]

Here when Paul mentions “works” he has in mind the observance of the Law of Moses with its hundreds of regulations. For example, the strict observance of the Sabbath will never result in a true justification before God and the gift of His Grace. God’s Grace is given apart from observance of the Law of Moses by virtue of deep and active faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

With such works in mind, Paul uses the example of Abraham, *“For if Abraham was pronounced innocent by means of works he would have reason to boast. Not (of course) toward God. For what does the Scripture say? ‘Abraham had deep conviction in The God and it was credited to him unto righteousness. [Genesis 15:6]’ However, the payment is not credited to the one working as if it were charity, but as a debt. But, to the one not working, but believing in the One who pronounces the irreverent innocent, his belief is credited as righteousness apart from works.” [Romans 4:2-5 NSR]*

SAVED BY GRACE

One of Paul’s major themes is “saved by Grace.” Let us consider what he says and what he means.

Paul writes that no Jew could ever achieve righteousness before God by observance of the Law of Moses: *“Because by works of the Law all [Jewish] flesh ‘in His sight are never pronounced innocent’ [Psalm 142:2]. ... [Romans 3:20 NSR]* No person may ever boast that they are perfectly innocent before God based on the observance of the Law or personal works of righteousness. *“For if Abraham was pronounced innocent by means of works he would have reason to boast. Not (of course) toward God. For what does the Scripture say? ‘Abraham had deep conviction in The God and it was credited to him unto righteousness. [Genesis 15:6]’ However, the payment is not credited to the one working as if it were charity, but as a debt. But, to the one not working, but believing in the One who pronounces the irreverent innocent, his belief is credited as righteousness apart from works. Also, even as David spoke: ‘Blessed is the person to whom God credits righteousness. Blessed are those whose lawlessness is forgiven and whose sins are covered over. Blessed a man whom the LORD [YHWH] never credits sin.’ [Psalm 32:1, 2]” [Romans 4:2-8 NSR]* Whenever God forgives a person it is because of His Grace.

God's choosing of the 1st Century Jewish remnant from among all the hundreds of thousands of Israel was by Grace and not observance of the Law of Moses. *"So, then, also, at the present time a remnant [of Israel] has come to be by [God's] choosing and [GRACE]. However, since it is no longer the [GRACE] that results from works it results from [GRACE]."* [Romans 11:5, 6 NSR]

Paul writes in a similar manner in some of his other epistles. *"I do not nullify the GRACE of God; for if justification were through the law, then Christ died to no purpose."* [Revised Standard Version] Christ died so that men and women could receive God's justification – His pronouncement of "Not Guilty" – and be declared righteous from sins traceable to Adam. Any man or women who claimed divine justification could occur based on observance of the Law of Moses has abandoned Christ: *"You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from GRACE."* [Galatians 5:4 Revised Standard Version] Paul believes that one can "fall from Grace" by insisting on observance of the Law of Moses as a requirement for salvation.

God's forgiveness leading to freedom is based on His Grave through Christ. *"It is by means of that One we are liberated by a ransom based on the blood of Jesus Christ. The God forgave our short-comings because of the wealth of His Grace."* [Ephesians 1:7 NSR Paraphrase]

Paul makes the simple and famous statement: "You have been saved by GRACE!" [Ephesians 2:5 NSR] What does he mean by this? Perhaps it can be illustrated with the analogy of a drowning victim. A person is drowning in the ocean surf. With a final breath a call goes out: "Help me!" The lifeguard responds and rushes into the surf, pulling the person to the safety of the beach. No one would argue the person had been "saved." Was the person "saved" because of former righteousness? Not at all. It was grace or unmerited kindness on the part of the lifeguard. Is the person grateful? Absolutely. Does this rescue mean the person can never drown again? Of course not! Might the rescue cause gratitude manifest in expressions of thanks? Surely.

Paul continues in Ephesians that God's saving Grace will be accompanied by certain kinds of works. *"This GRACE does not come about because of individual accomplishment so that not one person may brag. In corporate in Christ we were produced to walk in good works. These works were provided for in advance so that we would conduct our lives according to them."* [Ephesians 2:8 NSR Literal] So, though being "saved by Grace" those who are so blessed will be characterized by two apparent factors: a) Conviction resulting in action; and, b) Loving charity to others. [1 John 3:23] In other words: a "saved person" is a person of deep conviction who now shows the same grace, unmerited favor, or undeserved charity to others by works of loving concern.

We may summarize the work of God's Grace in this way: consider the parable of the Good Samaritan.

LK10:30 And so Jesus replied to him: “A certain [Jewish] man was descending from Jerusalem on his way to Jericho and he came upon bandits. They stripped him of everything he had and beat him until he was half dead. **LK10:31** Now by coincidence and a certain [Jewish] priest was descending by the same way. And when he saw the [Jewish] man he passed by on the far side of the road. **LK10:32** Also, in a similar manner a certain Levite happened on the same place, and approaching and seeing [the Jewish man] he also passed by on the far side of the road. **LK10:33** However, a certain Samaritan was traveling and came upon the man and saw him. He was filled with compassion, **LK10:34** so he drew near and bandaged his wounds, pouring wine and oil over them. Then he put him onto his animal and brought him to an inn and there cared for him some more. **LK10:35** The next day upon leaving the Samaritan gave two denarii to the inn-keeper and said: ‘Take care of him and whatever it costs you extra I will repay when I return. **LK10:36** Who of these three seems to you to have become a neighbor to the man who had fallen among the bandits?’ **LK10:37** And so [the man versed in the Law of Moses] answered: “The person who demonstrated charity.” Jesus said to him: “Go and you do the same!”[NSR]

Now was the unfortunate Jew who was beaten and robbed “saved” because of personal works of righteousness? No, but rather because of someone’s grace or “unmerited kindness.” Will the person who was the object of someone’s empathy and kindness feel grateful? Yes, we hope so. Is it likely, having been shown so much charity [or, grace], this person will be moved in the future to also show such charity [or, grace] to others. If the person repeats such charity to others then we can say that such a person is filled with grace or charity.

Thus, by God’s Grace, if you have been imbued by His Grace it will become self-evident to those who know you. For they will see in you such Grace manifest in your own daily charity and kindness to others. “Go and you do the same,” Jesus challenged.

*“As a result, my beloved, since you all possess this prior understanding, be on guard that you are never misguided by the inaccuracies and misinterpretations of those who defy God’s Law. You could possibly stumble from your own firm footing. Rather, **CONTINUE TO GROW IN GRACE** and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory now as well as far into the Day of Eternity. Amen!”[2 Peter 3:17, 18 NSR ©2000 Paraphrase]*

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WHEN WERE DANIEL AND REVELATION WRITTEN?

When as Daniel written?

First, when does it claim to have been written? [Daniel 1:1; 2:1; 5:1; 6:1; 7:1; 8:1; 9:1; 10:1; 11:1] Is this claim true or a later fabrication?

Second, portions of Daniel are found in the Dead Sea Scrolls, which date around 200-300 BC. Does it seem that Daniel would have been written much earlier in order to have been copied and included in the Bible canon of the Qumran caves?

Third, 1 Maccabees 2:60 references Daniel's deliverance from the den of lions: "*Daniel for his singleness of heart was rescued from the lion's jaws.*" [Daniel 6] Daniel is listed with Abraham, Joseph, Phinehas, Joshua, Caleb, David, Elijah and the three Hebrew youths "saved from the flame." [Daniel 3] In other words the account in Daniel would have to have been written long before 160 BC to have become an account on par with Abraham and David.

Fourth, the reliable 1st Century AD historian Josephus writes that Alexander the Great himself was shown a copy of Daniel before 332 BC -- "When the book of Daniel was shown to him, in which he had declared that one of the Greeks would destroy the empire of the Persians, he believed himself to be the one indicated." [*Jewish Antiquities*, XI, 337 (viii, 5)]

Fifth, Daniel 1:1-2:4a and 8:1-12:13 are written in Hebrew, while Daniel 2:4b-7:28 is written in Aramaic. This language marks a period during the 5th Century BC. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Volume 1, page 860) suggests: "When the Aramaic vocabulary of Daniel is examined, nine-tenths of it can be attested immediately from West Semitic inscriptions, or papyri from the 5th cent. B.C. or earlier. The remaining words have been found in sources such as Nabatean or Palmyrene Aramaic, which are later than the 5th cent. B.C. While it is at least theoretically possible that this small balance of vocabulary suddenly originated after the 5th cent. B.C., it is equally possible to argue from a fifth-century B.C. written form to an earlier oral one. By far the most probable explanation, however, is that the missing tenth represents nothing more serious than a gap in our current knowledge of the linguistic situation, which we may confidently expect to be filled in process of time." [Edited by G. Bromiley, 1979]

Sixth, how did Jesus apply the "abomination of desolation" [Daniel 9:26, 27] Not to events recorded in 1 and 2 Maccabees but to the Roman sieges against Jerusalem in 66 and 70 AD. [Matthew 24:15; Luke 21:20]

How many times does Revelation reference Daniel? [60 times] What verses does Revelation reference? [Daniel 1:12, 14; 2:19, 28, 35, 37, 47; 3:5; 4:30; 7:3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 13, 14, 20, 21, 22, 24, 25; 8:10; 10:6; 12:1, 4, 7.]

WAS REVELATION WRITTEN BEFORE 66 AD?

Some "preterists" are of the opinion that Revelation was written before the destruction of Jerusalem, though most scholars throughout the Church Age have believed it to have been penned between 90-100 AD.

Was Revelation written before 66 AD and the beginning of Rome's "war with the Jews"?

Jesus clearly alludes to Daniel 9:24-27 and applies it to "the surrounding of Jerusalem" by the Romans armies in 66 AD. [Matthew 24:15; Luke 21:20] He gives his own inspired interpretation of "the abomination of desolation" to be the Romans armies. [Daniel 8:11-13; 9:26, 27; 11:15, 30, 31]

Now, if Revelation was actually "a revelation of Jesus Christ which the God gave to him" [Revelation 1:1] BEFORE 66 AD why does Revelation not borrow at all from Daniel 9 or 11? Revelation borrows from Daniel 1:12, 14; 2:19, 28, 35, 37, 47; 3:5; 4:30; 7:3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 13, 14, 20, 21, 22, 24, 25; 8:10; 10:6; 12:1, 4, 7 BUT NEVER chapters 9 and 11 which deal specifically with the desolation of Jerusalem and her Temple between 66-70 AD. Indeed, Daniel 8:14's 2,300 days may run exactly from the fall of 66 to the spring of 73 proving that "the time of the end" was the war against Jerusalem by the Roman armies.

Is it not strange that the language found in Matthew, Mark, and Luke regarding the desolation of Jerusalem by "the abomination" is not also referenced in Revelation if the author of all four sources was Jesus Christ? Why would Revelation not also use language apropos of Jerusalem's desolation if it was written either before or shortly after the Temple's destruction? UNLESS, it was written three decades later and deals with future events?

Additionally, if Revelation was written contemporary with Paul and Peter, who were executed in the year 66 AD, why would they not have alluded to or referenced what is understood to be the final letters of Jesus Christ to the beloved apostle John? Why for example would Paul not make use of Revelation in his argument against the Jewish system in Hebrews? Why would Peter not include John's Revelation in the "Scriptures" some were twisting in the early Church, while he does mention Paul? [2 Peter 3:15, 16] If Paul could be "twisted" imagine what could be done with Revelation?

Also, why was Revelation written if its purpose was solely limited to the desolation of Jerusalem? To do any good, like Matthew, Mark and Luke, it would have to be written decades before 66-70. Otherwise it has no use at all.

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