

The Humor of Christ

We often take ourselves too seriously. God and Christ are usually depicted as stern and humorless beings, but the truth is that God has a tremendous sense of humor. After all, He created man, and the things man does in defiance of God are quite humorous, **Psalm 2:1-4, 37:12-13; Proverbs 1:24-26**. Humor is essential for good health, for, “A merry heart doeth good like a medicine: but a broken spirit drieth the bones,” **Proverbs 17:22**. Right laughter is a foretaste of the Kingdom of God, “Blessed are ye that hunger now: for ye shall be filled. Blessed are ye that weep now: for ye shall laugh,” **Luke 6:21**.

The first recorded laughter in Scripture is that of Abraham. God promised that Abraham would have a son through Sarah, and be the mother of nations and kings. “Then Abraham fell upon his face, and laughed, and said in his heart, Shall a child be born unto him that is an hundred years old? And shall Sarah, that is ninety years old, bear?” **Genesis 17:17**. Abraham was not being irreverent when he laughed at God’s promise. In God’s sense of humor, it was funny for Him to fulfill His promise to Abraham in such an unusual way. Sarah was past childbearing age, “Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, After I am waxed old shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?” **Genesis 18:12**. In line with God’s divine humor, the promised child was named Isaac (*Yitzak*, meaning “laughter”). The blessings of God through His chosen people originated with, and continued to be marked by, humor and laughter.

There is a misuse of humor. “But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks,” **Ephesians 5:3-4**.

The fruit of the Spirit is marked by “love, joy, peace,” **Galatians 5:22**. With God’s Spirit, we can rejoice in the Lord always, even when times are tough. “Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, ye righteous: and shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart,” **Psalm 32:11**. “And my soul shall be joyful in the Lord: it shall rejoice in His salvation,” **Psalm 35:9**. “Let all those that seek thee rejoice and be glad in thee: let such as love thy salvation say continually, the Lord be magnified,” **Psalm 40:16**. “Rejoice in the Lord, ye righteous; and give thanks at the remembrance of His holiness,” **Psalm 97:12**. “Glory ye in His holy name: let the heart of them rejoice that seek the Lord,” **Psalm 105:3**. “Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice,” **Philippians 4:4**.

A 127-page book explaining Christ’s humor, *The Humor of Christ*, by Elton Trueblood, is a real gem. Throughout the Gospels, Christ employed humor for the sake of Truth and many of His teachings, when seen in this light, become brilliantly clear for the first time. Irony, satire, paradox, and even laughter, are demonstrated in the teaching of Christ, which refute the false idea that our Savior was a somber, sad individual. Instead, He used humor to illustrate God’s Truth. The Appendix gives thirty humorous Gospel passages for further study.

Trueblood maintains, correctly, “Any alleged Christianity which fails to express itself in gaiety, at some point, is clearly spurious.” Our problem is that we take ourselves too seriously. That is why we have difficulty seeing the humor of Christ.

For example, we may, erroneously, conclude that **Matthew 23** is only a searing condemnation of the Pharisees. Not so. Jesus showed how ridiculous the scribes and Pharisees were, those who made broad their phylacteries and enlarged the tassels of their garments, so as to be seen by others as “righteous” men, **verse 5**. Vanity is one human failing that is essentially laughable. Acceptance of Christ’s wit and humor is not irreligious or blasphemous, but essential for us to understand His message.

You may order a photocopy of *The Humor of Christ*, for a suggested donation of \$6 postpaid, from **Giving & Sharing, PO Box 100, Neck City, MO 64849**.

The Papacy is the Antichrist

The ancient Waldensians, and the Protestant reformers, did not pussyfoot around. They called the Papacy the Antichrist. In 1120, twenty years before Peter Waldo, the Waldenses published a book, "What Is Antichrist?" Reinerius, inquisitor and persecutor of the Waldenses, reported, "They hold the church of Rome to be the whore of Babylon."

Many Seventh-day Adventists today are ashamed of their denomination for its former condemnation of the errors of the Roman Catholic Church. Likewise, books like *Babylon Mystery Religion* have been downplayed by the Church of God.

We have reprinted J.A. Wylie's classic 1888 book, *The Papacy is the Antichrist*, 36 pp., suggested donation \$5 postpaid. Wylie compares the teachings of Jesus with the Papacy, and shows how they are totally opposite. It is Christ versus Antichrist. Which one will you choose?

Cooking Oil for Burns?

Responding to our last Newsletter's article, "Home Remedies," someone said that cooking oil is not good for burns. It is not the first choice, but Dr. Barbara Boss reports: "At a caravan rally many years ago there was a teenage boy who got very bad third degree burns over a large area of his body playing with bonfires. He was in agony and all I could find was cooking oil, so I poured it over the burnt areas, clothes and all, in order to exclude air. Hospitals were a long way off. The day following he was seen by a doctor and came to thank me. He did not look the worse for wear or in pain either. Paraffin gauze used in hospitals works on the same principle.

"In my experience, pouring cold water on a burn makes it worse. I have an ointment made from Vaseline and PABA which will not even leave a blister if applied early enough. Used that when a gas bottle exploded in a chap's face once — worked like a dream!"

Giving & Sharing Newsletter

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Our Nation's Founders and Christianity

I taught school for twenty-five years, and ten of those were in the Southern United States. When I began to teach, prayer was offered in class every morning. Now that people who oppose Christianity have infiltrated both Canada and the USA, it has all had to stop. Jesus never forced His beliefs upon anyone, and so neither dare we do it. Our countries are now filled with people who reject Jesus as the Savior of mankind, and thus we all pay the price of being denied the freedoms we love.

Patrick Henry is not quoted properly in our present day school texts. "Give me liberty or give me death" is not exactly all that he said or why!

Patrick Henry, who is called the firebrand of the American Revolution, is still remembered for his words, "Give me liberty or give me death." But in current textbooks the context of these words is deleted.

Here is what he actually said:

"An appeal to arms and the God of hosts is all that is left us. But we shall not fight our battle alone. There is a just God that presides over the destinies of nations. The battle sir, is not to the strong alone. Is life so dear or peace so sweet as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? Forbid it almighty God. I know not what course others may take, but as for me, give me liberty, or give me death."

These sentences have been erased from our textbooks. Was Patrick Henry a Christian? The following year, 1776, he wrote this: "It cannot be emphasized too strongly or too often that this great Nation was founded not by religionists, but by Christians; not on religions, but on the Gospel of Jesus Christ. For that reason alone, people of other faiths have been afforded freedom of worship here."

Did you know that 52 of the 55 signers of the Declaration of Independence were orthodox, deeply committed Christians? The other three all believed in the Bible as the divine truth, the God of scripture, and His personal intervention. It is the same Congress that formed the American Bible Society. Immediately after creating the Declaration of Independence, the Continental Congress voted to purchase and import 20,000 copies of Scripture for the people of this nation.

Consider these words that **Thomas Jefferson** wrote on the front of his well-worn Bible: "I am a real Christian, that is to say, a disciple of the doctrines of Jesus. I have little doubt that our whole country will soon be rallied to the unity of our Creator and, I hope, to the pure doctrine of Jesus also." He was also the chairman of the American Bible Society, which he considered his highest and most important role. Jefferson also declared, "God who gave us life, gave us liberty. And can the liberties of a nation be thought secure if we have removed their only firm basis: a conviction in the minds of men that these liberties are the gift of God? That they are not to be violated but with His wrath? Indeed, I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just; that His justice cannot sleep forever." Jefferson's words thunder against today's liberals who argue for the separation of religion and state. When President, he said, "No nation has ever yet existed or been governed without religion. Nor can be. The Christian religion is the best religion that has ever been given to man and I, as chief Magistrate of this nation, am bound to give it the sanction of my example."

Consider these words from **George Washington**, the Father of our Nation, in his farewell speech on September 19, 1796: "It is impossible to govern the world without God and the Bible. Of all the dispositions and habits that lead to political prosperity, our religion and morality are the indispensable supporters. Let us with caution indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion. Reason and experience both forbid us to expect that our national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle."

Was George Washington a Christian? Consider these words from his personal prayer book: “Oh, eternal and everlasting God, direct my thoughts, words and work. Wash away my sins in the immaculate blood of the Lamb and purge my heart by Thy Holy Spirit. Daily, frame me more and more in the likeness of Thy son, Jesus Christ, that living in Thy fear, and dying in Thy favor, I may in thy appointed time obtain the resurrection of the justified unto eternal life. Bless, O Lord, the whole race of mankind and let the world be filled with the knowledge of Thee and Thy son, Jesus Christ.” Washington said, “True religion affords to government its surest support.”

Consider these words by **John Adams**, our second president, who also served as chairman of the American Bible Society. In an address to military leaders he said, “We have no government armed with the power capable of contending with human passions, unbridled by morality and true religion. Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.” He also said, “Statesmen may plan and speculate for liberty, but it is religion and morality alone which can establish the principles upon which freedom can securely stand. The only foundation of a free constitution is pure virtue.” Again, Adams said that this nation was founded on “the general principles of Christianity.”

Benjamin Franklin, “The longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this truth: ‘that God governs in the affairs of men.’ And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without His notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without His aid?” In March, 1778, Franklin said, “A Bible and a newspaper in every house, a good school in every district — all studied and appreciated as they merit — are the principle support of virtue, morality, and civil liberty.” Franklin said, “Rebellion to tyrants is obedience to God.”

How about our first Supreme Court Chief Justice, **John Jay**? He stated that when we select our national leaders, if we are to preserve our Nation, we must select Christians. “Providence has given to our people the choice of their rulers, and it is the duty as well as the privilege and interest of our Christian Nation to select and prefer Christians for their rulers.”

Elias Boudinot, president of the Continental Congress, later a congressman from New Jersey, and President of the American Bible Society, “Good government generally begins in the family, and if the moral character of a people once degenerate, their political character must soon follow.”

John Witherspoon, the only clergyman in the Continental Congress, “He is the best friend to American liberty, who is most sincere and active in promoting true and undefiled religion, and who sets himself with the greatest firmness to bear down on profanity and immorality of every kind. Whoever is an avowed enemy of God, I scruple not to call him an enemy to his country.”

Benjamin Rush signer of the Declaration of Independence, “The only foundation for . . . a republic is to be laid in Religion. Without this there can be no virtue, and without virtue there can be no liberty, and liberty is the object and life of all republican governments.”

Charles Carroll, signer of the Declaration of Independence, “Without morals, a republic cannot subsist any length of time; they therefore who are decrying the Christian religion, whose morality is so sublime and pure (and) which insures to the good eternal happiness, are undermining the solid foundation of morals, the best security for the duration of free governments.”

John Dickinson, signer of the Constitution and a member of the Continental Congress, said, “The rights essential to happiness. . . . We claim them from a higher source — from the King of kings and Lord of all the earth.”

In 1782, the **United States Congress** voted this resolution: “The Congress of the United States recommends and approves the Holy Bible for use in all schools.”

John Quincy Adams, son of John Adams, was the sixth U.S. President. He was also the chairman of the American Bible Society, which he considered his highest and most important role. On July 4, 1821, President Adams said, "The highest glory of the American Revolution was this: it connected in one indissoluble bond the principles of civil government with the principles of Christianity."

Abigail Adams, wife of John Adams, "A patriot without religion, in my estimation, is as great a paradox as an honest man without the fear of God. Is it possible that he whom no moral obligations bind, can have any real Good Will towards Men? Can he be a patriot who, by an openly vicious conduct, is undermining the very bonds of Society? . . . The Scriptures tell us righteousness exalteth a Nation."

Daniel Webster, one of our most distinguished leaders, said, "Our ancestors established their system of government on morality and religious sentiment. Moral habits, they believed, cannot safely be entrusted on any other foundation than religious principle, not any government secure which is not supported by moral habits . . . What-ever makes men good Christians, makes them good citizens."

Calvin Coolidge, our 30th President of the United States, reaffirmed this truth when he wrote, "The foundations of our society and our government rest so much on the teachings of the Bible that it would be difficult to support them if faith in these teachings would cease to be practically universal in our country."

William Holmes McGuffey was author of the *McGuffey Reader*, which was used for over 100 years in our public schools with over 125 million copies sold until it was stopped in 1963. President Lincoln called him the "Schoolmaster of the Nation."

Listen to these words of Mr. McGuffey: "The Christian religion is the religion of our country. From it are derived our notions on the character of God, on the great moral Governor of the universe. On its doctrines are founded the peculiarities of our free institutions. From no source has the author drawn more conspicuously than from the sacred Scriptures. From all these extracts from the Bible I make no apology."

Of the first 108 universities founded in America, 106 were distinctly Christian, including the first, **Harvard University**, chartered in 1636. In the original Harvard Student Handbook, rule number one was that students seeking entrance must know Latin and Greek so that they could study the scriptures: "Let every student be plainly instructed and earnestly pressed to consider well, the main end of his life and studies, is to know God and Jesus Christ, which is eternal life, **John 17:3**; and therefore to lay Jesus Christ as the only foundation of all sound knowledge and learning. And seeing the Lord only giveth wisdom, let every one seriously set himself by prayer in secret to seek it of Him (**Proverbs 2:3**)." For over 100 years, more than 50% of all Harvard graduates were pastors!

It is clear from history that the Bible and the Christian faith were foundational to our educational and judicial system. However, in 1947, there was a radical change of direction for the Supreme Court. It required ignoring every precedent of Supreme Court ruling for the past 160 years. The Supreme Court ruled in a limited way to affirm a wall of separation between church and State in the public classroom.

In the coming years, this led to removing prayer from public schools in 1962. Here is the prayer that was banished: "Almighty God, we acknowledge our dependence on Thee. We beg Thy blessings upon us and our parents and our teachers and our country. Amen."

In 1963, the Supreme Court ruled that Bible reading was outlawed as unconstitutional in the public school system. The court offered this justification: "If portions of the New Testament were read without explanation, they could and have been psychologically harmful to children."

Bible reading was now unconstitutional, though the Bible was quoted 94 percent of the time by those who wrote our Constitution and shaped our Nation and its system of

education and justice and government.

In 1965, the Courts denied as unconstitutional, the right of a student in the public school cafeteria to bow his head and pray audibly for his food. In 1980, *Stone vs. Graham* outlawed the Ten Commandments in our public schools. The Supreme Court said this: "If the posted copies of the Ten Commandments were to have any effect at all, it would be to induce schoolchildren to read them. And if they read them, meditated upon them, and perhaps venerated and obeyed them, this is not a permissible objective."

Should we educate our children to follow the moral principles of the Ten Commandments? **James Madison**, a primary author of the Constitution of the United States, said this: "We have staked the whole future of our new nation, not upon the power of government; far from it. We have staked the future of all our political constitutions upon the capacity of each of ourselves to govern ourselves according to the moral principles of the Ten Commandments." Madison said, "Religion [is] the basis and foundation of Government," and "Cursed be all that learning that is contrary to the cross of Christ."

Today, we are asking God to bless America. But, how can He bless a Nation that has departed so far from Him? Prior to September 11, He was not welcome in America.

President Andrew Jackson said, "the Bible, sir, is the rock upon which this Republic stands." If our Republic throws away this Rock, it will certainly fall.

Revisionists have rewritten history to remove the truth about our country's Christian roots. You are encouraged to make copies, and share with others, so that the truth of our nation's history will be told.

— adapted and expanded from an article by Morvel Klause, from the Internet

Note: One of the best sources of information about our constitutional, moral, and religious history, is Wallbuilders, led by David Barton. You may wish to visit their website, www.wallbuilders.com.

Burying, Not Cremating, the Dead

Alvin J. Schmidt, in his book, *Under the Influence, How Christianity Transformed Civilization*, pp. 70-74, gives some surprising information why early Christians were opposed to cremation. It was a continuation of their belief in the sanctity of human life, and this reverence did not stop with death.

Romans commonly cremated their dead, and Christians strongly opposed cremation. Like their Hebrew ancestors, they saw cremation as a pagan custom, cruel and violent, to the dead instead of respectful, for the deceased. Yes, Christians knew that God was able to resurrect the dead in any condition, but their Roman persecutors deliberately cremated Christian martyrs to show their utter contempt for them. Surviving Christians would try to gather up the fragments of their brethren from the flames, so that the deceased could "sleep in peace," an expression found on many epitaphs in the Christian catacombs.

The modern word, "cemetery," comes from the Christian term for a burial place, *koimeterion*, a Greek word meaning "dormitory," where people sleep. With the growing influence of Christianity in the Roman Empire, cremation became rare by the third century, and by the fourth century it had almost disappeared. In the eighth century, Emperor Charlemagne made cremation a capital crime. Not until the nineteenth century did cremation make a comeback into Western societies, and only then by liberals who patterned their thought after the Romans, who denied the Biblical doctrine of the resurrection.

Contrary to centuries of Christian opposition to cremation, more and more Christian denominations, even Sabbath-keeping ones, are allowing cremation. Before 1930, cremation in the United States was considered "bizarre." In 1996, about 22% of the dead in America were cremated, estimated to rise to 40% by 2010.

Instead of following the Bible injunction to return the dead to the ground, **Genesis 3:19**, people today are sprinkling the ashes of their loved ones on the ocean, shooting them into space, etc. One firm in California mixes ashes with gunpowder and packs them into fireworks; an Iowa firm will, upon request, put the ashes into shotgun shells. Among non-Christians, cremation is an open denial of the resurrection. Among professing Christians, cremation is deemed acceptable because their church has caved in to prevailing views. The Roman Catholic Church long opposed cremation, but in 1963 made an about-face, even producing an order of worship for the practice. In 1969, the Church of England followed suit, as did many other churches. Some of these same churches now accept divorce, abortion, and homosexual “marriage” as well.

Schmidt concludes his report against cremation (page 74): “Johann Heermann (1558-1647), the hymn writer, captured this Christian sentiment in his hymn, ‘O God, Thou Faithful God.’ In one stanza he wrote:

*And let my body have
A quiet resting-place
Within a Christian grave;
And let it sleep in peace.*

“The early Christians were mindful of Christ’s promise: ‘For a time is coming when all who are in the *graves* will hear His voice and come out — those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned,’ (**John 5:28-29**). They heard Him say ‘graves,’ not ‘urns’.”

Our Study No. 181, “Cremation Versus Burial — Which?” received perhaps the harshest criticism of any article we have ever published. Subscriptions to the Giving & Sharing Newsletter were cancelled, and I was called a “Pharisee.” A well-known Sabbatarian website answers a question about cremation with the ridiculous statement that the Bible is silent on cremation. He who is willingly ignorant, let him be ignorant. I will stick with the Bible. You may view more scriptures against the practice of cremation at www.giveshare.org/BibleStudy/181.cremation.html. Following the Bible example, and respecting the dead, leads us to honor our dead with a decent burial.

Ten Super Foods You Should Eat!

Health advice usually tells you what you should *not* eat. While there are some “do not’s,” there are also some “do’s.”

Nutrition Action Healthletter gives the names of bad foods sold today. They also recommend good foods to eat. You may wish to subscribe to their excellent health newsletter: **1875 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 300, Washington, DC 20009**.

These good folks recommend ten foods we should eat. (1) Cantaloupe. A quarter of this delicious melon supplies almost an entire day’s supply of vitamin A and C. (2) Sweet Potato (not to be confused with yams) are one of the best vegetables you can eat. (3) Skim or low-fat milk, (4) Salmon or other fatty fish (such as rainbow trout) are rich in omega-3 fats that can help reduce risk of heart attacks. (5) Oranges are rich in vitamin C. (6) Broccoli has vitamin C, carotenoids, and folic acid. (7) Whole-grain Bread is higher in fiber and a dozen vitamins and minerals than gooey white bread. Check our website for information on ordering a Bosch Bread Machine, www.giveshare.org/Health. (8) Watermelon is an excellent source of vitamin C and carotenoids. (9) Beans are inexpensive, low in fat, and rich in protein, iron, folic acid, and fiber. We like garbanzo, pinto, black, Navy, kidney, or lentils. (10) Spinach or Kale are loaded with vitamin C, carotenoids, calcium, and fiber. Steamed with a little butter or olive oil, they are a feast.

If these ten great foods are part of your diet, you may enjoy better health. Write for our free book, ***Biblical Health and Healing*** for more information.

Book Review: *Persecution: How Liberals are Waging War against Christianity*, by David Limbaugh, Washington, D.C., Regency Publishing, 2003, 416 pages.

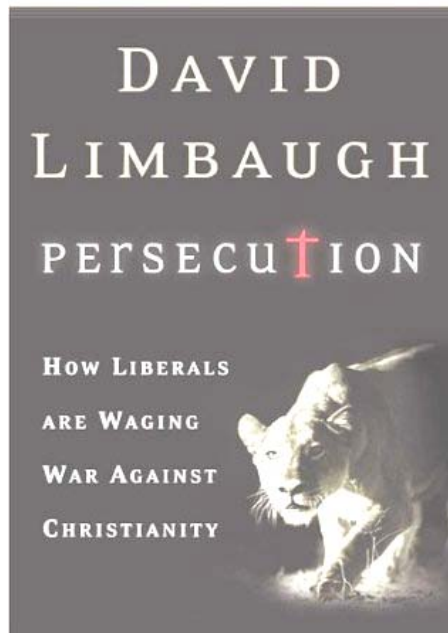
This book chronicles discrimination against Christians in American society. While tolerance is touted as the highest virtue in our popular culture, Christians are often subjected to scorn and ridicule and denied their religious freedoms. Anti-Christian discrimination, even persecution, occurs constantly throughout our society, in our schools, government, and media.

Page after page of this book describes outrageous conduct by liberals against any expression of Christianity. There might be a few exaggerations or misrepresentations, but there are so many bald facts of persecution in this book, as to convince even the most hardened skeptic, that Christians are a persecuted class.

The Bible says that “all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution,” **II Timothy 3:12**. Also, “Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the Lord delivereth him out of them all,” **Psalms 34:19**.

Today, there is much hue and cry about the “separation of church and state” supposedly implied in the First Amendment to the United States Constitution. However, the words “separation,” “church,” and/or “state,” are nowhere mentioned in the First Amendment. It actually says, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” A judge in Alabama, wanting to display the Ten Commandments, is not Congress, he is not making a law establishing a religion, yet he has been deprived of his exercise of religious freedom. The First Amendment forbids the federal government from setting up a national church. At the time the Bill of Rights was ratified, most of the states already had an official state-sponsored Church. The First Amendment did not change that. Today, atheists are using the supposed separation of Church and State doctrine to separate Christianity from public

BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF ABSOLUTE POWER



life in this country.

I know what persecution is like. Centuries ago, my German Mennonite ancestors were forced to leave Prussia to live in Russia, because they would not serve in the Prussian military. Much later, also for religious freedom, they were forced to leave Russia for the Americas.

About 1970, I had an unusual experience that I will never forget. I lived in southeast Portland, Oregon, and was walking, carrying my Bible, one summer Wednesday evening, intending to cross the bridge

over the Willamette River to southwest Portland for a Church Bible Study. A car dealer from a lot about a block away spied my Bible, and ran over to me, ridiculing me and calling me names. In his eyes, I was a religious freak, merely for carrying a Bible. I just kept walking.

During those years in Portland, I was frequently accosted by prostitutes trying to drum up business, and drug dealers, who bought and sold illegal drugs, unhindered and in full view of policemen driving by. But, carrying a Bible, was “bad”! Most of the stories in Limbaugh’s book, *Persecution*, are just as crazy and absurd. Read this book, and prepare to get angry.

David Limbaugh, lawyer brother of radio talk show host Rush Limbaugh, concludes his book with a stirring recounting of our nation’s history, showing the Christian foundations of our Republic.

So, where does that leave us today?

The power of anti-Christians has made significant inroads into the Sabbath-keeping community. Seventh-day Adventists have long been on the side of those who want to remove God from the public square. According to them, and others in various Church of God groups who are like them, Christianity must be a private affair. Marvin Moore, editor of the SDA mainstay publica-

tion, *Signs of the Times*, said in a recent editorial, on January 2004, that it was fine with him that the words “under God” be left out of the Pledge of Allegiance. Some in the various Sabbath-keeping Churches of God, believe that it is great that the government permits abortion, and divorce for any reason, claiming that before abortion was legalized, we had less religious freedom. The opposite is the case. All laws are based on a moral foundation. Today, the Christian moral basis for most of our laws is being thrown out, and our freedom goes out the door as well. *Freedom cannot exist without God’s Law.* By government legalization of sinful activities like abortion, easy divorce, homosexual “unions,” and the like, our religious freedoms are being seriously eroded, and the world is being set up for a totalitarian system. How ironic it is, that Adventists fear the govern-

ment of the USA becoming the Beast, while they unknowingly help it to become the Beast by taking Christianity out of our government.

At a recent Feast of Tabernacles, a member from California told me that he would be in favor of Hillary Clinton becoming President someday. She sneers at Christian faith, supports abortion, homosexual marriage, and other perversions. We have met the enemy — and it is us!

If this book does not jolt you out of your complacency, you are spiritually dead. Our response is generally not in the political arena. We do not vote in Presidential elections. I am not ashamed of the Gospel, because I love it, and will continue to share the Good News with others, as long as I have breath in me. Persecution? So what? Let us be about our Father’s business.

— by Richard C. Nickels Ω

Order *Persecution: How Liberals are Waging War Against Christianity* by our online link to Amazon, www.giveshare.org/amazon/persecution.html. Or, borrow this book for a free 30-day loan from **Sharing Library, PO Box 581, Granville, OH 43023**. Or, send a check for \$25 to **Richard C. Nickels, 3316 Alberta Drive, Gillette, WY 82718**.

Book Review: *Under the Influence, How Christianity Transformed Civilization*, by Alvin J. Schmidt, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Zondervan, 2001, 423 pages.

Until I read *Under the Influence*, I did not clearly understand several important scriptures. **Psalm 103:2** says, “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and *forget not all His benefits.*” What are some of those benefits? Do we have to wait until Christ returns to enjoy those benefits? Because of Abraham’s faithful obedience, the Eternal blessed and multiplied the seed of Abraham, “And in thy seed shall *all the nations* of the earth be *blessed*; because thou hast obeyed My voice,” **Genesis 22:18**. The seed of Abraham came to its ultimate fulfillment in the Messiah. How are the nations of the earth blessed because of the Messiah? Again, must the nations wait until the Millennium to be blessed? I have had such questions for some time.

This book answers these questions. God’s promises through Christ are greatly blessing all nations on the face of the earth, NOW! Almost every page of this book is an inspiration to the loving kindness of God. Secular humanists today have duped many people into believing that Christianity has

produced no benefits to our society. These atheists are attempting to remove all references to God in our government, educational institutions, media, and public square. In almost every facet of today’s life, the religion of Jesus Christ, albeit even in a watered down, corrupted form, has nevertheless delivered astounding benefits to society.

Roman and Greek culture had a low view of human life, epitomized by gladiators in the Coliseum of Rome. Infanticide, killing of newborn infants, was a universal practice in the days of Jesus. Infants were routinely abandoned, tossed away, to die. Abortion was advocated by Roman philosophers. Suicide was condoned, often advocated, sometimes extolled by poets and leaders, committed by the elite and the general populace. The pagan custom of cremation was the norm. From the first century onward, Christians have utterly opposed such practices, and when they eventually gained ascendancy, initiated laws against them.

In sexual matters, Romans and Greeks

were very “modern,” advocating fornication, adultery, prostitution, homosexuality, pedophilia, Lesbianism, group sex, and even bestiality. There was no moral stigma regarding such perverse practices. Christians elevated sex to a loving, lifelong relationship between a man and a woman, and declared sexual promiscuity sinful. Society, until recently, has greatly benefited by restrictions against unlawful sex.

Messiah’s teaching elevated the status of women to a level unknown in most ancient societies. If women’s liberation advocates today had an inkling of what it was like to be a woman in ancient cultures, they would bless the Eternal their God for the truly liberating influence of the Gospel! Christian colonizers virtually eliminated the practice of *clitoridectomy* (falsely called female circumcision) in Africa and the Middle East, *foot binding* in China, and *suttee* (burning of the widow at her husband’s funeral) in India. If this was the only area where Christianity has benefited the world, the benefits of God’s ways would still be incalculable. Did you know that in ancient Greece, the practice of *hetaera* allowed any man to have a legal mistress, in addition to his wife? The *burka* still remains in fundamentalist Islam cultures today, waiting for the liberation of the Gospel.

I have scratched the surface of the abundance of benefits bestowed on the world as the direct result of the teachings of Jesus, outlined in *Under the Influence*. This is a most inspiring book.

Roman giving was called *liberalitas*, which meant giving to please the recipient so that he would later bestow a favor on the giver. In stark contrast, the practice of Christian giving is called *caritas*, giving to relieve the recipient’s economic or physical distress without expecting anything in return. That is the “giving and sharing way.” Romans did not have compassion on the poor, the handicapped, or the elderly. Neither did modern twentieth-century Romans, the Nazis. Child labor laws, orphanages, soup kitchens, and the like, are examples of Christian charity (love) in action.

Christianity’s imprint on education is astounding. Most American universities were founded by churches to train ministers.

Christians want everyone educated, so they will be able to study the Bible and come to the knowledge of salvation.

A Benedictine proverb says, “To work is to pray.” In Roman, Greek, Islam, Hindu, etc., society, work was done by lowly slaves and servants, and the wealthy were indolent. Labor had no dignity in pagan society. The Christian Biblical work ethic has powered our society to its current state of unprecedented wealth for more people than ever before.

Today’s evolutionists would have you believe the lie that scientific advancement has come from those who disbelieve in the existence of God. Quite the contrary, most discoveries and advances in science have come through men and women who believed in God. In fact, their religious belief caused them to seek to advance and improve society through technological inventions, in fulfilling the command of God to Adam, to “dress and keep” the garden of God. Science truly has a multitude of Christian connections.

Our legal system, until its present defilement, stood as a bastion against injustice and oppression. No, it has never been perfect, but human laws based on Bible Law, have greatly benefited mankind. Through professing Christians like the British man Wilberforce, slavery was abolished in western society. But slavery still exists in Islamic countries.

Even art, architecture, literature, music, and our language itself, have been greatly influenced by Christian teaching. If this book does not inspire you, you are hopeless!

Before all these godly benefits are lost, we would do well to appreciate and relish the many good things God has done for us. Whether you live in Africa, Asia, Europe, or the Americas, you have been the recipient of many of God’s blessings to Abraham. It is astounding to realize that the quality of our lives has been greatly enhanced by the blessings of the Almighty. Forces are at work to take away God’s blessings and benefits. In the World Tomorrow, God’s benefits and blessings will not be impinged and watered down: they will fill the earth like the waters cover the seas!

Let us bless the Lord, and forget not all His benefits!

— by Richard C. Nickels Ω

Order *Under the Influence, How Christianity Transformed Civilization*, by our online link to Amazon, <http://www.giveshare.org/amazon/under-the-influence.html>. Or, borrow this book for a free 30-day loan from **Sharing Library, PO Box 581, Granville, OH 43023**. Or, send \$23 to **Richard C. Nickels, 3316 Alberta Drive, Gillette, WY 82718**.

In our common order of books, toward the back of the New Testament, is a neglected book. It is a General Epistle, meaning it has basic information that should be read before more complicated things. I believe that the best position to place it, in Topical Order, is right after the Book of Acts.

The epistle that we call Hebrews is truly a gold mine. It covers the seven fundamental doctrines, plus much more. Hebrews explains why Christ came to the earth as a man, the meaning of His sacrifice for sin, angels, prayer, tithing, the Sabbath, the New Covenant, the Unpardonable Sin, Faith, Trials and Persecution, Marriage, etc. Above all, Hebrews lets us see Jesus, as He is now, our High Priest who makes intercession for us today. Let's take a journey through this remarkable book, and highlight the major themes of the Book of Hebrews.

Hebrews, Chapter by Chapter

Chapter	Key Verse	Description
1	God has in these last days spoken unto us by His son, verses 1-2.	Jesus Christ is God's Son, the anointed one, the Creator, who lives forever and is the same. Angels are ministering spirits to the heirs of salvation (us).
2	"But we see Jesus . . ." verse 9.	Man is destined to have all things under his feet; let's take heed and not slip. Jesus became a man and died for our sins; He is the Captain of our salvation, delivered man from death and bondage, and is our brother and High Priest.
3	"To day if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation," verses 7-8, 15.	Israel did not enter the Promised Land because of unbelief (disobedience). Don't harden your hearts; we are God's house if we hold fast.
4	"There remaineth therefore a rest [margin: keeping of a Sabbath] to the people of God," verse 9.	The Sabbath is a type of the millennial rest, God's rest. On the seventh-day Sabbath, we cease from our own works, and labor to enter His rest. God's Word is powerful and reveals all our sins. Therefore, we should come boldly in prayer to Christ, our great High Priest, to obtain mercy and help to believe and obey.
5	"Though He were a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered," verse 8.	Christ learned obedience by His sufferings and is now a Melchisedec (King of Righteousness) High Priest. We ought to be teachers, skilful users of the Word, strong meat, and not only the milk, so that we may discern good and evil.
6	". . . let us go on unto perfection . . ." verse 1.	The fundamental doctrines are: repentance, faith, baptisms, laying on of hands, resurrection, eternal judgment, and perfection. Those who will not repent have committed the unpardonable sin. God, who cannot lie, is our anchor.
7	"For the priesthood being <i>changed</i> , there is made of necessity a <i>change</i> also of the law [of tithing]," verse 12.	Jesus is the Melchisedec priest to whom Abraham gave 1/10 of the spoils. Tithing is now to Jesus, rather than Levites. He is eternal, able to save those who come to God through Him.
8	"For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel . . . I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts . . ." verse 10.	The New Covenant is better than the Old Covenant. The fault of the Old was them, those who sinned. Under the New Covenant, God's Laws are put in our minds and hearts, and all shall know the Lord.

Chapter	Key Verse	Description
9	“So Christ was <i>once</i> offered to bear the sins of many . . .” verse 28.	The Tabernacle sacrificial worship services pointed to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the one big sacrifice whose blood remitted our sins.
10	“Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together . . .” verses 23, 25	The OT sacrifices did not make the comers perfect, but only reminded them of sins. The offering of Christ’s body once for all remitted sins (10:10). There is now no more offering for sin. Hold fast; assemble ourselves together; don’t sin willfully. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. The Just shall live by faith.
11	“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen,” verse 1.	The Faith Chapter. You must have faith to please God. Examples of the faithful saints show we need to seek the better resurrection, a city with foundations.
12	“For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth,” verse 6.	Trials and Corrections Chapter. Enduring trials and discipline of the Lord leads us to repentance, deepens our conversion, teaches obedience, helps us be compassionate of others, tests our faith in God, builds character, helps us to qualify to be priests and rulers in the Kingdom of God. Hold fast! Don’t let trials cause a root of bitterness to grow in you.
13	“Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge. . . . Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever,” verses 4, 8.	Jesus Christ has not changed His views of the sanctity of marriage, and the exceeding sinfulness of sexual perversions. Don’t be carried away with diverse and strange doctrines; obey them which have the rule over you (the ministry). Don’t cease sharing and helping the brethren.

Major Theme of Hebrews: “But We See Jesus”

In the Four Gospels, we see Jesus’ birth, ministry, death, and resurrection. We see Him healing, performing miracles, preaching, and teaching. In the Book of Hebrews, we see the reason why Jesus came to this earth, why He had to become a man, why He had to die for our sins. The wages of sin is death. Blood must be shed for the remission of sins. The Old Testament animal sacrifices did not atone for sin, but merely reminded of sin, and pointed to Christ, whose death and shed blood would truly forgive sins, once and for all. A man’s death must pay the penalty for man’s sin, which is the breaking of God’s law. So, God had to become a man to die for the sins of mankind. Hebrews helps us to see Jesus as our blood sacrifice for our sins, our compassionate redeemer, and merciful High Priest.

Here are some of the many ways that the Book of Hebrews helps us “see Jesus”: He is God’s Son, **1:2, 5, 8**. He is the Creator, **1:2, 10**. He purged our sins, **1:3**. He sits on the right hand of God, **1:3**. He is the first begotten, **1:6**. He is God, **1:8**, and has a throne and scepter of righteousness, **1:8**. He is the anointed, **1:9**; never perishes, **1:11**; is always the same, **1:12, 13:8**. He is the Son of Man, **2:6**; crowned with glory and honor, **2:9**; the captain of our salvation, **2:10**; made perfect through sufferings, **2:10**; became a man to taste death for every man, **2:9-10, 14-16**; a merciful and faithful High Priest, **2:17, 3:1**; our Apostle, **3:1**.

We become Christ’s house if we hold fast our confidence firm to the end, **3:6, 14**. Christ was tempted in all points as we are, yet without sin. Therefore, He understands our infirmities and weaknesses, and we can come boldly to Him to the throne of grace, **4:15-16**. Christ offered prayers in tears, and learned obedience by the things which He suffered, **5:7-8**. He was made perfect and became the author of eternal salvation to all them that obey Him, a priest after the order of Melchisedec, **5:9-10**; He is our forerunner, a Melchisedec High Priest forever, **6:20**. He lives forever, and has an unchangeable (not transferable) priesthood, **7:24**.

Christ is the Mediator of the New Covenant: by His own blood he entered once into the Holy Place and has obtained eternal redemption for us, **9:12, 15**; His sacrifice once and for all redeemed mankind, **9:28, 10:10**. Let us look unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, now seated on the right hand of God, **12:2**.

Seven Basic Doctrines

Hebrews does much more than mention the seven basic doctrines; it gives lots of details about most of them.

Repentance from dead works is more than lip service. It is not just being sorry for one's sins, it is being sorry enough to want to quit sinning. Moses' example of forsaking Egypt's pleasures is a type of true repentance, **11:24-27**. Esau's contempt for the birthright and later remorse for losing it is an example of false repentance, **12:16-17**.

Faith toward God is exemplified by frequent examples of the faithful saints in **Hebrews 11**, the Faith Chapter. But faith is also stressed throughout Hebrews: **4:2, 6:1, 12, 10:22, 23, 38, 12:2, 13:7**.

Baptisms, as you will notice, is plural in **Hebrews 6:2**. While baptism with water is not mentioned, baptism of the Holy Spirit is, as well as baptism with fire (judgment), **6:4-5, 8**. The Holy Spirit is received through the **laying on of the hands** of the ministry, whom we are taught to respect, **13:7, 17, 22, 24**.

The **Resurrection of the dead** is explained in **Hebrews 11:35**, where we are admonished to seek the better resurrection. So, there is a good resurrection (Great White Throne Judgment), and a better resurrection, as well as a bad resurrection to **eternal judgment**. The latter theme is covered many times in Hebrews. See references to "Unpardonable Sin," below.

Perfection is the seventh basic doctrine. Hebrews is replete with admonitions for us hold fast and go beyond the milk of the word to spiritual maturity, **5:9, 11-14**; we need to be made perfect to do His will, **13:21**.

Additional Themes of Book of Hebrews

There are many precious metals of Truth in the Book of Hebrews. Here are additional themes of this extraordinary book of the Bible:

Theme	Verses	Description
New Covenant	7:19	Better hope.
	8:6-13	Better covenant, established on better promises; God's laws in our hearts and minds; they shall not teach every man his neighbor, for all shall know the Lord.
	10:15-17, 20	God writes His laws on our hearts and minds, and remembers our sins and iniquities no more; a new and living way.
	13:20	The blood of the everlasting covenant.
Hold Fast	2:1-3	Give earnest heed; don't let slip the things we have heard.
	3:6,14	We are Christ's house IF we hold fast; we are made partakers of Christ IF we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast to the end.
	4:14	Let us hold fast our profession.
	10:23	Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering.
	10:35-36	Cast not away your confidence; have patience.
	12:27-28	Those things which cannot be shaken may remain.
Unpardonable Sin	3:8-19	Israel's rebellion in the wilderness is a type of the unpardonable sin. They could not enter in because of unbelief.
	4:2	The word preached to them did not profit them, not being mixed with faith.
	6:4-6, 8	It is impossible to renew to repentance those who fall away because they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh.
	8:8-9	They continued not in My covenant, and I regarded them not.

Theme	Verses	Description
Unpardonable Sin, cont.	10:26-31	If we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the Truth, there remains no more sacrifice for sins, but a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. Those who have trodden underfoot the blood of the covenant will face the Lord's judgment. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.
	10:38-39	If any man draw back unto perdition, My soul shall have no pleasure in him.
	12:15-17	Don't let a root of bitterness cause you to fall from the grace of God. Esau is a type of the person who commits the unpardonable sin.
	12:25	Refuse not Him who speaketh.
	12:29	For our God is a consuming fire.
	13:9	Be not carried about with diverse and strange doctrines.
Endure Trials	Ch. 11	Examples of God's faithful people who endured trials and persecution.
	Ch. 12	Trials and Corrections Chapter.
	13:12-13	As Jesus suffered without the gate, let us go without the camp, bearing His reproach.
Sabbath	3:11	So I swear in My wrath, they shall not enter into My rest.
	4:1-11	There remains a keeping of a Sabbath to the people of God.
Prayer	4:14-16	We have a great High Priest, tempted like we are. Therefore, let us come boldly to the throne of grace to find mercy and grace to help in time of need.
	5:7	Jesus offered prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears.
	13:15,18	Let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually. Pray for the ministry.
Seek the Eternal City	11:10, 16	Abraham looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God; a heavenly country.
	12:22, 28	Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem . . . a kingdom which cannot be moved.
	13:14	For here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come.
Better . . .	1:4	Christ is better than angels, has a more excellent name.
	7:4-7	Priesthood of Melchisedec (Christ) is better than Levitical priesthood.
	7:19, 22	Better hope . . . the New Covenant is a better testament.
	8:2; 9:11	Christ is the minister of the True (better) tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man; a greater and more perfect tabernacle.
	8:6	Christ is the mediator of a better covenant, with better promises.
	9:13-14	Blood of Christ is better than the blood of bulls and goats.
	11:16	We desire a better country, that is, an heavenly.
	11:35	Saints seek the better resurrection.
Serve the brethren	13:1-3	Serve the brethren in love: some have entertained angels unawares. Remember those who are suffering.
	13:16	Don't forget to do good and share; God pleased with such sacrifices.
Respect the elders	13:7	Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken the Word of God to you; follow their faith.
	13:17	Obey them that have the rule over you, submit yourselves, for they watch over your souls and shall give an account.
	13:22	Suffer the word of exhortation.
	13:24	Salute all them that have the rule over you.

The Book of Hebrews has it all. If it were the only New Testament book you had, you would do well. We see Jesus, we are encouraged to exercise faith and hold fast to the faith. We look beyond our trials, to the better resurrection, and the Eternal City.

— written by Richard C. Nickels Ω

The Historic Phenomena and Theology of the Nazarenes and Ebionites

Part I, The Nazarenes and the Ebionites as a Historical Phenomenon

The Nazarenes and the Ebionites are two groups which appeared as clearly defined entities in the second century within the phenomenon commonly called "Jewish Christianity." The use of a term such as Jewish Christianity is problematic due to the multitude of meanings associated with it. For the purpose of this paper, "Jewish Christianity" is used not as a designation of origin, but as the designation of the point of view of a party. Consequently, not every Christian of Jewish descent can here be regarded as Jewish Christian. (The weakness of the book by Jean Danielou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity*, London, 1964, is that while it presents a wealth of material, it confuses the two types.)

The Jewish Christians very early came into opposition and conflict with the European-centered, Gentile-dominated "Great Church." There were, of course, those of Jewish origin who were loyal members of the "Great Church." Justin, writing about the middle of the second century, distinguishes two groups of Christians of Jewish origin — moderates who were a part of the Great Church and who, especially in the Diaspora congregations, exercised a Judaizing influence on the formation of their doctrine and morality; and extremists who refused to live with Gentiles who would not incorporate the Jewish law into their faith in Christ (Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew*, ch. 47). There were probably such Jewish Christians who had separated themselves from the rest of what was being called Christianity because they combined faith in Christ with Jewish legal observance. They were to be found in many places such as Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Rome, and for a long time (H. Schoeps, *Jewish Christianity, Factional Disputes in Early Church*, Philadelphia, 1969, p. 10).

There is a clear profile only of the Jewish Christians of Palestine-Syria, who insistently emphasized their connection with the original cell of Christianity in Jerusalem and Galilee. This, and most of the information we have about them, comes from literary remains attributed to their circles. The polemic writings of the "Church Fathers" about the

various Jewish Christian groups are unreliable due to obvious prejudice against those who would oppose their teachings. The Jewish Christians had independent theological and literary traditions, and represented, from the turn of the century to the third century, a group which was independent of the "Great Church" and whose outward form does not conform with their hesiological characterization (Walter Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy*, Tübingen, 1964, p. 274).

Ebionite

The names under which these Jewish Christians appear in the lists of sects provided by the Church Fathers were originally honorable names in the New Testament but their meanings have since deteriorated. Ebionim or "Ebionites," is a rehebraized ancient title of honor, which the primitive Church adopted, probably after their flight from Jerusalem, on the basis of Jesus' beatitudes concerning the "poor." There was no one named Ebion who served as father of the sect, as the Church Fathers (Hippolytus, Tertullian, Epiphanius, etc.) suggested in order to conceal the group's true origin and to label it more easily as heretical. The name was chosen by the believers in accordance with a traditional pattern (e.g., Perusim = Pharisees, Sadducim = Sadducees) (Schoeps, p. 11). Later, the hatred and satire of opponents reduced Ebionite to a nickname and term of abuse so that the Jewish Christians themselves avoided it. The term has been broadly used by not only the Church Fathers but by almost all writers. Any group proclaiming Christ and upholding the Mosaic law, regardless of whatever other philosophies, doctrines, and practices they held, have been lumped together under the term Ebionite.

Nazarene

The Nazarenes were a distinct group within the larger body of Jewish Christians with various, mostly extreme, theologies — all of whom are referred to as Ebionites. The

term "Nazoreans" is used in **Acts 24:5** by Tertullus, a spokesman for Ananias and the Jewish elders, in describing the apostles and disciples in Palestine in the middle of the first century. The Hebraized form *Nozrim* is used in the *Birkath ha-Minim* (the *Petition against Heretics*) in the Jewish Eighteen Benedictions. This name was long used in Syria to designate Christians in general. Nazarene was obviously the first century appellation used to describe the disciples of Jesus of Nazareth. Kittel comments that the term should be considered as a substantive formed from the root *nsr* meaning "to keep," or "to observe" (Kittel and Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the NT*, art. "Nazoraion," Grand Rapids, 1977). If so, this would indicate that the Nazarenes were known as the Christian group of "observers," observing the Messiahship of Jesus (of note in Palestine) and the Mosaic law (of note in Syria).

Church Fathers and the Jews as Sources

The Church Fathers who have reported about these Ebionites/Nazoreans were seldom eye-witnesses of the communal life of these groups. They based their reports largely upon hearsay and upon the documents which had become known to them. We must understand the incredible prejudice in the form of anti-Semitism toward anything portending to observance of the Mosaic law. Justin, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Hippolytus, Origen, Epiphanius, Jerome, and Eusebius (whose *Ecclesiastical History* has preserved fragments from the memoirs of Hegesippus, who Eusebius considered to be a Jewish member of the Great Church) provide what we hope is some factual material in spite of various contradictions in their reports and their obvious prejudice. Of this material, the *Panarion* of Bishop Epiphanius of Salamis is especially important. It is intended to be a *kibotion iatrikon* (a medical box for use against wild beasts and snakes). He treats the Nazoreans in chapter 29 and, in detail, the entire Ebionite movement in chapter 30. The accounts are confused in various ways and often jumbled together, but seem partially verifiable by means of the information provided by the *Pseudo-Clementine Narrative*. According to Hans-Joachim Schoeps, Epiphanius, the "patriarch of orthodoxy," had a positive knowledge of the Ebionites and says that the original Clementines, in some form or another, were connected with them (H.

Schoeps, *Theology and History of the Jewish Christian*, Tübingen, 1949, pp. 457-79).

In contrast to the polemic of the Church Fathers against these "enemies," the Jewish synagogue chose to ignore them. The Jewish Christians are included among the *minim* (heretics), of whom it was said that they were worse than idolaters, for the latter deny God without knowing Him while the former know Him yet nevertheless deny him (stated about 100 A.D. by Rabbi Tarphon, *Tosefta Tractate Shab.*, 13:5).

Origin of the Nazarenes and Ebionites

The origin of the Nazarenes and Ebionites as clearly defined entities began with the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D. The cessation of the Jewish Temple worship had a paralyzing effect on the life of the Jewish people, and from it they only slowly recovered and settled to an essentially maimed existence, with their cherished religion bereft of much of its reason for being. To the Jewish Christians who survived the carnage of 70 A.D., heart-rending questions must have presented themselves, but of their reactions to it no certain record remains. Among all the documents which comprise the New Testament canon, and indeed among other extant writing of the sub-apostolic age, there is no description of the terrible events which attended the defeat of Judea's cause against Rome, or of the fortunes of the Palestinian Christians amid the confusion and overthrow of their nation's life; neither is there any conscious reference to the significance of the catastrophe for Christianity. There is so complete a silence maintained in these documents that on their testimony alone nothing would be known of this disaster.

The fact of this remarkable silence raises a twofold problem, namely why the Jerusalem Christians left no record of their fortunes or indications of their mental and emotional reaction to such a tremendous experience, and what was the reason which led the Gentile Christians apparently to allow so epoch-making an event as the destruction of the citadel of Judaism and the disappearance of the Mother Church to pass un-commemorated. Of this incredible period Church historian, Hurlbut, writes:

"For fifty years after Paul's life, a curtain hangs over the Church, through which we vainly strive to look; and when at last it rises, about 129 A.D. with the writings of the

earliest Church Fathers, we find a Church in many ways very different from that in the days of Peter and Paul” (Hurlbut, *Story of the Christian Church*, p. 41).

Edward Gibbon states:

“The scanty and suspicious materials of ecclesiastical history seldom enable us to dispel the dark cloud that hangs over the first age of the Church” (Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Random House, N.Y., ch. 15, p. 382).

What happened during this time? Obviously, it was a time of many heresies. The Church Fathers come on the scene in the second century to tell us vociferously who the heretics were and where the “orthodox Church” was. These men claimed to be the followers of the apostles but their theology was different and seemed to blend Hellenistic philosophy and Babylonian religious custom with Christianity.

It was certainly a far different theology from that of the Jerusalem Church which Paul said he had taught the Gentiles to follow (**Acts 15:2, 22-28; I Thessalonians 2:14**). It is interesting that the descendants of the Jerusalem Church, the Nazarenes, were labeled as heretics and persecuted for their regard of the Mosaic law when they were merely carrying on the tradition of the Church of Peter and James.

Flight to Pella

In the absence of any explicit statement in the New Testament or sub-apostolic documents, we are left to find our earliest, most complete, and almost only information about the fate of the Jerusalem Church in the fourth century *Ecclesiastical History* of Eusebius, which is substantially reproduced in the next century by Epiphanius.

Eusebius, after relating how the Apostles were finally driven from Judea by the hostility of the Jews, goes on to describe the fortunes of the Christian community in Jerusalem:

“However, when the people of the Church in Jerusalem, having been commanded by an oracle, given by revelation to men there approved, before the war (**Mark 13**), to depart from the city and to dwell in a certain city of Paraea, namely, Pella, and when those who believed on Christ had migrated thither from Jerusalem . . .” (Eusebius, *Eccl. Hist.*, III. v. 2-3).

Eusebius then proceeds to show that when all faithful Christians had left Jerusalem

and the whole land of Judea, the judgment of God then fell upon the unbelieving Jews in the form of the Roman armies. The accounts of Epiphanius agree on the main facts and add a note that some of the disciples subsequently returned to Jerusalem (Epiphanius, *De Mens. et Pond.*, xv.). Some historians such as S. G. F. Brandon doubt that the Jerusalem Church fled to Pella because of geographic and political reasons, and also because Epiphanius’ account of their returning to a Gentile city which excluded Jews is not possible (S. G. F. Brandon, *The Fall of Jerusalem*, London, 1951, p. 169).

In spite of the few historians who hold this opinion, there is no reason to doubt the accuracy of the statements of Eusebius and Epiphanius. That geographic and political reasons would have prevented this, is easily disproved by research into these factors by many historians, including Barbara C. Gray. Her article, “Movement of the Jewish Church during the First Jewish War,” is most cogent in regard to the Jewish migration to Pella (Barbara C. Gray, “Movement of the Jewish Church during First Jewish War,” *Jewish Ecclesiastical History*, Vol. 24:1-7, Jan. 1973). As for the Gentile city of Aelia admitting Jews, Gibbon states:

“At his (Marcus) persuasion the most considerable part of the congregation renounced the Mosaic law, in the practice of which they had persevered above a century. By this sacrifice of their habits and prejudices they purchased a free admission into the colony of Hadrian, and more firmly cemented their union with the Catholic Church” (Edward Gibbon, ch. 15, p. 390).

Both Eusebius and Epiphanius affirm that the migration to Paraea was a total one and that Christians fled over the Jordan, not only from Jerusalem but also from other cities and villages. Eusebius goes on to add that all of Palestine at that time was completely emptied of Christians. If this can be taken literally, it means that a new wave of Christians must have come into the area from the Gentile churches and totally replaced the Jerusalem Church and all Jewish Christians.

Independent of these accounts, there are the passages referring to the exodus to Pella in the Ebionite “Acts of the Apostles,” as reconstructed from the Pseudo-Clementines (H. Schoeps, *Study of the Pseudo-Clementines*, Leipzig, 1949, pp. 69 ff). Recognitions 1:37 (Syriac version) and 1:39 (Latin version of Rufinus) report that the wisdom of God led

those who believed in Him to a safe place in the country before the outbreak of the war. The war, which would not come unexpectedly but which would verify the prediction of the "True Prophet," would result in the destruction of non-believers. The Jewish war and its tragic consequences were evidently regarded as predicted by Jesus, and His Parousia was expected immediately after 70 A.D., when the prophecy of the destruction of the Temple and the abolition of sacrifice, emphasized in the teaching of the "Ebionite Jesus," had been fulfilled. Finally, the true gospel would be sent out, only after the destruction of the holy city, for the refutation of future heresies (Hom. 2:17). With respect to these accounts, Hans-Joachim Schoeps says:

"Who else in the whole of Christendom would have been interested in appealing to this event and placing it of all things at the center of an account of the history of salvation, except the posterity of these exiles, the separated Jewish Christians or Ebionites, who, it is true, appear to be removed by a considerable period of time from the moment of their separation" (H. Schoeps, *Theology*, p. 447).

The Jewish Christians moved to Pella in Transjordan, and thus the rest of the history of this portion of the primitive church took place in a land foreign to that of their origins.

Why Pella?

Why did the Jewish Christian community choose the Transjordan area while Jewish emigration went to cities such as Jamnia and Lydda which were less remote? A prominent reason could have been that the primitive Church had its real roots in Galilee, the country native to Jesus' family. Julius Africanus reports that Jesus' relatives had spread the gospel everywhere starting from the Jewish villages of Nazareth and Cochaba (Eusebius, I. vii. 14). This suggests that the Decapolis was Jewish Christian missionary territory at an early date. Jerome tells us in his commentary on **Isaiah 9:1** that:

"The Nazoreans venture to explain this passage as: When Christ came and His preaching was glittering, especially the land of Naphtali was delivered from the errors of the scribes and Pharisees, and He struck off from its neck the very burdensome yoke of Jewish traditions" (Jerome, *M.P.L.*, 24:125).

The Ebionites and Nazarenes understood the passage to mean that Jesus proclaimed the

gospel first for the land in which they themselves then resided. Eastern Palestine was the safest place the Jewish Christians could choose in this troubled period. Pella is a typical example of a hiding place, lying hidden in a valley on the edge of the Transjordanian high plateau. Today called *Khirbet Fahil*, it lies 260 feet above the Jordan, diagonally across from Scythopolis. Pella thus became a chief center of Jewish Christianity, which had hitherto been Palestinian, and it probably remained an important location in the following centuries. The Jewish Christians apparently expanded from Pella into the rest of Peraea — the whole territory east of the upper Jordan. Johannes Weiss asserts:

"That the church here subsisted not merely as an intimidated flock in hiding, but continued its communal living and its propaganda, is undoubtedly probable" (J. Weiss, *Earliest Christianity*, N.Y., Harper and Row, 1959, Vol. 2, p. 716).

Other Locations

The second most important location of Jewish Christians was the city of Cochaba. It seems to have been situated in Basanitis, about eighteen miles north of Pella.

According to Epiphanius (*Pan.* 30.18:1), the Ebionites lived "in Batanaea and Paneas, and especially in Moabitis and Cochaba, in Basanitis beyond Adraea," and the Nazarenes lived in Pella and practically the same territories (*Pan.* 29.7). The statement about the Nazarenes inhabiting Beroea is confusing. Some suggest that what is meant is that the "Nazorean heresy" found in Beroea derived from Coele-Syria (A. Schmidtke, *New Documents and Understanding of Jewish Christian Evangelism*, Leipzig, 1911, p. 124). Others add that the Nazarenes of Beroea should probably be regarded as Jewish Christians of the Damascus congregation who were exiled to the north and who only later became associated with the Transjordanian descendants of the primitive church (H. Schoeps, *Jewish Christianity*, p. 29).

Apart from the remote settlement in Beroea, Ebionite communities of the second, third, and fourth centuries inhabited the territory east of the Jordan. Catholic Christianity did not penetrate this area until, perhaps, the middle of the third century. Catholic bishops in Pella are mentioned for the first time in the first century.

Nazarene Bishops

The exodus into Transjordan took place under the second Nazarene bishop, Simon (Simeon) bar-Clopus. According to the report of Hegesippus, he was chosen bishop directly after the death of James when the relatives of Jesus assembled with the surviving apostles and disciples to elect a successor (quoted by Eusebius, III. xi. 1). As a cousin of Jesus and James, Simon bar-Clopus was apparently the next-of-kin. If the third bishop, Justus, should also prove to be a relative (not yet determined with certainty), there would be a definite "dynasty of Jesus." That Jesus' family, referred to as the *desposynoi* because of their relationship to the "Lord" (i.e., those who were closest to the Messianic throne) occupied a prominent position in the Nazarene/Ebionite community is also attested by another account of Hegesippus. According to him, two grandsons of Jude, the brother of Jesus, by the names of Jacob and Zocheh (Zechariah) were interrogated by the emperor Domitian and after their release governed their congregations until the time of Trajan (quoted by Eusebius, III. xx. 6).

Heresy Abounds

According to the dating of James' death, Simon bar-Clopus acceded to the episcopal seat of James between 63 and 66 A.D. In 107 A.D., according to Jerome, in the tenth year of Trajan's reign, Simon suffered crucifixion. He was executed by Trajan's governor, Atticus, as a descendant of David. Commenting on the tremendous significance of this event, Hegesippus wrote:

"The Church continued until then as a pure and uncorrupt virgin; while if there were any at all that attempted to pervert the sound doctrine of the saving gospel, they were yet skulking in dark retreats; but when the sacred choir of apostles became extinct, and the generation of those that had been privileged to hear their inspired wisdom, had passed away, then also vile abominations of impious error arose by the fraud and delusions of false teachers. These also, as there was none of the apostles left, henceforth attempted, without shame, to preach their false doctrine against the gospel of truth" (quoted by Eusebius, III. xxxii. 3-6).

There is some controversy as to exactly what is meant by Hegesippus. Schoeps would identify "Church" as the Ebionites. Certainly

it is true that it was at this juncture that heresies and schisms began to develop within the Jewish Christian movement. Some groups among the Ebionites began to question the divinity of Jesus and the validity of the teachings of Paul; some became Gnostic. The Nazarenes became known as "moderate" Ebionites — accepting the divinity of Jesus, the writings of Paul, and the Mosaic law.

Most historians commenting on Hegesippus' meaning of "Church," such as Henry Chadwick, understand it to mean the entire Christian Church, not just the Ebionites (H. Chadwick, "Hegesippus," *Ency. Brit.*, Chicago, 1967). This period strikingly corresponds to Brandon's "period of silence," Gibbon's "dark cloud," and Hurlbut's "curtain." Examining the Catholic Church which emerged from this period and its theology and practice, we find a Church significantly different from that of the Church of the days of Peter, Paul, and James. Heresy did undoubtedly abound during the period following the death of Simon while the "curtain" hung over the Church. When the curtain lifts, the "Church Fathers" are on the scene, telling us they have emerged victorious over the "heretics" and have established "orthodoxy." Of course, their orthodoxy while ostensibly condemning Gnosticism and the pagans, gradually accepted many of their ideas and customs. The customs, rites, temples, and idols of the pagans were no problem for the "Great Church"; it merely gave them Christian names. On one thing, however, the Great Church was dogmatic — there was to be no "Jewishness" nor "Mosaic law" allowed. Somewhat of a strange attitude for a Church founded on the Old Testament, originated by Jesus, and which worshipped a Jew. In a strange reversal of the truth, the Jewish Christian sects came to be blamed for the "abominations of impious error" spoken of by Hegesippus (*Ibid*).

Some Jewish Christians Join with the Great Church

According to Eusebius (*Eccl. Hist. V. xii*), up to the year 135 A.D. there were fifteen bishops of the circumcision who succeeded one another and who possessed all the marks of a kind of monarchical episcopate over the congregations of the Jewish Christian Church. Schoeps feels that this number can hardly be correct and thinks that perhaps bishops of other congregations beside the one designated

as Jerusalem's are included in this list (H. Schoeps, *Theology*, pp. 266 f). With the fall of Bether, the last Jewish stronghold, in 135 A.D., the revolt led by the Jewish partisan Bar Cocheba which had lasted for three and one-half years came to its end. This year marks the end of the Jewish Christian congregation of Jerusalem (at Pella). According to the list of bishops provided by Eusebius, their last bishop, Judas, resided there until the eighteenth year of Hadrian's reign (134-135 A.D.). Tradition ascribed to this last bishop the surname Kyriakos, which appears to bring him into relationship with Jesus' family (H. Schoeps, *Jewish Christianity*, p. 34). The next bishop in the episcopal seat of James, Marcus (Mark) by name, was not of Jewish origin. Marcus was a Gentile, probably a native either of Italy or of the Latin provinces. At his persuasion, the most considerable part of the congregation at Pella renounced the Mosaic law, in the practice of which they had persevered above a century. By this sacrifice of their habits and culture, they purchased a free admission into the colony of Hadrian, into Jerusalem, and firmly cemented their union with the Catholic Church (Eusebius, IV. vi.; Sulpicius Severus, ii. 31). By comparing their unsatisfactory accounts, Mosheim de Rebus (*Christians before Constantine the Great*, p. 327, etc.) has drawn out a very distinct representation of the circumstances and motives of this revolution. Here again, it is interesting to notice that while the pagans did not have to give up their culture or rites, the Jewish Christians were required to forsake their observance of the Mosaic law. Those Nazarenes who remained at Pella and continued in obedience to the Law were called heretics and mocked as "Ebionites (poor in doctrine)" by the Catholic Church (E. Gibbon, p. 391).

Later History

The Jewish Christians in Palestine did not participate in the Bar Cocheba war. The reason is not hard to guess: it was because of Bar Cocheba's messianic claim which was accepted by the majority of the people and by its rabbinic leadership headed by Rabbi Akiba. In the persecution of 135 A.D., conducted by the Jews, the last Jewish Christian martyrs of whom we have knowledge perished. It was probably another headlong flight for the Jewish Christians, for they had to leave behind their greatest relic,

the bishop's chair upon which James had sat and which was exhibited in Jerusalem as a precious relic even in the time of the emperor Constantine. The persecutions during and after the year 135 constituted the end of both the Jewish state and Palestinian Jewish Christianity. Hugh Schonfield writes:

"Jewish Christianity never regained its position of authority in the affairs of the Church. The Hadrianic war, which had wrung the death knell of Jewish hopes of political independence, had also relegated the Church of the apostles to the rank of a heretical sect. Henceforth the Jewish Christians, while they observed their ancestral customs, were practically excluded from the Catholic Church and might only associate with one another in their own congregations" (Hugh Schonfield, *History of Jewish Christianity*, London, 1936, p. 62).

For the external history of the Ebionite communities in Transjordan after 135 A.D., we possess few direct testimonies. We do know that they continued their mission in a limited way and that in this new homeland, which was practically untouched by international commerce, they held their own for a long time — some 350 years. Their tendency to heretical schism, following the customary sectarian fate, probably produced further schisms of separate lines of development. Since Epiphanius gives us information concerning the existence of Ebionite settlements on Cyprus about the year 375, we may suppose that the Ebionites fled from their hostile environment to this island. In the west around 360 A.D., Ambrosiaster and Marius Victorinus knew Symmachians and Nazoreans. Augustine identifies these groups with each other and explicitly states that remnants of them persisted to his own time — presumably he means in North Africa. In Syria, however, according to a statement by Theodoret of Cyprus who was certainly well enough informed about this region, the Ebionites were no longer in existence as autonomous groups about the year 450. It was at this time that Pella became an episcopal seat of the Catholic Church.

A New Source

Until 1966, this was all the information we had. In that year, Schlomo Pines published the discovery of an Arabic treatise written around the year 1000, with a Jewish Christian source. The greatest part of its material is

from early centuries of Christianity. The source reflects traditions and opinions of a Jewish Christian group, different from many of the Ebionites, but probably identical with the Nazarenes. Writing about his discovery, Pines states:

“The text appears to be of purely Jewish Christian origin and seems to relate some of the traditions of the sect. These traditions bear in part on the history of Christianity in the first century (and perhaps in the first half of the second) and do not appear to derive from a tradition which gives the point of view of the dominant churches. In other words, there is a fair chance that this text — which may have been written in the fifth century or later

— represents an independent, otherwise quite unknown tradition concerning some events which occurred in the earliest Christian community; this tradition, however distorted it may have been in the course of transmission, could conceivably go back in parts to the first period of Christianity” (Shlomo Pines, *Jewish Christians According to a New Source*, Jerusalem, 1966, p. 21).

Historically this text offers a location of the Jewish Christians among the Islamic tribes of the outer regions of Syria and elsewhere, a “clandestine” existence, to use the term of Schonfield. From the fifth century on, the Jewish Christians lived in small groups or wandered as individuals.

Part II, The Theology of the Nazarenes and the Ebionites

The Nazarenes are often referred to synonymously with the Ebionites. Jean Danielou is the most noted for this. This reference is only fair if you define Ebionism as the name for the entire Jewish Christian movement of which the Nazarenes were a part. S.G.F. Brandon feels there were Jewish Christians (Ebionites) living in Syria and Transjordan before 70 A.D. Indeed there were Ebionites who adopted Gnosticism (including rejecting portions of the Old Testament and embracing vegetarianism), Essenic notions, the theosophic stamp of the Elkesaites (in which we find the groundwork of the pseudo-Clementine system (P. Schaff, *Hist. of Christian Church*, Grand Rapids, 1950, p. 434)), the mysteries of the Mandeans, etc. The most numerous body of Ebionites, and most commonly referred to by that appellation, is the group which may well have arisen out of the Nazarene group, from the schisms occurring among the Jewish Christians in Transjordan following the Bar Cochba war of 135 A.D. This was the group which came to believe that Jesus was only a physical man, but became the Messiah as a result of his perfect obedience to the law of Moses. Based on the pseudo-Clementine documents, many historians conclude that they also felt that the whole ritual Law of Moses was necessary to salvation for all men and that Paul was an apostate heretic whose epistles should be discarded.

The Nazarenes, often called “moderate” Ebionites, were the legitimate remains of the apostolic Church — both ethnically and theologically. They united the Mosaic law

with belief in the virgin birth, the divinity of Jesus, and Jesus’ Messiahship. They practiced circumcision and the Sabbath in addition to the New Covenant Sacraments, and services of the Christian Church.

The Gospel in Aramaic, and possibly Hebrew, was used and there was no antipathy to Paul. Their eschatology focused on the resurrection from the dead, a future conversion of all Israel, and a millennial reign of Christ on earth (Ibid., pp. 430-432. See also Jerome’s *Commentary on Isaiah 9:1*).

After the Bar Cochba revolt of 132-135 A.D., the Nazarenes would not go back to Aelia and become part of a Gentile Church. It was at this time that the Catholic Church began to call them heretics, primarily due to their continued observance of the Sabbath, the Passover on the fourteenth of Nisan, and the annual Sabbaths, as well as dietary laws. Epiphanius suggests that, until 135 A.D., Christians everywhere observed Passover irrespective of the day of the week (Epiphanius, *Against Heresies*, 70, 10). W.D. Davies states that the Jewish Christians still observed the Feasts of Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles — understanding that the New Covenant through Jesus did not negate these aspects of the Old — and that, the Jewish Christians were the dominant element in Christianity until 70 A.D. (W.D. Davies, “Paul and Jewish Christianity,” *Jewish Christians*, 1972, p. 72).

The years 70 and 135 A.D., were times of crisis for the Nazarenes. The next time of crisis came at the time the Roman emperor Constantine was baptized into the Catholic

Church. An era of pagan persecution was passing away only to be replaced by the more terrible and prolonged persecutions by Christian Romans of any who would keep the Law of Moses (H. Schonfield, *History*, p. 97).

In the fourth-fifth century source attributed to the Nazarenes (or the remains of them) by Shlomo Pines, the Nazarenes attack the Romans (Catholic Christians) for abandoning the Mosaic law and for replacing it with different laws and customs. They also attack the Christology of the Catholic Church because of the emphasis on the person of Christ as opposed to their emphasis on Christ as prophet, proclaiming the coming of the Kingdom of God. Another charge against the "Great Church" is that they have replaced the Fast (Day of Atonement) with other fasts such as Lent. The descendants of the Nazarenes in this text further take to task the "Church Fathers" for their idea about Christ doing away with the Sabbath and instituting Sunday observance. They explain that Christ came to magnify the law (here in regard to how to observe the Sabbath) not to change or to do away with it. The Council of Nicea was viewed as a death warrant for Jewish Christians. Any who would observe the Sabbath rather than Sunday were to be executed (S. Pines, *Jewish Christians*, pp. 3-5, 31, 32, 34. For an analysis of the "salvation understanding" of the Nazarenes from this source see: D. Flugger, "Salvation Past and Future," *Numan*. 16:139-55, sp. 1969. 40. *Ibid.* p. 65). Under the sway of force — according to the text:

"... people who professed the religion of Christ came to do all that is reprehensible: they worshipped the cross, observed the Roman religious rites, and ate pork. Those who did not eat it were killed" (S. Pines, *Jewish Christians*, pp. 3-5, 31, 32, 34. For an analysis of the "salvation understanding" of the Nazarenes from this source see: D. Flugger, "Salvation Past and Future," *Numan*. 16:139-55, sp. 1969. 40. *Ibid.* p. 65).

Another condemnation of the Roman Church was that they had taken the Roman and Greek feast, called the "Nativity of Time," which celebrated the return of the sun in January, and had introduced various modifications into it and called it the "Nativity of Christ" (later observed in the West on December 25 — "Christmas"). The text denounces many additional customs in

the Christian churches as pagan (S. Pines, etc. *ibid.*).

It is interesting that the same period as the writing of this text, is also that of John Chrysostom's anti-Jewish sermons in Antioch, in which, he vehemently denounced the Judaizing tendencies of Christians who celebrate the Jewish rather than the Christian feasts. This well could have been in reaction to the group responsible for the writing of our text.

The author of our text claims that the Catholic Church hated the Jews because with their understanding of the Old Testament, they could see through the pretensions of the Catholics.

Summary

It would appear that, in the Nazarenes, apart from some later schisms and heretical movements, we have the true members of the Jerusalem Church led by the successors of James and the family of Jesus. They preserved, in the face of overwhelming persecution, the beliefs and customs transmitted to them by the Apostles. Their theological understanding from Jesus and James was that Jesus had not come to do away with the Law of Moses, but to refine it — making it a way of life not based on a temple and sacrificial system. While not antagonistic to the Gentile Christians, they warned of false leaders who would claim apostolic authority in replacing the Mosaic law with false customs and doctrines. They indicted the "Church Fathers" for their Alexandrian allegory, Platonic dualism, and antipathy to the Law of Moses. Out of an anti-Semitic bias, the "Great Church" labeled these true Christians as heretics and sought their destruction.

Though persecuted from without and troubled from within, they clung to their faith to death. Finally forced either to flight or to a clandestine existence, they almost disappeared; but, as individuals or as small groups, they hid among other "heretics," always clinging to their faith in Christ and their observance of the Law of Moses.

It is indeed ironic that the faith and family of Jesus came to be rejected as heretical while a syncretic blend of New Testament teaching, Gnosticism, paganism, Platonism, and allegory replaced it and became known as "orthodox Christianity." — by Dan Rogers Ω

Here are excerpts from the meaningful marriage ceremony currently used by the United Church of God (NKJV used throughout):

Surely there can be no greater human joy than to have a happy marriage, filled with giving and sharing. There is no deeper relationship among human beings than that achieved by a husband and wife in marriage.

Marriage is a natural union but a divine institution, ordained of God. It was established by the Creator God at creation and derives its authority from the divine laws of God, immutable and unchangeable.

When God created life upon the earth, He made human beings the pinnacle of the physical creation, fashioning them in His own image. He gave men and women creative minds with the ability to make choices, to develop plans and to build their lives upon those plans.

Men and women were created with the marvelous potential of eternal life in the family of God. And as a loving Father, God gave us the institution of marriage and the blessing of a family, that we might learn to love one another as He loves us.

After He created the first man from the dust of the ground, “The LORD God said, ‘It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him’,” **Genesis 2:18**.

The woman was made equal to the man in spiritual potential, the perfect complement to her husband. To emphasize His purpose for Adam and Eve, the Creator God did not make the woman directly from the ground, but from the very flesh and bone of the man. When the woman was presented to him, Adam said, “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh,” **Genesis 2:23**.

The Creator then united this first man and woman as husband and wife, saying, “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh,” **Genesis 2:24**.

“Then God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth,’” **Genesis 1:28**.

And so the institution of marriage and the cycle of human life began with God’s personal blessing.

Within the Church, it is God — not merely man or the laws of man — who joins together husband and wife as one flesh. Therefore, let us now consider the laws of God governing this union, and His instruction to husbands and wives as recorded in the Holy Scriptures.

In **Ephesians 5:21**, Paul talks about “submitting to one another in the fear of God.” The sacred marriage covenant calls upon you to yield yourselves to God and to each other — to hold each other in high esteem, giving honor and respect to one another with love and devotion.

Always give preference to the welfare of the other. Outgoing concern is the foundation of the marriage relationship.

[Read **Ephesians 5:22-25, 28, 33; I Peter 3:1, 5, 7.**]

The essential qualities of a happy and successful marriage are those that express an ever-growing, Godly love as described by the Apostle Paul to the Corinthian church. [Read **I Corinthians 13:4-8.**]

So we see that a loving relationship within marriage is a type of the spiritual relationship between God and the Church. And it is in your submission to God’s love that this marriage will be strengthened and protected.

As a loving Father, God wants to pour out upon us His richest blessings. He wants us all to be supremely happy. To that end He has given you, [his first name] and [her first name], this wonderful gift of marriage.

Because marriage is a divine institution, and we are asking God to join you as husband and wife, it is fitting and right that each of you should faithfully promise before God to accept the sacred marriage covenant according to the divinely ordained conditions established by Almighty God.

Do you then [his first name], faithfully promise and covenant with God, in the presence of these witnesses, to take [her full name] to be your lawful wedded wife — in sickness and in health, in good times and in difficult times, for as long as you both shall live — to love her, cherish her, honor her and provide for her? [Groom answers.]

And do you, [her first name], faithfully promise and covenant with God, in the presence of these witnesses, to take [his full name] to be your lawful wedded husband — in sickness and in health, in good times and in difficult times, for as long as you both shall live — to love him, cherish him, honor him and, as God has ordained, submit yourself to him? [Bride answers.]

Since all ordination or setting apart in the Scriptures is by the laying on of hands, would you please join your right hands and, with the laying on of my hands, I will ask the Eternal God to unite you as husband and wife. [Prayer.]

By the authority of Jesus Christ, I now pronounce you husband and wife!

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