

Superina Paolo

TEACHINGS and DEDUCTIONS
from the
New Testament

**A selection of particularly
significant and enlightening passages**

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**THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH
AND
THE UNIVERSAL COMMUNION**

In the Name of the Father and of His Son, Jesus Christ



As, at the beginning, there was perfect harmony between Yahweh and His whole creation, so it will be at the end, when all will live a new life of full spiritual communion with Yahweh and with each other

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In the Name of the Father
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TEACHINGS and DEDUCTIONS
from the
New Testament

A selection of particularly significant and enlightening passages

Text based on:

The Holy Bible - New International Version

The Gospel of Jesus Christ - a unified Gospel

The Acts of the Apostles Peter and Paul

The Letters of Peter, James, John and Jude

Paul's thought – from Paul's merged letters

The Revelation of John - disclosed

Thoughts – cogito ergo credo

Superina Paolo

GENERAL INDEX

Introductory note	Page 3
Introduction to the New Testament	4
The Gospel according to Mark	4
The Gospel according to Matthew	5
The Gospel according to Luke	5
The Gospel according to John	6
The Acts of the Apostles Peter and Paul	6
The Letters of Peter, James, John and Jude	7
Paul, his thought and his letters	9
The Revelation of John	14
Old Testament Books	15
New Testament Books	15
Teachings and deductions from:	
The Gospel of Jesus Christ – a unified Gospel	16
The Acts of the Apostles Peter and Paul	164
The Letters of Peter, James, John and Jude	207
Paul's thought – from Paul's merged letters	229
The Revelation of John - disclosed	326
Conclusive remarks	346
Summary of teachings and deductions	346
Index of chapters:	
The Gospel of Jesus Christ – a unified Gospel	364
The Acts of the Apostles Peter and Paul	369
The Letters of Peter, James, John and Jude	370
Paul's thought – from Paul's merged letters	372
The Revelation of John - disclosed	376
Index of main topics	378

PERSONAL INTRODUCTION: What follows is not intended and does not want to be a new or original study of the New Testament global message, but simply the summary of what I have learned from it and of it, then put in writing.

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

A comparison of what we read in the New Testament and of what the liturgical churches (Roman Catholic, Orthodox; Anglican, etc.) teach, make us immediately understand that there are abysmal differences between what is written in the New Testament and what those churches teach and practice.

Christian faith is and has to be as it clearly appears from reading, studying and analyzing the New Testament.

Whatever else is an arbitrary (even if in good faith) interpretation of or accretion to the New Testament's true teaching.

The purpose of **this study** (which is **not a New Testament commentary**) is not to criticize the liturgical churches, but to find out and put in evidence what, in Christianity, is really important. (For a New Testament commentary, see “The Gospel of Jesus Christ – a unified Gospel;” “The Acts of the Apostles Peter and Paul and The Letters of Peter, James, John and Jude;” “Paul's thought – from Paul's merged letters” and “The Revelation of John- disclosed”).

Note 1: For a proper comprehension of some New Testament passages and concepts which don't appear to be “Christian” or “Good News,” is important to remember that:

- 1) We usually don't realize how near Christianity was to becoming only another kind of Judaism. All the first Christians were Jews and all their traditions would have convinced them to keep the Good News for themselves, excluding completely the Gentiles.
- 2) All New Testament writers viewed the whole period beginning with Jesus Christ's birth as “the last days.” They understood this period to be the “last” of the days because neither former prophecy nor new revelation concerning the history of salvation indicated the coming of another era before the return of Jesus Christ.
- 3) The actual meaning of what they wrote is still too often concealed by considerations derived from Old Testament ideas -it could not have been easy, for the writers of the New Testament Books, to detach themselves immediately and completely from the ideas they grew up with.

Note 2: Every time “the Spirit of Yahweh” is cited (mainly in Acts), it has the wider meaning of “the spiritual communion and communication, always due to Yahweh's will and initiative, between Yahweh and men -and all ensuing actions.”

INTRODUCTION TO THE NEW TESTAMENT

The New Testament gives the early Christian Church's point of view about Jesus Christ's life and teachings. It contains 27 books, written between 50 AD and the end of the first century.

The four Gospels (written by Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John), which are the first four books of the New Testament, and the initial part of Acts (written by Luke), which is the fifth book, tell us almost everything we know about Jesus Christ. They tell us the Good News that Jesus, the Son of Yahweh, was born on Earth where he died for our sins, for the final salvation of all people. The actual purpose of the Gospels is to spread the Good News, not to write Jesus Christ's biography.

The 4 Gospels give a rough outline of Jesus Christ's life and teachings. 3 of them, called synoptic Gospels, closely resemble one another; though each author has his own distinctive arrangement and purpose.

Mark, the earliest Gospel, was written in Rome. It is mainly concerned to show that Yahweh has come and saved us through Jesus; everything leads up to the climax -Jesus Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection.

Matthew was written for the Jewish Christian community in Antioch. It was written particularly to show that Jesus was the promised Messiah.

Luke was directed to the Pagan converts. It shows Jesus as the Savior of all mankind. It was written at about the same time as Matthew, probably in Rome.

John is the more spiritual of the Gospels. Its purpose is to show that Jesus is the Son of Yahweh. It shows a developing Christian theology about Jesus Christ. It was written at the end of the first century.

The Acts of the Apostles, also written by Luke, takes where his Gospel stops. It tells of some outstanding incidents at the beginning of the Christian Church and gives a series of glimpses of the great moments and personalities of the early Church. It is the follow-up, we can say the book number 2, of Luke's Gospel.

The 13 Epistles of Paul are letters written to early Christian communities or to individuals. They are letters of instructions, guidance and admonition, written to strengthen the faith of the early converts and to put down errors.

The Letter to the Hebrews was written by an anonymous author to teach the Jewish Christians -some of whom were thinking of going back to Jewish faith- that Jesus completed the Jewish faith by making the final sacrifice for sin.

The 7 Catholic -General, or Universal- Epistles are letters addressed to the Church in general (2 of Peter, 1 of James, 3 of John, and 1 of Jude). Attributed to these apostles, these letters were probably written by their followers.

Revelation is a totally distinct kind of literature. Revelation is "apocalyptic" -a kind of highly symbolic writing, which often seems bizarre to the modern reader- and gives a series of figurative visions in symbolic and mysterious language. It was mainly meant to encourage and console the early Christians struggling under the Roman persecutions, and only then describes what will happen at the end of the world.

The Gospel according to Mark.

Mark was the son of a lady of Jerusalem whose name was Mary, and whose house was a meeting place of the early Church (Acts 12:12). Mark was also the cousin of Barnabas, and he accompanied Paul and Barnabas during the initial part of their first missionary journey, till Pergas in Pamphylia. Mark was in Rome with Paul when he wrote the letters to the Colossians (Colossians 4:10), to Philemon (Philemon 24) and to Timo-

thy (2 Timothy 4:11). Even more important, Mark was very close to Peter (1 Peter 5:13), and his Gospel is nothing other than a record of Peter's preaching material; of what Peter preached and taught about Jesus. (Papias, in the second century, went on collecting all the information available about the early days of the Church and wrote: "Mark, who was Peter's interpreter, wrote down accurately, though not in order, all that he recollected of what Jesus Christ had said or done. For he was not a hearer of the Lord or a follower of his. He followed Peter, who adapted his teachings to practical needs, without any attempt to give the Lord's words systematically.")

In Mark's Gospel we have what Mark remembered of Peter's preaching material. This Gospel was written (in Greek language) in Rome most probably about AD 65, just shortly after Peter died. The main recipient of it was the Church of Rome, to which Mark explains Jewish customs and translates Aramaic words. His main concern is to show that Yahweh has saved us through Jesus.

The Gospel according to Matthew

Matthew, whose name means "Gift of the Lord," was a tax collector who left his work to follow Jesus. In Mark and Luke he is called by his other name, Levi. Matthew was one of the 12 apostles and, since he was an eyewitness to the events of Jesus' life, it is hard to understand why he had to depend so heavily on Mark's account. Papias, again, gives us a very important information when he writes: "Matthew collected the sayings of Jesus in the Hebrew tongue." So, then, it seems that it was none other than Matthew who wrote that book which was the source from which all of them drew. This means that Matthew's Gospel follows Mark for what refers to the events of Jesus' life, and Matthew's own collection of sayings for what refers to Jesus' teaching.

Matthew's Gospel was written (in Greek language) for the Jewish Christian community in Syrian Antioch, most probably about AD 70. It was written particularly to demonstrate to the Jews that all the prophecies of the Old Testament are fulfilled in Jesus, and that, therefore, he must be the promised Messiah. The main interest of Matthew is in the Jews. Yet this does not mean that this Gospel is restricted to the Jews only; the Gospel has to be preached to the whole world (Mt 24:14) to make disciples of all nations (Mt 28:19).

The Gospel according to Luke

The author's name does not appear in the book, but all the evidence points to Luke. Luke was a non-Jew by birth, well educated in Greek culture, a physician by profession, Paul's "dear friend Luke, the doctor" (Colossians 4:14), and "fellow worker" (Philemon 24). He was a companion of Paul from his second missionary journey to his first imprisonment in Rome, a loyal friend (2 Timothy 4:11).

Luke is the only New Testament writer who was not a Jew. His Gospel was probably written (in Greek language) in Rome, in the 70s or the 80s. It is specifically directed to a man called Theophilus, most probably a high official in the Roman government. The message of this Gospel was intended for his own instruction (Lk 1:4) as well for the instruction of the other non-Jews among whom the book would be circulated. Luke wanted to show that the acceptance of the non-Jew Christians in Yahweh's Kingdom is based on the teaching of Jesus, that the preaching of the Gospel is for the whole world, and that Jesus is the Savior of all mankind. It is clear that Luke wrote mainly for the non-Jews. Theophilus was a non-Jew, as was Luke himself, and there is nothing in his Gospel that a non-Jew could not grasp and understand. Unlike Matthew, Luke is not

greatly interested in the life of Jesus as the fulfillment of Jewish prophecy. He very seldom quotes the Old Testament and he traces the descent of Jesus to Adam, the founder of the human race, not to Abraham, the founder of the Jewish race.

The Gospel according to John

The author of this book is the apostle John, “the disciple whom Jesus cherished” (Jn 13:23;19:26;20:2;21:7,20,24), even if it was most probably written, under the supervision of the aged John the Apostle by John the Elder, a member of the Church of Ephesus. John was the younger son of Zebedee, a well off fisherman on the sea of Galilee. With his brother James he followed Jesus, becoming one of the inner circle of the disciples.

The main characteristic of John's Gospel is that it looks quite different from the other three. It omits many things that they include. It has no account of the birth of Jesus, of his baptism, of his temptations; there is nothing of the Last Supper, of Gethsemane, and of the Ascension. It has none of Jesus' parable stories which appear in the other three Gospels. In the fourth Gospel Jesus' speeches are quite long and argumentative. On the other hand, John gives in his Gospel something which is missing in the other three; an account of what Jesus did at the beginning of his ministry, that is, before the imprisonment of John the Baptist. Furthermore, John gives a more accurate account of the duration of Jesus' ministry. From the other three Gospels it appears that it lasted only one year, when, actually, it was a matter of almost three years.

John's is the more spiritual of the Gospels. Its purpose is to show that Jesus is the Son of Yahweh. It was written (in Greek language) in Ephesus toward the end of the first century, circa AD 85 or later. It was written in a way that would appeal to Greek thinkers, for them to be introduced directly to the values of Christian salvation without being routed through Judaism. One of its many characteristics consists of the quite developed level of theology, focused mainly to rebuke the various heresies which were spreading around at that time. It was written to communicate not only what Jesus did say but, more important, what Jesus meant.

The Acts of the Apostles Peter and Paul

Although the book never says so, from the earliest times Luke has been considered the writer. In the Muratorian Canon (AD 170), there is the explicit statement that Luke was the author of both his Gospel and of Acts. Eusebius, in Ecclesiastical History, 3.4 (AD 325) lists numerous sources identifying Luke as the author. As Luke's Gospel, even Acts is addressed to Theophilus. In Acts Luke takes pains to show that the Christians are good and loyal citizens of the Roman Empire. Luke was writing in the days when the Christians were disliked and persecuted. In the meantime he wants to show that Christianity is for all men of every country. But the real purpose of Acts is to report the words of the risen Christ and the descent of the Spirit of Yahweh -spiritual communion Yahweh/man- on all men willing to receive Him.

The title of the book in Greek is “Acts of apostolic men,” not “The acts of the apostles.” In effect the book neither claims nor gives an exhaustive account of the acts of all the apostles. It is only about the apostle Peter that the book gives any real information, and very soon he passes from the scene as a leading character, replaced by Paul, whose life and missionary activity are accurately reported.

Luke did write Acts (in Greek language) most probably in Rome and in sequence with his Gospel, which means in the 80s or 90s.

The Letters of Peter, James, John and Jude

1 Peter

The author identifies himself as Peter the apostle (v. 1:1), and the contents and character of the letter support his authorship. The letter reflects the history and terminology of the Gospels and Acts (notably of Peter's speeches); its themes and concepts reflect Peter's experiences and his associations during Jesus Christ's earthly ministry and in the apostolic period (that he was acquainted, e.g., with Paul and his letters is made clear in 2 Pe 3:15-16; Gal 1:18; 2:1-21.) 1 Peter was recognized as authoritative and as the work of the apostle Peter from the beginning of the Christian Church.

Anyway, it must be noted that the idiomatic Greek of this letter, which was most probably beyond Peter's competence, is clearly due to Silas -as declared by Peter himself in v. 5:12 (It is well known that a secretary in those days often composed documents in good Greek for those who did not have the language facility to do so.)

This letter, with the persecution referred to in vv. 4:14-16; 5:8-9, reflects the situation that was developing in Nero's time (AD 54-68). So the letter can be dated in the early 60s. It cannot be earlier since it shows familiarity with at least some of Paul's Prison Letters (Colossians and Ephesians.) And it cannot be later than 67/68, since Peter was martyred at the end of Nero's reign.

In v. 1:1 Peter clearly states that he is writing for all Christians (mainly former Pagans, as there is no mention of any question of the Jewish Law, questions that always arose with Jew-Christians) scattered throughout Asia Minor.

2 Peter

The author identifies himself as Simon Peter the apostle (v. 1:1), asserts that this is his second letter to the readers (v. 3:1) and claims to be an eyewitness of the Transfiguration (v. 1:16-18).

The Greek of 2 Peter is quite different than that of 1 Peter because 1 Peter was written "with the help of Silas" (1 Pe 5:12) and 2 Peter, most probably, directly by Peter.

This letter was written toward the end of Peter's life, after he had written another letter (1 Peter) to the same readers (v. 3:1). Since Peter was martyred at the end of Nero's reign (AD 54-68), 2 Peter was likely written between AD 65 and 68.

James

The author identifies himself as James (v. 1:1), and was one of the four brothers of Jesus Christ -the oldest, since he heads the list in Mt 13:55. At first he did not believe in Jesus being the Messiah and even challenged him and misunderstood his mission (Jn 7:2-5). Later he became prominent in the Church -He saw the resurrected Jesus (1 Co 15:7); Paul called him a "pillar" of the Church (Gal 2:9); Paul, on his first post-conversion visit to Jerusalem, saw James, "The Lord Jesus Christ's brother" (Gal 1:19); Paul did the same on his last visit (Ac 21:18); when Peter was rescued from prison, he told his friends to tell James (Ac 12:17); James was a leader in the important Council of Jerusalem (Ac 15:13). He was martyred about AD 62.

Probably this letter was written before AD 50 -Its distinctively Jewish nature suggests that it was composed when the Church was still predominantly Jewish; it reflects a simple Church order (officers of the Church are still called "elders" and "teachers;") no reference is made to the controversy over the circumcision of Pagan converts; the Hebrew term "synagogue" is still used to designate the meetings of the Church.

The recipients of this letter are explicitly identified in v. 1:1: “The twelve tribes scattered in the world,” expression that properly applies to Jew-Christians. Furthermore, a Jewish audience would be more in keeping with the obviously Jewish nature of the letter.

1 John

The author is John son of Zebedee -the apostle, also author of a Gospel and of Revelation. He was a first cousin of Jesus Christ (his mother was Salome, a sister of Mary), a fisherman, one of Jesus Christ's inner circle and “the disciple whom Jesus cherished” (Jn 13:23). 1 John does not tell who its author is, and the earliest identification of him as John the apostle comes from Ireneus (AD 140-203), Clement of Alexandria (AD 155-215), Tertullian (AD 150-222) and Origen (AD 185-253). No other identification was ever suggested by the early Church.

The date of writing is not known but, since the letter builds on concepts and themes found also in John's Gospel, it is reasonable to set it between AD 85 and 95.

1 Jn 2:12-14,19; 3:1; 5:13 make it clear that this letter was addressed to believers, but without indicating who they were or where they lived. This, and the fact that no one is mentioned by name, suggests that it was a circular letter sent to a number of Churches to expose false teachers and to contrast an earlier form of the Gnostic heresy.

2 and 3 John

The author is John the apostle, and these two letters, addressed to individuals, have long been viewed as personal appendages to 1 John, which is clearly general in its address.

Most probably, 2 and 3 John were written either together or shortly after 1 John, that is, between AD 85 and 95.

2 John is addressed to an unknown Christian lady and her family, giving her advice against false traveling teachers. 3 John is addressed to a Christian man named Gaius, giving him advice against a dictatorial Church leader, Diotrephes.

Jude

The author identifies himself as Jude (or Judas), a “brother of James” (v. 1:1), that is, a brother of Jesus Christ.

As it is commonly accepted that 2 Peter makes use of Jude, then Jude has to be dated prior to 2 Peter, probably about AD 65.

The description of those to whom Jude addressed his letter is very general (v. 1:1) and could apply both to Jew and Pagan converts. As the heresy depicted in vv. 1:4-18 was quite widespread, this was most probably a circular letter sent to a number of Churches to contrast the early Gnostic heresy.

Note: The Gnosticism addressed to in the New Testament is an early form of the heresy, much simpler than the intricate system developed in the third century.

Central teaching: Spirit is entirely good, matter entirely evil.

The five main errors:

1. Man's body is only matter, therefore completely evil. Yahweh is pure spirit, therefore perfectly good.

2. Salvation of the soul is achieved escaping from the body; not by faith in Jesus Christ but by special knowledge (gnosis).

3. Jesus Christ's humanity was denied saying that the divine Christ joined the human Jesus at baptism and left him before he died.

4. Since the body is evil, it has to be treated harshly.

5. Since matter -and not the breaking of Yahweh's law- is considered evil, sinning by the body is of no moral consequence.

Paul, his thought and his letters

From the beginning of Christianity it was clear that its message was meant for and to be delivered to all men all around the world. But at its beginning Christianity was essentially a Jewish matter so, clearly, one thing was necessary -a man who could somehow be a bridge between the Jewish and the Gentile Greek-Roman worlds. And Yahweh provided this man, Paul, a Jew who was to be the apostle to the Gentiles.

Paul was brought up in a Gentile city -Tarsus, in the Roman province of Cilicia- and was a proud Roman citizen. He grew up in an atmosphere in which he was as familiar with Greek and Roman thought as he was with the Jewish thought of his own nation. He was a man completely Jewish, and also a man who knew the Romans and the Greeks as few Jews knew them. He was the man prepared by Yahweh to be the bridge by which the Gentiles might come to Yahweh.

Paul's life as an apostle of Jesus Christ was absolutely dynamic for he was involved in continuously changing situations, moving from place to place, facing one error after another. He was living in days when the Church was in ferment, long before it had worked out an institutional orthodoxy. As a consequence, his "theology" was not the result of a careful study -an intellectually fully satisfactory system. His theology, his knowledge of Yahweh and of Jesus Christ, was continuously developing, deepening and widening to meet the new situations which the life of the growing Church brought to him.

At the beginning of all his letters Paul always clearly refers to Jesus Christ as the Son of Yahweh, showing that he believed that Jesus Christ stood in a unique relationship with Yahweh. And Paul often equates the affection, the gospel, the grace and the work of Jesus Christ and of Yahweh, but he never identifies Jesus Christ and Yahweh.

By writing that "In Jesus Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form" (Col 2:9), Paul clearly states that Jesus Christ is a different person than Yahweh, a person having both a physical, human body -from his mother, a woman- and the divine nature -from Yahweh, his Father.

Further than that, Paul always declares that Jesus Christ is subordinate to Yahweh. He writes, "The head of every man is Jesus Christ, and the head of Jesus Christ is Yahweh" (1 Co 11:3). And, "You are of Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ is of Yahweh" (1 Co 3:23). And, in his picture of the end of things, "When... the Son himself will be made subject to Him [Yahweh]" (1 Co 15:28). The work of the Son is always done in obedience to the Father. Yahweh stands behind every word, action and event in the life of Jesus Christ.

A very important concept in Paul's thought, a concept which is often badly misunderstood, is the so called "pre-existence" of the Son. When he writes of "His [Yahweh's] eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus" (Eph 3:11), Paul actually says that even before the creation of time and of the world, the work of Jesus Christ was in the mind, was part of the plan and the purpose of Yahweh. This means that Yahweh did not begin the redemption of men when Jesus Christ came into this world, but that His redeeming action had been at work throughout all ages; in other terms, that Yahweh did never condemn men but had always been fond of them.

Another very important concept in Paul's thought, again too often badly misunderstood, is the so called "incarnation" of the Son. "Incarnation" means that in Jesus Christ Yahweh came into this world, into the physical life of man. The actual explanation is that, apart from Yahweh's genetic contribution in His Son's Conception, when Jesus Christ lived on Earth, between Father and Son developed a very deep spiritual communion, which allowed Yahweh to "see" the world through His Son's human eyes.

It is clear that for Paul the death of Jesus Christ on the Cross stood at the center of the Christian faith. Paul was certain that Jesus Christ died on behalf of all men, that his death achieved something for men that men by themselves could never have achieved. Paul is clear that it was the death of Jesus Christ which brought reconciliation between men and Yahweh, restoring the lost relationship of intimacy and affection.

It is also obvious that even Jesus Christ's Resurrection was for Paul, as it was and is for all Christians, central to the Christian faith. By reading the Gospels, we find that Jesus Christ never foretold his death without foretelling his rising again. He never thought of the shame without the triumph. The humiliation of the Cross and the glory of the Resurrection were integrally and inseparably connected. And Paul thought of Jesus Christ as the Savior who died and the Lord who rose again. He mentions specifically this connection in all his letter. Furthermore, for Paul, the Resurrection was an act of Yahweh, who raised Jesus Christ from the dead; a demonstration of Yahweh's power and of His decision of redeeming all men; the final proof that Jesus Christ was Yahweh's Messiah.

The thirteen letters written by Paul and the letter to the Hebrews -clearly written by a person very close to him- reveal very much about Paul's thought.

Paul's letters were written immediately, openly and sincerely to face some particular and threatening situation. As such, they are absolutely not to be considered moral, religious or theological treatises. Furthermore, it is evident that Paul was thinking only of the people he was writing to and that he had no idea that one day his letters would become fundamental part of Christian Scripture.

Being letters, it is sometimes difficult to understand them. We do not fully know the circumstances and the problems Paul was dealing with. It is only from the letters themselves that we can deduce the actual situation. So, to understand Paul's letters and his thought, we always must first try to understand the situation he was dealing with.

First letter to the Thessalonians [1 Th]

This letter is the first one Paul wrote. He sent it from Corinth (Ac 18:1,11) in the year AD 51 to the Church that he had started in Thessalonica (Ac 16:1-9). Paul had to leave Thessalonica abruptly (Ac 17:5-10) after a brief stay. Recent converts from paganism were thus left with little spiritual support in the middle of persecution. Paul's purpose in writing this letter was to encourage the new converts in their trials (vv. 3:3-5), to give instructions concerning godly living (vv. 4:1-8), to urge some not to neglect their daily work (vv. 4:11-12) and to give assurance concerning the future of the believers who die before Jesus Christ returns. Certain perplexing questions about Christians who have died led Paul to reflect on the Christians' hope. And, in his typical fashion, he spread various instructions on Christian living throughout the letter.

In the first half of this letter, Paul outlines both his joy and deep concern for the Thessalonian Church. In the second half, he discusses their Christian life and he answers their questions about the second coming of Jesus Christ.

Second letter to the Thessalonians [2 Th]

Paul wrote this brief letter to the Christians in Thessalonica from Corinth (Ac 18:11) in the year AD 51/52, approximately six months after his first letter to them. As the situation in the Thessalonian Church had not changed substantially, Paul's purpose in writing is very much the same as in his first letter to them. He had also to correct some misunderstandings regarding the Christians' hope that had resulted from his first letter. Furthermore, problems concerning the daily work of Christians, evident earlier (1 Th 4:11-12), had intensified and required an answer from Paul.

Most of ch.s 1 and 3 of this letter recall what Paul had written in his first letter to the Thessalonians. Ch. 2, however, is significantly different; it teaches that before Jesus Christ returns, the "man of lawlessness" -the Antichrist- will be revealed.

Letter to the Galatians [Ga]

Paul wrote this letter from Syrian Antioch (Ac 18:22) in the year AD 53, to the Churches in the Roman Province of Galatia (Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe) founded on his first missionary journey (Ac 13:13-14). There were Jew-Christians who believed, among other things, that a number of Jewish ceremonial practices were still binding for the Christian Church. They insisted that Gentile converts to Christianity abide to Jewish rites, especially circumcision. They may have been motivated by a desire to avoid the persecution of Zealot Jews who objected their fraternizing with Gentiles (v. 6:12). They argued that Paul was not an authentic apostle and that he had removed certain legal requirements in order to make the message more appealing to the Gentiles. Paul answered by clearly establishing his apostolic authority and, so, substantiating the Gospel he preached. By introducing additional requirements for justification, his adversaries had perverted the Gospel of grace and were pushing the Gentile converts into the bondage of legalism. It is only by Yahweh's grace through faith in Jesus Christ that men are justified, and it is by faith alone that they are to live their new life in spiritual freedom.

First letter to the Corinthians [1 Co]

When Paul was working out of Ephesus on his third missionary journey (Ac 19), there was regular communication by letters and personal messengers between him and the Church he had started in Corinth (Ac 18:1-17; 1 Co 16:8). Because a number of knotty problems had developed in that Church, Paul sent this letter written about the year AD 55 toward the end of his three years residency in Ephesus, to give instruction and advice.

Paul had received information from several sources concerning the conditions existing in the Church at Corinth: Of the factions that had developed, and of serious moral irregularities. Immorality had plagued the Corinthian assembly almost from the beginning. His chief goal was to encourage unity and affection within the Corinthian believers. Such qualities will never occur without humility and discipline. In addition, as the spiritual father of that young, immature congregation, Paul felt he had to insist on their obedience.

In this letter Paul deals, one by one, with the problems that had developed in the Church at Corinth. The issues being discussed are: Division in the Church, Church discipline, sexual standards, marriage, Christian freedom, women in the Church, spiritual gifts, and doubts concerning the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Second letter to the Corinthians [2 Co]

Paul sent this letter from Macedonia in the year AD 55, several months after writing his first letter to the Corinthians, after he had left Ephesus for Macedonia (Ac 20:1; 2 Co 7:5; 9:2-4). During the interval between the two letters, controversy had grown against Paul, with the “false teachers” challenging his integrity and his authority as an apostle. Because he had announced a change in his itinerary, with the result that he would now pay one long visit instead of two short visits, these adversaries were asserting that his word was not to be trusted. They were also saying that he was not a genuine apostle and that he was pocketing the money they had collected for the poverty-stricken believers in Jerusalem. Part of this second letter, therefore, is Paul's self-defense. For the Corinthians who accepted his authority he summarized his ministry as well as how much suffering he was enduring for Jesus Christ's sake. And in two chapters of this letter Paul attempted to raise money for the Church in Jerusalem, a Church experiencing poverty and hardship.

Letter to the Romans [Ro]

Paul wrote this letter in the spring of the year AD 57, when visiting Corinth at the end of his third missionary journey (Ac 20:2-3) and was ready to return to Jerusalem with the offerings from the Gentile Churches for the poverty-stricken believers in Jerusalem (vv. 15:25-28). In this letter, which is a letter of self-introduction to the Christians in Rome, whom he hoped to visit soon (vv. 1:13; 15:23-24), he explained the basic message of the Gospel.

The primary theme of this letter -which is a careful and systematic theological introduction to his ministry- is the Gospel, Yahweh's plan of salvation for all mankind, Jew and Gentile alike (vv. 1:16-17). It tells also of the right relation with Yahweh (v. 1:17), which includes justification by faith, and of some related ideas as guilt and sanctification. After a brief introduction, Paul wrote the first section (vv. 1:18-3:20) to demonstrate that all men -Jew and Gentile alike- are sinners -condemned before Yahweh- and, so, in need of salvation. Salvation that Yahweh has provided by sending His Son Jesus Christ to die on the Cross for the sins of all men (vv. 3:21-8:39).

Letter to the Ephesians [Eph]

Paul wrote this letter in the year AD 60, when imprisoned in Rome (Ac 24:27; 28:30), to the Church he had started in Ephesus (Ac 19), of which he made a center for evangelism for about three years, and the Church there flourished for some time, but later needed some warnings (Rev 2:1-7). During his imprisonment, he did reflect on Yahweh's plan to rescue the entire humankind from the power of sin and Satan. It is in Jesus Christ and by the power of his Resurrection that Yahweh is accomplishing this plan; He uses that power to give us new life in Jesus Christ and to unite us into one family in the Church.

This letter does not address any particular error or heresy. Paul wrote it to explain in a better way Yahweh's eternal purpose and grace so his readers might appreciate the high goals Yahweh has for the Church. Paul emphasizes that we have been saved, not only for personal benefit, but also to bring praise and glory to Yahweh. The climax of Yahweh's purpose, “when the times will have reached their fulfillment,” is to bring all things in the universe together under Jesus Christ (v. 1:10).

Letter to the Colossians [Col]

Paul wrote this letter to the Church in Colosse in the year AD 60, during his first imprisonment in Rome, where he spent at least two years under house arrest (Ac 24:27; 28:16-31). He had heard about certain false teachers who were influencing the Church, and he used this letter as a defense of his Gospel.

Paul never explicitly describes the false teaching he opposes in the Colossian letter. The nature of the heresy must be inferred from the statements he made in opposition to the false teachers. Some of the elements of this heresy were: *Ceremonialism* (strict rules about the kind of permissible food, drink, religious festivals and circumcision), *Asceticism* (“Do not do” rules), *Angel worship*, and *Reliance on human wisdom and tradition*. From these elements we can understand that the Colossian heresy was a mixture of an extreme form of Judaism and an early stage of Gnosticism.

Letter to Philemon [Phm]

Paul wrote this letter while imprisoned in Rome (Ac 24:27; 28:30), at the same time he wrote Colossians, that is, in the year AD 60. Onesimus, a runaway slave, had contacted Paul in prison, through whom he had become a Christian and was now willing to return to his master. Paul therefore wrote to the owner, Philemon, a Christian, pleading with him to forgive Onesimus, to take him back without the usual harsh punishment such slaves received and to accept him as a Christian brother.

Letter to the Philippians [Php]

Paul wrote this letter in the year AD 61, when detained under house arrest in Rome (Ac 24:27; 28:30), to the Church he had started in Philippi (Ac 16:11-40). Paul's frequent references to joy that fill the letter show the positive relationship that he enjoyed with this Church. He wrote to encourage the Philippians in their Christian life, giving particular attention to the concept of selfless sacrifice that stands at the center of the Christian faith.

First letter to Timothy [1 Ti]

After Paul was released from prison in Rome (Ac 28:30), he continued his missionary work, traveling part of the time with Timothy and Titus. Paul left behind Timothy as pastor in Ephesus (1 Ti 1:3) while he went to Macedonia, and some time later, in the year AD 65, wrote this letter to encourage Timothy in his pastoral duties, to instruct him how to supervise the growing Ephesian Church and to warn him about false heretic doctrines infiltrating the Church, doctrines that combined Gnosticism, decadent Hebraism and false asceticism. Paul's instructions centered around Church conduct and the establishment of proper order in the Church.

Letter to Titus [Tit]

After Paul was released from prison in Rome (Ac 28:30), he continued his missionary work, traveling part of the time with Timothy and Titus. Paul left behind Titus as pastor in Crete (Tit 1:5) to oversee the organization of the Church there. To help accomplish this task, in the year AD 65, from Philippi, Paul wrote this letter of pastoral advice, where Paul gives Titus personal authorization and guidance in meeting opposition, instructions about faith and conduct, and warnings about false teachers. Paul also informed Titus of his future plans for him.

Second letter to Timothy [2 Ti]

This is Paul's last letter, written shortly before his death (2 Ti 4:6-8), in the year AD 67 in Rome from the Mamertine dungeon. In it Paul warned Timothy of the hard times ahead, due to increasing persecution and the proliferation of false teachers infiltrating the Church. But Paul went on encouraging Timothy to persevere in the Christian faith and in his work as pastor.

Letter to the Hebrews [Heb]

Though for many centuries this letter was commonly called "The epistle of Paul to the Hebrews," it is clear that Paul was not the author. Even if there is no disharmony between the teaching of Hebrews and Paul's letters, the specific emphases and the writing styles are markedly different. Contrary to Paul's practice, the author of Hebrews does not identify himself. Moreover, v. 2:3 indicates that the author had neither been with Jesus Christ nor received special revelation from the Risen Lord, as had Paul. From the letter itself it is clear that the writer had authority in the Church and was a Jew-Christian well versed in the Old Testament. Probably the author was either Barnabas, the man who accompanied Paul in his first missionary journey, or Apollos, who was associated with Paul in the early years of the Church in Corinth.

Clearly, Hebrews was written before the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in AD 70. In effect, had it been written later, there would have been mention of the Temple's destruction and of the end of the Jewish sacrificial system. Furthermore, the author uses the present tense when speaking of the Temple and of the priestly activities.

This letter was written to a group of Jewish Christians who, because of persecution, were tempted to revert to Hebraism. The author therefore wrote to encourage them to persevere in their faith and to find maturity through dependence on Yahweh the Lord. He reminded his readers of Jesus Christ, who came as the fulfillment of the Old Testament. No person and no institution of the Old Testament is greater than Jesus Christ, for he is the only man Son of Yahweh and he answers to all our needs.

The Revelation of John

The Revelation is quite unlike the rest of the New Testament. It looks unworthy to be taken into account, negative and unacceptable for the Christian faith -too many people did use and are still using it to draw celestial time tables of what is to come. In all the images and visions of the book the teaching of Jesus Christ is never mentioned, and the inspiration of the Spirit of Yahweh is never perceptible in it.

By this cryptic book, John wants to encourage and to strengthen the faith of the Christians, who were suffering under the harsh persecution launched by the Roman Emperor Domitian -and, before of him, by Nero- assuring them that the hostile power of Rome would fall in a not too far future and, then, describing what will happen at the end of times, with the final defeat of evil and Satan, and with the full establishment of Yahweh's Kingdom.

The Revelation is often difficult and unintelligible to the modern reader, but it uses pictures and ideas which those who read it at the time of its writing would have known and understood without any particular problem.

The author identifies himself four times as John (vv. 1:1,4,9; 22:8), without telling which John. Anyway, from the beginning of the Church it has been considered that this John was the Apostle.

The Revelation was written about the year 95 AD, when the Christians were entering a time of heavy persecution, during the latter part of Domitian's reign (81-96 AD). But some parts could have been written earlier, during Nero's reign (54-68 AD) and persecution.

Old Testament Books

Genesis	Ge	Song of Songs	Ss
Exodus	Ex	Wisdom	Wis
Leviticus	Le	Sirach	Sir
Numbers	Nu	Isaiah	Isa
Deuteronomy	Dt	Jeremiah	Jer
Joshua	Jos	Lamentations	La
Judges	Jdg	Baruch	Bar
Ruth	Ru	Ezekiel	Eze
1 Samuel	1Sa	Daniel	Da
2 Samuel	2Sa	Hosea	Hos
1 Kings	1Ki	Joel	Joel
2 Kings	1Ki	Amos	Am
1 Chronicles	1Ch	Obadiah	Ob
2 Chronicles	2Ch	Jonah	Jnh
Ezra	Ezr	Micah	Mic
Nehemia	Ne	Nahum	Na
Tobias	Tob	Habakkuk	Hab
Judit	Jud	Zephaniah	Zep
Esther	Est	Haggai	Hag
Job	Job	Zechariah	Zec
Psalms	Ps	Malachi	Mal
Proverbs	Pr	1 Maccabees	1Mac
Ecclesiastes	Ecc	2 Maccabees	2Mac

New Testament Books

Gosp. Mark	Mk	Philippians	Php
Gosp. Matthew	Mt	1 Timothy	1Ti
Gosp. Luke	Lk	2 Timothy	2Ti
Gosp. John	Jn	Titus	Tit
Acts	Ac	Hebrews	Heb
1 Thessalonians	1Th	James	Jm
2 Thessalonians	2Th	1 Peter	1Pe
Galatians	Gal	2 Peter	2Pe
1 Corinthians	1Co	1 John	1Jn
2 Corinthians	2Co	2 John	2Jn
Romans	Ro	3 John	3Jn
Ephesians	Eph	Jude	Jd
Colossians	Col	Revelation	Rev
Philemon	Phm		

Teachings and deductions from:**THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST**

**A unified Gospel, according to
Mark, Matthew, Luke, John**

Introduction - Jesus is conceived**Introduction** [Luke 1:1-4]

(Lk1:1) Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, (2) just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the Word. (3) Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, (4) so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.

When reading, studying and truly trying to understand the Scriptures, nobody ever can be completely satisfied with anyone else's explanation. One must have his own. Real comprehension is never a second-hand thing. All explanations are important, and must be properly taken into account, but beyond them all comes the individual, personal experience of investigating, meditating and, finally, understanding.

The Son of Yahweh [Mark 1:1 John 1:1-5;10-14;16-18]

(Mk1:1) The beginning of the Gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of Yahweh.

(Jn1:1) At the beginning there was Yahweh's Logos, and the Logos was with Yahweh, and the Logos was Yahweh. (2) The Logos was with Yahweh at the beginning.

(3) Through Yahweh all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made. (4) In Him was Life, and that Life generated the Light of men. (5) He, the Light, shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood and has not overcome him.

(10) He came in the world, and though the world was made by Yahweh, the world did not recognize him. (11) He came to that which was Yahweh's own, but Yahweh's own did not receive him. (12) Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of Yahweh (13)-children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of Yahweh.

(14) Yahweh generated a man who made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only begotten Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. (16) From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another. (17) For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. (18) No one has ever seen Yahweh., but the One and Only begotten Son, who is at the Father's side, has made Him known.

This passage is, practically, a summary of all the really important points:

- Yahweh is the only creator of everything and everybody.
- There is no other god, not even as a "trinity."
- Jesus Christ is Yahweh's son, a man, not a "god." His only son with the human race.
- Jesus Christ has opened to everybody the possibility of being in spiritual communion with Yahweh.

-The coming of Jesus Christ marks the passage from legalism (Moses' Law) to Yahweh's grace.

Note. The term "Logos" is left un-translated because of the impossibility of rendering it by one word only. Logos is Yahweh Himself (the Jews used it as a periphrasis for His Name, which could not be pronounced), His Spirit in action, creating. In effect John's "Logos" is Genesis' "Spirit of Yahweh" (Genesis 1:1-24).

The birth of John the Baptist foretold [Luke 1:5-25]

(Lk1:5) In the time of Herod king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah; his wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron. (6) Both of them were upright in the sight of Yahweh, observing all the Lord's commandments and regulations blamelessly. (7) But they had no children, because Elizabeth was barren; and they were both well along in years.

(8) Once, when Zechariah's division was on duty and he was serving as priest before Yahweh, (9) he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the Temple of Yahweh and burn incense. (10) And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshippers were praying outside.

(11) Then an angel of Yahweh appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. (12) When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. (13) But the angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to give him the name of John. (14) He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, (15) for he will be great in the sight of Yahweh. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Spirit of Yahweh even from his mother's womb. (16) Many of the people of Israel will he bring back to Yahweh their God. (17) And he will go on before Him, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearths of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous -to make ready a people prepared for Yahweh."

(18) Zechariah asked the angel, "How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years."

(19) The angel answered, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of Yahweh, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news. (20) And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their proper time."

(21) Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah and wondering why he stayed so long in the Temple. (22) When he came out, he could not speak to them. They realized he had seen a vision in the Temple, for he kept making signs to them but remained unable to speak.

(23) When his time of service was completed, he returned home. (24) After this his wife Elizabeth became pregnant and for five months remained in seclusion. (25) "Yahweh has done this for me," she said. "In these days He has shown His favor and taken away my disgrace among the people."

A clear example of the spiritual communion between Yahweh and men, as it was in Old Testament times, due to Yahweh's initiative only and reserved to few chosen people. And John had been specially chosen by Yahweh for a particular prophetic mission. As such he did receive Yahweh's special support from the moment of his conception.

The birth of Jesus foretold [Luke 1:26-38]

(Lk1:26)In the sixth month, Yahweh sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, (27)to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. (28)The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! Yahweh is with you."

(29)Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. (30)But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with Yahweh. (31)You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. (32)He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord Yahweh will give him the throne of his father David, (33)and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; his Kingdom will never end."

(34)"How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

(35)The angel answered, "The Spirit of Yahweh will come upon you, and the Power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the Holy One to be born will be called the Son of Yahweh. (36)Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. (37)For nothing is impossible with Yahweh."

(38)"I am Yahweh's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said." Then the angel left her.

To write that Mary was a virgin points, quite simply, to the fact that Jesus, her son to be, will have no human father.

Mary was found worthy of carrying Yahweh's human son and as such, was chosen. No choice was given her: to be chosen by Yahweh means to accept, act and live as He wants.

In this special, unique case, Mary not only was in spiritual communion with Yahweh; she received in herself His creative, life giving, Spirit to generate His human son.

Note. Here it is necessary to contrast two wide-spread beliefs:

1) That all human beings are marked by the stain of the so called "original sin."

Now, by eating the forbidden fruit, Adam and Eve "sinned" for the first time in their lives and in the history of mankind. This was the "Original Sin" -the sin committed at the beginning of mankind for which only Adam and Eve were responsible and bore the punishment. All other human beings, who are their descendants, did not and do not have any moral involvement nor responsibility, even if they are suffering the consequences of it, having to live outside the garden.

2) That Yahweh had preserved Mary from the stain of the original sin.

If true, it means that Mary had no freedom of choice, that she was predestined -obliged- to carry Yahweh's son, without the need of personally being worthy of it. But, as seen above, no new-born human being partakes in Adam and Eve's sin. Proof of this is that "The Kingdom of Yahweh belongs to the little children" [The little children and Jesus (Mark 10:13-16 Matthew 19:13-15 Luke 18:15-17)]. And the Kingdom cannot belong to sinners of any kind.

Mary visits Elizabeth [Luke 1:39-45]

(Lk1:39)At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, (40)where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. (41)When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Spirit of Yahweh. (42)In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among wo-

men, and blessed is the child you will bear! (43)But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? (44)As the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. (45)Blessed is she who has believed that what Yahweh has said to her will be accomplished!"

In that moment Yahweh entered in spiritual communion with Elizabeth, so to make her aware of Mary's special condition, and of the two totally different kinds of His intervention in her and in Mary's case.

At the sound of Mary's voice, Elizabeth's baby leaped for joy in his mother womb. Only the special relation between Yahweh and John -filled with the Spirit of Yahweh from the moment of his conception- and Yahweh's fatherhood of Jesus can explain this remarkable response in the unborn baby.

Mary's song [Luke 1:46-56]

(Lk1:46)And Mary said: "My soul glorifies Yahweh (47)and my spirit rejoices in Yahweh my Savior, (48)for He has been mindful of the humble state of His servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, (49)for the Mighty One has done great things for me -holy is His Name. (50)His mercy extends to those who fear Him, from generation to generation. (51)He has performed mighty deeds with His arm; He has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. (52)He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. (53)He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. (54)He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful (55)to Abraham and his descendants, forever, exactly as He said to our fathers." (56)Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home.

Mary was fully aware of her very special -absolutely unique- situation.

The birth of John the Baptist [Luke 1:57-66]

(Lk1:57)When it was time for Elizabeth to have her baby, she gave birth to a son. (58)Her neighbors and relatives heard that Yahweh had shown her great mercy, and they shared her joy.

(59)On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him after his father Zechariah, (60)but his mother spoke up and said, "No! He is to be called John."

(61)They said to her, "There is no one among your relatives who has that name."

(62)Then they made signs to his father, to find out what he would like to name the child. (63)He asked for a writing tablet, and to everyone's astonishment he wrote, "His name is John." (64)Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue was loosed, and he began to speak, praising Yahweh. (65)The neighbors were all filled with awe, and throughout the hill country of Judea people were talking about all these things. (66)Everyone who heard this wondered about it, asking, "What then is this child going to be?" For Yahweh's hand was with him.

Zechariah's song [Luke 1:67-80]

(Lk1:67)His father Zechariah was filled with the Spirit of Yahweh and prophesied: (68)"Praise be to Yahweh, the God of Israel, because He has come and has redeemed His people. (69)He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant

David (70) (as He said through His holy prophets of long ago), (71) salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us (72) - to show mercy to our fathers and to remember His holy covenant, (73) the oath He swore to our father Abraham: (74) to rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve Him without fear (75) in holiness and righteousness before Him all our days. (76) And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Messiah to prepare the way for him, (77) to give His people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, (78) because of the tender mercy of Yahweh our God, by which the raising sun will come to us from Heaven (79) to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace."

(80) And the child grew and became strong in spirit; and he lived in the desert until he appeared publicly to Israel.

Prophecy did consist mainly in proclaiming Yahweh's words; only seldom in predicting future events. The prophets, because of their spiritual communion with Yahweh, were able to express and proclaim Yahweh's will, that otherwise they could not have formulated on their own.

Jesus is born

The birth of Jesus Christ [Matthew 1:18-25 Luke 2:1-7]

(Mt1:18) This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Spirit of Yahweh. (19) Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

(20) But after he had considered this, an angel of Yahweh appeared to him in a dream, and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Spirit of Yahweh. (21) She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save His people from their sins."

(22) All this took place to fulfill what Yahweh had said through the prophet: (23) "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" - which means, "Yahweh with us."

(24) When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of Yahweh had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. (25a) But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son.

(Lk2:1) In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (2) (This was the first census that took place while Quirinus was governor of Syria.) (3) And everyone went to his own town to register.

(4) So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David. (5) He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. (6) While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, (7) and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. (Mt1:25b) And he gave him the name Jesus.

After Jesus' birth, fulfilled her "physical" mission, Joseph and Mary had four sons, -Jesus' half-brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas- and some daughters -Jesus' half-sisters, whose names are not known- as reported in Mark 6:3; Matthew 13:55-56; John 2:12; 7:3,5; Acts 1:14; 1Corinthians 9:5; Galatians 1:19.

The shepherds and the angels [Luke 2:8-20]

(Lk2:8)And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. (9)An angel of Yahweh appeared to them, and the glory of Yahweh shone around them, and they were terrified. (10)But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. (11)Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. (12)This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

(13)Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising Yahweh and saying, (14)"Glory to Yahweh in the highest, and on Earth peace to men, on whom His favor rests."

(15)When the angels had left them and gone into Heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem ad see this thing that has happened, which Yahweh has told us about."

(16)So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. (17)When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, (18)and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. (19)But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. (20)The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising Yahweh for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

To notice the simplicity of the birth of the Son of Yahweh. The first announcement of Yahweh came to some shepherds who, because of their work, were surely unable to keep the details, the meticulous hand-washing and the rules and regulations of the ceremonial laws. People who were considered "sinners" by observant Jews.

Mary takes note of all these events which, without any doubt, give her plenty to think about the future role of her son, aware that Jesus was Yahweh's son, but knowing nothing at all about what was to happen next, about what kind of life she, Joseph and Jesus were expecting.

Jesus presented in the Temple [Luke 2:21-40]

(Lk2:21)On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise him, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he had been conceived.

(22)When the time of their purification according to the Law of Moses had been completed, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to Yahweh (23)(as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to Yahweh"), (24)and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: "A pair of doves or two young pigeons."

(25)Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Spirit of Yahweh was upon him. (26)It had been revealed to him by the Spirit of Yahweh that he would not die before he had seen Yahweh's Messiah. (27)Moved by the Spirit of Yahweh, he went into the Temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, (28)Simeon took him in his arms and praised Yahweh, saying: (29)

"Sovereign Lord, as You have promised, You now dismiss Your servant in peace. (30) For my eyes have seen Your salvation, (31) which You have prepared in the sight of all people, (32) a Light for revelation to the Pagans and for glory to Your people Israel."

(33) The child's father and mother marveled at what was said about him. (34) Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, (35) so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too."

(36) There was also a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, (37) then she was a widow, and now she was eighty-four years old. She never left the Temple but worshipped night and day, fasting and praying. (38) Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to Yahweh and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

(39) When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth. (40) And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of Yahweh was upon him.

Still Old testament kind of spiritual communion, totally due to Yahweh's initiative, as for all the Old Testament prophets. Here Simeon was given a special insight by Yahweh so he would recognize the "Messiah."

Here again Joseph and Mary, not knowing what was expecting them, and even if aware of Jesus' real paternity, are understandably surprised by all these exceptional events.

Even if son of Yahweh, Jesus was fully a man and exactly for this reason his body and mind had to develop following the rules imposed by the human nature. And later, as a grown man, after becoming aware of his special relation with Yahweh, he will have to choose what to do and which way [The temptations of Jesus (Mark 1:12-13 Matthew 4:1-11 Luke 4:1-13)].

The visit of the Magi [Matthew 2:1-12]

(Mt2:1) After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem (2) and asked, "Where is the one who has been born King of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose in the east and have come to worship him."

(3) When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. (4) When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. (5) "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written:

(6) 'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of My people Israel.'"

(7) Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star has appeared. (8) He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and make a careful search for the Child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him."

(9) After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the

child was. **(10)**When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. **(11)**On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshipped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gift of gold and of incense and of myrrh. **(12)**And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

One can only try and guess how much surprised surely were Joseph and Mary by the arrival and behavior of those important men.

It doesn't have to surprise that, this time, Yahweh's message of warning was addressed to Pagans for, Jews or not, all people of any time, race and religion belong to Yahweh and is clear that those Magi had His full support.

The escape to Egypt [Matthew 2:13-18]

(Mt2:13)When they had gone, an angel of Yahweh appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up," he said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him."

(14)So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, **(15)**were he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what Yahweh had said through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called My Son."

(16)When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and in his vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. **(17)**Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled:

(18)"A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more."

The return to Nazareth [Matthew 2:19-23]

(Mt2:19)After Herod died, and angel of Yahweh appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt **(20)**and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child's life are dead."

(21)So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. **(22)**But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, **(23)**and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets: "He will be called a Nazarene."

The boy Jesus at the Temple [Luke 2:41-52]

(Lk2:41)Every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover. **(42)**When he was twelve years old, they went up to the Feast, according to the custom. **(43)**After the Feast was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it. **(44)**Thinking he was in their company, they traveled on for a day. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends. **(45)**When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him. **(46)**After three days they found him in the Temple Court, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. **(47)**Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers. **(48)**When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you."

(49)"Why were you searching for me?" he asked. "**Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's House?**" **(50)**But they did not understand what he was saying to them.

(51)Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart. (52)And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with Yahweh and men.

Here, one more time, after 12 years of normal family life, Joseph and Mary, not knowing what was expecting them, and not prepared for Jesus' independence, are understandably surprised by this event.

It is also clear that at this point, at 12 years of age, Jesus was already aware of his unique relationship to Yahweh.

Mary can only take note of this event which, again, gives her plenty to think about the future life and role of her son.

Another clear declaration that, even if son of Yahweh, Jesus was fully a man and exactly for this reason his mind and body had to develop following the rules imposed by the human nature. Although Jesus was of divine descent, he did not had all knowledge and wisdom from birth. He had to mature like any other man.

John the Baptist prepares the way and denies being the Christ

[Mark 1:2-8 Matthew 3:1-12 Luke 3:1-20 John 1:6-9;15;19-28]

(Lk3:1)In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar -when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and Traconitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene- (2)during the High Priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the Word of Yahweh came to John son of Zechariah in the desert.

(Jn1:6)There came a man who was sent from Yahweh; his name was John. (7)He came as a witness to testify concerning that Light, so that through him all men might believe. (8)He himself was not the Light; he came only as a witness to the Light. (9)The true Light that gives light to every man who comes into the world. (15)John testifies concerning him. He cries out, saying, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me surpasses me because he had been before me.'"

(Mk1:4)(Mt3:1)(Lk3:3)John the Baptist came in those days. He went into all the country around the Jordan, baptizing in the desert region of Judea, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, (Mt3:2)and saying, "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near."

(Mk1:2-3)(Mt3:3)(Lk3:4)This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah. As is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet: "I will send My messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way -a voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him. (Lk3:5)Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low. The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth. (6)And all mankind will see Yahweh's salvation."

(Mk1:6)(Mt3:4)John clothes were made of camel's air, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey.

(Mk1:5)(Mt3:5-6)The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem and the whole region of the Jordan went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.

(Mt3:7-9)(Lk3:7-8)But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them and to the crowds coming out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you that out of these stones Yahweh can raise up chil-

dren for Abraham. **(Mt3:10)(Lk3:9)**The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire." **(Lk 3:10)**"What should we do then?" the crowd asked. **(11)**John answered, "The man with two tunics should share with him who has none, and the one who has food should do the same." **(12)**Tax collectors also came to be baptized. "Teacher," they asked, "what should we do?" **(13)**"Don't collect any more than you are required to," he told them. **(14)**Then some soldiers asked him, "And what should we do?" He replied, "Don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely -be content with your pay."

(15)The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Messiah.

(Jn1:19)Now this was John's testimony when the Jews of Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was. **(20)**He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, "I am not the Messiah." **(21)**They asked him, "Then who are you? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" He answered, "No." **(22)**Finally they said, "Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" **(23)**John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, "I am the voice of one calling in the desert, 'Make straight the way for the Lord.'"

(24)Now some Pharisees who had been sent **(25)**questioned him, "Why then do you baptize if you are not the Messiah, not Elijah, nor the Prophet?"

(Mk1:7-8)(Mt3:11)(Lk3:16)(Jn1:26-27)John answered them all, "I baptize with water for repentance, but among you stands one who you do not know. After me will come one who is more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie, and whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Spirit of Yahweh and with fire. **(Mt3:12)(Lk3:17)**His winnowing fork is in his hands, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

(Lk3:18)And with many other words John exhorted the people and preached the Good News to them.

(Jn1:28)This all happened at Bethany on the other side of the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

(Lk3:19)But when John rebuked Herod the tetrarch because of Herodias, his brother's wife, and all the other evil things he had done, **(20)**Herod added this to them all: he locked John up in prison.

John, who had been specially chosen by Yahweh from before being conceived, now has to fulfill his mission. To be specially chosen by Yahweh means to live and act as He wants, not as people want.

Yahweh' salvation, that is, the possibility of being in spiritual communion with Yahweh and to enter His Kingdom, is offered to all people of any religion, race and time.

John is forwarding a clear message, of universal validity, with three examples covering all practical personal and social relations and condemning all greedy and unethical practices.

An announcement of Jesus Christ's saving action, which will open to everybody the possibility of being in spiritual communion with Yahweh.

Jesus is baptized

The baptism of Jesus [Mark 1:9-11 Matthew 3:13-17 Luke 3:21-22]

(Mk1:9-11)(Mt3:13-17)(Lk3:21-22)Then, at that time, when all the people were being baptized, Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?"

Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented and Jesus too was baptized by John in the Jordan.

As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water, and he was praying. At that moment Heaven was torn opened, and he saw the Spirit of Yahweh descending on him in bodily form like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice came from Heaven and said, "You are My Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

The ceremony of Jesus' baptism was officiated by a prophet of Yahweh, John the Baptist, and marks the beginning of Jesus' mission. The descent on Jesus of Yahweh's Spirit (symbolic of actively entering in spiritual communion with him) and His words, represent Jesus' official anointing for his ministry.

Two other times the Gospels record the declarations of a voice coming from Heaven and addressing Jesus: on the Mount of Transfiguration (The Transfiguration. Mark 9:2-13; Matthew 17:1-13; Luke 9:28-36) and in the Temple during Jesus' final week (Jesus predicts his death. John 12:20-36). Here Yahweh Himself proclaims Jesus as His own Son and speaks personally and directly to him.

Note 1. This was the first "Christian Baptism" and Jesus was the first human being to enter in permanent spiritual communion with Yahweh as a consequence of understanding and accepting Him and His will. Jesus' baptism was the bridge between a purely ceremonial baptism (immersion in or pouring of water) and the present Christian Baptism which, even if maintaining the ceremony, has a deep spiritual meaning by putting a person in spiritual communion with Yahweh. (Clearly, this better applies to adult baptism, as in the case of Jesus, who at the time was thirty years old, that is, the baptism of people who fully understand and accept the ceremony and its moral and spiritual meaning. In effect, present-day children baptism is followed, years later, by a similar ceremony, Confirmation, when they are supposed to be sufficiently grown-up).

Note 2. For more information about baptism, see "Miscellanea. Baptism in the New Testament and in the history of the Roman Church."

The genealogy of Jesus [Matthew 1:1-17]

(Mt1:1)A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the Son of David, the Son of Abraham: (2)Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, (3)Judah the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar, Perez the father of Hezron, Hezron the father of Ram, (4)Ram the father of Aminadab, Amminabad the father of Nahshon, Nahshon the father of Salmon, (5)Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab, Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth, Obed the father of Jesse, (6)and Jesse the father of King David. David was the father of Solomon, whose mother [Bathsheba] had been Uriah's wife, (7)Solomon the father of Rehoboam, Rehoboam the father of Abijah, Abijah the father of Asa, (8)Asa the father of Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat the father of Jehoram, Jehoram the father of Uzziah, (9)Uzziah the father of Jotham, Jotham the father of Ahaz, Ahaz the father of

Hezekiah, (10) Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, Manasseh the father of Amon, Amon the father of Josiah, (11) and Josiah the father of Jeconiah and his brothers at the time of the exile to Babylon. (12) After the exile to Babylon: Jeconiah was the father of Shealtiel, Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel, (13) Zerubbabel the father of Abiud, Abiud the father of Eliakim, Eliakim the father of Azor, (14) Azor the father of Zadok, Zadok the father of Akim, Akim the father of Eliud, (15) Eliud the father of Eleazar, Eleazar the father of Matthan, Matthan the father of Jacob, (16) and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ.

(17) Thus there were fourteen generations in all from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to the Christ.

The genealogy of Jesus [Luke 3:23-38]

(Lk3:23) Now Jesus himself was about thirty years old when he began his ministry. He was the son, so it was thought, of Joseph, the son of Heli, (24) the son of Matthat, the son of Levi, the son of Melki, the son of Jannai, the son of Joseph, (25) the son of Mattathias, the son of Amos, the son of Nahum, the son of Hesli, the son of Naggai, (26) the son of Maath, the son of Mattathias, the son of Semein, the son of Josech, the son of Joda, (27) the son of Joanan, the son of Rhesa, the son of Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, the son of Neri, (28) the son of Melki, the son of Addi, the son of Cosam, the son of Elmadam, the son of Er, (29) the son of Josua, the son of Eliezer, the son of Jorim, the son of Matthat, the son of Levi, (30) the son of Simeon, the son of Judah, the son of Joseph, the son of Jonam, the son of Eliakim, (31) the son of Melea, the son of Menna, the son of Mattatha, the son of Natham, the son of David, (32) the son of Jesse, the son of Obed, the son of Boaz, the son of Salmon, the son of Nahshom, (33) the son of Amminadab, the son of Ram, the son of Hezron, the son of Perez, the son of Judah, (34) the son of Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham, the son of Terah, the son of Nahor, (35) the son of Serug, the son of Reu, the son of Peleg, the son of Eber, the son of Shelah, (36) the son of Cainan, the son of Arphaxad, the son of Shem, the son of Noah, the son of Lamech, (37) the son of Methuselah, the son of Enoch, the son of Jared, the son of Mahalel, the son of Kenan, (38) the son of Enosh, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of Yahweh.

Matthew's genealogy has a very important characteristic: it shows Yahweh's total disregard for human social (even religious) strict and set rules, that is, for human stupidity. In effect, it includes five names of women, which was absolutely not normal. Even more amazing is who four of these women were: Rahab was a prostitute of Jericho (Joshua 2:1-7). Ruth was not even a Jew, but a Moabite, an alien and hated people (Deuteronomy 23:3). Tamar was a deliberate seducer and an adulteress (Genesis 38). Bathsheba, the mother of Solomon, was a sinner, the woman seduced by David from Uriah, her husband (2 Samuel 11,12). And the fifth one is Mary, Jesus' mother.

The temptations of Jesus [Mark 1:12-13 Matthew 4:1-11 Luke 4:1-13]

(Mk1:12-13a)(Mt4:1-2)(Lk4:1-2) Then Jesus, full of the Spirit of Yahweh, returned from the Jordan and at once was led by the Spirit of Yahweh in the desert, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them, after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.

(Mt4:3)(Lk4:3) The tempter, the devil, came to him and said, "If you are the Son of Yahweh, tell these stones to become bread."

(Mt4:4)(Lk4:4) Jesus answered, **"It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of Yahweh.'"**

(Mt4:5-6)(Lk4:9-11) Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, the Holy City, and had him stand on the highest point of the Temple. **"If you are the Son of Yahweh,"** he said, **"throw yourself down from here. For it is written: 'He will command His angels concerning you to guard you carefully; and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'"**

(Mt4:7)(Lk4:12) Jesus answered him, **"It is also written: 'Do not put Yahweh your Lord to the test.'"**

(Mt4:8)(Lk4:5) Again, the devil took him to a high place, a very high mountain, and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. **(Mt4:9)(Lk4:6-7)** And he said to him, **"All this I will give you, if you will bow down and worship me. I will give you all their authority and splendor, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. So if you worship me, it will all be yours."**

(Mt4:10)(Lk4:8) Jesus answered him, **"Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship Yahweh your Lord, and serve Him only.'"**

(Mk1:13b)(Mt4:11)(Lk4:13) When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time. Then he was with the wild animals, and angels came and attended him.

The first, important point, is that this testing of Jesus was decided by Yahweh, his Father, to allow him to choose and decide which kind of Messiah he wanted to be. And Jesus had the actual possibility of accepting Satan's proposals, in which case he would have become a totally different kind of Messiah (possibly the kind of Messiah the Jews were waiting for: a warrior, who would have given again to Israel the powerful position the nation had with David and Solomon. And the history of the world would have been quite different). Jesus was Yahweh's Messiah, and he knew it, but he had to decide -on his own- which methods to follow. And Satan was trying to push him to wrongly use his powers, in this way jeopardizing his true mission.

Jesus' temptations were real, not merely symbolic. Even if he had no inward desire or inclination to sin, he was actually tempted and had a real opportunity to sin. The temptation story shows Jesus rejecting the way of power and glory and accepting the way of complete obedience to Yahweh. It is clear that this kind of temptations could have come only to a man who could do astonishing things, whose powers were unique, but who had to decide how to use them. And Jesus decided: he would not accomplice his mission by using his supernatural powers for his own needs (changing stones into bread), or to win a large following by miracles or magic (flying down the Temple pinnacle), or by compromising with the world (bowing down and worshipping Satan). He would accept and follow, moment after moment, Yahweh's will for him.

To note that Satan continued his testing all throughout Jesus' ministry, culminating in the supreme test at Gethsemane. It was a long battle -which actually ended only at the moment of his death on the cross. In effect, in the present case, the devil "left him until an opportune time."

Jesus the Lamb of Yahweh [John 1:29-34]

(Jn1:29) The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, **"Look, the Lamb of Yahweh, who takes away the sin of the world!"** **(30)** This is the one I meant when I said, **'A man who comes after me has surpassed me when he was before me.'** **(31)** I my-

self did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel."

(32)Then John gave this testimony: "I saw the Spirit of Yahweh come down from Heaven as a dove and remain on him. (33)I would not have known him, except that the One who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see My Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize you with the Spirit of Yahweh.' (34)I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of Yahweh."

Jesus' action -following Yahweh's will till his crucifixion- has opened to all people of the past, the present and the future the possibility of entering in spiritual communion with him and Yahweh, that is, to be accepted in the Kingdom of Yahweh.

John was speaking to his own disciples, fully-grown men, and considers the baptism of an adult person, who fully understands and accepts the spiritual meaning of such a ceremony which marks the beginning of the spiritual communion between that person and Yahweh.

Jesus' first disciples [John 1:35-42]

(Jn1:35)The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. (36)When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, "Look, the Lamb of Yahweh!"

(37)When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. (38)Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, "What do you want?" They said, "Rabbi" (which means Teacher), "where are you staying?"

(39)"Come," he replied, "and you will see." So they went and saw where he was staying, and spent that day with him. It was about the tenth our.

(40)Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. (41)The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ). (42)And he brought him to Jesus.

*Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You will be called **Cephas**" (which, when translated, is Peter or Rock).*

Even if, as it is clearly stated in the Gospels, none of Jesus' disciples really understood his kind of Messiahship until after Jesus' resurrection.

First trip to Galilee

Jesus calls Philip and Nathanael [John 1:43-51]

*(Jn1:43)The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, "**Follow me.**"*

(44)Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. (45)Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the One Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote -Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."

(46)"Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" Nathanael asked. "Come and see," said Philip.

*(47)When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, "**Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false.**" (48)"How do you know me?" Nathanael asked. Jesus answered, "**I saw you while you were under the fig tree before Philip called you.**"*

(49) Then Nathanael declared, "Rabbi, you are the Son of Yahweh; you are the King of Israel."

(50) Jesus said, "You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You shall see greater things than that." (51) He then added, "I tell you the truth, you shall see Heaven open, and the angels of Yahweh ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

A double declaration of Jesus, using an image taken from the Old Testament, that of Jacob who had seen the golden ladder leading up to Heaven, to Yahweh's presence (Genesis 28:12-13):

- 1) To be divine, with the angels of Yahweh ascending to and descending from him.
- 2) To be human, calling himself Son of Man.

Jesus changes water to wine [John 2:1-11]

(Jn2:1) On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, (2) and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. (3) When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine."

(4) "Dear woman, why do you involve me?" Jesus replied, "My time has not yet come."

(5) His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

(6) Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from two to three metretes.

(7) Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water"; so they filled them to the brim.

(8) Then he told them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet." They did so, (9) and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside (10) and said. "Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now."

(11) This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed at Cana in Galilee. He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him.

It is from here, from Mary's request, that began the development of the wrong doctrine of "Mary, Mediatrix of All Graces." The belief that Mary participates in the mediatory work of Jesus Christ in a unique way. That her holiness and her unique relationship to Jesus Christ, the only Redeemer, would make her a powerful intercessor in Heaven for the needs of humanity. But Jesus himself has declared a number of times to be the Way to the Father, the only intermediary between men and Yahweh.

As had decided when tempted by Satan, Jesus never performed miracles for himself, on the contrary, always for helping other people, like the present one, his first recorded miracle, where he saved a humble Galilean family from the social shame of running without wine on that special day.

Jesus clears the Temple [John 2:12-25]

(Jn2:12) After this he went down to Capernaum with his mother and brothers and his disciples. There they stayed for a few days.

(13) When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

*(14)In the Temple courts he found men selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. (15)So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the Temple area, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. (16)To those who sold doves he said, "**Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father's House into a market!**"*

(17)His disciples remembered that it is written: "Zeal for Your House will consume me."

(18)Then the Jews demanded of him, "What miraculous sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?"

*(19)Jesus answered them, "**Destroy this Temple, and I will raise it again in three days.**"*

(20)The Jews replied, "It has taken forty-six years to build this Temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?" (21)But the Temple he had spoken of was his body. (22)After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the Scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken.

(23)Now while he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many people saw the miraculous signs he was doing and believed in him. (24)But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all men. (25)He did not need man's testimony about man, for he knew what was in a man.

After Jesus' birth, fulfilled her "physical" mission, Joseph and Mary had four sons, -Jesus' half-brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas- and some daughters -Jesus' half-sisters, whose names are not known- as reported in Mark 6:3; Matthew 13:55-56; John 2:12; 7:3,5; Acts 1:14; 1Corinthians 9:5; Galatians 1:19.

Not only the merchants and the money changers were using -with the approval of the religious authorities- the Temple (its Court of the Pagans) as a market area (which, in theory, was forbidden); but, furthermore, they were charging too much. And we can say that even today this still is the situation around every Christian Sanctuary and Place of Pilgrimage.

Jesus teaches Nicodemus [John 3:1-21]

(Jn3:1)Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. (2)He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from Yahweh. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if Yahweh were not with him."

*(3)In reply Jesus declared, "**I tell you the truth, no one can see the Kingdom of Yahweh unless he is born again.**"*

(4)"How can a man be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!"

*(5)Jesus answered, "**I tell you the truth, no one can enter the Kingdom of Yahweh unless he is born of water and the Spirit.** (6)**Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.** (7)**You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.**' (8)**The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.**"*

(9)"How can this be?" Nicodemus asked.

*(10)"You are an Israel's teacher," said Jesus, "and do you not understand these things? (11)**I tell you the truth, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony.** (12)**I have spoken to you***

of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? (13)No one has ever gone into Heaven except the One who came from Heaven -the Son of Man. (14)Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, (15)that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.

(16)For Yahweh so was so fond of the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. (17)For Yahweh did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. (18)Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of Yahweh's one and only Son. (19)This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men chose darkness instead of Light because their deeds were evil. (20)Everyone who does evil hates the Light, and will not come into the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. (21)But whoever lives by the truth comes into the Light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through Yahweh."

Note. Many times in the Gospel of John, as here, is difficult to understand which are Jesus' words and which is John's reasoning.

To be "born again" happens not only at the baptism of an adult, or at the confirmation of someone who had been baptized as an infant (born of water), but every time an adult decides to live in a "Christian" way (born of the Spirit).

A clear, plain declaration: Yahweh is fond of all men and wants to be in spiritual communion with all of them. And His son, Jesus, has opened this possibility to every man willing to believe in him (For more information about universal spiritual communion, see "Thoughts. At the end of time everybody will be with Yahweh").

John the Baptist's testimony about Jesus [John 3:22-36]

(Jn3:22)After this, Jesus and his disciples went out into the Judean countryside, where he spent some time with them, and baptized. (23)Now John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because there was plenty of water, and people were constantly coming to be baptized. (24)(This was before John was put in prison.) (25)An argument developed between some of John's disciples and a certain Jew over the matter of ceremonial washing. (26)They came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, that man who was with you on the other side of the Jordan -the one you testified about- well, he is baptizing, and everyone is going to him."

(27)To this John replied, "A man can receive only what is given him from Heaven. (28)You yourselves can testify that I said, 'I am not the Christ but am sent ahead of him.' (29)The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete. (30)He must become greater; I must become less.

(31)The one who comes from Above is above all; the one who is from the Earth belongs to the Earth, and speaks as one from the Earth. The one who comes from Heaven is above all. (32)He testifies to what he has seen and heard, but no one accepts his testimony. (33)The man who has accepted it has certified that Yahweh is truthful. (34)For the one whom Yahweh has sent speaks the words of Yahweh, for Yahweh gives His Spirit without limit. (35)The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands. (36)Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for Yahweh's judgment remains on him."

The importance of the baptism ceremony -in its simplest form, that is, immersion in a river, when feasible, and pouring of clear, plain water- is clearly stated by the fact that Jesus and his more closed disciples were baptizing from the beginning of his preaching activity.

Note. Verses 3:31-36 are typical of John's way of writing, with a long and argumentative reasoning.

Second trip to Galilee (through Samaria)

Jesus talks with a Samaritan woman [John 4:1-26]

(Jn4:1)*The Pharisees heard that Jesus was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John, (2)although in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples. (3)When the Lord learned of this, he left Judea and went back once more to Galilee.*

(4)*Now he had to go through Samaria. (5)So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. (6)Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about the sixth hour.*

(7)*When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "**Will you give me a drink?**" (8)(His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)*

(9)*The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For the Jews do not associate with Samaritans; they do not use dishes Samaritans have used.)*

(10)*Jesus answered her, "**If you knew the gift of Yahweh and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.**"*

(11)*"Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? (12)Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his flocks and herds?"*

(13)*Jesus answered. "**Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, (14)but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.**"*

(15)*The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water."*

(16)*He told her, "**Go, call your husband and come back.**"*

(17)*"I have no husband," she replied. Jesus said to her, "**You are right when you say you have no husband. (18)The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true.**"*

(19)*"Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet. (20)Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we may worship is Jerusalem."*

(21)*Jesus declared, "**Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. (22)You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. (23)Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks. (24)Yahweh is spirit, and His worshippers must worship in spirit and in truth."***

(25)*The woman said, "I know that the Messiah (called Christ) is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us."*

(26)*Then Jesus declared, "**I who speak to you am he.**"*

As Yahweh is always assigning any kind of important tasks to angels and to men, so it has been, from the beginning of his preaching, for Jesus.

Symbolic for the giving of the actual possibility of entering in spiritual communion with Yahweh to whoever is willing to. And Jesus only, being the only intermediary with Yahweh, can offer this possibility. This is the message his true disciples have to spread all over the world.

Jesus coming has put an end to the materialistic way of worshipping Yahweh with animal sacrifices and priestly rituals and put in their place a direct approach to Yahweh which doesn't need a ritual of sacrifice or a temple. The whole Earth, actually His whole Creation -the Universe- is Yahweh's temple, where He is always present. In other terms, the place and the ritual of worship are totally irrelevant, actually totally unnecessary.

The disciples rejoin Jesus [John 4:27-38]

(Jn4:27) Just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman. But no one asked, "What do you want?" or "Why are you talking with her?"

(28) Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, (29) "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?" (30) They came out of the town and made their way toward him.

(31) Meanwhile his disciples urged him, "Rabbi, eat something."

(32) But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you know nothing about."

(33) Then his disciples said to each other, "Could someone have brought him food?"

(34) "My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of Him who sent me and to finish His work. (35) Do you not say, 'Four months more and then the harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. (36) Even now the reaper draws his wages, even now he harvests the crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. (37) Thus the saying 'One sows and another reaps' is true. (38) I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor."

A clear declaration of Jesus: he obeys to Yahweh, he is not at the same level of his Father -not even as part of a supposed trinity.

Jesus' mission was to open to everybody the possibility of entering in spiritual communion with Yahweh, that is, to enter His Kingdom.

Many of the Samaritans believe [John 4:39-42]

(Jn4:39) Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I ever did." (40) So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. (41) And because of his words many more became believers.

(42) They said to the woman, "We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world."

Yahweh's Word was announced once for ever by Jesus; then, it must be transmitted from man to man.

Jesus begins to preach [Mark 1:14-15 Matthew 4:12-17 Luke 4:14 John 4:43]

(Mk1:14-15)(Mt4:12-17)(Lk4:14)(Jn4:43)After two days, when Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he left from there to go to Galilee, where he returned in the power of the Spirit of Yahweh. Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebelun and Naphtali -to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah:

"Land of Zebelun and land of Naphtali, the way to the sea, along the Jordan, Galilee of the Pagans - the People living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned."

From that time on Jesus began to preach, proclaiming the Good News of Yahweh.

"The time has come," he said. "Repent, for the Kingdom of Yahweh is near. Repent and believe the Good News!" And the news about him spread through the whole countryside.

John's imprisonment marks a turning point: the end of John's mission and the full beginning of Jesus' one.

To believe and have faith in Jesus -either on Earth or in the afterlife- is the only condition for salvation.

Jesus heals the official's son [John 4:44-54]

(Jn4:44)Now Jesus himself had pointed out that a prophet has no honor in his own country. (45)When he arrived in Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him. They had seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, for they also had been there.

(46)Once more he visited Cana in Galilee, where he had turned the water into wine. And there was a certain royal official whose son lay sick at Capernaum. (47)When this man heard that Jesus had arrived in Galilee from Judea, he went to him and begged him to come and heal his son, who was close to death.

(48)"Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders," Jesus told him, "you will never believe."

(49)The royal official said, "Sir, come down before my child dies."

(50)Jesus replied, "You may go. Your son will live." The man took Jesus at his word and departed. (51)While he was still on the way, his servants met him with the news that his boy was living. (52)When he inquired as to the time when his son got better, they said to him, "The fever left him yesterday at the seventh our."

(53)Then the father realized that this was the exact time at which Jesus had said to him, "Your son will live." So he and all his household believed.

(54)This was the second miraculous sign that Jesus performed, having come from Judea to Galilee.

To obtain Jesus' help in something extraordinary as healing from an incurable illness is absolutely necessary to have faith, that is, to believe that the miracle asked for can actually happen. Nothing more is requested.

Jesus rejected at Nazareth [Luke 4:15-30]

(Lk4:15)He (Jesus) taught in their synagogues, and everyone praised him.

(16)He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read. (17)The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is

written:

(18) "The Spirit of Yahweh is on me, because He has anointed me to preach Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, **(19)** to proclaim the year of Yahweh's favor."

(20) Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, **(21)** and he began by saying to them, "**Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.**"

(22) All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips, "Isn't this Joseph's son?" they asked.

(23) Jesus said to them, "Surely you will quote this proverb to me: 'Physician, heal yourself! Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum.' **(24)** I tell you the truth," he continued, "no prophet is accepted in his hometown. **(25)** I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah's time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. **(26)** Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. **(27)** And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed -only Naaman the Syrian."

(28) All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. **(29)** They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him down the cliff. **(30)** But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way.

Jesus' custom of regular worship sets and example for all his followers to follow.

Here Jesus is using the reading of the day (Isaiah 61:1-2) not only to declare himself as Yahweh's Messiah, but even which kind of Messiah.

The calling of the first disciples [Mark 1:16-20 Matthew 4:18-22 Luke 5:1-11]

(Lk5:1) One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennezareth, with the people crowding around him and listening to the Word of Yahweh, **(2)** he saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets. **(3)** He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat. **(4)** When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "**Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch.**" **(5)** Simon answered, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets." **(6)** When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. **(7)** So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink. **(8)** When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" **(9)** For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, **(10a)** and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners.

(Mk1:16)(Mt4:18) As Jesus was walking besides the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. **(Mk1:17)(Mt4:19)** "**Come, follow me,**" Jesus said, "**and I will make you fishers of men.**" **(Lk5:10b)** Then Jesus said to Simon, "**Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch men.**" **(Mk1:18)(Mt4:20)(Lk5:11)** At once they left their nets and everything, pulled their boats up to shore and followed him.

(Mk1:19)(Mt4:21) Going on a little farther from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. (Mk1:20)(Mt4:22) Without delay Jesus called them, and immediately they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.

The calling to be full-time disciples of some of his followers marks the beginning of the Christian Community, the Christian Church.

Jesus drives out an evil spirit [Mark 1:21-28 Luke 4:31-37]

(Mk1:21)(Lk4:31) Then they went to Capernaum, a town in Galilee, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the Synagogue and began to teach the people. (Mk1:22)(Lk4:32) The people were amazed at his teaching, because his message had authority. He taught them as one who has authority, not as the teachers of the law. (Mk1:23)(Lk4:33) In their synagogue there was a man who was possessed by a demon, an evil spirit. Just then he cried out at the top of his voice, (Mk1:24)(Lk4:34) "Ha! What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are -the Holy One of Yahweh!"

(Mk1:25-26)(Lk4:35) "Be quiet!" said Jesus sternly. "Come out of him!" Then the demon, the evil spirit, shook the man violently, threw him down before them all and came out of him with a shriek, without injuring him.

(Mk1:27)(Lk4:36) The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, "What is this? A new teaching -and with authority! With authority and power he even gives orders to evil spirits and they obey him and come out."

(Mk1:28)(Lk4:37) And the news about him spread quickly throughout the surrounding area over the whole region of Galilee.

"Holy One" means that Jesus was a man specially chosen by Yahweh, not a part of a supposed trinity.

Jesus heals many [Mark 1:29-34 Matthew 8:14-17 Luke 4:38-41]

(Mk1:29-30)(Mt8:14)(Lk4:38) As soon as they left the synagogue, Jesus went with James and John to the home of Simon and Andrew. Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed suffering from a high fever and they told Jesus about her. When Jesus came into Peter's house, he saw Peter's mother-in-law lying in bed with a fever, and they asked Jesus to help her. (Mk1:31)(Mt8:15)(Lk4:39) So he went and bent over her and rebuked the fever, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she got up at once and began to wait on them. (Mk1:32-34)(Mt8:16)(Lk4:40-41) That evening when the sun was setting the people brought to Jesus all who had various kinds of sickness and many who were demon-possessed. The whole town gathered at the door, and, laying his hands on each one, Jesus healed all the sick who had various diseases. He also drove out many spirits and demons with a word. Moreover, demons came out of many people, shouting, "You are the Son of Yahweh!" But he rebuked them and would not allow the demons to speak, because they knew who he was, the Christ. (Mt8:17) This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah:

"He took our infirmities and carried our diseases."

Peter, as well as many other disciples -as Philip (Ac 21:8-9)- and even other apostles, was married. And so it has been for more than 1000 years of Church history.

Note. It was the Synod of Rome, called by Pope Gregory VII in AD 1075 that imposed clerical celibacy. Married priests were excommunicated. As a result, the priests of the Roman Church become a class apart, cut off from the most sacred and elevating experience of family life.

Important to note the usual order of Jesus' actions: first the healing of body or mind and, second, the preaching of the Good News. A sick, demoralized or hungry man is not in condition of understanding a moral preaching. Soul's care can't and doesn't have to be separated from body and mind's care.

This time -and not only this time- Jesus was healing all the people brought to him (who clearly hadn't had the chance of listening to his preaching in the synagogue) because their faith in Jesus' capability of healing them was enough to be healed, even if they understood little or nothing of his Messiahship.

First preaching trip through Galilee

Jesus prays in a solitary place and heals the sick

[Mark 1:35-39 Matthew 4:23-25 Luke 4:42-44]

(Mk1:35-37)(Lk4:42)At day break, very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went out to a solitary place, where he prayed. The people were looking for him, and when they came to where he was, Simon and his companions found him and tried to keep him from leaving them, and exclaimed: "Everyone is looking for you!"

(Mk1:38)(Lk4:43)But Jesus replied, "I must preach the Good News of the Kingdom of Yahweh to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent. Let us go somewhere else -to the nearby village- so I can preach there also. That is why I have come." (Mk1:39)(Mt4:23)(Lk4:44)So Jesus traveled throughout Galilee, the Land of the Jews, and he kept on teaching in their synagogues, preaching the Good News of the Kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people and driving out demons. (Mt4:24)News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed, and he healed them. (25)Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed him.

Jesus, as a man, knew that he could not accomplish his mission without the help of Yahweh; that if he was to spend his life for others, he had to pray and ask for spiritual aid and reinforcement.

As usual, as he went preaching and healing, Jesus never separated soul, body and mind. Man is soul, body and mind and the task of Christianity is to help and put in the proper condition the whole human being, not just part of him.

A man with leprosy *[Mark 1:40-45 Matthew 8:1-4 Luke 5:12-16]*

(Mk1:40)(Mt8:1-2)(Lk5:12)When he came down from the mountainside, large crowds followed him. While Jesus was in one of the towns, a man came along to him who was covered with leprosy. When he saw Jesus, he knelt before him, fell with his face to the ground and begged, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean."

(Mk1:41-42)(Mt8:3)(Lk5:13) Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. **"I am willing,"** he said. **"Be clean!"** And immediately the leprosy left him and he was cured.

(Mk1:43-44)(Mt8:4)(Lk5:14) Then Jesus sent him away at once and ordered him, with a strong warning: **"See that you don't tell this to anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them."**

(Mk1:45)(Lk5:15-16) Instead he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news. As a result, the news about him spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses. And Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but often stayed outside and withdrew to lonely places and prayed. Yet the people still came to him from everywhere.

The man came with faith in what Jesus could do, which is the first condition to be healed.

The faith of the centurion [Matthew 8:5-13 Luke 7:1-10]

(Mt8:5-8)(Lk7:1-7) When Jesus had finished saying all this in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum. There a centurion's servant, whom his master valued highly, was sick and about to die. The centurion heard of Jesus and sent some elders of the Jews to him, asking him for help, to come and to heal his servant. When they came to Jesus, they pleaded earnestly with him, "Lord," they said, "his servant lies at home paralyzed and in terrible suffering. This man deserves to have you do this, because he likes our nation and has built our synagogue." Jesus said to them, **"I will go and heal him."** So Jesus went with them. He was not far from the house when the centurion sent friends to say to him: "Lord, don't trouble yourself, for I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed.

(Mt8:9)(Lk7:8) For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and that one, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it."

(Mt8:10)(Lk7:9) When Jesus heard this, he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd of those following him, he said, **"I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone with such great faith even in Israel. (Mt8:11)I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the Kingdom of Heaven. (12)But the subjects of the Kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."**

(Mt8:13)(Lk7:10) Then Jesus said to the men who had been sent by the centurion, **"Go! It will be done just as you believed it would."** And his servant was healed at that very hour. And they returned to the house and found the servant well.

Jesus could only rejoice to find that in this case a Pagan, the centurion, was highly respected by the Jewish community, in spite of the barriers existing between Jews and Pagans.

The man spoke with humility, had full faith in what Jesus could do, and so his request was granted. To Jesus, that is, to true Christianity, there are no racial or religious barriers.

Jesus raises a widow's son [Luke 7:11-17]

(Lk7:11) Soon afterward, Jesus went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd went along with him. **(12)** As he approached the town gate, a dead person was being carried out -the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the town was with her. **(13)** When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, "Don't cry."

(14) Then he went up and touched the coffin, and those carrying it stood still. He said, "Young man, I say to you, get up!" **(15)** The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother.

(16) They were all filled with awe and praised Yahweh. "A great prophet has appeared among us," they said. "Yahweh has come to help His people." **(17)** This news about Jesus spread throughout the land of the Jews and the surrounding country.

Here we can see another aspect of Jesus' way to act and help people. We can see his compassion, his full understanding of the grief and desperation of a lonely mother.

Jesus heals a paralytic [Mark 2:1-12 Matthew 9:1-8 Luke 5:17-26]

(Mk2:1)(Mt9:1) A few days later, Jesus stepped into a boat, crossed over and came to his own town. When Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home.

(Lk5:17) One day as he was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law, who had come from every village of Galilee and from Judea and Jerusalem, were sitting there. And the power of Yahweh was present for him to heal the sick. **(Mk2:2)** So many gathered that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the Word to them. **(Mk2:3-5)(Mt9:2)(Lk5:18-20)** Some men came, bringing to him a paralytic, lying on a mat, carried by four of them, and tried to take him into the house to lay him before Jesus. When they could not find a way to do this and they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they went up on the roof, made an opening in the roof above Jesus and, after digging through it, lowered him on his mat through the beams into the middle of the crowd, right in front of Jesus. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven."

(Mk2:6-8)(Mt9:3-4)(Lk5:21-22) Now some Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting there, and they began thinking to themselves, "Why does this fellow talk like that? Who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but Yahweh alone?"

Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit what they were thinking in their hearts, and he asked them, "Why are you thinking these things and entertain evil thoughts in your hearts? **(Mk2:9)(Mt9:5)(Lk5:23)** Which is easier: to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take your mat and walk'? **(Mk2:10-11)(Mt9:6)(Lk5:24)** But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on Earth to forgive sins..." Then he said to the paralyzed man, "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home." **(Mk2:12)(Mt9:7-8)(Lk5:25-26)** And immediately the man stood up in front of them, took the mat he had been lying on and went home praising Yahweh walking out in full view of them all. When the crowd saw this, everyone was amazed; they were filled with awe and they gave praise to Yahweh, who had given such authority to men, saying, "We have seen remarkable things today. We have never seen anything like this!"

It was because of his deep spiritual communion with Yahweh, his father, that Jesus, a man on Earth, had the power to heal.

The calling of Matthew-Levi [Mark 2:13-17 Matthew 9:9-13 Luke 5:27-32]

(Mk2:13) Once again Jesus went out beside the lake. A large crowd came to him, and he began to teach them. (Mk2:14)(Mt9:9)(Lk5:27-28) After this Jesus went out from there and, as he walked along, he saw a tax collector by the name of Levi, a man named Matthew, son of Alphaeus, sitting at his tax collector's booth. "Follow me," Jesus told him, and Levi, Matthew, got up, left everything, and followed him.

(Mk2:15)(Mt9:10)(Lk5:29) Then Levi held a great banquet for Jesus at his house. While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, a large crowd of tax collectors and of other "sinners" came and were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. (Mk2:16)(Mt9:11)(Lk5:30) But when the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect, who were Pharisees, saw him eating with the "sinners" and tax collectors, they complained and asked his disciples: "Why does your teacher and why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and 'sinners'?"

*(Mk2:17)(Mt9:12-13)(Lk5:31-32) On hearing this, Jesus said to them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. For **I have not come to call the righteous, but the sinners to repentance.** But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.'"*

Jesus' mission was, and is, to bring all people in spiritual communion with Yahweh. So he was going to help those who were sick in their soul, those who recognized themselves as sinners and longed for his cure.

Jesus questioned about fasting [Mark 2:18-22 Matthew 9:14-17 Luke 5:33-39]

(Mk2:18)(Lk5:33) Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting. Some people came and asked Jesus, "How is it that John's disciples often fast and pray, and so do the disciples of the Pharisees, but yours are not and go on eating and drinking?" (Lk9:14) Then John's disciples came and asked him, "How is it that we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?"

(Mk2:19-20)(Mt9:15)(Lk5:34-35) Jesus answered, "How can you make the friends of the bridegroom mourn and fast while he is with them? They cannot, so long as they have him with them. But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them, and then, in those days they will fast."

(Mk2:21)(Mt9:16)(Lk5:36) He told them a parable: "No one tears a patch of unshrunk cloth from a new garment and sews it on an old one. For, if he does, the new piece will pull away from the old garment, making the tear worse. He will have torn the new garment, and the patch from the new will not match the old. (Mk2:22)(Mt9:17)(Lk5:37-38) And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the new wine will burst the skins, the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, new wine must be poured into new wineskins, and both are preserved. (Lk5:39) And no one after drinking old wine wants the new, for he says, 'The old is better.'"

Lord of the Sabbath [Mark 2:23-28 Matthew 12:1-8 Luke 6:1-5]

(Mk2:23)(Mt12:1)(Lk6:1) At that time, on one Sabbath, Jesus was going through the grainfields. His disciples were hungry and, as they walked along, they began to pick some heads of grain, rub them in their hands and eat the kernels. (Mk2:24)(Mt12:2)

(Lk6:2) *When some of the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, "Look! Why are your disciples doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?"*

(Mk2:25)(Mt12:3)(Lk6:3) *Jesus answered them, "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need? (Mk2:26)(Mt12:4)(Lk6:4) In the days of Abiathar the High Priest, he entered the House of Yahweh, and taking the consecrated bread, he and his companions ate the consecrated bread -which was not lawful for them to do, but only for the priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions. (Mt12:5) Or haven't you read in the Law that on the Sabbath the priests in the Temple desecrate the day and yet are innocent? (Mt12:6) I tell you that One greater than the Temple is here. (Mt12:7) If you had known what these words mean, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the innocent. (Mk2:27-28)(Mt12:8)(Lk6:5) Then Jesus said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."*

Jesus -and his disciples as well- wasn't following all the rules and regulations of the Rabbinic Law; he was teaching a new way of interacting with Yahweh, a way of morality, not of formal actions.

This quotation from Hosea 6:6 means that Yahweh doesn't desire ritual actions or sacrifices but kindness, the attitude of the man who knows no other law than that he must answer the call of human need. Religion does not consist in rules and rituals. People are far more important than rituals. The best way to worship Yahweh is to help men in their spiritual and material needs.

Jesus has received the authority to overrule all the Rabbinical Laws and regulations, inclusive of those considered specially important, as the laws concerning the Sabbath.

A man with a shriveled hand [Mark 3:1-6 Matthew 12:9-14 Luke 6:6-11]

(Mk3:1-2)(Mt12:9-10)(Lk6:6-7) *Going on from that place, on another Sabbath he went into the synagogue and was teaching, and a man was there whose right hand was shriveled. Some of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal him on the Sabbath. They asked him, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?"*

(Mk3:3)(Lk6:8) *But Jesus knew what they were thinking and said to the man with the shriveled hand, "Get up and stand in front of everyone." So he got up and stood there.*

(Mk3:4)(Lk6:9) *Then Jesus asked them, "I ask you, which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill and destroy it?" But they remained silent.*

(Mt12:11) *He said to them, "If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out? (12) How much more valuable is a man than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath."*

(Mk3:5)(Mt12:13)(Lk6:10) *Then he looked around at them all in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He did so, he stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored, just as sound as the other.*

(Mk3:6)(Mt12:14)(Lk6:11) *But they were furious and began to discuss with one another what they might do to Jesus. Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus.*

The question is an evident indication that the Jewish authorities actually believed in Jesus' healing power. But, clearly, there was no compassion at all in their hearts, only stubborn, bureaucratic prohibitions. They were not concerned with human suffering; the

only important matter was their Rabbinic Law with all its rules and regulations. What a level can reach human stupidity! And, unfortunately, no Christian Church or Denomination was ever really much better.

Crowds follow Jesus, Yahweh's Chosen Servant

[Mark 3:7-12 Matthew 12:15-21 Luke 6:17-19]

(Mk3:7-8)(Mt12:15)(Lk6:17-18a) Aware of this, Jesus withdrew with his disciples from that place, went down with them to the lake and stood on a level place. And a large crowd from Galilee followed him, and he healed all their sick. A large crowd of his disciples was there and, when they heard all he was doing, a great number of people came to him from all over Judea, from Jerusalem, Idumea, and the regions across the Jordan and from the coast around Tyre and Sidon, to hear him and to be healed of their diseases. *(Mk3:9)* Because of the crowd he told his disciples to have a small boat ready for him, to keep the people from crowding him. *(10)* For he had healed many, so that those with diseases were pushing forward to touch him. *(Lk6:18b)* Those troubled by evil spirits were cured, *(19)* and the people all tried to touch him, because power was coming from him and healing them all. *(Mk3:11)* Whenever the evil spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, "You are the Son of Yahweh." *(Mk3:12)(Mt 12:16)* But he gave them strict orders, warning them not to tell who he was. *(Mt12:17)* This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah:

(18) "Here is My servant whom I have chosen, the One I am fond of, in whom I delight; I will put My Spirit on him, and he will proclaim justice to the nations.

(19) He will not quarrel, or cry out; no one will hear his voice in the streets.

(20) A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out, till he leads justice to victory. *(21)* In his name the nations will put their hope."

Note. For more information about the working of Jesus' healing power, see "Miscellanea. Miraculous healing: is it possible to reconcile faith and science?"

Jesus came to bring salvation to all men of every time, race and religion.

The appointing of the Twelve Apostles *[Mark 3:13-19 Matthew 10:2-4 Luke 6:12-16]*

(Mk3:13-15)(Lk6:12-13) One of those days Jesus went out up on a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to Yahweh. When morning came, he called to him those of his disciples he wanted and chose Twelve of them, and they came to him. He appointed Twelve, whom he also designated Apostles, that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons. *(Mk 3:16-19)(Mt10:2-4)(Lk6:14-16)* These are the names of the Twelve Apostles he appointed: first, Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter) and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee and his brother John (to them he gave the name Boanerges, which means Sons of Thunder); Philip and Bartholomew, Matthew the tax collector and Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus (Judas son of James), Simon who was called the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him and became a traitor.

The step was very important and so, to be sure of his choice, Jesus asked for his Father's help in private prayer, that is, being in deep spiritual communion with Him.

The Twelve were ordinary working men; none of them was noble or rich and none of them did become rich or powerful during the rest of their life. Furthermore, they always kept dressing as ordinary people, without wearing some religious "uniform."

Jesus and Beelzebub [Mark 3:20-30 Matthew 12:22-32 Luke 11:14-23;12:10]

(Mk3:20) Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat. **(21)** When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, "He is out of his mind."

(Mt12:22) Then they brought him a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute, and Jesus healed him, so that he could both talk and see. **(Lk11:14)** Then Jesus was driving out a demon that was mute. When the demon left, the man who had been mute spoke, and the crowd was amazed. **(Mt12:23)** All the people were astonished and said, "Could this be the Son of David?"

(Mk3:22)(Mt12:24)(Lk11:15) But when the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who came down from Jerusalem heard this, some of them said, "He is possessed by Beelzebub! It is only by Beelzebub, the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons." **(Lk11:16)** Others tested him by asking for a sign from Heaven.

(Mk3:23-25)(Mt12:25)(Lk11:17) Jesus knew their thoughts and so he called them and spoke to them in parables: "How can Satan drive out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand and will be ruined. If a city or household is divided against itself, it cannot stand and will fall. **(Mk3:26)(Mt12:26)(Lk11:18)** And if Satan drives out Satan, if he opposes himself and is divided against himself, he cannot stand; his end has come. How then can his kingdom stand? I say this because you claim that I drive out demons by Beelzebub. **(Mt12:27)(Lk11:19)** And now if I drive out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your followers drive them out? So then, they will be your judges. **(Mt12:28)(Lk11:20)** But if I drive out demons by the Spirit, by the finger, of Yahweh, then the Kingdom of Yahweh has come upon you.

(Mk3:27)(Mt12:29)(Lk11:21) Or again, when a strong man, fully armed, guards his own house, his possessions are safe. In fact, how can anyone enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man? Then he can rob his house. **(Lk11:22)** But when someone stronger attacks and overpowers him, he takes away the armor in which the man trusted and divides up the spoils.

(Mt12:30)(Lk11:23) He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters. **(Mk3:28-29)(Mt12:31)** And so I tell you the truth, every and all sins and blasphemies of men will be forgiven them, but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit of Yahweh will never be forgiven; he is guilty of eternal sin. **(Mt12:32)(Lk12:10)** And anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks or blasphemes against the Spirit of Yahweh will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come. **(Mk3:30)** He said this because they were saying, "He has an evil spirit."

In this case, those who were affirming that Jesus was acting under the power of Satan and not of Yahweh. Generally, those who don't want Jesus' help and repeatedly refuse to repent.

Forgiveness will be offered both in this life and after death and, in both cases, can be accepted or rejected.

Note. For more information about the offering of forgiveness, see "Thoughts. At the end of time, everybody will be with Yahweh. A direct consequence of Yahweh's justice and affection."

A tree and its fruit [Matthew 7:15-23;12:33-37 Luke 6:43-45]

*(Mt7:15)"Watch out for **false prophets**. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. (16)By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? (17)Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. (Mt7:18;12:33)(Lk6:43-44)Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad. No good tree will bear bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. For each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thornbushes, or grapes from briars. (Mt7:19)Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. (20)Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.*

(Mt12:34-35)(Lk6:45)You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks. (Mt12:36)But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. (37)For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.

(Mt7:21)Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in Heaven. (22)Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' (23)Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'"

Priest, pastors, preachers, all the people interpreting falsely Jesus' words or using their ecclesiastical position to acquire power and riches.

The sign of Jonah [Matthew 12:38-42 Luke 11:29-32]

*(Mt12:38-39)(Lk11:29)Then, as the crowd increased, some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law said to him, "Teacher, we want to see a miraculous sign from you." Jesus answered, "**This is a wicked and adulterous generation. It asks for a miraculous sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. (Mt12:40)For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the Earth. (Lk11:30)For as Jonah was a sign to the Ninevites, so also will the Son of Man be to this generation. (Mt12:41)(Lk11:32)The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now one greater than Jonah is here. (Mt12:42)(Lk11:31)The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with the men of this generation and condemn them; for she came from the ends of the Earth to listen to Solomon's wisdom, and now one greater than Solomon is here.**"*

Jesus, bringer of the Good News, is the “miraculous” sign sent by Yahweh to all men, to let them know His affection for them.

An evil spirit leaving and coming back [Matthew 12:43-45 Luke 11:24-28]

(Mt12:43-44)(Lk11:24-25)"When an evil spirit comes out of a man, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. Then it says, 'I will return to the house I left.' When it arrives, it finds the house unoccupied, swept clean and put in order. (Mt 12:45)(Lk11:26)Then it goes and takes with it seven other spirits more wicked than

itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that man is worse than the first. That is how it will be with this wicked generation."

*(Lk11:27)As Jesus was saying these things, a woman in the crowd called out, "Blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you." (28)He replied, "**Blessed rather are those who hear the Word of Yahweh and obey it.**"*

Spiritually speaking, is not enough to be "born again" at baptism or confirmation (see Note at "Jesus teaches Nicodemus"), is necessary to continue and seek spiritual communion with Yahweh.

Jesus' mother and brothers [Mark 3:31-35 Matthew 12:46-50 Luke 8:19-21]

(Mk3:31)(Mt12:46)(Lk8:19)Then while Jesus was still talking to the crowd, his mother and brothers came to see him, but they were not able to get near him because of the crowd. Standing outside, wanting to speak to him, they sent someone in to call him.

(Mk3:32)(Mt12:47)(Lk8:20)A crowd was sitting around him, and someone told him, "Your mother and brothers are standing outside looking for you, wanting to speak to you."

*(Mk3:33-35)(Mt12:48-50)(Lk8:21)He replied to him, "**Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?**" Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and pointing to his disciples, he said, "**Here are my mother and my brothers. My mother and brothers are those who hear Yahweh's Word and put it into practice. For whoever does the will of Yahweh my Father in Heaven is my brother and sister and mother.**"*

Another clear declaration that after Jesus' birth, fulfilled her "physical" mission, Joseph and Mary had other children: four sons, -Jesus' half-brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas- and some daughters -Jesus' half-sisters, whose names are not known- as reported in Mark 6:3; Matthew 13:55-56; John 2:12; 7:3,5; Acts 1:14; 1Corinthians 9:5; Galatians 1:19.

The beatitudes. Blessings and woes [Matthew 5:1-12 Luke 6:20-26]

(Mt5:1-2)(Lk6:20a)Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and looking at them, he began to teach them, saying:

*(Mt5:3)(Lk6:20b)"**Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven, of Yahweh.***

*(Mt5:4)(Lk6:21a)**Blessed are those who mourn and weep now, for they will be comforted and will laugh.***

*(Mt5:5)**Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the Earth.***

*(Mt5:6)(Lk6:21b)**Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness now, for they will be filled and satisfied.***

*(Mt5:7)**Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.***

*(Mt5:8)**Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see Yahweh.***

*(Mt5:9)**Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of Yahweh.***

*(Mt5:10)**Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.***

*(Mt5:11)(Lk6:22)**Blessed are you when people hate and insult you, when they persecute you and exclude you and reject your name as evil and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me, the Son of Man.***

(Mt5:12)(Lk6:23) Rejoice in that day and be glad and leap for joy, because great is your reward in Heaven. For in the same way their fathers treated and persecuted the prophets who were before you.

(Lk6:24) But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort.

(Lk6:25) Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry.

Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep.

(Lk6:26) Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for that is how their fathers treated the false prophets."

Looking at the hierarchical top positions in the history of all Christian Churches and Denominations, it appears really difficult to think or to find high prelates as bishops, cardinals, popes and others who can satisfy the "blessed are" and not the "woe to."

The salt of the Earth [Mark 9:49-50 Matthew 5:13 Luke 14:34-35]

(Mk9:49-50)(Mt5:13)(Lk14:34-35)"Everyone will be salted with fire. You are the salt of the Earth. Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good and fit for anything, neither for the soil nor for the manure pile, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with each other."

What a good and nice world it would be!

The light of the world [Mark 4:21 Matthew 5:14-16 Luke 8:16]

(Mk4:21)(Mt5:14-15)(Lk8:16)He said to them, "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. No one lights his lamp and hides it in a jar or puts it under a bed. Instead, he puts it on a stand, so that those who come in can see the light, and it gives light to everyone in the house. (Mt5:16)In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in Heaven."

A Christian must necessarily be an example, a guide to all those in doubt or with less courage.

The fulfillment of the Law [Matthew 5:17-20 Luke 16:16-17]

(Lk16:16)"The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John. Since that time, the Good News of the Kingdom of Yahweh is being preached, and everyone is forcing his way into it.

(Mt5:17)Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. (18)I tell you the truth, until Heaven and Earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. (Lk16:17)It is easier for Heaven and Earth to disappear than for the least stroke of a pen to drop out of the Law. (Mt5:19)Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the Kingdom of Heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven. (20)For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the Kingdom of Heaven."

In the Old Testament itself we find a number of social and religious regulations, yet very few moral rules; what we do find are great, broad principles which a man must himself take and interpret under Yahweh's guidance, and apply to the individual situations in life. The problem was that the Teachers of the Law, the Scribes, did reduce the great principles of the Law to literally thousands upon thousands of regulations which to them were the essence of religion. Jesus said he had come not to cancel the Law, but to fulfill it, to bring out the real meaning of the Law; that is, the one great principle of reverence and respect. Reverence for Yahweh, respect for everybody else. A reverence and respect that did not, and does not, consist in obeying a multitude of regulations. Not in sacrifice, but in mercy, not in legalism, but in affection.

A clear declaration that, at a certain point, all men will enter Heaven, the Kingdom of Yahweh, without any exception. Only their "position" in the Kingdom -that is, the level of spiritual communion they will receive from and give to others- will be different. There will be the "great" -those who had tried to live a "Christian" life- and the "least" -those who will enter the Kingdom after a bad life and a long, redemptive, period in hell, that is, only after recognizing Jesus Christ and his interpretation of the Law.

Note. For a better understanding of this point, see "Thoughts. At the end of time everybody will be with Yahweh. A direct consequence of Yahweh's justice and affection."

Do not murder [Matthew 5:21-26]

(Mt5:21)"You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' (22)*But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca,' is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell.*

(23)Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, (24)leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.

(25)Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still with him on the way, or he may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. (26)I tell you the truth, you will not get out until you have paid the last kodrantes."

Causing to sin. Adultery. Sin, faith, duty

[Mark 9:42-48 Matthew 5:27-30;18:6-10 Luke 17:1-10]

(Mt5:27)(Lk17:1a)Jesus said to his disciples: "You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' (Mt5:28)*But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.*

(Mk9:42)(Mt18:6)(Lk17:2)And if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone tied around his neck and to be thrown and drowned into the depths of the sea.

(Mt18:7)(Lk17:1b)Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to sin! Such things are bound to and must come, but woe to that person through whom they come!

(Mk9:43-46)(Mt5:30;18:8)And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body and to enter eternal life maimed than with two hands and your whole body to go into hell, where the fire never goes out, where

'their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.'

And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter eternal life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into the fire of hell, where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.'

(Mk9:47-48)(Mt5:29;18:9)And if your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body and enter eternal life, the Kingdom of Yahweh, with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown with your whole body into the fire of hell, where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.'

(Mt18:10)See that you do not look down on one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in Heaven always see the face of my Father in Heaven. (Lk17:3)So watch yourselves.

If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. (4)If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, 'I repent,' forgive him."

(5)The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!"

(6)He replied, "If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it will obey you.

(7)Suppose one of you had a servant plowing or looking after the sheep. Would he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, 'Come along now and seat down to eat'? (8)Would he not rather say, 'Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink'? (9)Would he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? (10)So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.'"

Note. In these two passages, as in many others in the New Testament, we can see the eastern custom to use language in the most vivid possible way.

The moral teaching of these passages is that in all his relations with other men and with Yahweh, that is, in all his personal, social and religious relations and actions, a man has always to consider and give priority to the moral implications, never to the legalistic ones, never to be revengeful but always forgetful and humble. And, if and when necessary, to "cut off" some bad habit, wrong pleasure and friendship in order to remain in spiritual contact with Yahweh.

And, if taking the necessary and proper action will look too difficult or impossible, we must always to have faith in and ask for Jesus and Yahweh's help.

Furthermore, we must never forget what the duty of a Christian is: to be a servant (giving moral and physical help) of the others, as Jesus was.

The parable of the lost sheep [Matthew 18:11-14 Luke 15:1-7]

(Lk15:1)Now the tax collectors and "sinners" were all gathering around to hear him. (2)But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."

*(Lk15:3)Then Jesus told them this parable: (Mt18:11)"**The Son of Man came to save what was lost.** (Mt18:12)(Lk15:4)What do you think? Suppose a man, one of you, owns a hundred sheep and loses one of them that wanders away. Will he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country on the hills and go to look after the one lost sheep that wandered off until he finds it? (Mt18:13)(Lk15:5)And when he finds it, I tell you the truth, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not*

wandered off, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders (Lk15:6)and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.' (Mt18:14)(Lk15:7)I tell you that in the same way your Father in Heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost. There will be more rejoicing in Heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent."

The parable of the lost coin [Luke 15:8-10]

(Lk15:8)"Or suppose a woman has ten drachmas and loses one. Does she not light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? (9)And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.' (10)In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of Yahweh over one sinner who repents."

The parable of the lost son [Luke 15:11-32]

(Lk15:11)Jesus continued, "There was a man who had two sons. (12)The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them.

(13)Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. (14)After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country and he began to be in need. (15)So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. (16)He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

(17)When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! (18)I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against you. (19)I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.' (20)So he got up and went to his father.

But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

(21)The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against Heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

(22)But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. (23)Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. (24)For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate.

(25)Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. (26)So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. (27)'Your brother has come,' he replied, 'and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.'

(28)The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. (29)But he answered his father, 'Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. (30)But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!'

(31)'My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. (32)But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.'"

Many times Jesus, the “Son of Man,” has declared that his mission was to save those in need, that is, the “sinners” who are “lost” to Satan.

These passages give Jesus' favorite picture of Yahweh, a spiritual Father who is going seeking for each one lost man and rejoices after taking him back. Yahweh looking and searching for a sinner to be brought back from sin: something totally alien to the mentality of the orthodox Jews of the time (and, unfortunately, still not properly accepted by most of the ecclesiastical hierarchies).

A repented sinner is spiritually reborn, “born again” in the sight of Yahweh.

The unforgiving and resentful attitude of the older brother is that of many orthodox men of any time, who refuse to understand and forgive what Yahweh has already forgiven.

A brother who sins against you [Matthew 18:15-20]

(Mt18:15) "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listen to you, you have won your brother over. (16) But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' (17) If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the Assembly; and if he refuses to listen even to the Assembly, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

(18) I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on Earth will be bound in Heaven, and whatever you loose on Earth will be loosed in Heaven.

(19) Again, I tell you that if two of you on Earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in Heaven. (20) For where two or three come together in my name, there I am with them."

Note. It is evident that this passage, speaking of a not yet existing Church, is a mixture of Jesus' words and of later, already legalistic, considerations.

Jesus' actual words and, anyway, their true meaning, could have been: “If anyone makes something against you, spare no effort to get things right again between you and him.”

Some Churches take this “binding” as an authorization to forgive or not the sins of their followers, to decide of their destiny on Earth or in the afterlife. The actual meaning is that whatever we do, whatever relationship we establish during our life, they and their consequences will not end with our life, but will last into eternity.

Note. For a better comprehension of this last point, see “Miscellanea. Earthly ties, sentimental and legal. Will they still exist in the future life?”

When more people meet to pray and worship together, there is an overall spiritual communion with Jesus and Yahweh stronger than the sum of the individual ones. And that gives more power to their prayers (which, anyway, will be answered if that fits Yahweh's decision).

The parable of the unmerciful servant [Matthew 18:21-35]

(Mt18:21) Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?"

(22) Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy times seven.

(23) Therefore, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. (24) As he began the settlement, a man who owned him ten thousand talents was brought to him. (25) Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered

that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay for the debt.

(26)The servant fell on his knees before him, 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.' (27)The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.

(28)But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. He grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he demanded.

(29)His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.'

(30)But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. (31)When the other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened.

(32)Then the master called the servant in, 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. (33)Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had of you?' (34)In anger his master turned him over to the jailers until he should pay back all he owed.

(35)This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart."

Yahweh always forgives, every time the request of forgiveness is accompanied by repentance. And so must do the Christians: there must be no limit to their forgiveness, even because they must forgive men to be forgiven by Yahweh (to remember also that to forgive does not mean to forget; will is a spiritual matter, memory a physical one).

The parable of the workers in the vineyard [Matthew 20:1-16]

(Mt20:1)"For the Kingdom of Heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire men to work in his vineyard. (2)He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard.

(3)About the third hour he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. (4)He told them, 'You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.' (5)So they went.

He went out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour and did the same thing. (6)About the eleventh hour he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, 'Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?'

(7)'Because no one has hired us,' they answered.

He said to them, 'You also go and work in my vineyard.'

(8)When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foremen, 'Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going to the first.'

(9)The workers who were hired about the eleventh hour came and each received a denarius. (10)So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. (11)When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. (12)'These men who were hired last worked only one hour,' they said, 'and you have made them equal to us who have born the burden of the work and the heat of the day.'

(13)But he answered one of them, 'Friend, I am not being unfair to you. Didn't you agree to work for a denarius? (14)Take your pay and go. I want to give the man who

was hired last the same as I gave you. (15) Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?

(16) So the last will be first, and the first will be last.

Yahweh, the Creator of everything and everybody, has all the right to receive in His Kingdom every man who truly repents, even at the very last moment of his life.

Note. For more information about the offering of forgiveness, see "Thoughts. At the end of time, everybody will be with Yahweh. A direct consequence of Yahweh's justice and affection."

Divorce [Mark 10:1-12 Matthew 19:1-12;5:31-32 Luke 16:18]

(Mk10:1)(Mt19:1-2) When Jesus had finished saying these things, he left Galilee and went into the region of Judea to the other side of the Jordan. Again large crowds of people came and followed him, and as it was his custom, he taught them and he healed them there.

(Mk10:2)(Mt19:3) Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?"

(Mk10:3) "What did Moses command you?" he replied.

(Mk10:4) They said, "Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away."

(Mk10:5)(Mt19:8) Jesus replied, "Moses wrote this law and permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning."

(Mt19:7) "Why then," they asked, "did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?"

(Mk10:6-9)(Mt19:4-6) "Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning of creation Yahweh the Creator made them male and female, and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh?' So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what Yahweh has joined together, let man not separate."

(Mk10:10) When they were in the house again, the disciples asked Jesus about this.

(Mk10:11-12)(Mt5:31-32;19:9)(Lk16:18) He answered, "It has been said, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.' But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman, commits adultery against her and causes her to become an adulteress. And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery and the man who marries the divorced woman commits adultery."

(Mt19:10) The disciples said to him, "If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry."

(11) Jesus replied, "Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given. (12) For some are eunuchs because they were born that way; others were made that way by men, and others have renounced marriage because of the Kingdom of Heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it."

In this passage Jesus lays down the principle that any divorce is wrong. But, as usual, Jesus' is a principle, not a law. It depicts an ideal situation, perfectly knowing that reality is so often quite, if not dramatically, different. A divorce is a serious and sad matter, so Jesus' principle has to be intelligently and compassionately applied to any single and

particular situation, doing everything possible to help those unfortunate people, with more sympathy and less condemnation, without rigid legalism, but with plenty of understanding. Beginning of v. Mt 19:11 and end of v. 19:12 ("Not everyone can accept... The one who can accept this should accept") put a clear end to the discussion.

The passage about eunuchs has a double meaning. First, it reinforces with a physical example the comprehension of the condition of who can and who cannot accept a certain existing situation. Second, it speaks of those who "can" voluntarily renounce marriage, parenthood, and human physical love to dedicate themselves to some particular mission, a condition that has to be strictly voluntary, and doesn't have to be made compulsory to all the people who want to follow a religious vocation.

Oaths [Matthew 5:33-37]

(Mt5:33)"Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not break your oath, but keep the oaths you have made to Yahweh.' (34)But I tell you, Do not swear at all: either by Heaven, for it is Yahweh's throne; (35)or by the Earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the City of the Great King. (36)And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. (37)Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No;' anything beyond this comes from the evil one."

A simple consideration of general validity: to swear is a necessity when the sincerity and truth of a declaration cannot be trusted. Clearly, the ideal case, that is, total sincerity is the one of v. 5:37.

An eye for an eye. Kindness for enemies [Matthew 5:38-48;7:12 Luke 6:27-36]

(Mt5:38)"You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' (Mt5:39)(Lk6:29)But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic. (Mt5:40)And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. (41)If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. (Mt5:42)(Lk6:30)Give to everyone who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. (Mt7:12)(Lk6:31)So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.

(Mt5:43)You have heard that it was said, 'You'll be fond of neighbor and hate your enemy.' (Mt5:44)(Lk6:27-28)But I tell you who hear me: Be kind to your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who mistreat and persecute you, (Mt5:45)that you may be sons of your Father in Heaven. He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. (Mt5:46)(Lk6:32)If you are fond of those who are fond of you, what credit is that to you? What reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? Even 'sinners' are fond of those who are fond of them. (Mt5:47)And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? (Lk6:33)And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' do that. (34)And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' lend to 'sinners,' expecting to be repaid in full. (35)But be kind to your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back.

Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because He is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. (Mt5:48)(Lk6:36) Be perfect and merciful, therefore, just as your heavenly Father is perfect and merciful.

This passage gives what should be the perfect ethic of a Christian; a way of thinking and behaving which, clearly, had been fully possible only to Jesus Christ as no men, ever, can reach such perfection.

The core of this ethic is in the phrase “do to others what you would have them do to you,” which expresses the very essence of Christian conduct, that consist not in refraining from bad things, but in actively doing good things.

And, the nearest is a man to this way of conduct, the nearest he is to Yahweh.

Giving to the needy [Matthew 6:1-4]

(Mt6:1) Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in Heaven.

(2)So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. (3)But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, (4)so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you."

A recommendation specifically addressed to the Jews, but of general validity: whenever doing something “good and righteous” do it as Yahweh desires, that is, as much as possible without publicity and without expecting any reward.

Jesus' teaching on prayer (Our Father) [Matthew 6:5-15 Luke 11:1-4]

(Lk11:1)One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John has taught his disciples."

(Lk11:2a)He said to them, (Mt6:5)"When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they like to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. (6)But when you pray, go in your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. (7)And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. (8)Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.

(Mt6:9-13)(Lk11:2b-4) This, then, is how you should pray:

***'Our Father in Heaven, hallowed be Your Name,
Your Kingdom come; may Your will be done, on Earth as it is in Heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.***

Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

And let us not fall into temptation, but deliver us from evil.'

(Mt6:14)For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. (15)But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins."

Note. In any established Church prayers tend to be formalized, in kind and timing, with the liturgy supplying specific prayers to be recited at specific times or occasions. Fur-

thermore, there is a tendency to link prayers with certain places, as Churches, Sanctuaries and so on, as if the prayers were more efficacious if offered there.

Jesus condemns two habits. First, to pray to be seen by men, making of it a show of devotion. Second, to pray using repetitive fixed formulas, which don't require mental concentration and so carry very little spiritual meaning.

Jesus is very clear: prayers have to be addressed to Yahweh, not even to himself (Jesus) and much more not to the angels or to his mother Mary or to the recognized "saints."

The two last verses (Mt 6:14-15) explain, without leaving any doubt, how Yahweh's forgiveness works.

Note. For a proper explanation of all the implications of this prayer, see "Gospel. Jesus' teaching on prayer (Our Father)."

Fasting [Matthew 6:16-18]

(Mt6:16)"When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. (17)But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, (18)so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you."

Another "righteous" act, which involved an evident danger, that a man might fast as a sign of superior piety, to demonstrate to men, not to Yahweh, how devoted and disciplined he was.

Anyway, there is a proper fasting, which can be good for self-discipline, and accepted by Yahweh.

Note. As a further sign of penitence, the Jews put ashes on their heads when fasting (the Christian Ash Day comes from this Jewish habit). On the contrary, putting oil and washing the face was reserved for joyous occasions. In other terms, Jesus is condemning all acts of exterior formalism as totally useless.

Treasures in Heaven [Matthew 6:19-21 Luke 12:32-34]

(Lk12:32)"Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the Kingdom. (Mt6:19)Do not store up for yourselves treasures on Earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. (Mt6:20)(Lk12:33)But store up for yourselves treasures in Heaven, sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in Heaven that will not be exhausted, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not come near, do not break in and steal. (Mt6:21)(Lk12:34)For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

Another way to announce the Good News, that Yahweh's Kingdom -spiritual communion with Him- is open to all people.

Note. Jesus never said that this world is unimportant; but he always said and implied that its importance is not in itself, but in that to which it leads.

The lamp of the body [Matthew 6:22-23 Luke 11:33-36]

(Lk11:33)"No one lights a lamp and puts it in a place where it will be hidden, or under a bowl. Instead he puts it on its stand, so that those who come may see the light. (Mt6:22-23)(Lk11:34)Your eye is the lamp of your body. If your eyes are good, your whole body also will be full of light. But if your eyes are bad, your whole body also will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness! (Lk11:35)See to it, then, that the light within you is not darkness. (36)Therefore, if your whole body is full of light, and no part of it dark, it will be completely lighted, as when the light of a lamp shines on you."

A follow-up and a confirmation of what said in "The Light of the World" (Mark 4:21 Matthew 5:14-16 Luke 8:16): a Christian has to "shine" as a light, being a moral an spiritual example, a guide, to all those in doubt or with less courage.

No one can serve two masters [Matthew 6:24 Luke 16:13-15]

(Mt6:24)(Lk16:13)"No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and be fond of the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both Yahweh and Money."

(Lk16:14)The Pharisees, who were eager for money, heard all this and were sneering at Jesus. (15)He said to them, "You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of men, but Yahweh knows your hearts. What is highly valued among men is detestable in Yahweh's sight."

A fundamental statement and universal truth. It is clear and evident that it would be absolutely impossible for any man to follow both such masters, Yahweh and Money (in more general terms, Yahweh and Satan), whose requirements are totally antithetic.

The rebuke to the Pharisees applies to all Church people and institutions that -during the history of the Church- were, and still are, looking for earthly prosperity (money and possessions) and personal, institutional or political power.

Do not worry [Matthew 6:25-34 Luke 12:22-31]

(Mt6:25)(Lk12:22-23)Then Jesus said to his disciples: "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? (Mt6:26)(Lk12:24)Look at the birds of the air; consider the ravens: they do not sow or reap or store away in storerooms or barns, and yet Yahweh your heavenly Father feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds!

(Mt6:27)(Lk12:25)Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life or a single cubit to his height? (Lk12:26)Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest?

(Mt6:28-29)(Lk12:27)And why do you worry about clothes? See and consider how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. (Mt6:30)(Lk12:28)If that is how Yahweh clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will He clothe you, O you of little faith! (Mt6:31)(Lk12:29)So do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' (Mt6:32)(Lk12:30)For the pagans run after all these things, and your hea-

*venly Father knows that you need them. (Mt6:33)(Lk12:31) **But seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. (Mt6:34)Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of his own."***

Here there is a clear, moral and practical advice: if a person is too worried about the normal facts of life, the only effect is to take out of it all the joy life can give.

And, if things look completely out of control, the only solution for a Christian is to put all his faith in Yahweh, accepting His will.

Judging others [Mark 4:24-25 Matthew 7:1-6 Luke 6:37-42]

*(Mk4:24)(Mt7:1-2)(Lk6:37-38)"Consider carefully what you hear," he continued. **"Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged. Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you -and even more. (Mk4:25)Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him.***

(Mt7:3)(Lk6:41)Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? (Mt7:4-5)(Lk6:42)How can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me take the speck out of your eye,' when you yourself fail to see that all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye."

(Lk6:39)He also told them this parable: "Can a blind man lead a blind man? Will they not both fall into a pit? (40)A student is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher.

(Mt7:6)Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces."

The same advice found in the Lord's Prayer [Jesus' teaching on prayer (Our Father) Matthew 6:5-15 Luke 11:1-4]: forgive men to be forgiven by Yahweh. Advice accompanied by an invitation, actually a command, to be generous, with the certainty but not the purpose to receive the due reward in the future life.

Ask, seek, knock [Matthew 7:7-11 Luke 11:5-13]

(Lk11:5)Then he said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and he goes to him at midnight and says, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, (6)because a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have nothing to set before him.'

(7)Then the one inside answers, 'Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children are with me in bed. I can't get up and give you anything.' (8)I tell you, though he will not get up and give him the bread because he is his friend, yet because of the man's persistence he will get up and give him as much as he needs.

*(Mt7:7)(Lk11:9)So I say to you: **Ask** and it will be given to you; **seek** and you will find; **knock** and the door will be opened to you. (Mt7:8)(Lk11:10)For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.*

(Mt7:9-10)(Lk11:11)Which of you fathers, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? (Lk11:12)Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? (Mt7:11)(Lk11:13)If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in Heaven give good gifts and His Spirit to those who ask Him!"

Another, more intense exhortation to pray and ask for real necessities only (prayers that, anyway, will be answered as requested if that fits Yahweh's decisions).

Important to remember that praying to Yahweh is always a way to enter in spiritual communion with Him.

The narrow and wide gates [Matthew 7:13-14 Luke 13:22-30]

(Lk13:22)Then Jesus went through the towns and villages, teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem. (23)Someone asked him, "Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?"

He said to them, (Mt7:13-14)(Lk13:24)"Make every effort to enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it. Because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able. (Lk 13:25)Once the Owner of the house gets up and closes the door, you will stand outside knocking and pleading, 'Sir, open the door for us.'

But he will answer, 'I don't know you or where you come from.'

(26)Then you will say, 'We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.'

(27)But he will replay, 'I don't know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evil-doers!'

(28)There will be weeping there, and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the Kingdom of Yahweh, but you yourselves thrown out. (29)People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the Kingdom of Yahweh. (30)Indeed there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last."

At the end, all people of every time, race and religion will be "saved," that is, accepted in Yahweh's Kingdom, in universal spiritual communion, even if at different "levels" of it, depending on the single person's life and afterlife; with the Highest "level" given to those who were willing to fight strongly for it during their terrestrial life.

The "last," that is, the humble, the persecuted, after suffering so much on Earth, will receive a "compensation" in the next life. The "first," that is, the rich and the powerful, accustomed to rely too much on themselves, have a high probability of not being good Christians during their life, with clear consequences in their next life.

The wise and foolish builders [Matthew 7:24-29 Luke 6:46-49]

(Lk6:46)"Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say? (Mt7:24)(Lk6:47)Therefore, I will show you that everyone who comes to me and hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. (Mt7:25)(Lk6:48)He is like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundations on the rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not

shake it, because it was well built. (Mt7:26-27)(Lk6:49)But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on the ground of sand without a foundation. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed with a great crash and its destruction was complete."

(Mt7:28)When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, (29)because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.

A consideration strictly linked to the previous passage (The narrow and wide gates): to speak without acting is, in any case, not sufficient, actually wrong.

Jesus anointed by a sinful woman [Luke 7:36-50]

(Lk7:36)Now one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, so he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. (37)When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume, (38)and as she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.

(39)When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is -that she is a sinner."

(40)Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to tell you." "Tell me, teacher," he said.

(41)"Two men owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. (42)Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he canceled the debts of both. Now which of them will like him more?"

(43)Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt canceled." "You have judged correctly," Jesus said.

(44)Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. (45)You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, had not stopped kissing my feet. (46)You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. (47)Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven -for she has shown much kindness. But he who has been forgiven little is he who has shown little kindness."

(48)Then Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."

(49)The other guests began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?"

has shown (50)Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

A perfectly clear example: even a "heavy sinner" can be fully forgiven by Yahweh in case of true repentance.

In other terms, a self-supposed righteous man does not realize his need for salvation -and is not forgiven-, but a self-admitted sinner does -and is forgiven.

Second preaching trip through Galilee

Jesus travels again through Galilee [Luke 8:1-3]

(Lk8:1) After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom of Yahweh. The Twelve were with him, (2) and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; (3) Joanna the wife of Cuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means.

The group of people traveling with Jesus (we don't have to forget the great differences existing among his followers, beginning with the twelve apostles, and among the women. Furthermore, in both groups there were some well-known "sinners") fully represents what the Christian Church should be: a melting pot accepting the most diverse temperaments and qualities of even dramatically different people, all united by their faith in Yahweh and Jesus.

The parable of the sower [Mark 4:1-20;22-23 Matthew 13:1-23 Luke 8:4-15;17-18]

(Mk4:1-4)(Mt13:1-4)(Lk8:4-5) Again that same day Jesus went out of the house, sat by the lake and began to teach while a large crowd was gathering and people were coming to him from town after town. The crowd that gathered around Jesus was so large that he got into a boat and sat in it out on the lake, while all the people stood along the shore at the water's edge. Then he taught them many things by parables, and in his teaching he told this parable and said: "Listen! A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path; it was trampled on, and the birds of the air came and ate it up. (Mk4:5-6)(Mt13:5-6)(Lk8:6) Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. And when it came up, it sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root and no moisture. (Mk4:7)(Mt13:7)(Lk8:7) Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up with it and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain. (Mk4:8-9)(Mt13:8-9)(Lk8:8) Still other seed fell on good soil, where it came up, grew and produced a crop, multiplying thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times what was sown."

Then, when Jesus said this, he called out, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

(Mk4:10)(Mt13:10)(Lk8:9) When he was alone, the Twelve and the others disciples around him came to him and asked him about what these parables meant, "Why do you speak to the people in parables?"

(Mk4:11-12)(Mt13:11;13-15)(Lk8:10) He replied and told them, "The knowledge of the secrets of the Kingdom of Yahweh has been given to you. But not to them; to those on the outside everything is said in parables. This is why I speak to the others in parables, so that,

'Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand.'

In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah:

'You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving. For this people's heart has become callused;

They hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes.

Instead, if they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, I would heal them.'

(Mt13:16)But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. (17)For I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it."

(Mk4:13)Then Jesus said to them, "Don't you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable? (Mk4:14)(Mt13:18)(Lk8:11)Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: The seed is the Word of Yahweh, and the farmer sows the Word. (Mk4:15)(Mt13:19)(Lk8:12)Some people are like seed along the path, where the Word is sown. Those, the seed along the path, are the ones who hear the message about the Kingdom and do not understand it. And then, as soon as they hear it, Satan, the evil one, comes and snatches away from their hearts the Word that was sown in them, so that they may not believe and be saved. (Mk4:16-17)(Mt13:20-21)(Lk8:13)Others, like the seed sown that fell on rocky places, are the ones who, when they hear the Word, receive it at once with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing, when trouble or persecution comes because of the Word, they quickly fall away. (Mk4:18-19)(Mt13:22)(Lk8:14)Still others, like the seed that was sown and fell among the thorns, are those who hear the Word; but as they go their way they are choked by the worries of this life, the riches and pleasures. The deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the Word, making it unfruitful, and they do not mature. (Mk4:20)(Mt13:23)(Lk8:15)Others, like the seed sown that fell on good soil, are those who hear the Word, understand it and accept it. The seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the Word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop -yielding thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times what was sown.

(Mk4:22)(Lk8:17)For whatever is hidden is meant to be disclosed, there is nothing hidden that will not be disclosed. And whatever is concealed is meant to be brought out into the open; there is nothing concealed that will not be known or brought out into the open. (Mt13:12)(Lk8:18)Therefore consider carefully how you listen. Whoever has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he thinks he has will be taken from him. (Mk4:23)If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear."

The moral meaning of this passage is that surely that there are different ways of accepting -or rejecting- the Word of Yahweh, and the fruit which it produces depends on the heart of him who receives it. Anyway, even if it may seem that much of the work is wasted, that in many places the message fails, there always is a good, abundant harvest.

The meaning of the last verses of this passage is that there is no standing still in physical and spiritual life. All the time we are either going forward -being physically and spiritually active- or going back -being passive.

The parable of the growing seed [Mark 4:26-29]

(Mk4:26)He also said, "This is what the Kingdom of Yahweh is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. (27)Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. (28)All by itself the soil produces grain -first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. (29)As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come."

As in physical nature, the spiritual work of Yahweh goes on quietly, unfolding His plans, in spite of men's rebellion and disobedience. Nothing can stop His purposes.

The parable of the weeds. Parable's explanation [Matthew 13:24-30;36-43]

(Mt13:24) Jesus told them another parable: "**The Kingdom of Heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field.** (25) But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. (26) When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared.

(27) The owner's servants came to him and said, 'Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?'

(28) 'An enemy did this,' he replied.

The servants asked him, 'Do you want us to go and pull them up?'

(29) 'No,' he answered, 'because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them. (30) **Let both grow together until the harvest.** At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.'"

(Mt13:36) Then he left the crowd and went into the house. His disciples came to him and said, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field."

(37) He answered, "The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. (38) The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the sons of the Kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, (39) and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are the angels.

(40) **As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire,** so it will be at the end of the age. (41) The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his Kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. (42) They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (43) Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the Kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear."

Here we have a typical, Jewish, image of the final punishment of the sinners, one of the many cases when the New Testament authors were unable to detach themselves from the ideas they grew up with.

The meaning of the passage is that we can never surely know who the good and the bad are. Even less we can know if, in a near or far away future, an evil person will become saint (Yahweh can do it!)

The parable of the mustard seed and the yeast

[Mark 4:30-34 Matthew 13:31-35 Luke 13:18-21]

(Mk4:30-32)(Mt13:31-32)(Lk13:18-19) Then, again Jesus told them another parable and asked, "What shall we say the Kingdom of Yahweh is like? What shall I compare it to? Or what parable shall we use to describe it? **The Kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all the seed you plant in the ground, yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants and becomes a tree, with such big branches that the birds of the air can come and perch in its shade.**"

(Mt13:33)(Lk13:20-21) Again he told them still another parable and asked, "What shall I compare the Kingdom of Yahweh to? **The Kingdom of Heaven is like the yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough.**"

(Mk13:33-34)(Mt13:34)Jesus spoke all these things to the crowd; and with many similar parables Jesus spoke the Word to them, as much as they could understand. He did not say anything to them without using a parable. But when he was alone with his own disciples, he explained everything. (Mt13:35)So was fulfilled what was spoken through the prophet,

*'I will open my mouth in parables,
I will utter things hidden since the creation of the world.'*

Practically, a double affirmation: that, in spite of being such a small group of people, they are the core of the Christian Church and that, at the end, the Church will spread to the whole Earth.

The parables of the hidden treasure and the pearl [Matthew 13:44-46]

(Mt13:44)"The Kingdom of Heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy he went and sold all he had and bought that field.

(45)Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. (46) When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it."

To find Yahweh and His Kingdom can be the result of a long search or of coming upon it unaware. However it happens, either at the end of a long and conscious search, or in the flash of a moment's illumination, it is worth sacrificing everything to accept it.

The parable of the net [Matthew 13:47-52]

(Mt13:47)"Once again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. (48)When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up to the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away. (49)This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous (50)and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

(51)Have you understood all these things?" Jesus asked.

"Yes, they replied."

(52)He said to them, "Therefore every teacher of the law who has been instructed about the Kingdom of Heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old."

As in a fishing net, in the Kingdom of Yahweh on Earth -in the human institution of the Church- there is a mixture of all kinds of people, good and bad.

As in a fishing net, in the Kingdom of Yahweh in Heaven -in universal spiritual communion with Him- every time Jesus goes fishing souls, are allowed in a number of first-timers -those souls already good- and also a number of second, third, n-th timers -those souls who, after a period of redemptive punishment in hell have accepted to repent and to follow Jesus. (Fishing in the "fiery furnace," which is the usual Jewish picture of punishment, figurative of the actual hell, the punitive and formative place where Yahweh is not present.)

Note. For more information about this point, see "Thoughts. At the end of time, everybody will be with Yahweh. A direct consequence of Yahweh's justice and affection."

The cost of following Jesus [Matthew 8:18-22 Luke 9:57-62]

(Mt8:18-19)(Lk9:57)As they were walking along the road, when Jesus saw the crowd around him, he gave orders to cross to the other side of the lake. Then a man, a teacher of the law, came to him and said, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go."

*(Mt8:20)(Lk9:58)Jesus replied, "**Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.**"*

*(Mt8:21-22)(Lk9:59-60)He said to another man, "**Follow me.**" But the man, another disciple, replied, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father."*

*But Jesus told him, "**Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the Kingdom of Yahweh.**"*

(Lk9:61)Still another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family."

*(62)Jesus replied, "**No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the Kingdom of Yahweh.**"*

To spread the Word of Yahweh, and the Christian Church on Earth, Jesus doesn't need followers brought by a moment of emotion or hesitating after being personally called, but men and women fully aware of what they have to and are actually doing. Furthermore, nobody has to believe that the Christian way is an easy way. On the contrary, it always involves a personal cross.

Jesus calms the storm [Mark 4:35-41 Matthew 8:23-27 Luke 8:22-25]

*(Mk4:35-36)(Mt8:23)(Lk8:22)One day when evening came, Jesus said to his disciples, "**Let us go over to the other side of the lake.**" So they got into a boat and set out. Then, leaving the crowd behind, he got into the boat and they took him along, just as he was. There were also other boats with him, and his disciples followed him. (Mk4:37-41)(Mt8:24-27)(Lk8:23-25)As they sailed, he fell asleep. Without warning, a furious storm, a squall, came up on the lake, and the waves broke over the boat, so that the boat was nearly being swamped, and they were in great danger. But Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples went and woke him and said to him, "Lord, save us! We are going to drown! Teacher, don't you care if we drown?"*

*He replied, asking to his disciples, "**You of little faith, why are you so afraid? Where is your faith? Do you still have no faith?**" Then he got up and rebuked the wind and the raging waters, and said, "**Quiet! Be still!**" Then the storm subsided, the wind died down and it was all completely calm. The men were terrified and amazed, and they asked each other, "Who is this? What kind of man is this? He commands and even the winds and the waves obey him!"*

A confirmation that Jesus was a man -not a god, not part of a trinity. And, because he was a man, he became tired; he too could reach the point of exhaustion when the claim of sleep is imperative.

As Jesus stopped a storm in Galilee, so whenever the storms of life shake our body and soul, we have to call Jesus for spiritual help.

The healing of a demon-possessed man

[Mark 5:1-20 Matthew 8:28-34 Luke 8:26-39]

(Mk5:1-3)(Mt8:28)(Lk8:26-27)They sailed and went across the lake to the region of the Gadarenes, which is across the lake from Galilee. When Jesus arrived at the other

side, he got out of the boat and stepped ashore. A man from the town, demon-possessed by an evil spirit, came from the tombs to meet him. He was so violent that no one could pass that way. For a long time this man had not worn clothes or lived in a house, but had lived in the tombs, and no one could bind him any more, not even with a chain. **(Mk5:4)**For he had often been chained hand and foot, but he tore the chains apart and broke the irons on his feet. No one was strong enough to subdue him. **(5)**Night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones.

(Mk5:6-8)(Mt8:29)(Lk8:28-29)When he saw Jesus from a distance, he cried out, ran, and fell at his feet on his knees in front of him. He shouted at the top of his voice, "What do you want with me, Jesus, Son Yahweh, the Most High? Have you come here to torture me before the appointed time? I beg you, swear to Yahweh that you won't torture me!" For Jesus had commanded the evil spirit to come out of the man and said to him, **"Come out of this man, you evil spirit!"** Many times it had seized him, and though he was chained hand and foot and kept under guard, he had broken his chains and had been driven by the demon into solitary places.

(Mk5:9)(Lk8:30)Then Jesus asked him, **"What is your name?"**

"My name is Legion, for we are many," he replied, because many demons had gone into him. **(Mk5:10)(Lk8:31)**And he begged Jesus again and again not to send them out of the area and not to order them go into the Abyss.

(Mk5:11-13)(Mt8:30-32)(Lk8:32-33)Some distance from there a large herd of pigs was feeding on the nearby hillside. The demons begged Jesus to let them go into them, "If you drive us out, send us among the pigs; allow us to go into them." And he gave them permission, saying, **"Go!"** And so, when the evil spirits, the demons, came out of the man, they went into the pigs. And the whole herd, about two thousand in number, rushed down the steep bank into the lake and were drowned in the water.

(Mk5:14-16)(Mt8:33)(Lk8:34-36)When those tending the pigs saw what had happened, they ran off and reported all this in the town and countryside, and the people went out to see what had happened. When they came to Jesus, they found the man who had been possessed by the legion of demons, from whom the demons had gone out, sitting there at Jesus' feet, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid. Those who had seen it told the people what had happened to the demon-possessed man and how the man had been cured -and told about the pigs as well.

(Mk5:17)(Mt8:34)(Lk8:37)Then the whole town, all the people of the region of the Gadarenes went out to meet Jesus. And when they saw him, they began to plead with Jesus to leave them and their region, because they were overcome with fear. So he got into the boat and left.

(Mk5:18-20)(Lk8:38-39)As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed and from whom the demons had gone out begged to go with him. Jesus did not let him, but sent him away, saying, **"Go, return home to your family and tell them how much the Lord Yahweh has done for you, and how He has had mercy on you."** So the man went away and began to tell all over town and in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed.

This is the report of a spiritual healing, written to confirm that Jesus is the only intermediary between men and Yahweh, and that everything is actually done by Yahweh, with Jesus' intercession.

A dead girl and a sick woman [Mark 5:21-43 Matthew 9:18-26 Luke 8:40-56]

(Mk5:21-24)(Mt9:18-19)(Lk8:40-42) Now, after saying this, when Jesus had again crossed over by boat and returned to the other side of the lake, a large crowd welcomed him and gathered around him while he was by the lake, for they were all expecting him. Then a man named Jairus, one of the synagogue rulers, came there. And, seeing Jesus, he fell at his feet and pleaded earnestly with him to come to his house because his only daughter, a girl of about twelve, was dying, "My little daughter is dying. But please come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live." Jesus got up and went with him, and so did his disciples. As Jesus was on his way, a large crowd followed and pressed around him almost crushing him.

(Mk5:25-29)(Mt9:20-21)(Lk8:43-44) And just then a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years, but no one could heal her. She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse. When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched the edge of his cloak, because she said to herself, "If I just only touch his cloak, I will be healed." And immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was free from her suffering.

*(Mk5:30-31)(Lk8:45) At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, "**Who touched me and my clothes?**"*

*"You see the people crowding against you," his disciples answered, "and yet you can ask, '**Who touched me?**'" When they all denied it, Peter said, "Master, the people are crowding and pressing against you."*

*(Mk5:32)(Lk8:46) But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it and said, "**Someone touched me; I know that power has gone out from me.**"*

*(Mk5:33)(Lk8:47) Then the woman, knowing what had happened to her and seeing that she could not go unnoticed, came, fell at his feet trembling with fear, and told him the whole truth. In the presence of all people, she told why she had touched him and how she had been instantly healed. (Mk5:34)(Mt9:22)(Lk8:48) Then Jesus turned, and saw her, "**Take heart, daughter,**" he said to her, "**your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering.**" And the woman was healed from that moment.*

(Mk5:35)(Lk8:49) While Jesus was still speaking, some men came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue ruler. "Your daughter is dead," they said. "Why bother the teacher any more?"

*(Mk5:36)(Lk8:50) Hearing this and ignoring what they said, Jesus told Jairus, the synagogue ruler, "**Don't be afraid; just believe, and she will be healed.**"*

(Mk5:37-43)(Mt9:23-25)(Lk8:51-56) When they came to the home of Jairus, the synagogue leader, he did not let anyone follow him and go in except Peter, James and John the brother of James, and the child's father and mother. Jesus saw a commotion, with people crying and wailing loudly, as meanwhile the people were wailing and mourning for her.

*When Jesus entered the ruler's house and saw the flute players and the noisy crowd, he went in and said to them, "**Why all this commotion and wailing? Stop wailing, go away, the girl is not dead but asleep.**" But they laughed at him, knowing that she was dead.*

*After he put them all and the crowd outside, he took the child's father and mother and the disciples who were with him, and went in where the child was. He took the girl by the hand and said to her, "**Talitha kum!**" (which means, "**My little girl, I say to you,***

get up!"). Immediately her spirit returned, and at once the girl stood up and walked around (she was twelve years old). At this her parents were completely astonished. But Jesus gave them strict orders not to tell and let anyone know about what had happened, and told them to give her something to eat.

(Mt9:26)News of this spread through all the region.

We would say that the woman showed nothing other than superstition, as to touch the edge of Jesus' cloak is the same kind of thing as to look for healing power in the relics of saints, but here Jesus accepts the woman's simple faith because she is a very simple person. Clearly, this doesn't extend to learned people, who don't have any excuse to be superstitious and condemns all Church people and Churches who believe to or spread "religious" superstitions of any kind.

Here we discover -as his disciples discovered at the time- that the power to heal comes with a "cost," even for Jesus.

Note. For more information about healing, see "Miscellanea. Miraculous healing: is it possible to reconcile faith and science?"

Jesus heals the blind and mute [Matthew 9:27-34]

(Mt9:27)As Jesus went on from there, two blind men followed him, calling out, "Have mercy on us, Son of David!"

(28)When he had gone indoors, the blind men came to him, and he asked them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?"

"Yes, Lord," they replied.

*(29)Then he touched their eyes and said, "**According to your faith will it be done to you;**" (30)and their sight was restored. Jesus warned them sternly, "**See that no one knows about this.**" (31)But they went out and spread the news about him all over that region.*

(32)While they were going out, a man who was demon-possessed and could not talk was brought to Jesus. (33)And when the demon was driven out, the man who had been mute spoke. The crowd was amazed and said, "Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel."

(34)But the Pharisees said, "It is by the prince of demons that he drives out demons."

This passage shows the importance of faith as the essential for a "miracle" is faith. Simple people can come to Jesus with a very inadequate idea of who and what he is, even approaching him in a superstitious way (in "holy" places, through saints, relics, and so on) and yet he helps them, seeing the sincerity of their faith.

Third preaching trip through Galilee

A prophet without honor [Mark 6:1-6a Matthew 13:53-58]

(Mk6:1-2)(Mt13:53-54)When Jesus had finished these parables, he moved on from there and went to his hometown, accompanied by his disciples. When the Sabbath came, he began to teach the people in their synagogue, and the many who heard him were amazed. "Where did this man get these things, this wisdom and these miraculous powers?" they asked. "What's this wisdom that has been given him, that he even does miracles! (Mk6:3-4)(Mt13:55-57)Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother's name

Mary, and aren't his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas? Aren't all these his sisters here with us? Where then did this man get all these things?" And they took offense at him.

But Jesus said to them, "Only in his hometown, among his relatives and in his own house is a prophet without honor."

(Mk6:5)(Mt13:58)And he could not do many miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them, because of their lack of faith. (Mk6:6a)And he was amazed at their lack of faith.

After Jesus' birth, fulfilled her "physical" mission, Joseph and Mary had four sons, -Jesus' half-brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas- and some daughters -Jesus' half-sisters, whose names are not known- as reported in Mark 6:3; Matthew 13:55-56; John 2:12; 7:3,5; Acts 1:14; 1Corinthians 9:5; Galatians 1:19.

To obtain Jesus' help in something extraordinary as healing from an incurable illness is absolutely necessary to have faith, that is, to believe that the miracle asked for can actually happen. Nothing more is requested.

The workers are few [Matthew 9:35-38]

(Mt9:35)Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the Good News of the Kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. (36) When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. (37)Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. (38)Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into His harvest field."

Here, in one sentence, we see the activity which was the essence of Jesus' life. He was the healer of body and soul, and he spent far more time healing the sick, feeding the hungry and comforting the sorrowing than he did talking about Yahweh.

Jesus saw that the Jewish people were left without guidance, that the Priests and the Teachers of the Law, the pillars of the orthodox religion of his days, had nothing to offer them; neither guidance, nor comfort, nor strength to give. On the contrary, they were harassing men with subtle arguments about the Law, which could not give any help or comfort. And, how similar is the situation, even today, in many liturgical Churches and Denominations!

Jesus needs men. When he was on Earth, his voice could reach so few. He was never outside Palestine, and there was a world which was waiting. So, he needs men who will spread around and tell everybody the Good News of the Gospel.

Jesus sends out the Twelve. Warnings and encouragements

[Mark 6:6b-13 Matthew 10:1,5-42 Luke 9:1-6;12:1-9,11-12]

(Mk6:6b)Then Jesus went around teaching from village to village. (Mk6:7)(Mt10:1)(Lk9:1)When Jesus had called his Twelve disciples together to him, he sent them out by two and gave them authority over evil spirits, the power to drive out all demons and to cure and heal every disease and sickness, (Lk9:2)and sent them out to preach the Kingdom of Yahweh and to heal the sick.

(Mk6:8-9)(Mt10:5-10)(Lk9:3)Jesus sent the Twelve out and the following were his instructions. He told them: "Do not go among the Pagans or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. As you go, preach this message: 'The

Kingdom of Heaven is near.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give. Do not take along any gold or silver or copper in your belts. Take nothing for the journey except a staff -no bread, no bag, no money in your belts. Wear sandals but not an extra tunic, or sandals or a staff; for the worker is worth his keep.

(Mk6:10)(Mt10:11)(Lk9:4)Whatever town or village you enter, search for some worthy person there and stay at his house. Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you live that town. (Mt10:12)As you enter the home, give it your greeting. (13) If the home is deserving, let your peace rest on it; if it is not, let your peace return to you. (Mk6:11)(Mt10:14)(Lk9:5)And if any people in any place will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake the dust off your feet when you leave that home or their town, as a testimony against them. (Mt10:15)I tell you the truth, it will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town. (16)I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves."

(Mt10:17)(Lk12:1)Meanwhile, when a crowd of many thousands had gathered, so that they were trampling on one another, Jesus began to speak, first to his disciples, saying: "Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. Be on your guard against men; they will hand you over to the local councils and flog you in their synagogues. (Mt10:18)On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Pagans. (Mt10:19-20)(Lk12:11-12)But when they arrest you, when you are brought before synagogues, rulers and authorities, do not worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of Yahweh your Father will teach you at that time what you should say, speaking through you.

(Mt10:21)Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. (22)All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. (23)When you are persecuted in one place, flee to another. I tell you the truth, you will not finish going through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes.

(24)A student is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. (25)It is enough for the student to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If the head of the house has been called Beelzebub, how much more the members of his household!

(Mt10:26)(Lk12:2)So do not be afraid of them. There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. (Mt10:27)(Lk12:3)What I tell you in the dark, and what you have said in the dark, speak so it will be heard in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, and what you have whispered in the ear in the inner rooms proclaim so it will be proclaimed from the roofs. (Mt10:28)(Lk12:4-5)I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body but after that can do no more and cannot kill the soul. But I will show you whom you should fear. Rather, fear Him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell. Be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Yes, I tell you, fear Him. (Mt10:29)(Lk12:6)Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And five sparrows for two copper coins? Yet not one of them is forgotten by Yahweh and will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. (Mt10:30-31)(Lk12:7)And, indeed,

even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

(Mt10:32)(Lk12:8)I tell you, whoever acknowledges me before men, I, the Son of Man, will also acknowledge him before the angels of Yahweh, my Father in Heaven. (Mt10:33)(Lk12:9)But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before the angels of Yahweh, my Father in Heaven.

(Mt10:34)Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to Earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. (35)For I have come to turn 'a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law (36)-a man's enemies will be the members of his own household.

(37)Anyone who is fond of his father or mother more than of me is not worthy of me; anyone who is fond of his son or daughter more than of me is not worthy of me; (38)and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. (39)Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

(40)He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives the One who sent me. (41)Anyone who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and anyone who receives a righteous man because he is a righteous man will receive a righteous man's reward. (42)And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward."

(Mk6:12-13)(Lk9:6)So they set out and went from village to village, preaching the Gospel and telling people to repent. They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed people everywhere.

The ministry Jesus assigned to the Twelve was as his own, joining preaching and healing. It joined concern for both men's bodies and souls. Their message was not to be confined to the news of eternal life; it had to propose a change to the conditions on Earth showing that health to men's bodies was an integral part of Yahweh's purpose as was health to their souls. And this should, always, be clearly in the mind of any minister of any Church.

Jesus warns his men of any time that they might well find the state and the consolidated religious organization allied against them; that both State and Church would persecute them. In effect, no established Church likes and accepts to be upset, and quite often the man with a message from Yahweh had -and still has- to undergo the hatred and the enmity of a fossilized orthodoxy.

Jesus told his men that Christians don't have to uselessly waste their lives. Often Christians have to die for their faith, but they don't have to throw away their lives in a way that does not help the faith. There is real wisdom in recognizing when to escape.

A very clear concept; if a man is loyal to Jesus Christ in this life, Jesus Christ will be loyal to him in the life to come. And the same is valid for the opposite attitude; he who rejects Jesus in his earthly life, will be rejected by Jesus -and sent to hell for the necessary formative and punitive period. (For more information about this point, see "Thoughts. At the end of time, everybody will be with Yahweh. A direct consequence of Yahweh's justice and affection.")

In the ancient Mediterranean world olive oil was widely used as a medicine, and was regarded as a panacea for all cures. Practically they were using the pharmacopoeia of their time for treating men. Jesus and his apostles did never "bless" or "consecrate" water, oil or any other substance. Jesus did and does call and send, without any ceremony.

Jesus and John the Baptist [Matthew 11:1-19 Luke 7:18-35]

(Mt11:1)After Jesus had finished instructing his Twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach in the towns of Galilee.

(Mt11:2-3)(Lk7:18-19)John's disciples told him about all these things. When John heard in prison what Jesus was doing, he called two of his disciples and sent them to the Lord to ask him, "Are you the One who was to come, or should we expect someone else?"

(Lk7:20)When the men came to Jesus, they said, "John the Baptist sent us to you to ask, 'Are you the One who was to come, or should we expect someone else?'"

(21)At that very time Jesus cured many who had diseases, sicknesses and evil spirits, and gave sight to many who were blind. (Mt11:4-5)(Lk7:22)So Jesus replied to the messengers, "Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the Good News is preached to the poor. (Mt11:6)(Lk7:23)Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me."

(Mt11:7)(Lk7:24)As John's disciples were leaving, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: "What did you go out into the desert to see? A reed swayed by the wind? (Mt11:8)(Lk7:25)If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine and expensive clothes and indulge in luxury are in kings' palaces. (Mt11:9)(Lk7:26)But then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. (Mt11:10)(Lk7:27)This is the one about whom it is written:

'I will send My messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.' (Mt11:11)(Lk7:28)I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than he. (Mt11:12)From the days of John the Baptist until now, the Kingdom of Heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it. (13)For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John. (14)And if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come. (15)He who has ears, let him hear."

(Lk7:29)(All the people, even the tax collectors, when they heard Jesus' words, acknowledged that Yahweh's way was right, because they had been baptized by John. (30)But the Pharisees and experts in the law rejected Yahweh's purpose for themselves, because they had not been baptized by John.)

(Mt11:16-17)(Lk7:31-32)"To what, then, can I compare the people of this generation? What are they like? They are like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling out to each other: 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn and cry.' (Mt11:18)(Lk7:33)For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and they say, 'He has a demon.' (Mt11:19)(Lk7:34-35)The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and "sinners.'" But wisdom is proved right by her actions, by her children."

Jesus' example shows that the life of a Christian should be based on facts, not on words. A Christian has to be judged not for what he claims to be or to do, but for what he is actually doing both in the material and the moral-spiritual field.

Even those considered heavy sinners had shown their willingness to repent (by accepting John's baptism) whereas the pillars of Jewish orthodoxy showed their rejection of Yahweh's message (by refusing to be baptized). They did not feel to be sinners and need to repent as going for being baptized would have indicate. And the actual situation, today, in the Christian Churches, is not so different!

Not peace but division [Luke 12:49-53]

(Lk12:49)"I have come to bring fire on the Earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! (50)But I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is completed! (51)Do you think I came to bring peace on Earth? No, I tell you, but division. (52)From now on there will be five in one family divided against each other, three against two and two against three. (53)They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law."

Jesus had to pass through the Cross, which was always before his eyes, and wished that the hour of his suffering were already past and his earthly mission already accomplished. But we have to remember that his mission was mainly to open the Kingdom of Yahweh to all men. On Earth everybody had to carry his cross -as Jesus himself did. So we don't have to believe that someday there will be a time of total peace on Earth.

Woe on unrepentant cities [Matthew 11:20-24 Luke 10:12-15]

(Mt11:20)Then Jesus began to denounce the cities in which most of his miracles had been performed, because they did not repent. (Mt11:21)(Lk10:13)"Woe to you, Korazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. (Mt11:22)(Lk10:14)But I tell you, it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you. (Mt11:23)(Lk10:15)And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the Skies? No, you will go down to the depths. If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day. (Mt11:24)(Lk10:12)But I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for that town."

The Greek word translated "woe" is "ouai," which expresses sorrowful pity more than anger. This means that, in spite of the strong words employed by Matthew and Luke, Jesus' condemnation of this sin, as of any other sin, was of the kind of anger that comes from a broken, not a revengeful, heart.

Rest for the weary [Matthew 11:25-30 Luke 10:21-22]

(Mt11:25-26)(Lk10:21)At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Spirit of Yahweh said, "I praise You, Father, Lord of Heaven and Earth, because You have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was Your good pleasure.

(Mt11:27)(Lk10:22)All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows who the Son is except the Father, and no one knows who the Father is except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him.

(Mt11:28)Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. (29)Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. (30)For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Jesus, as everybody should do, thanked Yahweh for the actual situation of life in which he was put. And he didn't ask for anything different.

Jesus is the center of the Christian faith and he alone can reveal Yahweh to men. Furthermore, between men and Yahweh there is no other intermediary or intercessor -no priest or pastor, no angel, no recognized "saint," not even Jesus' mother.

John the Baptist beheaded [Mark 6:14-29 Matthew 14:1-12 Luke 9:7-9]

(Mk6:14)(Mt14:1-2)(Lk9:7)Now, at that time, King Herod the Tetrarch heard the reports about all this that was going on, for Jesus' name had become well known. And he was perplexed, because some were saying to his attendants, "This is John the Baptist; he has been raised from the dead! And that is why miraculous powers are at work in him."

(Mk6:15)(Lk9:8)Others said that Elijah had appeared, "He is Elijah." And still others claimed that one of the prophets of long ago had come back to life, "He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of long ago."

(Mk6:16)(Lk9:9)But when Herod heard this, he said, "John has been raised from the dead! I beheaded that man! Who, then, is this I hear such things about?" And he tried to see him.

(Mk6:17)(Mt14:3)For Herod himself had given orders to have John arrested, and he had him bound and put in prison. He did this because of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, whom he had married. (Mk6:18)(Mt14:4)For John had been saying to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have her, your brother's wife." (Mk6:19)So Herodias nursed a grudge against John and wanted to kill him. But she was not able to, (20)because Herod feared John and protected him, knowing him to be a righteous and holy man. When Herod heard John, he was greatly puzzled; yet he liked to listen to him. (Mt14:5)Herod wanted to kill John, but he was afraid of the people, because they considered him a prophet.

(Mk6:21-23)(Mt14:6-7)Finally the opportune time came. On his birthday Herod gave a banquet for his high officials and military commanders and the leading men of Galilee. When the daughter of Herodias came in and danced for them, she pleased Herod and his dinner guests so much that he promised with an oath to give her whatever she asked.

The king said to the girl, "Ask me for anything you want, and I'll give it to you. Whatever you ask, up to half my kingdom."

(24)She went out and said to her mother, "What shall I ask for?"

"The head of John the Baptist," she answered.

(Mk6:25)(Mt14:8)At once, prompted by her mother, the girl hurried in to the king with the request, and said: "I want you to give me right now the head of John the Baptist on a platter."

(Mk6:26)(Mt14:9)The king was greatly distressed, but because of his oaths and his dinner guests, he did not want to refuse her and he ordered that her request be granted. (Mk6:27)(Mt14:10)And so he immediately sent an executioner with orders to bring John's head. The man went and had John beheaded in the prison. (Mk6:28)(Mt14:11)

And his head was brought back on a platter. He presented it to the girl, and she carried it and gave it to her mother. (Mk6:29)(Mt14:12) On hearing of this, John's disciples came and took his body and buried it in a tomb. Then they went and told Jesus.

Jesus feeds the five thousand [Mk 6:30-44 Mt 14:13-21 Lk 9:10-17 Jn 6:1-15]

*(Mk6:30-34)(Mt14:13-14)(Lk9:10-11)(Jn6:1-2) Some time after this, when the apostles returned, they gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. Then, when Jesus heard what had happened and, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, "**Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.**" So Jesus took them with him and they crossed in a boat to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee (that is, the Sea of Tiberias), to a town called Bethsaida, and they withdrew by themselves to a solitary place. But, hearing of this, many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. So the crowds learned about it and a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the miraculous signs he had performed on the sick. When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he welcomed them, began teaching them many things, and spoke to them about the Kingdom of Yahweh, and healed their sick, those who needed healing. (Jn6:3) Then Jesus went up on a mountain-side and sat down with his disciples. (4) The Jewish Passover Feast was near.*

(Mk6:35-36)(Mt14:15)(Lk9:12) By this time it was late in the afternoon and, as evening approached, the Twelve disciples came to him and said, "This is a remote place, and it's already getting very late. Send the crowd away so they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages to find lodging and buy themselves some food to eat."

*(Jn6:5) When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, "**Were shall we buy bread for those people to eat?**" (6) He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do.*

*(Mk6:37-38)(Mt14:16-17)(Lk9:13)(Jn6:7-9) Philip answered him, "Two hundred denarii would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!" But Jesus replied, "**They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat.**" They said, "That would take two hundred denarii! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?"*

*"**How many loaves do you have?**" he asked. "**Go and see.**"*

Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up, "Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?"

*When they found out, they answered, "We have here only five loaves of bread, and two fish -unless we go and buy food for all this crowd." (Mk6:39-41)(Mt14:18-19)(Lk 9:14-16)(Jn6:10-11)"**Bring them here to me,**" Jesus said. And then Jesus directed them to have all the people sit down in groups on the green grass, saying to his disciples, "**Have the people sit down in groups of about fifty each.**" There was plenty of grass in that place, the disciples did so, and so all the men who were there, about five thousand of them, sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties. Taking the five loaves and looking up to Heaven, Jesus gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to his disciples to set before the people, and the disciples gave them to the people, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the two fish, dividing them also among them all.*

(Mk6:42-43)(Mt14:20)(Lk9:17)(Jn6:12-13) They all ate and were satisfied. When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, "**Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted.**" And so the disciples picked them up and filled twelve basketfuls of the broken pieces of the five barley loaves of bread and of the fish that were left over by those who had eaten. *(Mk6:44)(Mt14:21)* The number of the men who had eaten was about five thousand, besides women and children.

(Jn6:14) After the people saw the miraculous sign that Jesus did, they began to say, "Surely this is the prophet who is to come into the world." *(15)* Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.

Jesus was moved with compassion for them, so desperately in physical and spiritual need. Spiritually, they were left to themselves -the Priests and the Teachers of the Law, their pastors, had nothing to offer them; neither guidance, nor comfort, nor strength to give. On the contrary, they were harassing men with subtle arguments about the Law, which could not give any help or comfort. And, how similar is the situation, even today, in so many liturgical Churches and Denominations!

To note that, when Jesus wants something done, he gets a man to do it. Jesus always needs people through whom he can act and speak. And it can be anybody, in any place, at any time.

Jesus walks on the water [Mark 6:45-56 Matthew 14:22-36 John 6:16-24]

(Mk6:45-47)(Mt14:22-24)(Jn6:16-17) When evening came, his disciples went down to the lake. Immediately Jesus made them get into the boat and go ahead of him to the other side, to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. They got into a boat and set off across the lake for Capernaum. After he had dismissed and left them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. By now it was dark, and Jesus had not yet joined them. He was there alone on land, but the boat was already a considerable distance from land, in the middle of the lake, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it.

(Mk6:48-50)(Mt14:25-27)(Jn16:18-20) He saw the disciples straining at the oars, because a strong wind was blowing against them and the waters grew rough. About the fourth watch of the night, when they had rowed twenty-five or thirty stadia, Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. He was about to pass by them, but when all the disciples saw him approaching the boat, walking on the water of the lake, they thought he was a ghost, and they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear.

But Jesus immediately spoke to them and said, "**Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid.**"

(Mt14:28) "Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water."

(29) "Come," he said.

Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. *(30)* But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!"

(31) Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "**You of little faith,**" he said, "**why did you doubt?**"

(Mk6:51)(Mt14:32-33)(Jn6:21) Then they were willing to take them into the boat and, when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down and immediately the boat reached

the shore where they were heading. Then those who were in the boat worshipped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of Yahweh." They were completely amazed, (Mk6:52) for they had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened.

(Mk6:53)(Mt14:34) When they had crossed over, they landed at Gennezaret and anchored there. (Mk6:54-56)(Mt14:35-36) And as soon as they got out of the boat, when the men of that place recognized Jesus, they sent word to all the surrounding country. They ran throughout that whole region and carried the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. And wherever he went -into villages, towns or countryside- people brought all their sick to him and placed them in the marketplaces. They begged him to let the sick just touch even the edge of his cloak, and all who touched him were healed.

(Jn6:22) The next day the crowd that had stayed on the opposite shore of the lake realized that only one boat had been there, and that Jesus had not entered it with his disciples, but that they had gone away alone. (23) Then some boats from Tiberias landed near the place where the people had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks. (24) Once the crowd realized that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they got into the boats and went to Capernaum in search of Jesus.

Jesus, as a man, knew that he could not accomplish his mission without the help of Yahweh; that if he was to spend his life for others, he had to pray and ask for spiritual aid and reinforcement.

Jesus the Bread of Life [John 6:25-59]

(Jn6:25) When they found him on the other side of the lake, they asked him, "Rabbi, when did you get here?"

(26) Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. (27) Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him Yahweh the Father has placed His seal of approval."

(28) Then they asked him, "What must we do to do the works Yahweh requires?"

(29) Jesus answered, "The work of Yahweh is this: to believe in the one He has sent."

(30) So they asked him, "What miraculous sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? (31) Our forefathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written: 'He gave them bread from Heaven to eat.'"

(32) Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from Heaven, but my Father who gives you the true bread from Heaven. (33) **For the bread of Yahweh is he who comes down from Heaven and gives life to the world.**"

(34) "Sir," they said, "from now on give us this bread."

(35) Then Jesus declared, "**I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty. (36) But as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe. (37) All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. (38) For I have come down from Heaven not to do my will but to do the will of Him who sent me. (39) And this is the will of Him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that He has given me, but raise them up at the last day. (40) For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.**"

(41) At this the Jews began to grumble about him because he said, "I am the bread that came down from Heaven." (42) They said, "Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, 'I came down from Heaven'?"

(43) "Stop grumbling among yourselves," Jesus answered. (44) "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day. (45) It is written in the Prophets: 'They will all be taught by Yahweh.' Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from Him comes to me. (46) No one has seen the Father except the one who is from Yahweh; only he has seen the Father. (47) I tell you the truth, he who believes has everlasting life. (48) I am the bread of life. (49) Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died. (50) But here is the bread that comes down from Heaven, which a man can eat and not die. (51) I am the living bread that came down from Heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."

(52) Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"

(53) Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. (54) Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. (55) For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. (56) Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. (57) Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. (58) This is the bread that came down from Heaven. Your forefathers ate manna and died, but he who feeds on this bread will live forever." (59) He said this while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum.

Note. It is important to remember that John wrote his Gospel many years after the death of Jesus, and that he never tried to give the actual words of Jesus, but their inner significance.

The real, spiritual, Bread of Yahweh is Jesus, His son, who gives men not satisfaction from physical hunger, but eternal life.

A double confirmation, that Jesus was working following the will of his Father, a will he had fully accepted, and that Jesus' salvation will be given, at the end, to all people. (For more information about this point, see "Thoughts. At the end of time, everybody will be with Yahweh. A direct consequence of Yahweh's justice and affection.")

To the ancient people, accustomed to animal sacrifices, this ideas presented no difficulty at all. They would not normally read phrases like "eating Jesus' body and drinking his blood" with crude and shocked realism. They would think about the experience of an union closer than any earthly union, of a kind of "communion;" a spiritual union between the worshipper and a god, here Jesus. In few words, all this means that Jesus is the essential for life, that to refuse his invitation is to miss true life both in this world and in the world to come, that, at the end of time, all people will be in spiritual communion with Jesus and, through him, with Yahweh and with everybody else.

Many disciples desert Jesus [John 6:60-71]

(Jn6:60) On hearing it, many of his disciples said, "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?"

(61) Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, "Does this offend you? (62) What if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before! (63) The Spirit of Yahweh gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life. (64) Yet there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him. (65) He went on to say, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him."

(66) From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.

(67) "You do not want to leave too, do you?" Jesus asked the Twelve.

(68) Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. (69) We believe and know that you are the Holy One of Yahweh."

(70) Then Jesus replied, "Have I not chosen you, the Twelve? Yet one of you is a devil!" (71) (He meant Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, who, though one of the Twelve, was later to betray him.)

The real difficulty of Christianity, besides its demand to surrender to Jesus accepting him as the final authority, is that it demands a moral standard of the highest level. In the last analysis Christianity is not a philosophy or a theory to discuss before accepting it; it is a personal, spontaneous, response to Jesus Christ.

The cost of being a disciple [Luke 14:25-33]

(Lk14:25) Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said:

(26) "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters -yes, even his own life- he cannot be my disciple.

(27) And anyone who does not carry his cross and follows me cannot be my disciple.

(28) Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? (29) For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, (30) saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.'

(31) Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? (32) If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. (33) In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple."

Eastern language was very strong in its expressions, and these words don't have to be taken literally. When Jesus told to hate the nearest and dearest, he actually meant to say that no affection in life can compare with the affection men must bear to him and that the man who wants to be a disciple has to remember that in following him there is always a Cross.

Anyway, it is actually possible to be a follower of Jesus without being a disciple. In effect, in the Christian Churches the vast majority is composed by distant followers of Jesus, with so few true disciples. This vast majority constitutes the flock, of which the few disciples are the shepherds.

Clean and unclean [Mark 7:1-23 Matthew 15:1-20]

(Mk7:1-5)(Mt15:1-2) Then some Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus and saw some of his disciples eating food with hands that were "unclean," that is, unwashed. (The Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they give their hands a ceremonial washing, holding to the tradition of the elders. When they come from the marketplace they do not eat unless they wash. And they observe many other traditions, such as the washing of cups, pitchers and kettles).

So the Pharisees and the teachers of the law asked Jesus, "Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders and don't live according to it, instead of eating their food with 'unclean' hands? They don't wash their hands before they eat!"

(Mk7:6-13)(Mt15:3-9) Jesus replied, "**You hypocrites!** Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you; as it is written:

'These people honor Me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me.

They worship Me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.'

You have let go of the commands of Yahweh and are holding on to the tradition of men."

And he said to them: "You have a fine way of breaking and setting aside the commands of Yahweh in order to observe your own traditions! For with Moses Yahweh said, 'Honor your father and your mother,' and, 'Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.' But you say that if a man says to his father or mother: 'Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is Corban' (that is, a gift devoted to Yahweh), he is not to 'honor his father or his mother' with it, and then you no longer let him do anything for his father or mother. Thus you nullify the Word of Yahweh for the sake of your tradition, that you have handed down. And you do many things like that."

(Mk7:14)(Mt15:10) Again Jesus called the crowd to him and said, "Listen to me, everyone, and understand this. **(Mk7:15)(Mt15:11)** Nothing of what from outside goes into a man's mouth can make him 'unclean' by going into him. Rather, it is what comes out of a man's mouth that makes him 'unclean.' **(Mk7:16)** If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear."

(Mk7:17)(Mt15:12) Then, after he had left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples came to him and asked him about this parable, "Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this?"

(Mt15:13) He replied, "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots. **(14)** Leave them; they are blind guides. If a blind man leads a blind man, both will fall into a pit."

(15) Peter said, "Explain the parable to us."

(Mk7:18-19)(Mt15:16-17) "Are you still so dull?" Jesus asked them. "Don't you see that nothing that enters a man from outside can make him 'unclean'? For whatever enters the mouth doesn't go into his heart but into his stomach, and then out of his body." (In saying this, Jesus declared all foods "clean.")

(Mk7:20)(Mt15:18) He went on: "But the things that come out of a man's mouth come from the heart, and these are what make a man 'unclean.' **(Mk7:21-22)(Mt15:19)** For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, false testimony, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. **(Mk7:23)(Mt15:20)** All these evils come from inside and are what make a man 'unclean;' but eating with unwashed hands does not make him 'unclean.'"

The “commands of Yahweh” or the “Law” originally were the Ten Commandments and the first five books of the Old Testament, the Pentateuch. And, even if they contain a number of regulations and instructions, in the matter of moral questions they set down a series of great moral principles which a man must properly interpret and apply for himself.

The “tradition of the elders” or “of men” was a set of detailed rules, thousand of written and unwritten ones, developed in the course of time. The problem was that these rules had become to the Orthodox Jews a matter of spiritual life or death. To serve Yahweh, to be religious, it was absolutely necessary to observe all of them. This gives rise to “hypocrisy,” when a man believes to be a good, “clean,” man if he carries out the correct acts and practices, no matter what his heart and his thoughts are. And today's situation in the Christian Churches is not so much different!

The faith of the Canaanite woman [Mark 7:24-30 Matthew 15:21-28]

(Mk7:24)(Mt15:21) Jesus left that place and withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon, to the vicinity of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know it; yet he could not keep his presence secret. (Mk7:25-26)(Mt15:22) In fact, as soon as she heard about him, a Canaanite woman from that vicinity, whose little daughter was possessed by an evil spirit, came to him and fell at his feet. The woman was a Greek, born in Syrian Phoenicia. She begged Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter, crying out, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon-possession."

(Mt15:23) Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, "Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us."

(24) He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel."

(25) The woman came and knelt before him. "Lord, help me!" she said.

(Mk7:27)(Mt15:26) "First let the children eat all they want," he replied and told her, "for it is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs."

(Mk7:28)(Mt15:27) "Yes, Lord," she replied, "but even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs that fall from their masters' table."

*(Mk7:29)(Mt15:28) Then Jesus answered her, "**Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted. For such a reply, you may go; the demon has left your daughter.**" And her daughter was healed from that very hour.*

(Mk7:30) She went home and found her child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

The healing of a deaf and mute man [Mark 7:31-37]

(Mk7:31) Then Jesus left the vicinity of Tyre and went through Sidon, down to the Sea of Galilee and into the region of the Decapolis. (32) There some people brought to him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk, and they begged him to place his hand on the man.

*(33) After he took him aside, away from the crowd, Jesus put his fingers into the man's ears. Then he spit and touched the man's tongue. (34) He looked up to Heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, "**Ephphatha!**" (which means, "**Be opened!**"). (35) At this, the man's ears were opened, his tongue was loosened and he began to speak plainly.*

(36) Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone. But the more he did so, the more they kept talking about it. (37) People were overwhelmed with amazement. "He has done everything well," they said. "He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak."

Faith only is necessary for receiving Jesus' help. In the first passage, Jesus tested the faith of the woman and found it true, so her prayer was answered. In the second one, it is clear that the man and his friends had faith in Jesus, and the man was healed.

Jesus feeds the four thousand [Mark 8:1-10 Matthew 15:29-39]

(Mt15:29) Jesus left there and went along the Sea of Galilee. Then he went up on a mountainside and sat down. *(Mt15:30)* Great crowds came to him, bringing the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute and many others, and laid them at his feet; and he healed them. *(31)* The people were amazed when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled made well, the lame walking and the blind seeing. And they praised [Yahweh] the God of Israel. *(Mk8:1-3)(Mt15:32)* Since they had nothing to eat, Jesus called his disciples to him and said, **"I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them away hungry, or they may collapse on the way, because some of them have come a long distance."**

(Mk8:4)(Mt15:33) His disciples answered, "But where could we get enough bread in this remote place to feed such a crowd?"

(Mk8:5)(Mt15:34) "How many loaves do you have?" Jesus asked.

"Seven," they replied, "and a few small fish."

(Mk8:6-7)(Mt15:35-36) He told the crowd to sit down on the ground. Then, when he had taken the seven loaves and given thanks, he broke them and gave them to his disciples, to set in turn before the people, and they did so. They had a few small fish as well; he gave thanks for them also and told the disciples to distribute them. *(Mk8:8)(Mt15:37)* All the people ate and were satisfied. Afterward the disciples picked up seven basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. *(Mk8:9-10)(Mt15:38-39)* The number of those who were present and ate was about four thousand men, besides women and children. And, after Jesus had sent the crowd away, he got into the boat with his disciples and went to the region of Dalmanutha, to the vicinity of Dalmanutha and Magadan.

Here, as in so many other occasions, we see Jesus moved with compassion for the problems and the physical needs of men.

And here, again, we have to note that, when Jesus wants something done, he gets a man to do it. Jesus always needs people through whom he can act and speak.

The demand for a sign. Interpreting the times

[Mark 8:11-13 Matthew 16:1-4 Luke 12:54-59]

(Mk8:11)(Mt16:1) The Pharisees and the Sadducees came to Jesus and began to question him. To test him, they asked him to show them a sign from Heaven. *(Mk8:12)(Mt16:2-4a)(Lk12:54-56)* He sighed deeply and said to the crowd, **"When evening comes, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red,' and in the morning, 'Today it will be stormy, for the sky is red and overcast.' When you see a cloud rising in the west, immediately you say, 'It's going to rain,' and it does. And when the south wind blows, you say, 'It's going to be hot,' and it is. Hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky and the earth. But how is it that you don't know how to interpret the signs of this present time? Why does this wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign? But I tell you the truth, no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah.**

(Lk12:57) Why don't you judge for yourselves what is right? (58) As you are going with your adversary to the magistrate, try hard to be reconciled to him on the way, or they may drag you off to the judge, and the judge turn you over to the officer, and the officer throw you into prison. (59) I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last lepton.

(Mk8:13)(Mt16:4b) Then Jesus left them, got back into the boat, went away and crossed to the other side.

Not only Jesus' miracles (physical "signs") but also the Good News were there, before everybody's eyes, showing who he was, Yahweh's Messiah.

This is another confirmation of the expiatory and redemptive function of the punishment of hell, where the souls of the bad will suffer, and learn, until they accept Yahweh's salvation through Jesus. At that moment -paid to the smallest coin- they will join Jesus in Yahweh's Kingdom.

Repent or perish [Luke 13:1-5]

(Lk13:1) Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. (2) Jesus answered, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? (3) I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. (4) Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them -do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? (5) I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish."

The Jews -as many Christians do even today- rigidly connected sin and suffering. They assumed that a calamity would fall on those who were extremely sinful. And Jesus absolutely denied it pointing out that all men are sinners and that all men must repent. Furthermore, as we know very well, it is often the greatest saints who have to suffer most, to carry the heavier cross.

The yeast of the Pharisees, Sadducees and Herod [Mark 8:14-21 Matthew 16:5-12]

(Mk8:14)(Mt16:5) When they went across the lake, the disciples forgot to take bread, except for one loaf they had with them in the boat. (Mk8:15)(Mt16:6) "Be careful," Jesus warned them. "Watch out for and be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees and that of Herod."

(Mk8:16)(Mt16:7) They discussed this among themselves and said, "It is because we didn't bring any bread."

(Mk8:17-19)(Mt16:8-9) Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked them: "You of little faith, why are you talking among yourselves about having no bread? Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears and fail to hear? And don't you remember? When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?"

"Twelve," they replied.

(Mk8:20)(Mt16:10) "And when I broke the seven loaves for the four thousand, and how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?"

They answered, "Seven."

(Mk8:21)He said to them, "Do you still not understand? (Mt16:11)How is it you don't understand that I was not talking to you about bread? But be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees."

(12)Then they understood that he was not telling them to guard against the yeast used in bread, but against the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

The Pharisees saw religion in terms of laws and rules. On the contrary, Jesus was actually telling his disciples to be careful not to transform their religion in a series of outward actions and of "you don't have to" rules. The Sadducees were wealthy, aristocratic and deeply involved in politics. And so Jesus was telling his disciples to be careful of not identifying the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth -the Christian Church- with terrestrial goods and with political influence. And we can see how much both his exhortations have been followed!

The healing of a blind man at Bethsaida [Mark 8:22-26]

*(Mk8:22)They came to Bethsaida, and some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him. (23)He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. When he had spit on the man's eyes and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, "**Do you see anything?**"*

(24)He looked up and said, "I see people; they look like trees walking around."

*(25)Once more Jesus put his hands on the man's eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. (26)Jesus sent him home, saying, "**Don't go and tell anyone in the village.**"*

Here, as in so many other occasions, we see Jesus moved with compassion for the problems and the physical needs of men.

Faith only is necessary for receiving Jesus' help. In this case it is clear that the man and his friends had faith in Jesus, and the man was healed.

The healing at the pool [John 5:1-15]

*(Jn5:1)Some time later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for a feast of the Jews. (2)Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades. (3)Here a great number of disabled people used to lie -the blind, the lame, the paralyzed- and they waited for the moving of the waters. (4)From time to time an angel of Yahweh would come down and stir up the waters. The first one into the pool after each such disturbance would be cured of whatever disease he had. (5)One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. (6)When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, "**Do you want to get well?**"*

(7)"Sir," the invalid replied, "I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me."

*(8)Then Jesus said to him, "**Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.**" (9)At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked.*

The day on which this took place was a Sabbath, (10)and so the Jews said to the man who had been healed, "It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat."

*(11)But he replied, "The man who made me well said to me, '**Pick up your mat and walk.**'"*

(12)So they asked him, "Who is the fellow who told you to pick it up and walk?"

(13)The man who was healed had no idea who it was, for Jesus had slipped away into the crowd that was there.

(14)Later Jesus found him at the Temple and said to him, "See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you." (15)The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well.

That was mere superstition. But it was the kind of belief which was spread all over the world in the past -and which still exists in so many "holy" places.

The man strongly wanted to be healed, so he had the first essential characteristic for receiving the healing power of Jesus, which is to have an intense desire for it. And Jesus' only desire was to help the man, without even bothering consider the man's useless superstition.

Jesus healing an incurable disease and the orthodox Jews complaining for the man's breaking of the scribal law are fully representative, even today, of the difference between how the Christian Church should act and how actually acts.

Life through the Son [John 5:16-30]

(Jn5:16)So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jews persecuted him. (17)Jesus said to them, "My Father is always at His work to this very day, and I, too, am working." (18)For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling Yahweh his own Father, making himself equal with Yahweh.

(19)Jesus gave them this answer: "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. (20)For the Father loves the Son and shows him all He does. Yes, to your amazement He will show him even greater things than these. (21)For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it. (22)Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, (23)that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him.

(24)I tell you the truth, whoever hears my Word and believes Him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life. (25)I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of Yahweh and those who hear will live. (26)For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in himself. (27)And He has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man.

(28)Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice (29)and come out -those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned. (30)By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but Him who has sent me."

Note. When we read passages like this one we must always remember that John was not trying to give the actual words that Jesus spoke but the inner meaning of Jesus' words and actions. Furthermore, the actual meaning of what he wrote is still too often concealed by considerations derived from Old Testament ideas -it could not have been easy, for a writer of the New Testament, to detach himself immediately and completely from the ideas he grew up with.

Jesus always declared to be a man -not a "god," not part of a supposed trinity- and that all his powers came only from Yahweh, from his total obedience to, and his spiritual communion with, his father Yahweh.

As a consequence of this spiritual communion, Jesus, the only intermediary between men and Yahweh, is judging men at the end of their earthly life and, for those sent to hell, also at the moment of their repentance. (For more information about this point, see "Thoughts. At the end of time, everybody will be with Yahweh. A direct consequence of Yahweh's justice and affection").

Testimonies about Jesus [John 5:31-47;7:15-24]

(Jn5:31)"If I testify about myself, my testimony is not valid. (32)There is another who testifies in my favor, and I know that his testimony about me is valid.

(33)You have sent to John and he has testified to the truth. (34)Not that I accept human testimony; but I mention it that you may be saved. (35)John was a lamp that burned and gave light, and you chose for a time to enjoy his light.

(36)I have testimony weightier than that of John. For the very work that the Father has given me to finish, and which I am doing, testifies that the Father has sent me.

(37)And the Father who sent me has Himself testified concerning me. You have never heard His voice nor seen His form, (38)nor does His Word dwell in you, for you do not believe the one He sent. (39)You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, (40)yet you refuse to come to me to have life.

(41)I do not accept praise from men, (42)but I know you. I know that you do not have the benevolence of Yahweh in your hearts. (43)I have come in my Father's Name, and you do not accept me; but if someone else comes in his own name, you will accept him. (44)How can you believe if you accept praise from one another, yet make no effort to obtain the praise that comes from [Yahweh] the Only One God?

(45)But do not think I will accuse you before the Father. Your accuser is Moses, on whom your hopes are set. (46)If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. (47)But since you do not believe what he wrote, how are you going to believe what I say?"

(7:15)The Jews were amazed and asked, "How did this man get such learning without having studied?"

(16)Jesus answered, "My teaching is not my own. It comes from Him who sent me.

(17)If anyone chooses to do Yahweh's will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from Yahweh or whether I speak on my own. (18)He who speaks on his own does so to gain honor for himself, but he who works for the honor of the One who sent him is a man of truth; there is nothing false about him. (19)Has not Moses given you the Law? Yet not one of you keeps the Law. Why are you trying to kill me?"

(20)"You are demon-possessed," the crowd answered. "Who is trying to kill you?"

(21)Jesus said to them, "I did one miracle, and you are all astonished. (22)Yet, because Moses gave you circumcision (though actually it did not come from Moses, but from the patriarchs), you circumcise a child on the Sabbath. (23)Now if a child can be circumcised on the Sabbath so that the Law of Moses may not be broken, why are you angry with me for healing the whole man on the Sabbath? (24)Stop judging by mere appearances, and make a right judgment."

Note. Here, again, it is important to remember that John wrote his Gospel many years after the death of Jesus, and that he never tried to give his actual words, but their inner significance.

Scriptures are to be taken for their moral and spiritual meaning, without any need to study and analyze every single word.

The real teaching, as in the case of Jesus, comes straight from Yahweh to the men He chooses and sends for some reason (reasons usually they are not aware of and don't understand at all).

No man can properly judge another man, having in his hands only "appearances," not deep knowledge. Only Yahweh -and, because of His decision, Jesus- can judge properly, knowing really everything of a man.

Peter's confession of Christ [Mark 8:27-30 Matthew 16:13-20 Luke 9:18-21]

(Mk8:27)(Mt16:13)(Lk9:18) When Jesus and his disciples came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, they went on to the villages around. Once, on the way, when Jesus was praying in private and his disciples were with him, he asked them, "Who do people of the crowds say I, the Son of Man, am?"

(Mk8:28)(Mt16:14)(Lk9:19) They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or that one of the prophets of long ago has come back to life."

(Mk8:29)(Mt16:15-16)(Lk9:20) "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"

Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of [Yahweh] the living God."

(Mt16:17) Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in Heaven. (18) And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. (19) I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven; whatever you bind on Earth will be bound in Heaven, and whatever you loose on Earth will be loosed in Heaven." (Mk8:30)(Mt16:20)(Lk9:21) Then Jesus strictly warned his disciples not to tell anyone about him, that he was the Christ.

Note. Here, in this short passage, there are five declarations on which many wrong beliefs were developed. For a better understanding of this passage, see "The Gospel of Jesus Christ. Peter's confession of Christ."

Son of man. Son of Yahweh. Jesus always stressed the point that, even if being Son of Yahweh, he was essentially and totally a man, physical with body and mind and spiritual with soul.

Peter... on this rock I will build my Church. Peter had been the first to understand that Jesus was the Son of Yahweh, so he was the first "stone", the first "brick," that is, the first member of the Christian Church which, in this sense, is built on him -the first member, not the head of the Church. And each Christian, in any place and in any time, is another stone, another brick, added to the Christian Church.

The gates of Hades will not overcome it. Hades or, generally, Satan. On Earth there will always be good and evil and, even if evil will appear dominant, it will never win.

I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. A typical Jewish phrase, carrying the meaning of duty and responsibility, not of power. Peter was assigned the responsibility of spreading Jesus' Good News, not the top position in the Church.

Whatever you bind... will be bound... Whatever you loose... will be loosed... Another typical Jewish phrase, commonly used for the teachings of the great Rabbis and carrying the meaning of declaring something “allowed” or “forbidden.” Jesus was actually saying to Peter that he will have to be the guide and the support of the infant Church, not giving him the power to admit or to exclude from Heaven, absolving or not men from their sins.

Jesus predicts his death [Mark 8:31-38;9:1 Matthew 16:21-28 Luke 9:22-27]

(Mk8:31)(Mt16:21)(Lk9:22)Then from that time on Jesus began to teach to his disciples and to explain them that he, the Son of Man, must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of, and be rejected by, the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised again to life. **(Mk8:32)(Mt16:22)**He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. "Never, Lord!" He said. "This shall never happen to you!"

(Mk8:33)(Mt16:23)But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!" he said. "You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of Yahweh, but the things of men."

(Mk8:34)(Mt16:24)(Lk9:23)Then Jesus called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said to them all: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. **(Mk8:35)(Mt16:25)(Lk9:24)**For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the Gospel will find and save it. **(Mk8:36-37)(Mt16:26)(Lk9:25)**What good is for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose his soul or forfeit his very self? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? **(Mk8:38)(Mt16:27)(Lk9:26)**For, if anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes with the holy angels in his glory and in the glory of the Father, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done."

(Mk9:1)(Mt16:28)(Lk9:27)And he said to them, "I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Kingdom of Yahweh come with power and the Son of Man coming in His Kingdom."

Jesus never tried to offer men an easy way. He did not offer men peace, but spiritual glory.

A warning of inevitable judgment at the end of earthly life. Christianity clearly teaches that at the end of this life there always is Jesus' judgment -accepting a person in Yahweh's Kingdom or sending him to the expiatory and redemptive punishment of hell.

The Transfiguration [Mark 9:2-13 Matthew 17:1-13 Luke 9:28-36]

(Mk9:2-3)(Mt17:1-2)(Lk9:28-29)About a week after Jesus said this, he took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone, to pray. There, as he was praying, he was transfigured before them. The appearance of his face changed and shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them; as white as the light, as bright as a flash of lightning.

(Mk9:4)(Mt17:3)(Lk9:30-31)And just then there appeared before them two men in glorious splendor, Moses and Elijah, who were talking with Jesus. They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem. **(Lk9:32)**Peter

and his companions were very sleepy, but when they became fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him.

(Mk9:5-6)(Mt17:4)(Lk9:33) As the men were leaving Jesus, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, let us put up three shelters -one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." (He did not know what he was saying, they were so frightened.)

(Mk9:7)(Mt17:5)(Lk9:34-35) Then, while he was still speaking, a bright cloud appeared and enveloped them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. A voice came from the cloud saying, "This is My Son, whom I have chosen and whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!"

(Mt17:6) When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified.

(Mk9:8-10)(Mt17:7-9)(Lk9:36) But, when the voice had spoken, Jesus came and touched them. "Get up," he said. "Don't be afraid." Suddenly, when they looked up around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus, who was alone.

As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus instructed them ordering, "Don't tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead." The disciples kept this matter to themselves, discussing what "rising from the dead" meant, and told no one at that time what they had seen.

(Mk9:11)(Mt17:10) And the disciples asked him, "Why then do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first?"

(Mk9:12)(Mt17:11) Jesus replied, "Surely, Elijah must come first, and will restore all things. And it is also written that the Son of Man must suffer much and be rejected. *(Mk9:13)(Mt17:12)* But I tell you, Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but they have done to him everything they wished, just as it is written about him. In the same way the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands." *(Mt17:13)* Then the disciples understood that he was talking to them about John the Baptist.

There is no way of telling what actually happened. Clearly, this was a great and extraordinary moment and we can only take note of the changes happened to Jesus and to his clothes as they are reported by the Gospels.

Two other times the Gospels record the declarations of a voice coming from Heaven and addressing Jesus: at Jesus' baptism (The Baptism of Jesus. Mark 1:9-11; Matthew 3:13-17; Luke 3:21-22) and in the Temple during Jesus' final week (Jesus predicts his death. John 12:20-36). Here, for the second time, Yahweh Himself proclaims Jesus as His own Son and Messiah. In practical terms, Yahweh said to Jesus, "My Son, you are acting properly, go on." On the mountain of the Transfiguration Jesus was assured that he had chosen the right way and saw not only the inevitability, but the essential rightness of the Cross. It was Jesus' "Confirmation," his full acceptance of Yahweh's will.

Note. From another point of view, we can say that this can be considered the institution of the ceremony of Confirmation or of being Born Again.

The healing of a boy with an evil spirit

[Mark 9:14-32 Matthew 17:14-23 Luke 9:37-45]

(Mk9:14)(Lk9:37) The next day, when they came down from the mountain to the other disciples, they saw a large crowd around them who met him, and the teachers of the law arguing with them.

(Mk9:15-17)(Mt17:14)(Lk9:38) When they came to the crowd, as soon as all the people saw Jesus, they were overwhelmed with wonder and ran to greet him.

"What are you arguing with them about?" he asked.

A man in the crowd approached Jesus, knelt before him and called out answering, "Teacher, I brought you my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech. I beg you to look at my son, for he is my only child. (Mk9:18)(Mt17:15-16) (Lk9:39-40) Lord, have mercy on my son, he has seizures and is suffering greatly. A spirit seizes him and he suddenly screams. Whenever it seizes him, it throws him to the ground. It throws him into convulsions so that he foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth and becomes rigid. He often falls into the fire or into the water. It scarcely ever leaves him and is destroying him. I brought him to your disciples, and asked, begged, them to drive out the spirit, but they could not heal him."

(Mk9:19)(Mt17:17)(Lk9:41) **"O unbelieving and perverse generation,"** Jesus replied, **"how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy, your son, here to me."**

(Mk9:20-26)(Mt17:18)(Lk9:42) So they brought him. Even when the boy was coming, when the spirit saw Jesus, the demon immediately threw the boy to the ground in a convulsion. He fell to the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth.

Jesus asked the boy's father, **"How long has he been like this?"**

"From childhood," he answered. "It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us."

"If you can?" said Jesus. **"Everything is possible for him who believes."**

Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, **"I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"**

When Jesus saw that a crowd was running to the scene, he rebuked the evil spirit. **"You deaf and mute spirit,"** he said, **"I command you, come out of him and never enter him again."**

The spirit shrieked, convulsed him violently and came out of the boy, and he was healed from that moment, and Jesus gave him back to his father. The boy looked so much like a corpse that many said, "He's dead." (Mk9:27) But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him to his feet, and he stood up.

(Mk9:28)(Mt17:19) Then, after Jesus had gone indoors, the disciples came to him in private and asked, **"Why couldn't we drive it out?"**

(Mk9:29)(Mt17:20-21) He replied, **"Because you have so little faith. But this kind can't go out except by prayer and fasting. I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you."** (Mk9:30-32)(Mt17:22-23)(Lk9:43-45) And they were amazed at the greatness of Yahweh.

While everyone was marveling at all that Jesus did, they left that place and passed together through Galilee. Jesus did not want anyone to know where they were, because he was teaching his disciples, and he said to them, **"Listen carefully to what I am to tell you: The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, and on the third day he will be raised to life."** But the disciples were filled with grief and they did not understand what he meant. It was hidden from them, so that they did not grasp it, and they were afraid to ask him about it.

Here Jesus states the conditions for a miracle, saying, "The cure of your boy depends, not on me, but on you. The miracles are possible only if approached with faith." And, because humanly speaking it is so difficult to have enough faith, we have to ask Jesus and Yahweh to reinforce it continuing to pray.

The disciples, not able to heal the boy, had clearly taken for granted the power given to them and had come to believe that it was inherent in them. As a consequence, they did not pray enough, loosing their spiritual connection -communion- with Jesus and Yahweh. This is why there are so few miraculous healings; for the vast majority of people it is too difficult, almost impossible, to have such a strong faith.

Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?

[Mark 9:33-37 Matthew 18:1-5 Luke 9:46-48]

(Lk9:46)An argument started among the disciples as to which of them would be the greatest.

(Mk9:33)They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the road?" (34)But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest.

(Mt18:1)At a certain time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?"

(Mk9:35)Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, "If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all."

(Mk9:36-37)(Mt18:2-5)(Lk9:47-48)Jesus, knowing their thoughts, called a little child and had him stand among them beside him. And then taking him in his arms, he said to them, "Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the One who sent me. I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven. For he who is the least among you all -he is the greatest."

The disciples were ambitious and the very fact that they asked this question showed how far they still were from understanding what the Kingdom of Heaven really was. And it seems that most high prelates of all Churches are still at this point.

In effect, Jesus did not abolish ambition. Rather, he defined it in a totally different way. For the ambition to rule (to have earthly power and greatness) he substituted the ambition to serve (to do things for others). For the ambition to be served (to have things done for themselves) he substituted the ambition to serve, to do things for others.

Whoever is not against us is for us *[Mark 9:38-41 Luke 9:49-50]*

(Mk9:38)(Lk9:49)"Teacher," said John, "we saw a man driving out demons in your name and we tried and told him to stop, because he was not one of us."

(Mk9:39-40)(Lk9:50)"Do not stop him," Jesus said. "No one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me, for whoever is not against us is for us. (Mk9:41)I tell you the truth, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to Christ will certainly not lose his reward."

The teaching of this passage is simple and clear. Any kindness shown, any help given to another person will be rewarded in the next life. And Jesus request was and is for very simple things and help, which can be given without any difficulty.

The Temple tax [Matthew 17:24-27]

(Mt17:24)After Jesus and his disciples arrived in Capernaum, the collectors of the two-drachma tax came to Peter and asked, "Doesn't your teacher pay the Temple tax?"

(25)"Yes, he does," he replied.

When Peter came into the house, Jesus was the first to speak. "What do you think, Simon?" He asked. "From whom do the kings of the Earth collect duty and taxes -from their own sons or from others?"

(26)"From others," Peter answered.

"Then the sons are exempt," Jesus said to him. (27)"But so that we may not offend them, go to the lake and throw out your line. Take the first fish you catch; open his mouth and you will find a shekel. Take it and give it to them for my tax and yours."

Note. The yearly two-drachma (= half a shekel) tax per person was necessary for running all religious activities in the Temple.

The teaching of this passage is that, however unpleasant that might be, the duties of a citizen must always be shouldered.

Jesus goes to the Feast of Tabernacles [John 7:1-13]

(Jn7:1)After this, Jesus went around in Galilee, purposely staying away from Judea because the Jews there were waiting to take his life. (2)But when the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles was near, (3)Jesus' brothers said to him, "You ought to leave here and go to Judea, so that your disciples may see the miracles you do. (4)No one who wants to become a public figure acts in secret. Since you are doing these things, show yourself to the world." (5)For even his own brothers did not believe in him.

(6)Therefore Jesus told them, "The right time for me has not yet come; for you any time is right. (7)The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify that what it does is evil. (8)You go to the Feast. I am not yet going up to this Feast, because for me the right time has not yet come." (9)Having said this, he stayed in Galilee.

(10)However, after his brothers had left for the Feast, he went also, not publicly, but in secret. (11)Now at the Feast the Jews were watching for him and asking, "Where is that man?"

(12)Among the crowds there was widespread whispering about him. Some said, "He is a good man." Others replied, "No, he deceives the people." (13)But no one would say anything publicly about him for fear of the Jews.

After Jesus' birth, fulfilled her "physical" mission, Joseph and Mary had four sons, -Jesus' half-brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas- and some daughters -Jesus' half-sisters, whose names are not known- as reported in Mark 6:3; Matthew 13:55-56; John 2:12; 7:3,5; Acts 1:14; 1Corinthians 9:5; Galatians 1:19.

Is Jesus the Christ? [John 7:14;25-44]

(Jn7:14)Not until halfway through the Feast did Jesus go up to the Temple courts and begin to teach. (7:25)At that point some of the people of Jerusalem began to ask, "Isn't this the man they are trying to kill? (26)Here he is, speaking publicly, and they are not saying a word to him. Have the authorities really concluded that he is the Christ? (27)But we know where this man is from; when the Christ comes, no one will know where he is from."

(28) Then Jesus, still teaching in the Temple courts, cried out, **"Yes, you know me, and you know where I am from. I am not here on my own, but He who sent me is true. You do not know Him, (29) but I know Him because I am from Him and He sent me."**

(30) At this they tried to seize him, but no one laid a hand on him, because his time had not yet come. (31) Still, many in the crowd put their faith in him. They said, "When the Christ comes, will he do more miraculous signs than this man?"

(32) The Pharisees heard the crowd whispering such things about him. Then the chief priests and the Pharisees sent Temple guards to arrest him.

(33) Jesus said, **"I am with you for only a short time, and then I go to the One who sent me. (34) You will look for me, but you will not find me; and where I am, you cannot come."**

(35) The Jews said to one another, "Where does this man intend to go that we cannot find him? Will he go where our people live scattered among the Greeks, and teach the Greeks? (36) What did he mean when he said, 'You will look for me, but you will not find me,' and, 'Where I am, you cannot come'?"

(37) On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, **"If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. (38) Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him."** (39) By this he meant the Spirit of Yahweh, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit of Yahweh had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.

(40) On hearing his words, some of the people said, "Surely this man is the Prophet."

(41) Others said, "He is the Christ."

Still others asked, "How can the Christ come from Galilee? (42) Does not the Scripture say that the Christ will come from David's family and from Bethlehem, the town where David lived?" (43) Thus the people were divided because of Jesus. (44) Some wanted to seize him, but no one laid a hand on him.

Two clear declarations of Jesus: He had been sent by and obeys to Yahweh. And he is not at the same level of his Father -not even as part of a supposed trinity.

The spiritual communion with Yahweh always existed; but men never really enjoyed its full power until after Pentecost. It took the life and death of Jesus Christ to really allow men to enter in spiritual communion with Yahweh.

Unbelief of the Jewish leaders [John 7:45-53]

(Jn 7:45) Finally the Temple guards went back to the chief priests and Pharisees, who asked them, "Why didn't you bring him in?"

(46) "No one ever spoke the way this man does," the guards declared.

(47) "You mean he has deceived you also?" the Pharisees retorted. (48) "Has any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed in him? (49) No! But this mob that knows nothing of the law -there is a curse on them."

(50) Nicodemus, who had gone to Jesus earlier and who was one of their own number, asked, (51) "Does our Law condemn anyone without first hearing him to find out what he is doing?"

(52) They replied, "Are you from Galilee too? Look into it, and you will find that a prophet does not come out of Galilee."

(53) Then each went to his own home.

The adulterous woman [John 8:1-11]

(Jn8:1) But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. **(2)** At dawn he appeared again in the Temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. **(3)** The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group **(4)** and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. **(5)** In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" **(6)** They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him.

But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. **(7)** When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "**If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.**" **(8)** Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground.

(9) At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. **(10)** Jesus straightened up and asked her, "**Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?**"

(11) "No one, sir," she said.

"**Then neither do I condemn you,**" Jesus declared. "**Go now and leave your life of sin.**"

The incident was clearly staged to trap Jesus, showing the attitude of the religious authorities to the Jewish people, for them not men and women but things they could use at will for their purposes.

Nobody is without sin, and nobody can perfectly judge another human being. Perfect justice has to take into exact account all the circumstances of every person's life -country and epoch, social reality, family, education, hereditary and acquired diseases, physical and psychical dysfunctions, etc. Only Yahweh and, because of His decision, Jesus Christ, are in condition to administer this perfect justice. And this is valid even for the Churches having a sacramental or ceremonial "confession" of sin. Priest and pastors can listen and give advice, but cannot "absolve" or not. Their real duty is to tell to people asking for moral help that, if they truly repent, Yahweh forgives them; if not, no. (For more information about this point, see "Miscellanea. The "secret" in the Roman Catholic confession. Is it justified by the Christian morality?")

By sending the woman away, Jesus did not forgive her lightly and easily, as if her sin did not matter. What he actually did was to differ the sentence, giving the sinner a chance to prove that she could do better and redeem herself.

The validity of Jesus' testimony [John 8:12-30]

(Jn8:12) When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "**I am the Light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the Light of Life.**"

(13) The Pharisees challenged him, "Here you are, appearing as your own witness; your testimony is not valid."

(14) Jesus answered, "**Even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid, for I know where I came from and where I am going. But you have no idea where I come from or where I am going. (15) You judge by human standards; I pass judgment on no one. (16) But if I do judge, my decisions are right, because I am not alone. I stand with the Father, who sent me. (17) In your own Law it is written that the testimony of two men is valid. (18) I am one who testifies for myself; my other witness is the Father, who sent me.**"

(19) Then they asked him, "Where is your Father?"

"You do not know me or my Father," Jesus replied. "If you knew me, you would know my Father also." (20) He spoke these words while teaching in the Temple area near the place where the offerings were put. Yet no one seized him, because his time had not yet come.

(21) Once more Jesus said to them, "I am going away, and you will look for me, and you will die in your sin. Where I go, you cannot come."

(22) This made the Jews ask, "Will he kill himself? Is that why he says, 'Where I go, you cannot come'?"

(23) But he continued, "You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. (24) I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins."

(25) "Who are you?" they asked.

"Just what I have been claiming all along," Jesus replied. (26) "I have much to say in judgment of you. But He who sent me is reliable, and what I have heard from Him I tell the world."

(27) They did not understand that he was telling them about his Father. (28) So Jesus said, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am the one I claim to be and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me. (29) The One who sent me is with me; He has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases Him." (30) Even as he spoke, many put their faith in him.

Note. Here there is one of those passages of argument and debate so characteristic of John's Gospel and quite difficult to understand.

In short terms, Jesus is speaking of his right to judge because his coming into the world was primary for bringing Yahweh's affection to men, not for judging them. That is, in his judgment he will always be not only fair and just, but full of lovely comprehension.

The children of Abraham [John 8:31-41]

(Jn8:31) To the Jews who had believed in him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. (32) Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

(33) They answered him, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?"

(34) Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. (35) Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. (36) So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. (37) I know you are Abraham's descendants. Yet you are ready to kill me, because you have no room for my word. (38) I am telling you what I have seen in the Father's presence, and you do what you have heard from your father."

(39) "Abraham is our father," they answered.

"If you were Abraham's children," said Jesus, "then you would do the things Abraham did. (40) As it is, you are determined to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from Yahweh. Abraham did not do such things. (41) You are doing the things your own father does."

"We are not illegitimate children," they protested. "The only Father we have is Yahweh Himself."

The children of the devil [John 8:42-47]

(Jn8:42) Jesus said to them, "If Yahweh were your Father, you would be fond of me, for I came from Yahweh and now am here. I have not come on my own; but He sent me. (43) Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. (44) You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. (45) Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe me! (46) Can any of you prove me guilty of sin? If I am telling the truth, why don't you believe me? (47) He who belongs to Yahweh hears what Yahweh says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to Yahweh."

The claims of Jesus about himself [John 8:48-59]

(Jn8:48) The Jews answered him, "Aren't we right in saying that you are a Samaritan and demon-possessed?"

(49) "I am not possessed by a demon," said Jesus, "but I honor my Father [Yahweh] and you dishonor me. (50) I am not seeking glory for myself; but there is One who seeks it, and He is the judge. (51) I tell you the truth, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death."

(52) At this the Jews exclaimed, "Now we know that you are demon-possessed! Abraham died and so did the prophets, yet you say that if anyone keeps your word, he will never taste death. (53) Are you greater than our father Abraham? He died, and so did the prophets. Who do you think you are?"

(54) Jesus replied, "If I glorify myself, my glory means nothing. My Father [Yahweh], whom you claim as your God, is the One who glorifies me. (55) Though you do not know Him, I know Him. If I said I did not, I would be a liar like you, but I do know Him and keep His word. (56) Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad."

(57) "You are not yet fifty years old," the Jews said to him, "and you have seen Abraham!"

(58) "I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!" (59) At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the Temple grounds.

Jesus, a man, son of Yahweh, was sent by Him for a specific mission, which Jesus had accepted. And he acts and speaks exactly as his Father tells him to do.

Jesus heals a man born blind [John 9:1-12]

(Jn9:1) As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. (2) His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

(3) "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the work of Yahweh might be displayed in his life. (4) As long as it is day, we must do the work of Him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. (5) While I am in the world, I am the Light of the World."

(6) Having said this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. (7) "Go," he told him, "wash in the Pool of Siloam" (this word means Sent). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing.

(8)His neighbors and those who had formerly seen him begging asked, "Isn't this the same man who used to sit and beg?" (9)Some claimed that he was. Others said, "No, he only looks like him." But he himself insisted, "I am the man."

(10)"How then were your eyes opened?" they demanded.

(11)He replied, "The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed, and then I could see."

(12)"Where is this man?" they asked him.

"I don't know," he said.

The Jews -and so many Christians- connected and still connect suffering and sin. They assume that wherever there is suffering, there must be sin. Another belief is the pre-existence of the soul. The belief that all souls exist somewhere in Heaven, waiting to enter into a body, that these souls have the possibility to sin, and that a man's affliction, especially if it is from birth, comes from some sin his soul has committed before he was born. An alternative belief is that a man's affliction is due to the sins of his parents -idea still quite wide-spread, even among Christians. In effect, clearly, children simply inherit -suffer or enjoy- the physical and moral consequences of whatever their parents do.

Jesus immediately and strongly contradicted both beliefs affirming that this man's affliction came to him to give an opportunity of showing the miracles Yahweh can do.

Note 1. The soul -spiritual part of a man- is not pre-existent, is generated by his parents' souls at the moment of his conception, as his body -physical part- is generated by their bodies.

Note 2. The case of this man can be seen in parallel to the case of Job (Old Testament). Both were put in the situation they were in for some purpose of Yahweh.

The Pharisees investigate the healing [John 9:13-34]

(Jn9:13)They brought to the Pharisees the man who had been blind. (14)Now the day on which Jesus had made the mud and opened the man's eyes was a Sabbath. (15)Therefore the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. "He put mud on my eyes," the man replied, "and I washed, and now I see."

(16)Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from Yahweh, for he does not keep the Sabbath."

But others asked, "How can a sinner do such miraculous signs?" So they were divided.

(17)Finally they turned again to the blind man, "What have you to say about him? It was your eyes he opened."

The man replied, "He is a prophet."

(18)The Jews still did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they sent for the man's parents. (19)"Is this your son?" they asked. "Is this the one you say was born blind? How is it that now he can see?"

(20)"We know he is our son," the parents answered, "and we know he was born blind.

(21)But how he can see now, or who opened his eyes, we don't know. Ask him. He is of age; he will speak for himself." (22)His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews, for already the Jews had decided that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Christ would be put out of the synagogue. (23)That was why his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."

(24)A second time they summoned the man who had been blind. "Give glory to Yahweh," they said. "We know this man is a sinner."

(25)He replied, "Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!"

(26)Then they asked him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?"

(27)He answered, "I have told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples, too?"

(28)Then they hurled insults at him and said, "You are this fellow's disciple! We are disciples of Moses! (29)We know that Yahweh spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, we don't even know where he comes from."

(30)The man answered, "Now that is remarkable! You don't know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. (31)We know that Yahweh does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly man who does His will. (32)Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. (33)If this man were not from Yahweh, he could do nothing."

(34)To this they replied, "You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!" And they threw him out.

Spiritual blindness [John 9:35-41]

(Jn9:35)Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, "**Do you believe in the Son of Man?**"

(36)"Who is he, sir?" the man asked. "Tell me so that I may believe in him."

(37)Jesus said, "**You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you.**"

(38)Then the man said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshipped him.

(39)Jesus said, "**For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind.**"

(40)Some Pharisees who were with him heard him say this and asked, "What? Are we blind too?"

(41)Jesus said, "**If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains.**"

The man conscious of his own spiritual defects and of not knowing enough the teachings of the Gospel -who longs to be better- is the man whose "eyes can be opened" and who can be led to a more deep knowledge of those teachings. But the man who thinks he knows everything, and is convinced to be spiritually "farsighted" -no need to be better- is spiritually totally "blind."

The more knowledge a man has, the more he is to be condemned if he does not recognize and practice the good. In other terms, what is a serious sin for a well-learned and well-off man, can be not a sin at all for a man brought up and living in totally different, and not so good, conditions.

A crippled woman healed on the Sabbath [Luke 13:10-17]

(Lk13:10)On a Sabbath Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues, (11)and a woman was there who had been crippled by a spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not straighten up at all. (12)When Jesus saw her, he called her forward and said to her, "**Woman, you are set free from your infirmity.**" (13)Then he put his hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised Yahweh.

(14)Indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, the synagogue ruler said to the people, "There are six days for work. So come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath."

*(15)The Lord answered him, "**You hypocrites! Doesn't each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or donkey from the stall and lead it out to give it water? (16)Then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?"***

(17)When he said this, all his opponents were humiliated, but the people were delighted with all the wonderful things he was doing.

Jesus at a Pharisee's house [Luke 14:1-6]

*(Lk14:1)One Sabbath, when Jesus went to eat in the house of a prominent Pharisee, he was being carefully watched. (2)There in front of him was a man suffering from dropsy. (3)Jesus asked the Pharisees and experts in the law, "**Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?**" (4)But they remained silent. So taking hold of the man, he healed him and sent him away.*

*(5)Then he asked them, "**If one of you has a son or an ox that falls into a well on the Sabbath day, will not you immediately pull him out?**" (6)And they had nothing to say.*

At the time, everybody believed that most disorders were caused by evil spirits.

It is evident that the woman had faith and considered Jesus the Messiah of Yahweh.

Jesus, by breaking the scribal law on the Sabbath, makes it clear that the suffering of a human being must be taken in much higher consideration than a men's law. Furthermore, for that law it was perfectly legal to take on the Sabbath the domestic animals from their stall and to lead them to drink water or to rescue them from a dangerous situation. The rabbis, who made this rule, had more regards for the needs of the animals than for the needs of the people.

Jesus at a Pharisee's house [Luke 14:7-14]

*(7)When he noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, he told them this parable: (8)"**When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. (9)If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, 'Give this man your seat.'** Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place. (10)But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, 'Friend, move up to a better place.' Then you will be honored in the presence of all your fellow guests. (11)**For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.**"*

*(12)Then Jesus said to his host, "**When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. (13)But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, (14)and you will be blessed. Also they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.**"*

The host was a sophisticated well-off orthodox Jew, as most of his guests surely were. The behavior of those ambitious men showed how far they were from understanding what the Kingdom of Heaven really was and is. There, the ambition to have and show earthly power and greatness is substituted by the ambition to humbly help and serve other people, the people in need. And it seems that most high prelates of all Churches have still to understand and put in practice this point.

The parable of the great banquet [Luke 14:15-24]

(Lk14:15)When one of those at the table with him heard this, he said to Jesus, "Blessed is the man who will eat at the feast in the Kingdom of Yahweh."

(16)Jesus replied, "A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. (17)At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, 'Come, for everything is now ready.'

(18)But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, 'I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please, excuse me.'

(19)Another said, 'I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I'm on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.'

(20)Still another said, 'I just got married, so I can't come.'

(21)The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.'

(22)'Sir,' the servant said, 'what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.'

(23)Then the master told his servant, 'Go out to the roads and the country lanes and make them come in, so that my house will be full. (24)I tell you, not one of those men who were invited will get a taste of my banquet.'"

Even if all Jews and Christians are “automatically” invited to enter the Kingdom of Yahweh -and many of them “refuse” by not living properly- also all people of all other religions are invited and will be fully welcomed in if they “accept” the invitation, that is, live a good, moral life.

Jesus sends out the seventy-two [Luke10:1-11;16-20;23-24]

(Lk10:1)After this the Lord [Jesus] appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. (2)He told them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into His harvest field. (3)Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves. (4)Do not take a purse or bag or sandals; and do not greet anyone on the road.

(5)When you enter a house, first say, 'Peace to this house.' (6)If a man of peace is there, your peace will rest on him; if not, it will return to you. (7)Stay in that house, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages. Do not move around from house to house.

(8)When you enter a town and are welcomed, eat what is set before you. (9)Heal the sick who are there and tell them, 'The Kingdom of Yahweh is near you.' (10)But when you enter a town and are not welcomed, go into its streets and say, (11)'Even the dust of your town that sticks to our feet we wipe off against you. Yet be sure of this: The Kingdom of Yahweh is near.'

(16)He who listens to you listens to me; he who rejects you rejects me; but he who rejects me rejects Him who sent me."

(17)The seventy-two returned with joy and said, "Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name."

(18)He replied, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from Heaven. (19)I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the powers of the enemy; nothing will harm you. (20)However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in Heaven."

(23)Then he turned to his disciples and said privately, "Blessed are the eyes that see what you see. (24)For I tell you that many prophets and kings wanted to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it."

All Christians as well -not only the missionaries- are "appointed and sent," that is, have to give testimony to and spread Jesus' Good News, without forgetting that taking care of the physical needs is, many times, the priority. And always having clear that, even if refused, the seed of Christianity is planted. Unfortunately here, again, it clearly appears that the vast majority of Christians -inclusive of so many priests and nuns- does not.

Another warning against the risk of pride and self-confidence, that Christians have to work for their admission to Heaven, not to gain some glory on Earth.

The parable of the good Samaritan [Luke 10:25-37]

(Lk10:25)On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

(26)"What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?"

(27)He answered: "'You'll be fond of Yahweh your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind;' and 'you'll be fond of your neighbor as of yourself.'"

(28)"You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live."

(29)But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

(30)In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. (31)A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. (32)So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. (33)But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. (34)He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. (35)The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expenses you may have.'

(36)Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"

(37)The expert of the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him."

Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

To be fond of Yahweh and to be fond of all men is the actual essence of Christianity. Nothing more -in terms of laws and rules- is needed. Furthermore, this passage teaches that we must help a man even when he has brought his trouble on himself. Any man of any nation and religion who is in need is our neighbor.

Note. For a better explanation of this point, see "Miscellanea. What does it mean to be Christian? Which laws/rules do we have to follow to be Christian?"

At the home of Martha and Mary [Luke 10:38-42]

(Lk10:38)As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. (39)She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. (40)But Martha was distracted by all the

preparations that had to be done. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"

(41)"Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, (42)but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

These verses show the wrong type of kindness. Jesus needed few hours of calm and rest, and Martha was trying to make a small celebration, surely with many guests. So often, when we want to be kind, we want it done in our own way; and if it happens that our way is not the necessary way, we take offense and think that we are not appreciated.

The shepherd and his flock [John 10:1-21]

(Jn10:1)"I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. (2)The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep. (3)The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. (4)When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. (5)But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice." (6) Jesus used this figure of speech, but they did not understand what he was telling them.

(7)Therefore Jesus said again, "I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. (8) All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. (9)I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture. (10)The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

(11)I am the Good Shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. (12)The hired hand is not the shepherd who own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. (13)The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

(14)I am the Good Shepherd. I know my sheep and my sheep know me (15)-just as the Father knows me and I know the Father- and I lay down my life for the sheep. (16)I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. (17)The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life -only to take it up again. (18)No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father."

(19)At these words the Jews were again divided. (20)Many of them said, "He is demon-possessed and raving mad. Why listen to him?"

(21)But others said, "These are not the sayings of a man possessed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?"

Through Jesus, and through Jesus alone, men can find access to Yahweh, as Jesus alone opens the way to Yahweh. Between men and Yahweh there is no other intermediary or intercessor -no priest or pastor, no angel, no recognized "saint," not even Jesus' mother.

At the end of time all men, without any exception, will be admitted by Jesus to the Reign of Yahweh to live in His presence and company -that is, in spiritual communion

with Him and everybody else. (For more information about this point, see “Thoughts. At the end of time, everybody will be with Yahweh. A direct consequence of Yahweh's justice and affection”)

The unbelief of the Jews [John 10:22-42]

(Jn10:22)Then came the Feast of Dedication at Jerusalem. It was winter, (23)and Jesus was in the Temple area walking in Solomon's Colonnade. (24)The Jews gathered around him, saying, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly."

(25)Jesus answered, "I did tell you, but you do not believe. The miracles I do in my Father's name speak for me, (26)but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. (27)My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. (28)I give eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. (29)My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. (30)I and the Father are one."

(31)Again the Jews picked up stones to stone him, (32)but Jesus said to them, "I have shown you many great miracles from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?"

(33)"We are not stoning you for any of these," replied the Jews, "but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be as Yahweh."

(34)Jesus answered to them, "Is it not written in your Law, 'I have said you are gods'? (35)If he called them 'gods,' to whom the word of Yahweh came -and the Scripture cannot be broken- (36)what about the one whom the Father set apart as His very own and sent into the world? Why then do you accuse me of blasphemy because I said, 'I am Yahweh's Son'? (37)Do not believe me unless I do what my Father does. (38)But if I do it, even though you do not believe me, believe the miracles, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father." (39)Again they tried to seize him, but he escaped their grasp.

(40)Then Jesus went back across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptizing in the early days. Here he stayed (41)and many people came to him. They said, "Though John never performed a miraculous sign, all that John said about this man was true." (42)And in that place many believed in Jesus.

This doesn't mean that Jesus' followers would be saved from sorrow, suffering, and physical death on Earth; but that nobody will have the power to jeopardize and take their eternal life in the Kingdom of Yahweh.

Jesus was and is “one” with Yahweh -that is, in complete spiritual communion- because he obeyed and loved Him as no one ever did. Similarly, the Christians, when they are bound by fondness and obey to the words of Jesus Christ, are “one” with each other and, consequently, with Jesus and with Yahweh -that is, in complete spiritual communion with all men, with Jesus, and with Yahweh.

The death of Lazarus [John 11:1-16]

(Jn11:1)Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. (2)This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair. (3)So the sisters sent word to Jesus, "Lord, the one you are fond of is sick."

(4)When he heard this, Jesus said, "**This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for Yahweh's glory so that Yahweh's Son may be glorified through it.**" (5)Jesus was fond of Martha, her sister and Lazarus. (6)Yet when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days.

(7)Then he said to his disciples, "**Let us go back to Judea.**"

(8)"But Rabbi," they said, "a short while ago the Jews tried to stone you, and yet you are going back there?"

(9)Jesus answered, "**Are there not twelve hours of daylight? A man who walks by day will not stumble, for he sees by this world's light. (10)It is when he walks by night that he stumbles, for he has no light.**"

(11)After he had said this, he went on to tell them, "**Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up.**"

(12)His disciples replied, "Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better." (13)Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep.

(14)So then he told them plainly, "**Lazarus is dead, (15)and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so you may believe. But let us go to him.**"

(16)Then Thomas (called Didymus) said to the rest of the disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

Here, as in other cases, Lazarus' death and then his raising from it gives another opportunity of showing the miracles Yahweh can do. In particular, this miracle displays the "glory of Yahweh (who alone can raise the dead) in Jesus," that is, his position as Yahweh' Messiah.

Jesus comforts the sisters [John 11:17-37]

(Jn11:17)On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. (18)Bethany was less than fifteen stadia from Jerusalem, (19)and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. (20)When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home.

(21)"Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died. (22)But I know that even now Yahweh will give you whatever you ask."

(23)Jesus said to her, "**Your brother will rise again.**"

(24)Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."

(25)Jesus said to her, "**I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; (26)and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"**

(27)"Yes, Lord," she told him, "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of Yahweh, who was to come into the world."

(28)And after she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. "The Teacher is here," she said, "and is asking for you." (29)When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him. (30)Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. (31)When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house, comforting her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there.

(32)When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, "Lord, if you had been there, my brother would not have died."

(33)When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. (34)"Where have you laid him?" he asked.

"Come and see, Lord," they replied.

(35)Jesus wept.

(36)Then the Jews said, "See how he was fond of him!"

(37)But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?"

Here, clearly, Jesus was not speaking in terms of physical life for, physically speaking, it is not true that the men who believe in him will never die. Actually, he was saying, "Even if a man dies in a condition of serious sin, I will make him spiritually alive for ever (from the moment -at the end of this life or in the afterlife- he repents and believes in me)." Jesus brought into life the certainty that physical death is not the end of everything; that he who believes in him will, spiritually, never die.

Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead [John 11:38-44]

(Jn11:38)Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. (39)"Take away the stone," he said.

"But, Lord," said Martha, the sister of the dead man, "by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days."

(40)Then Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of Yahweh?"

(41)So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "**Father, I thank You that You have heard me.** (42)**I knew that You always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that You sent me.**"

(43)When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "**Lazarus, come out!**" (44)The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face.

Jesus said to them, "**Take off the grave clothes and let him go.**"

Jesus always prayed to the Father, always clearly declaring that the power which flowed through him was not his; that it was Yahweh's. That he followed always and only the will of Yahweh; and that all his miracles were due to the power of Yahweh Who had sent him.

The plot to kill Jesus [John 11:45-54]

(Jn11:45)Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, put their faith in him.

(46)But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. (47)Then the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the Sanhedrin. "What are we accomplishing?" they asked. "Here is this man performing many miraculous signs. (48)If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation."

(49)Then one of them, named Caiaphas, who was High Priest that year, spoke up, "You know nothing at all! (50)You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish."

(51)He did not say this on his own, but as High Priest that year he prophesied that

Jesus would die for the Jewish nation, (52) and not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of Yahweh, to bring them together and make them one. (53) So from that day on they plotted to take his life.

(54) Therefore Jesus no longer moved about publicly among the Jews. Instead he withdrew to a region near the desert, to a village called Ephraim, where he stayed with his disciples.

Jesus' death would have effects far beyond the Jewish nation, extending to all Yahweh's people -that is, to all people of all races and religions- who ever lived, live and will live on Earth. And its final result will be to have all of them, after their admission to Heaven, living in complete spiritual communion with Jesus and Yahweh.

The last trip toward Jerusalem

Samaritan opposition [Luke 9:51-56]

*(Lk9:51) As the time approached for him to be taken up to Heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem. (52) And he sent messengers on ahead, who went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for him; (53) but the people there did not welcome him, because he was heading for Jerusalem. (54) When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, "Lord, do you want us to call fire down from Heaven to destroy them?" (55) But Jesus turned and rebuked them. And he said, "**You do not know what kind of spirit you are of! For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them.**" (56) And they went to another village.*

Jesus would never permit a religious war, whose very concept is absolutely contrary to his teaching and his saving mission. All "religious" wars are doubly wrong: They destroy human life, and they do that in the name of Jesus or Yahweh. This passage teaches the duty of tolerance, which must be based not on indifference but on affection. Yahweh calls people to Himself in many different ways; and no man or Church can have a monopoly of His truth. Instead, the best way to "destroy" an enemy is to make him a friend.

Ten healed of leprosy [Luke 17:11-19]

(Lk17:11) Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. (12) As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance (13) and called out in a loud voice, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!"

*(14) When he saw them, he said, "**Go, show yourselves to the priests.**" And as they went, they were cleansed.*

(15) One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising Yahweh in a loud voice. (16) He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him -and he was a Samaritan.

*(17) Jesus asked, "**Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? (18) Was no one found to return and give praise to Yahweh except this foreigner?**" (19) Then he said to him, "**Rise and go; your faith has made you well.**"*

All ten men had faith in Jesus' healing power, and were healed. But only one was spiritually moved and felt the moral duty to thank his healer. And, because of that, he received spiritual salvation in addition to the physical healing all of them had received.

The little children and Jesus [Mark 10:13-16 Matthew 19:13-15 Luke 18:15-17]

(Mk10:13)(Mt19:13)(Lk18:15)Then people were also bringing babies to Jesus to have him touch them, and for him to place his hands on them and pray for them. But, when the disciples saw this, they rebuked those who brought them. (Mk10:14)(Mt19:14)(Lk18:16)But, when Jesus saw this, he was indignant. Jesus called the children to him and said to them, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the Kingdom of Yahweh belongs to such as these. (Mk10:15)(Lk18:17)I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the Kingdom of Yahweh like a little child will never enter it." (Mk10:16)(Mt19:15)And he took the children in his arms and, when he had placed his hands on them and blessed them, he went on from there.

This passage gives a very important confirmation: If the Kingdom is open to little children, when a baby of any religion dies he goes straight into Heaven, without being barred from it by something as "the Original Sin" which, anyway, doesn't exist. In effect, by eating the forbidden fruit, Adam and Eve "sinned" for the first time in their lives and in the history of mankind. This was the "Original Sin" -the sin committed at the beginning of mankind for which only Adam and Eve were responsible and bore the punishment. All other human beings, who are their descendants, did not and do not have any moral involvement nor responsibility, even if they are suffering the consequences of it, having to live outside the garden.

The rich young man [Mark 10:17-31 Matthew 19:16-30 Luke 18:18-30]

(Mk10:17)(Mt19:16)(Lk18:18)Now as Jesus started on his way, a man, a certain ruler, ran up to him and fell on his knees before him, "Good teacher," he asked, "what good things must I do to inherit eternal life?"

(Mk10:18)(Mt19:17)(Lk18:19)"Why do you call me good and ask me about what is good?" Jesus answered, "No one is good -except Yahweh alone. There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, obey the commandments."

(Mk10:19)(Mt19:18-19)(Lk18:20)"Which ones?" the man inquired.

Jesus replied, "You know the commandments: 'You will not murder, you will not commit adultery, you will not steal, you will not give false testimony, you will not defraud, you will honor your father and mother, and you will be fond of your neighbor as of yourself.'"

(Mk10:20)(Mt19:20)(Lk18:21)"Teacher," the young man declared, "all these I have kept since I was a boy. What do I still lack?"

*(Mk10:21)(Mt19:21)(Lk18:22)When Jesus heard this, he looked at him and liked him, "You still lack one thing," Jesus answered, "**If you want to be perfect, go, sell every possession you have and give to the poor, and you will have a treasure in Heaven. Then come, follow me.**"*

(Mk10:22)(Mt19:22)(Lk18:23)When the young man heard this, his face fell, he became very sad and he went away, because he was a man of great wealth.

(Mk10:23)(Mt19:23)(Lk18:24)Then Jesus looked around at him and said to his disciples, "I tell you the truth, how hard it is for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven!"

(Mk10:24)The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, "Children, how hard it is for those who trust in riches to enter the Kingdom of Yahweh! (Mk10:25)(Mt19:24)(Lk18:25)Again, I tell you, it is easier indeed for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Yahweh."

(Mk10:26)(Mt19:25)(Lk18:26)When the disciples heard this, they were even more greatly astonished, and asked to each other, "Who then can be saved?"

(Mk10:27)(Mt19:26)(Lk18:27)Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but not with Yahweh; all things are possible with Yahweh."

(Mk10:28)(Mt19:27)(Lk18:28)Peter said to him, "We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?"

(Mk10:29-30)(Mt19:28-29)(Lk18:29-30)"I tell you the truth," Jesus replied to them, "at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And no one who has left home or wife or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for me and the Gospel and for the sake of the Kingdom of Yahweh will fail to receive in this present age a hundred times the value of homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields (and with them, persecutions) and, in the age to come, to inherit eternal life. (Mk10:31)(Mt19:30)But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first."

Moral and spiritual perfection on Earth is clearly almost if not totally impossible to achieve. Here, as in other cases, Jesus gives an advice, a suggestion on how to further improve an honest life; that is, a target, not an obligation.

This is the true and whole doctrine of Christian salvation. If it had to depend solely on a man's efforts, it would be impossible for anyone. Salvation can be reached if and when a man realizes he needs Yahweh and Jesus' spiritual help. It is important to note that Jesus did not say that it is impossible for the rich to enter the Kingdom of Heaven, nor that those who have riches are shut out. In effect, riches are not a sin, but they are a responsibility and a danger. The responsibility to use riches for doing good, the danger of thinking that one does not need Yahweh.

The "last," that is, the humble, the persecuted, after suffering so much on Earth, will receive a "compensation" in the afterlife. The "first," that is, the rich and the powerful, accustomed to rely too much on themselves, have a high probability of not being good Christians during their life, with clear consequences in their next life.

Jesus again predicts his death [Mark 10:32-34 Matthew 20:17-19 Luke 18:31-34]

(Mk10:32-34)(Mt20:17-19)(Lk18:31-33)Now they were on their way up to Jerusalem, with Jesus leading the way, and the disciples were astonished, while those who followed were afraid. Again Jesus took the Twelve disciples aside and told them what was going to happen to him. "We are going up to Jerusalem," he said, "and everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled. He will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Pagans, who will mock him, insult him and spit on him, flog him and crucify and kill him. Later, on the third day, he will be raised again to life!"

(Lk18:34)The disciples did not understand any of this. Its meaning was hidden from them, and they did not know what he was talking about.

Raised by Yahweh, as Jesus, a man, had no possibility at all of raising by himself.

The request of James and John [Mark 10:35-45 Matthew 20:20-28 Luke 22:24-30]
*(Mk10:35)(Mt20:20)Then the mother of James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favor of him. "Teacher," they said, "we want you to do for us whatever we ask."
 (Mk10:36-37)(Mt20:21)"What it is you want me to do for you?" he asked.
 They replied, "Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory."
 She said, "Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your Kingdom."
 (Mk10:38-40)(Mt20:22-23)"You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said to them. "Can you drink the cup I am going to drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?"
 "We can," they answered.
 Jesus said to them, "You will indeed drink from the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father."
 (Mk10:41)(Mt20:24)When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with two brothers James and John.
 (Lk22:24)Also a dispute arose among them as to which of them was considered to be the greatest. (Mk10:42)(Mt20:25)(Lk22:25)Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the kings, those who are regarded as rulers of the Pagans, lord it over them; and their high officials, those who exercise authority over them, call themselves Benefactors. (Mk10:43-44)(Mt20:26-27)(Lk22:26)But not so with you, you are not to be like that. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. The greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. (Lk22:27)For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? It is not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves. (Mk10:45)(Mt20:28)For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. (Lk22:28)You are those who have stood by me in my trials. (29)And I confer on you a Kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me, (30)so that you may eat and drink at my table in my Kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."*

James and John were Jesus' cousins, were ambitious and aimed at being his chief ministers of what they supposed to be an earthly state. It is clear that they -as so many Church members in every epoch- had completely failed to understand both Jesus' teaching and the fact that he was fully following his father Yahweh's will.

And Jesus pointed to the different standards of greatness in the kingdoms of the world and in Yahweh's Kingdom on Earth, where the standard of life has to be that of service, where greatness has to consist, not in reducing other men to one's service, but in putting oneself to their service, in this way overturning the value structure of the world.

In effect, Jesus gave himself as ransom for "all men," for salvation is offered to "all," but only "many" receive it at any given time, when they accept Jesus Christ's offer of it. **Note.** For more information about the offering of salvation, see "Thoughts. At the end of time, everybody will be with Yahweh. A direct consequence of Yahweh's justice and affection."

The blind beggar Bartimaeus receives his sight

[Mark 10:46-52 Matthew 20:29-34 Luke 18:35-43]

(Mk10:46-47)(Mt20:29-30)(Lk18:35-38)Then they came to Jericho. As Jesus and his disciples, together with a large crowd which followed him, were approaching the city, a blind man, Bartimaeus (that is, the Son of Timaeus), was sitting by the roadside begging. When he heard the crowd going by, he asked what was happening. They told him, "Jesus of Nazareth is passing by." When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth going by, he began to shout, "Lord Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

(Mk10:48)(Mt20:31)(Lk18:39)Many of those in the crowd who led the way rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

(Mk10:49-51)(Mt20:32-33)(Lk18:40-41)Jesus stopped and ordered the man to be brought to him. "Call him," he said.

So they called the blind man, "Cheer up! On your feet! He's calling you." Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus. When he came near, Jesus asked him, "What do you want me to do for you?"

The blind man replied, "Rabbi, Lord, I want to see."

(Mk10:52)(Mt20:34)(Lk18:42-43)Jesus had compassion on him and touched his eyes. "Go," said Jesus to him, "Receive your sight; your faith has healed you." Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road, praising Yahweh. When all the people saw it, they also praised Yahweh.

Clearly, Bartimaeus had a quite inadequate conception of Jesus but, in spite of this, he had faith, and faith is the only important matter. The essential point is not to fully understand Jesus, but to have faith in him. And Bartimaeus had faith and was healed.

Zacchaeus the tax collector *[Luke 19:1-10]*

(Lk19:1)Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. (2)A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. (3)He wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man he could not, because of the crowd. (4)So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way.

(5)When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." (6)So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.

(7)All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a sinner."

(8)But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount."

(9)Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. (10)For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."

As usual, most of the people did not understand the essence of what Jesus was doing and complained about him going to be guest of a hated "heavy sinner." It is so easy to complain and condemn, and so difficult to understand and forgive (without forgetting)!

And Jesus -not the people, not the priests- recognized the full and total sincerity of the man, though the Jewish society still excluded him. A kind of situation that keeps repeating every day from ever.

A summary of Jesus' main purpose; to bring salvation, that is, eternal life in the Kingdom of Yahweh, to those which were lost, to the men who had wandered away from Yahweh, without any exception, that is, to all men of all races and religions of the past, present and future.

The parable of the ten minas [Luke 19:11-27]

(Lk19:11) While they were listening to this, he went on to tell them a parable, because he was near to Jerusalem and the people thought that the Kingdom of Yahweh was going to appear at once. (12) He said, "A man of noble birth went to a distant country to have himself appointed king and then to return. (13) So he called ten of his servants and gave them ten minas. 'Put this money to work,' he said, 'until I come back.'

(14) But his subjects hated him and sent a delegation after him to say, 'We don't want this man to be our king.'

(15) He was made king, however, and returned home. Then he sent for the servants to whom he had given the money, in order to find out what they had gained with it.

(16) The first one came and said, 'Sir, your mina has earned ten more.'

(17) 'Well done, my good servant!' his master replied. 'Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities.'

(18) The second came and said, 'Sir, your mina has earned five more.'

(19) His master answered, 'You take charge of five cities.'

(20) Then another servant came and said, 'Sir, here is your mina; I have kept it laid away in a piece of cloth. (21) I was afraid of you, because you are a hard man. You take out what you did not put in and reap what you did not sow.'

(22) His master replied, 'I will judge you by your own words, you wicked servant! You knew, did you, that I am a hard man, taking out what I did not put in, and reaping what I did not sow? (23) Why then didn't you put my money on deposit, so that when I came back, I could have collected it with interest?'

(24) Then he said to those standing by, 'Take his mina away from him and give it to the one who has ten minas.'

(25) 'Sir,' they said, 'he already has ten!'

(26) He replied, 'I tell you that to everyone who has, more will be given, but as for the one who has nothing, even what he has will be taken away. (27) But those enemies of mine who did not want me to be king over them -bring them here and kill them in front of me.'"

Here we have an example valid for all Christians. The servants were trusted and, in so being, were tested whether or not they were faithful and reliable in the things they had been given. Similarly, it is precisely in their routine duties that Yahweh is testing men. And there is no better example of this than Jesus himself.

Those who seek spiritual gain in the Gospel, for themselves and others, and follow Jesus' advices, will become richer and richer; but those who neglect or waste the spiritual capital that was given them will become more and more impoverished, losing even what spirituality they have.

The sheep and the goats [Matthew 25:31-46]

(Mt25:31) "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. (32) All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. (33) He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

(34) Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the Kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. (35) For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink. I was a stranger and you invited me in, (36) I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

(37) Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? (38) When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? (39) When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'

(40) The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'

(41) Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. (42) For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, (43) I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.'

(44) They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?'

(45) He will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.'

(46) Then they will go away to final punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."

The purpose of this judgment -which will occur at the end of time and is referred to in typical Jewish language- will be not separation between Heaven and hell, but separation in different levels of communion with Yahweh.

In effect, the Greek word used here for "punishment" is "kolasis," which actually means "discipline for the purpose of correcting." A punishment given to amend and cure, that has to last only till its purpose is reached, and then it has to end.

Note. For a deeper explanation of this passage, see its commentary on "The Gospel of Jesus Christ."

The coming of the Kingdom of Yahweh [Matthew 24:37-41 Luke 17:20-37]

(Lk17:20) Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the Kingdom of Yahweh would come, Jesus replied, "The Kingdom of Yahweh does not come with your careful observation, (21) nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the Kingdom of Yahweh is among you."

(22) Then he said to his disciples, "The time is coming when you will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man, but you will not see it. (23) Men will tell you, 'There he is!' or 'Here he is!' Do not go running off after them. (24) For the Son of Man in his day will be like the lightning, which flashes and lights up the sky from one end to the other. (25) But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.

(Mt24:37)(Lk17:26)Just as it was in the days of Noah, so also it will be in the days of the coming of the Son of Man. (Mt24:38-39)(Lk17:27)For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and being given in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark, and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and destroyed and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.

(Lk17:28)It was the same in the days of Lot. People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. (29)But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulfur rained down from Heaven and destroyed them all.

(30)It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed. (31)On that day no one who is on the roof of his house, with his goods inside, should go down to get them. Likewise, no one in the field should go back for anything. (32)Remember Lot's wife! (33)Whoever tries to keep his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life [for me] will preserve it. (34)I tell you, on that night two people will be in one bed; one will be taken and the other left. (Mt24:40)(Lk17:36) Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. (Mt24:41)(Lk17:35)Two women will be grinding grain together with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left."

(Lk17:37)"Where, Lord?" they asked.

He replied, "Where there is a dead body, there the vultures will gather."

Until the Earth lasts, the Kingdom of Yahweh -which is the final destination of all the spiritual beings He has created; that is, where, at the "end of time," all men will live together an everlasting life in full spiritual communion with Jesus Christ, Yahweh and everybody else- was and is present both in Heaven and on Earth.

Nobody will be able to predict Jesus Christ's return on Earth at the "end of time," nor will have the time to announce it. Many people will come out with false prophecies and false predictions; but nobody must believe and follow them. Any speculation is totally vain.

Seven woes. Jesus' sorrow for Jerusalem

[Matthew 23:1-13;15-39 Luke 11:37-54;13:31-35]

(Lk11:37)When Jesus had finished speaking, a Pharisee invited him to eat with him; so he went in and reclined at the table. (38)But the Pharisee, noticing that Jesus did not first wash before the meal, was surprised.

(Mt23:1)(Lk11:39a)Then Jesus said him and to the crowds and to his disciples: (Mt 23:2)"The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. (3)So you must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. (4)They tie up heavy loads and put them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them.

(Mt23:5)Everything they do is done for men to see: They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long; (6)they like the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; (7)they like to be greeted in the marketplaces and to have men call them 'Rabbi.'

(Mt23:8)But you are not to be called 'Rabbi,' for you have only one Master and you are all brothers. (9)And do not call anyone on Earth 'father,' for you have one Father, and He is in Heaven. (10)Nor are you to be called 'teacher,' for you have one Teacher, the Christ. (11)The greatest among you will be your servant. (12)For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted."

(Lk11:45) One of the experts in the law answered him, "Teacher, when you say these things, you insult us also."

(Lk11:46) Jesus replied, "And you experts in the law, woe to you, because you load people down with burdens they can hardly carry and you yourselves will not lift one finger to help them."

(Lk11:43) Woe to you Pharisees, because you like the most important seats in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces.

(Mt23:13)(Lk11:52) Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! Because you have taken away the key to knowledge. You shut the Kingdom of Heaven in men's faces. You yourselves have not entered, nor will you let those enter who are trying to, hindering them.

(Mt23:15) Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are.

(Mt23:16) Woe to you, blind guides! You say, 'If anyone swears by the Temple, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gold of the Temple, he is bound by his oath.' (17) You blind fools! Which is greater; the gold, or the Temple that makes the gold sacred? (18) You also say, 'If anyone swears by the altar, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gift on it, he is bound by his oath.' (19) You blind men! Which is greater: the gift, or the altar that makes the gift sacred? (20) Therefore, he who swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it. (21) And he who swears by the Temple swears by it and by the One who dwells in it. (22) And he who swears by Heaven swears by Yahweh's throne and by the One who sits on it.

(Mt23:23)(Lk11:42) Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! Because you give Yahweh a tenth of your spices -mint, dill, cummin, rue and all other kinds of garden herbs. But you have neglected the more important matters of the Law -justice, mercy, faithfulness and the affection of Yahweh. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. (Mt23:24) You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel.

(Mt23:25)(Lk11:39b) Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! Now then you clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of greed, wickedness and self-indulgence. (Mt23:26) Blind Pharisees! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean. (Lk11:40) You foolish people! Did not the one who made the outside make the inside also? (41) But give what is inside the dish -what you have- to the poor, and everything will be clean for you.

(Mt23:27)(Lk:11:44) Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! Because you are like unmarked graves, which men walk over without knowing it. You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean. (Mt23:28) In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.

(Mt23:29)(Lk11:47) Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! Because you build tombs for the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous and it was your forefathers who killed them. (Lk11:48) So you testify that you approve of what your forefathers did; they killed the prophets and you build their tomb. (Mt 23:30) And you say, 'If we had lived in the days of our forefathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.' (31) So you testify against

yourselves that you are the descendants of those who murdered the prophets. (32) You fill up, then, the measure of the sin of your forefathers!

(Mt23:33) You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell? (Mt23:34)(Lk11:49) Because of this, Yahweh in His wisdom said, 'Therefore I am sending you prophets and apostles and wise men and teachers. Some of them you will kill and crucify and persecute; others you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town.' (Mt23:35-36)(Lk11:50-51) And so, therefore, this generation will be held responsible for the blood of all the prophets, and upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on Earth, since the beginning of the world, from the blood of the righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berekiah, whom you murdered between the Temple and the altar. Yes, I tell you the truth, this generation will be held responsible for it all."

(Lk13:31) At that time some Pharisees came to Jesus and said to him, "Leave this place and go somewhere else. Herod wants to kill you."

(32) He replied, "Go tell that fox, 'I will drive out demons and heal people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal.' (33) In any case, I must keep going today and tomorrow and the next day -for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem!"

(Mt23:37)(Lk13:34) O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! (Mt23:38-39)(Lk13:35) Look, your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of Yahweh.'"

(Lk11:53) When Jesus left there, the Pharisees and the teachers of the law began to oppose him fiercely and to besiege him with questions, (54) waiting to catch him in something he might say.

Note. This is the most important passage in the whole New Testament -unfortunately always fully valid- against all evils of past, present and future Christian Churches.

Jesus did not follow the social-religious ceremonial acts and practices. To omit them was -and so it is for their equivalent in Christian times- considered to sin!

The teachers of the law were considered the only authorized successors of Moses, exactly as, in Christian times, priest and pastors of all denominations consider themselves the only authorized successors of Peter and the apostles. And all of them used and still use their position to impose on men plenty of absurd ceremonial rules and ceremonies, making of religion a depressing affair of burdens and prohibitions; a religion of ostentation (imposing churches and ceremonies, compulsory use of objects "necessary" for the proper cult, inclusive of their "uniforms," the so called "sacred paraments").

In the eyes of Yahweh all men are exactly equals (brothers), so no one has the right to consider himself to be a master (Rabbi). Furthermore, all Christians should always remember that they have only one Father -Yahweh- and only one Teacher and Master -Jesus Christ. And we can see how much these words are respected by all levels of Church-men and women. He who gives himself to the service of the Gospel can't ask to be called Father, Monsignor, Excellency, Eminence, Holy Father, Pontiff, Vicar of Peter, Vicar of Christ, and so many other titles, even in their feminine form. Repeatedly Jesus had told his disciples that, if they looked for greatness, they would find it not by being first, but by being last; not by being masters, but by being servants of all.

Furthermore, the very persons who should have brought and should bring men close to Yahweh, actually obscured and obscure their understanding with faulty interpretations and erroneous systems of theology, giving “official” interpretations of Scriptures, tuned to keep the power of knowledge in their hierarchical organizations, excluding everybody else.

And so many of these “religious” people, so meticulous in keeping and asking to keep so many ceremonial acts and practices, were and are more concerned about the keeping of ceremonial acts than about being moral; and can be hard, arrogant and cruel, forgetting the claims of justice, mercy, faithfulness and, more important, the call of Yahweh's affection.

The rejection and, so often, the slaughter of true Yahweh's men and women was and is a constant in the history of all Christian Churches, always done in the name of Jesus and Yahweh.

The parable of the shrewd manager [Luke 16:1-12]

(Lk16:1) Jesus told his disciples: "There was a rich man whose manager was accused of wasting his possessions. (2) So he called him in and asked him, 'What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your management, because you cannot be manager any longer.'

(3) The manager said to himself, 'What shall I do now? My master is taking away my job, I'm not strong enough to dig, and I'm ashamed to beg -(4) I know what I'll do so that, when I lose my job here, people will welcome me into their houses.'

(5) So he called in each one of his master's debtors. He asked the first, 'How much do you owe my master?'

(6) 'A hundred batos of olive oil,' he replied.

The manager told him, 'Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it fifty.'

(7) Then he asked the second, 'And how much do you owe?'

'A hundred koros of wheat,' he replied.

He told him, 'Take your bill and make it eighty.'

(8) The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the Light. (9) I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.

(10) Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. (11) So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? (12) And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own?"

Even if it doesn't seem so, the point of this passage is not the man's dishonesty, but his willingness to use all the means at his disposal to plan for his future well-being. The meaning is that, if the Christians -the people of the light- were as eager and ingenious in their attempts to attain goodness as the men of the world are in their attempts to attain money and comfort, they would be much better people.

The rich man and Lazarus [Luke 16:19-31]

(Lk16:19) "There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. (20) At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered

with sores (21) and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores.

(22) The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. (23) In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. (24) So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.'

(25) But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. (26) And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.'

(27) He answered, 'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father's house, (28) for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.'

(29) Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.'

(30) 'No, father Abraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.'

(31) He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone will rise from the dead.'"

Note. The image of punishment given in this passage -punishment by the torment of fire- is the most traditional one, the easiest to understand for Jesus' listeners.

Possibly for the first time the man who had been rich showed concern for other people, even if they were members of his family. During his life he had failed to pay attention to the Scripture and its teaching, and now he feared that his brothers would be punished as him. Actually, for him, the first step toward accepting Jesus' offer of salvation. This is a clear indication that the punishment of hell is formative and redemptive.

The parable of the persistent widow [Luke 18:1-8]

(Lk18:1) Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. (2) He said: "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared Yahweh nor cared about men. (3) And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.'

(4) For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear Yahweh or care about men, (5) yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually wear me out with her coming!'"

(6) And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. (7) And will not Yahweh bring about justice for His chosen ones, who cry out to Him day and night? Will He keep putting them off? (8) I tell you, He will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the Earth?"

Here, we have again a fundamental suggestion; men have never to despair and always seek, with perseverance, Yahweh's help.

The parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector [Luke 18:9-14]

(Lk18:9) To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable: (10) "Two men went up to the Temple to pray,

one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. (11) The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: 'Yahweh, I thank You that I am not like other men -robbers, evildoers, adulterers- or even like this tax collector. (12) I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.'

(13) But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to Heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'Yahweh, have mercy on me, a sinner.'

(14) I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before Yahweh. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

So often orthodox, fully observant people are absolutely confident to be right and tend to rate low every person who is not as them.

The Pharisee's was and is not a way to pray, but only a demonstration of pride and superiority. In effect, he did not really go to pray Yahweh, but went to inform Him of how good he was, enumerating his virtues. On the contrary, the tax collector -the official "sinner"- did not plead his good works but the mercy of Yahweh in forgiving his sins.

This passage tells that no man who is proud can properly pray, and that no man who despises his fellow-men can really pray. It is true that the Pharisee did fast; that he did meticulously give the tenth; that he was not as so many other men were; still less that he was like that tax collector. But he was comparing himself with other men, not with the requests of Yahweh. Furthermore, he did not ask for the only important thing, the mercy of Yahweh for being a sinner.

Jesus at Mary and Martha's home [John 11:55-57;12:1]

(Jn11:55) When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, many went up from the country to Jerusalem, for the ceremonial cleansing before the Passover. (56) They kept looking for Jesus, and as they stood in the Temple area they asked one another, "What do you think? Isn't he coming to the Feast at all?" (57) But the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that if anyone found out where Jesus was, he should report it so that they might arrest him.

(12:1) Six days before the Passover, Jesus arrived at Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead.

The Last Week

The triumphal entry

[Mark 11:1-11 Matthew 21:1-11 Luke 19:28-44 John 12:12-19]

(Lk19:28)(Jn12:12) The next day, after Jesus had spoken, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. And the great crowd that had come for the Feast heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. (Mk11:1-2)(Mt21:1-2)(Lk19:29-30) As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage from Bethany, at the hill called the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples, saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and just as you enter it, at once you will find a donkey tied there, with a colt by her, which no one has ever ridden. Untie them and bring them here to me. (Mk11:3)(Mt21:3)(Lk 19:31) If anyone says anything to you and asks you, 'Why are you doing this? Why are you untying them?' tell him, 'The Lord needs them and he will send them back right away.'"

(Mk11:4-5)(Mt21:6)(Lk19:32-33)Those disciples who were sent ahead went, did as Jesus had instructed them, and found a colt outside in the street, tied at a doorway. As they were untying the colt, some people standing there, its owners, asked them, "What are you doing? Why are you untying that colt?" (Mk11:6)(Lk19:34)They answered as Jesus had told them to, "The Lord needs it." And the people let them go. (Mk11:7)(Mt 21:4;7)(Lk19:35)(Jn12:14)When they brought the donkey and the colt to Jesus, they placed their cloaks on the colt, and Jesus sat on it. This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet. As it is written,

(Mt21:5)(Jn12:15)"Say to the Daughter of Zion,

'Do not be afraid, O Daughter of Zion; see, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, seated on a colt, the foal of a donkey.'"

(Mk11:8-10)(Mt21:8-9)(Lk19:36-38)(Jn12:13)As he went along a very large crowd took and cut branches from the palm trees and spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread on the road branches they had cut in the fields and went out to meet him.

When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples, those who went ahead of him and those who followed, began joyfully to praise Yahweh in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen and shouted,

"Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the Name of the Lord [Yahweh]!

Hosanna, Son of David!

Blessed is the king who comes in the Name of the Lord [Yahweh]!

Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!

Blessed is the King of Israel!

Glory in the Highest!

Peace in Heaven and glory in the Highest!"

(Lk19:39)Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples!"

*(40)"I tell you," he replied, "**if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.**"*

*(41)As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it (42)and said, "**If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace -but now it is hidden from your eyes. (43)The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. (44)They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of Yahweh's coming to you.**"*

(Mk11:11)(Mt21:10-11)When Jesus entered Jerusalem, he went to the Temple. The whole city was stirred and asked, "Who is this?"

The crowd answered, "This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee."

Jesus looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve.

(Jn12:16)At first his disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realize that these things had been written about him and that they had done these things to him.

(17)Now the crowd that was with him when he called Lazarus from the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to spread the word. (18)Many people, because they had heard that he had given this miraculous sign, went out to meet him. (19)So the Pharisees said to one another, "See, this is getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world has gone after him!"

The crowd was greeting Jesus as a Messiah conqueror, the kind he had refused to be. So, entering Jerusalem, Jesus did something to have everybody see and know that he was a Messiah of peace. He came riding on a donkey's colt, a clear claim to be not the warrior figure the Jews dreamed of, but the Messiah of peace. And this means that no war can ever be made and justified in Jesus' name!

Jesus predicts his death [John 12:20-36]

(Jn12:20) Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the Feast. **(21)** They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. "Sir," they said, "we would like to see Jesus." **(22)** Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus.

(23) Jesus replied, "**The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.** **(24)** **I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.** **(25)** **The man who is fond of his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.** **(26)** **Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.**

(27) Now **my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour!'** No, it was **for this very reason I came to this hour.** **(28)** **Father, glorify Your Name!"**

Then **a voice came from Heaven, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again."** **(29)** The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him.

(30) Jesus said, "**This voice was for your benefit, not mine.** **(31)** **Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out.** **(32)** **But I, when I am lifted up from the Earth, will draw all men to myself.**" **(33)** He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.

(34) The crowd spoke up, "We have heard from the Law that the Christ will remain forever, so how can you say, '**The Son of Man must be lifted up**'? Who is this Son of Man?"

(35) Then Jesus told them, "**You are going to have the Light just a little while longer. Walk while you have the Light, before darkness overtakes you. The man who walks in the dark does not know where he is going.** **(36)** **Put your trust in the Light while you have it, so that you may become sons of Light.**" When he had finished speaking, Jesus left and hid himself from them.

Here we have the essence of the Christian faith: only by service -on Earth- comes greatness -in Heaven. The people of importance, from the Christian point of view, are only those who unselfishly serve others. As Jesus did, first healing and, then, dying for the spiritual salvation of all men.

Two other times the Gospels record the declarations of a voice coming from Heaven and addressing Jesus: at his baptism (The Baptism of Jesus. Mark 1:9-11; Matthew 3:13-17; Luke 3:21-22) and on the Mount of Transfiguration (The Transfiguration. Mark 9:2-12; Matthew 17:1-13; Luke 9:28-36). Here Yahweh Himself speaks to strengthen Jesus before the ordeal of the Cross.

The Jews continue in their unbelief [John 12:37-50]

(Jn12:37) Even after Jesus had done all these miraculous signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him. (38) This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet:

"Lord, who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?"

(39) For this reason they could not believe, because, as Isaiah says elsewhere:

(40) "He has blinded their eyes and deadened their hearts, so they can neither see with their eyes, nor understand with their hearts, nor turn -if not, I would heal them."

(41) Isaiah said this because he saw Jesus' glory and spoke about him.

(42) Yet at the same time many even among the leaders believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they would not confess their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; (43) for they liked praise from men more than praise from Yahweh.

(44) Then Jesus cried out, "When a man believes in me, he does not believe in me only, but in the One who sent me. (45) When he looks at me, he sees the One who sent me. (46) I have come into the world as a Light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness.

(47) As for the person who hears my words but does not keep them, I do not judge him. For I did not come to judge the world, but to save it. (48) There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; that very Word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day. (49) For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it. (50) I know that His command leads to eternal life. So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say."

A clear declaration of Jesus: he obeys to Yahweh and he is not at the same level of his Father -not even as part of a supposed trinity. Jesus' mission -to open to everybody the possibility of entering in spiritual communion with Yahweh- as well as the deep communion of the Father and the Son, is stressed all throughout John's Gospel.

Judgment is not the purpose of Jesus' coming, but judgment is the other side of salvation. Jesus did not come to condemn; he came to save. It was not the wrath of Yahweh which sent Jesus to men; it was His fondness. Yet the coming of Jesus inevitably involves a judgment because by his attitude to Jesus a man shows what he is and therefore judges himself. If he finds in Jesus a person to be fond of, even if he never succeeds in making his life what he knows he ought to make it, he is safe. If on the other hand he sees in Jesus nothing lovely, it means that he is impervious to Yahweh; and he has therefore judged himself.

The fig tree withers [Mark 11:12-14 Matthew 21:18-19]

*(Mk11:12)(Mt21:18) The next day early in the morning, as they were leaving Bethany and were on their way back to the city, Jesus was hungry. (Mk11:13-14)(Mt21:19) Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf by the road, he went up to find out if it had any fruit. When he reached it, he found nothing on it except leaves, because it was not the season for figs. Then he said to the tree, "**May you never bear fruit again! May no one ever eat fruit from you again.**" Immediately the tree withered. And his disciples heard him say it.*

Jesus clears the Temple [Mark 11:15-19 Matthew 21:12-17 Luke 19:45-48]

(Mk11:15)(Mt21:12)(Lk19:45)Then, on reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the Temple area and began driving out all those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves, **(Mk11:16)**and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the Temple courts.

(Mk11:17)(Mt21:13)(Lk19:46)And as he taught them, he said, **"It is not written:**

'My House will be called a House of Prayer for all nations'?

But you have made it 'a den of robbers.'

(Mt21:14)The blind and the lame came to him at the Temple, and he healed them. **(15)**But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the Temple area, "Hosanna, Son of David," they were indignant.

(16)"Do you hear what these children are saying?" they asked him.

"Yes," replied Jesus, **"have you never read,**

'From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise'?"

(Mk11:18)(Lk19:47-48)Every day he was teaching at the Temple. But the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the leaders among the people heard this and began looking for a way to kill him, for they feared him. Yet they could not find any way to do it, because all the people hung on his words, and the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching.

(Mk11:19)(Mt21:17)And, when evening came, he left them and went out of the city to Bethany, where he spent the night.

The merchants and the money changers were using -with the approval of the religious authorities- the Temple (its Court of the Pagans) as a market area (which, in theory, was forbidden) depriving the Temple of its sanctity. And, furthermore, they were charging too much, taking financial advantage of the people. In effect, the Temple authorities were treating the pilgrims not as worshippers, but as subjects to be exploited for getting the maximum possible profit. And we can say that even today this still is the situation around every Christian Sanctuary and Place of Pilgrimage.

The withered fig tree [Mark 11:20-26 Matthew 21:20-22]

(Mk11:20)In the morning, as they went along, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots. **(21)**Peter remembered and said to Jesus, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree you cursed has withered!" **(Mt21:20)**When the disciples saw this, they were amazed. "How did the fig tree wither so quickly?" they asked.

(Mk11:22-23)(Mt21:21)"Have faith in Yahweh," Jesus answered, **"I tell you the truth, if anyone of you has faith and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. Not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and it will be done. (Mk11:24)(Mt21:22)Therefore I tell you, if you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer; believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. (Mk11:25)And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in Heaven may forgive you your sins. (26) But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father who is in Heaven forgive your sins."**

Jesus clearly says that if we forgive others, Yahweh will forgive us; but if we refuse to forgive others, Yahweh will refuse to forgive us. Human forgiveness and divine forgiveness are inextricably inter-combined, and cannot be separated. If a man has not put things right with his fellow men, he cannot put things right with Yahweh.

The parable of the fig tree [Luke 13:6-9]

(Lk13:6) Then he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree, planted in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it, but did not find any. (7) So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, 'For three years now I've been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven't found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?'

(8) 'Sir,' the man replied, 'leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it. (9) If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.'"

It is always Jesus' way, for bringing men to himself and to Yahweh, to give them chance after chance both in this life and in the afterlife. So, at the end, a man has always the possibility of rising to Jesus and Yahweh.

The authority of Jesus questioned [Mark 11:27-33 Matthew 21:23-27 Luke 20:1-8]

(Mk11:27-28)(Mt21:23)(Lk20:1-2) They arrived again in Jerusalem, and Jesus entered the Temple courts. While he was walking and teaching the people and preaching the Gospel, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, together with the elders of the people, came up to him. "Tell us, by what authority are you doing these things?" they asked. "And who gave you authority to do this?"

(Mk11:29)(Mt21:24)(Lk20:3) Jesus replied, "I will also ask you one question. Answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. (Mk11:30-31) (Mt21:25)(Lk20:4-5) John's baptism -where did it come from? Was it from Heaven, or from men? Tell me!"

They discussed it among themselves and said, "If we say, 'From Heaven,' he will ask, 'Then why didn't you believe him?'" (Mk11:32)(Mt21:26)(Lk20:6) But if we say, 'From men,' we are afraid all the people will stone us, for they all hold that John really was a prophet."

(Mk11:33)(Mt21:27)(Lk20:7-8) So they answered Jesus, "We don't know where it was from."

Then Jesus said, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things."

The parable of the two sons [Matthew 21:28-32]

(Mt21:28) "What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work today in the vineyard.'

(29) 'I will not,' he answered, but later he changed his mind and went.

(30) Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, 'I will, sir,' but he did not go.

(31) Which of the two did what his father wanted?"

"The first," they answered.

Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the Kingdom of Yahweh ahead of you. (32) For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him."

This passage considers two common classes of people. First, those whose practice is far better than their profession. They profess to have no interest in the Church and in religion, and yet they live more Christian lives than many professing Christians. Second, those whose profession is much better than their practice. They promise anything and make great protestations of piety and fidelity; but their practice lags far behind. Clearly, neither class is perfect. The really good man is the man in whom profession and practice meet and match, and this is the target of life for every Christian.

The parable of the tenants [Mark 12:1-12 Matthew 21:33-46 Luke 20:9-19]

(Mk12:1)(Mt21:33)(Lk20:9)He then went on and began to speak to the people in parables. "Listen to another parable: There was man, a landowner, who planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a pit in it for the winepress and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and went away for a long time on a journey. (Mk12:2-3)(Mt21:34-35)(Lk20:10)When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit. The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. Then he sent a servant so they would give him some of the fruit of the vineyard. But the tenants seized him, beat him and sent him away empty-handed. (Mk12:4)(Lk20:11)Then he sent another servant to them; but they beat also that man, they struck him on the head and treated him shamefully and sent away empty-handed. (Mk12:5)(Mt21:36)(Lk20:12)He sent still another, a third, and that one they wounded and killed and threw him out. Then he sent many other servants to them, more than the first time; and the tenants treated them the same way, some of them they beat, others they killed.

(Mk12:6)(Mt21:37)(Lk20:13)He had one left to send, a son, whom he loved. Then, last of all, the owner of the vineyard sent him to them saying, 'What shall I do? I will send my son, whom I love; perhaps they will respect him.'

(Mk12:7)(Mt21:38)(Lk20:14)But when the tenants saw the son, they talked the matter over and said to one another, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him and the inheritance will be ours.' (Mk12:8-9)(Mt21:39-41)(Lk20:15-16)So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what then will he do to those tenants? He will come and bring those wretches to a wretched end and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time."

When they heard this, they said, "May this never be!"

(Mk12:10-11)(Mt21:42)(Lk20:17)Jesus looked directly at them and asked, "What then is the meaning of that which is written? Haven't you ever read this Scripture?:

'The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes.'

(Mt21:43)Therefore I tell you that the Kingdom of Yahweh will be taken away and given to a people who will produce its fruit. (Mt21:44)(Lk20:18)Everyone who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed."

(Mk12:12)(Mt21:45-46)(Lk20:19)Then, when the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the Pharisees heard Jesus' parables, they looked for a way to arrest him immediately, because they knew he was talking about them and had spoken this parable against them. But they were afraid of the crowd because the people held that he was a prophet; so they left him and went away.

The meaning of this passage is that, even if a man rejects Jesus and seeks to eliminate him from his life, at least at the end of it, he will have to meet Jesus' judgment and recognize that Jesus is the most important person in this world and in Heaven.

The parable of the wedding banquet [Matthew 22:1-14]

(Mt22:1) Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: (2) "The Kingdom of Heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. (3) He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come.

(4) Then he sent some more servants and said, 'Tell those who had been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.'

(5) But they paid no attention and went off -one to his field, another to his business. (6) The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them. (7) The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.

(8) Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. (9) Go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.' (10) So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, both good and bad, and the wedding hall was filled with guests.

(11) But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. (12) 'Friend,' he asked, 'how did you get in here without wedding clothes?' The man was speechless.

(13) Then the king told the attendants, 'Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

(14) For many are invited, but few are chosen."

This passage reminds that Christianity is not a religion of sorrow. Yahweh's invitation is to a feast as joyous as a wedding feast. It is to joy that the Christians are invited; and it is joy they miss, if they refuse the invitation.

The meaning of this passage is that many -ALL- are always invited to come into the Kingdom of Yahweh (in this life, at the moment of personal judgment following death, and when Jesus goes to preach to the souls of the dead who are in hell), but that only few at a time choose to accept the invitation.

Paying taxes to Caesar [Mark 12:13-17 Matthew 22:15-22 Luke 20:20-26]

(Mt22:15) Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap him in his words. (Mk 12:13-14)(Mt22:16-17)(Lk20:20-22) Later, keeping a close watch on him, they sent spies to Jesus, some of the Pharisees' disciples, who pretended to be honest, along with the Herodians. They hoped to catch Jesus in something he said so that they might hand him over to the power and authority of the governor. So they came to him and the spies questioned him saying, "Teacher, we know you are a man of integrity. You aren't swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are; but you speak and teach what is right, and you do not show partiality but teach the way of Yahweh in accordance with the truth. Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not? (Mk12:15-17)(Mt22:18-22)(Lk20:23-26) Should we pay or shouldn't we?"

But Jesus, knowing their hypocrisy and their evil intent, saw through their duplicity and said to them, "You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? Bring me the coin used for paying the tax, a denarius, and let me look at it." They brought him a denarius, and he asked them, "Whose portrait is this? And whose inscription is on it?"

"Caesar's," they replied.

Then Jesus said to them, "Then give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to Yahweh what is Yahweh's."

They were unable to trap him in what he had said there in public. When they heard this, they were amazed at him and, astonished by his answer, they became silent. So they left him and went away.

This passage states the proper relationship between a Christian citizen and the civil authorities of his country. If the state remains within its proper boundaries and makes its proper demands, the citizen must give it his loyalty and his service. And, even clearly distinguishing between state and religion, there are obligations to the state that don't infringe the obligations to Yahweh.

The resurrection and marriage [Mark 12:18-27 Matthew 22:23-33 Luke 20:27-40]

(Mk12:18)(Mt22:23)(Lk20:27)Then the same day some of the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to Jesus with a question. (Mk12:19)(Mt22:24)(Lk20:28) "Teacher," they said, "Moses told and wrote for us that if a man's brother dies and leaves a wife but no children, the man must marry the widow and have children for his brother. (Mk12:20)(Mt22:25)(Lk20:29)Now there were seven brothers among us. The first one married a woman and, since he died without leaving any children, he left his wife to his brother. (Mk12:21-22)(Mt22:26-27)(Lk20:30-32)The same thing happened to the second brother, who married the widow, but he also died, leaving no child. And then it was the same with the third. And in the same way, right on down to the seventh, the seven died. In fact, none of the seven left any children. Finally, last of all, the woman died too. (Mk12:23)(Mt22:28)(Lk20:33)Now then, at the resurrection, when men rise from the dead, whose wife will she be of the seven, since all of them were married to her?"

(Mk12:24-25)(Mt22:29-30)(Lk20:34-36)Jesus replied, "You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of Yahweh. The people of this age marry and are given in marriage. But at the resurrection, when the dead rise, and they are considered worthy of taking part in that age and in the resurrection from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage; and they can no longer die for they will be like the angels in Heaven. They are Yahweh's children, since they are children of the resurrection. (Mk12:26-27)(Mt22:31-32)(Lk20:37-38)But now about the resurrection of the dead -have you not read in the book of Moses, in the account of the bush, that even Moses showed that the dead rise, for Yahweh said to him, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for to Him all are alive. You are badly mistaken!"

(Lk20:39)Some of the teachers of the law responded, "Well said, teacher!" (Mt22:33) When the crowds heard this, they were astonished at his teaching. (Lk20:40)And no one dared to ask him any more questions.

At the end of time, after the Universal Resurrection, the laws of physical life and matters like marrying will no longer apply. Life in Heaven can't be thought at all in terms of

this life, it will be quite different, because men will be quite different. The whole question starts from a basic error, the error of thinking of Heaven in terms of Earth, and thinking of eternity in terms of time. Heaven is not going to be simply an extension of this world. But life in heavenly places will be greater than any conception this present physical life can supply.

Note. For a deeper understanding of this point, see “Miscellanea. Earthly ties, sentimental and legal. Will they still exist in the future life?”

The greatest commandment [Mark 12:28-34 Matthew 22:34-40]

(Mt22:34)Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. (Mk12:28)(Mt22:35-36)One of them, a teacher of the law, an expert in the law, came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he tested him and asked him this question, "Teacher, of all the commandments in the Law, which is greatest and the most important?"

*(Mk12:29-30)(Mt22:37)"**The most important one,**" answered Jesus, "**is this: 'Hear, O Israel; the Lord [Yahweh] our God, the Lord is One. You'll be fond of the Lord [Yahweh] your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'** (Mt22:38)**This is the first and greatest commandment. (Mk12:31)(Mt 22:39)And the second is like it: 'You'll be fond of your neighbor as of yourself.'** There is no commandment greater than these. (Mt22:40)**All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."***

(Mk12:32)"Well said, teacher," the man replied. "You are right in saying that Yahweh is One and there is no other but Him. (33)To be fond of Him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to be fond of your neighbor as of yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices."

*(34)When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, "**You are not far from the Kingdom of Yahweh.**" And from then on no one dared ask him any more questions.*

In this passage Jesus takes and puts together the two greatest commandments showing that fondness for neighbors is a natural and logical consequence of fondness for Yahweh.

Note 1. The fondness of the second commandment is not the fondness of feeling, but of willing. The Greek verb used here for fondness is “agapao,” the commitment of the will, which can be commanded as a moral duty. For the very nature of it, the affection for neighbors has to be a matter of the will, an intentional choice.

Note 2. All the laws of the Old Testament, all the recommendations and instructions of the prophets strictly derive from these two commandments.

Whose son is the Christ? [Mark 12:35-40 Matthew 22:41-46;23:14 Luke 20:41-47]

*(Mk12:35-36)(Mt22:41-44)(Lk20:41-43)While the Pharisees were gathered together and Jesus was teaching in the Temple courts, he asked them, "**What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?**"*

"The son of David," they replied.

*Then Jesus said to them, "**How is it that the teachers of the law say that the Christ is the son of David? How is it then that David himself, speaking by the Spirit of Yahweh, calls him 'Lord'? For he declares in the Book of Psalms:***

'The Lord said to my Lord:

"Sit at My right hand until I make your enemies a footstool under your feet.""

(Mk12:37)(Mt22:45)(Lk20:44)If David himself calls him 'Lord,' how then can he be his son?"

The large crowd listened to him with delight. (Mt22:46)No one could say a word in reply, and from that day no one dared to ask him any more questions.

(Mk12:38-39)(Lk20:45-46)As he taught, while all the people were listening, Jesus said to his disciples, "Watch out for the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and be greeted in the market-places, and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets. (Mk12:40)(Mt23:14)(Lk 20:47)Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You devour widows' houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. Therefore you will be punished more severely."

The meaning of this passage -Jesus is the Messiah son of Yahweh- is difficult to understand, because it uses thoughts and methods of argument which are strange to modern people. But it would not have been difficult at all for the people who heard it in the Temple precincts in Jerusalem, for they were accustomed to such ways of arguing and of using Scripture.

This passage warns against three things. 1)Desire of prominence. Office in the Church is a responsibility, not a privilege. 2)Desire for deference. A basic fact of Christianity is that it ought to make a man wish to obliterate self rather than to exalt it. 3)Attempt to make a commerce of religion. Religion does not have to be used for self-gain and self-advancement. And the higher is the place of a man in the life of the community, the more severe is the demand of true justice; the more hypocrisy a man will show, the greater will be his condemnation.

The widow's offering [Mark 12:41-44 Luke 21:1-4]

(Mk12:41)(Lk21:1)Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the Temple Treasury. As he looked up, Jesus saw many rich people throwing in their gifts, large amounts. (Mk12:42)(Lk21:2) But he also saw a poor widow who came and put in two leptons, worthy a kodrantes.

(Mk12:43)(Lk21:3)Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the Treasury than all the others. (Mk12:44)(Lk21:4)All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything -all she had to live on."

The lesson from this passage is that two things determine the value of a gift, the spirit in which it is given and the sacrifice it involves. If unwillingly extracted, given with a grudge, for the sake of prestige or of self-display, it loses most of its value. The real gift is that which comes from the heart and which, furthermore, involves some sacrifice. The amount of the giving is never so important as its cost to the giver.

Signs of the end of the age [Mark 13:1-31 Matthew 24:1-35 Luke 21:5-38]

Note: In each of the individual Gospels there is a composite vision of the future, with the various strands all entangled. The unified version tries to disentangle them and, for a matter of clarity, is divided into the following sections:

**The doom of Jerusalem. The terror of the siege. The day of the Lord.
The persecution to come. Threats to the faith. The coming of the king.
Be on the watch.**

[The doom of Jerusalem]

(Mk13:1-2)(Mt24:1-2)(Lk21:5-6)As Jesus was leaving the Temple and was walking away, some of his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its buildings, remarking about how the Temple was adorned with beautiful stones and with gifts dedicated to Yahweh. One of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!" But Jesus said, "Do you see all these things, all these great buildings? I tell you the truth, as for what you see here, the time will come when not one stone here will be left on another; every one of them will be thrown down.

This section foretells the ultimate complete destruction of Jerusalem.

[The terror of the siege]

(Lk21:20)When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near. (Mk13:14)(Mt24:15-16)(Lk21:21)So when you see 'the abomination that causes desolation,' spoken of through the prophet Daniel, standing in the Holy Place where it does not belong -let the reader understand- then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those in the city get out, and let those in the country not enter the city. (Mk13:15)(Mt24:17)Let no one on the roof of his house go down or enter the house to take anything out of the house. (Mk13:16)(Mt24:18)Let no one in the field go back to get his cloak. (Lk21:22)For this is the time of punishment in fulfillment of all that has been written. (Mk13:17-19)(Mt24:19-21)(Lk21:23)How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! Pray that this and your flight will not take place in winter or on the Sabbath. Because those will be days of great distress in the land and wrath against this people, unequalled from the beginning, when Yahweh created the world, until now -and never to be equaled again. (Lk21:24)They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations. Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Pagans until the times of the Pagans are fulfilled.

(Mk13:20)(Mt24:22)If the Lord had not cut short those days, no one would survive. But for the sake of the elect, His elects, He has shortened them."

This section foretells the terrible days of the siege of Jerusalem.

[The day of the Lord]

(Mk13:7-8)(Mt24:6-8)(Lk21:9-11)Then he said to them: "When you will hear of wars and rumors of wars and revolutions, do not be frightened but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen first, but the end will not come right away. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes, famines and pestilences in various places, and fearful events and great signs from Heaven. All these are the beginning of birth pains.

(Mk13:24-25)(Mt24:29)But in those days, immediately following that distress,

*'The sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light;
the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.'*

(Lk21:25)There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the Earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. (26)Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken.

(Mk13:26)(Mt24:30)(Lk21:27)At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the Earth will mourn. Men will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with great power and glory. (Mk13:27)(Mt24:31) And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the Earth to the ends of the Heavens. (Lk21:28)When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.

This section foretells the end of time using typical Jewish pictures.

[The persecution to come]

(Mk13:9)(Mt24:9)(Lk21:12-13)But you must be on your guard. Before all this, they will lay hands on you and persecute you. Then you will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. They will deliver you to prisons, to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. And all on account of me and my name you will be brought and stand before governors and kings. This will result in your being witnesses to them. (Mt24:10)At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other. (Mk13:11)(Lk21:14)But whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, make up your mind and do not worry beforehand about what to say and how you will defend yourselves. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Spirit of Yahweh. (Lk21:15)For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict. (Mk13:12)Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child. Children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. (Lk21:16)You will be betrayed even by parents, brothers, relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death. (Mk13:13)(Lk21:17-19)All men will hate you because of me, but not a hair of your head will perish. By standing firm to the end you will be saved and gain life."

(Mk13:3-4)(Mt24:3)(Lk21:7)As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the Temple, the disciples, Peter, James, John and Andrew asked him privately, "Teacher, tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are all about to be fulfilled? And what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?"

This section foretells the persecutions the Christians will have to endure, not only at the beginning of Christianity from the Jewish authorities, but also -so many times- from civil and/or religious Christians authorities.

[Threats to the faith]

(Mk13:5-6)(Mt24:4-5)(Lk21:8)Jesus answered them: "Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am he, the Christ,' and 'The time is near,' and will deceive many. Do not follow them. (Mt24:11)And many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. (12)Because of the increase of wickedness, the faith of most will grow cold, (13)but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. (Mk13:21)(Mt24:23)At that time if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or, 'Look, there he is!' do not believe it. (Mk13:22)(Mt24:24)For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive the elect -if that were possible. (Mk13:23)(Mt24:25)So be on your guard; see, I

have told you everything ahead of time. (Mt24:26) So if anyone tells you, 'There he is, out in the desert,' do not go out; or, 'Here he is, in the inner rooms,' do not believe it.

This section foretells the threats against the faith and the purity of the Church, specifically considering the false leaders; who will try to attach other men to themselves rather than to Jesus Christ, with the inevitable result of spreading division instead of building up the unity of the Christians.

[The coming of the king]

(Mk13:10)(Mt24:14) And this Gospel of the Kingdom must and will first be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. (Mt24:27) For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. (28) Whenever there is a carcass, there the vultures gather."

This section clearly foretells the second coming of Jesus Christ. It will happen at the end of time, in full view of everybody, all around the world. The important point is that nobody can know that time, and nobody has to speculate about it.

[Be on the watch]

(Mk13:28)(Mt24:32)(Lk21:29-30) He told them this parable: "Now look at the fig tree and all the trees and learn this lesson: As soon as their twigs get tender and their leaves come out, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. (Mk13:29)(Mt24:33)(Lk21:31) Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the Kingdom of Yahweh is near, right at the door. (Mk13:30)(Mt24:34)(Lk21:32) I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. (Mk13:31)(Mt24:35)(Lk21:33) Heaven and Earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away. (Lk21:34) Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap. (35) For it will come upon all those who live on the face of the whole Earth. (36) Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man."

(37) Each day Jesus was teaching at the Temple, and each evening he went out to spend the evening on the hill called the Mount of Olives, (38) and all the people came early in the morning to hear him at the Temple.

This section speaks of the necessity of being always alert and ready to face Jesus. Anyway, even if at the end of time, Yahweh's physical creation (Heaven here means physical universe) will have a physical end, the words of Jesus, which are the earthly expression of Yahweh's words, are eternal.

The parable of the rich fool [Luke 12:13-21]

(Lk12:13) Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me."

(14) Jesus replied, "Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?" (15) Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."

(16)And he told them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. (17)He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.'

(18)Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. (19)And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry."'

(20)But Yahweh said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?'

(21)This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward Yahweh."

This passage explains which has to be the attitude of Jesus' followers to material goods, that is, to avoid thinking and doing as that rich man. He was absolutely self-centered and, even when he had a superfluity of goods, he never thought to give some away to the needy. To note how much the passage is full of the words "I" and "my." That rich man whole attitude was the very reverse of Christianity. He never thought beyond this world and all his plans were made on the basis of terrestrial life.

Watchfulness [Luke 12:35-38]

(Lk12:35)"Keep your loins girded and your lamps burning, (36)like men waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him. (37)It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. I tell you the truth, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them. (38)It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the second or third watch of the night."

The day and hour unknown [Mark 13:32-37 Matthew 24:36;42-51 Luke 12:39-48]

(Mk13:32)(Mt24:36)"No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in Heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

(Mk13:33)(Mt24:42)Therefore, be on guard! Be alert! Keep watch because you do not know when that time will come, on what day your Lord will come.

(Mt24:43)(Lk12:39)But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. (Mk13:34)It's like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with his assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch. (Mt24:44)(Lk12:40)So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him."

(Lk12:41)Peter asked, "Lord, are you telling this parable to us, or to everyone?"

(Mt13:45)(Lk12:42)The Lord answered, "Who then is the faithful servant, the wise manager, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food allowance at the proper time? (Mt13:46)(Lk12:43)It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns. (Mt13:47)(Lk12:44) I tell you the truth, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. (Mt13:48-49)(Lk 12:45)But suppose that the servant is wicked and says to himself, 'My master is staying away, taking a long time in coming,' and he then begins to beat his fellow men-servants and maidservants and to eat and drink and get drunk with drunkards. (Mt

13:50-51)(Lk12:46)The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, with the unbelievers, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

(Lk12:47)The servant who knows his master's will and does not get ready or does not do what his master wants will be beaten with many blows. (48)But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.

(Mk13:35)Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back -whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. (36)If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. (37)What I say to you, I say to everyone: 'Watch!'"

This passage states quite definitely that no one knows the time of the end of the world and of Jesus' the second coming; not the angels, not even Jesus himself -when living on Earth- but only Yahweh. Another clear demonstration that Jesus was a man, not a "god," not a part of a trinity.

This passage finishes with the warning that knowledge and privilege always bring responsibility. Sin is much more serious to the man who knew better; failure is doubly blameworthy in the man who had every chance to do well. The grade of punishment will be in proportion to both the privileges each person has enjoyed and his response to those privileges.

The parable of the ten virgins [Matthew 25:1-13]

(Mt25:1)"At that time the Kingdom of Heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. (2)Five of them were foolish and five were wise. (3)The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. (4)The wise, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. (5)The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep.

(6)At midnight the cry rang out: 'Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!'

(7)Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. (8)The foolish ones said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.'

(9)'No,' they replied, 'there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.'

(10)But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut.

(11)Later the others also came. 'Sir! Sir!' they said, 'Open the door for us!'

(12)But he replied, 'I tell you the truth, I don't know you.'

(13)Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour."

The lesson here is that there are certain things which cannot be obtained at the last minute. Many times, to be too late could mean to lose everything. The time of a man's death -the moment of his personal judgment- is not known, so better to be always ready as much as possible.

The parable of the talents [*Matthew 25:14-30*]

(Mt25:14)"Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them. (15)To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. (16)The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more. (17)So also, the one with the two talents gained two more. (18)But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.

(19)After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. (20)The man who had received the five talents brought the other five. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more.'

(21)His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'

(22)The man with the two talents also came, 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with two talents; see, I have gained two more.'

(23)His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'

(24)Then the man who had received the one talent came. 'Master,' he said, 'I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting were you have not sown and gathering were you have not scattered seed. (25)So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.'

(26)His master replied, 'You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest were I have not sown and gather were I have not scattered seed? (27)Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers; so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.

(28)Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents. (29)For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. (30)And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, were there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'"

Here we have an example valid for all Christians. The servants were trusted and, in so being, were tested whether or not they were faithful and reliable in the things they had been given. Similarly, it is precisely in their routine duties that Yahweh is testing men. And there is no better example of this than Jesus himself.

This passage teaches that there can be no religion without adventure, as Yahweh can find no use for the shut mind. Furthermore, Yahweh gives men different gifts. One man received five talents, another two, and another one. It is not the number of talents which matters; what matters is how they are used. Yahweh never demands a man to use abilities he has not got; but He does demand that a man should use to the full the abilities he does possess. Men are not equal in talent; but they can be equal in effort.

Those who seek spiritual gain in the Gospel, for themselves and others, and follow Jesus' advices, will become richer and richer; but those who neglect or waste the spiritual capital that was given them will become more and more impoverished, losing even what spirituality they have.

Jesus anointed at Bethany [Mark 14:3-9 Matthew 26:6-13 John 12:2-11]

(Mk14:3)(Mt26:6-7)(Jn12:2-3) While Jesus was in Bethany, a dinner was given in his honor in the home of a man known as Simon the Leper. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. Then a woman, Mary, took an alabaster jar with about a pound of pure nard, a very expensive perfume, and came to him. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on Jesus' head and feet as he was reclining at the table, and she wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

(Mk14:4-5)(Mt26:8-9)(Jn12:4-5) But when some of the disciples present there saw this, they were indignantly saying to one another, "Why this waste of perfume?" And they rebuked her harshly. One of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, "Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It could have been sold at a high price, as it was worth more than three hundred denarii." **(Jn 12:6)** He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it.

(Mk14:6)(Mt26:10)(Jn12:7) Aware of this, Jesus said to them, "**Leave her alone. Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a beautiful thing to me. It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial.** **(Mk14:7)(Mt26:11)(Jn12:8)** The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me. **(Mk14:8)(Mt26:12)** **She did what she could. When she poured this perfume on my body, she did it beforehand to prepare me for burial.** **(Mk14:9)(Mt26:13)** **I tell you the truth, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her."**

(Jn12:9) Meanwhile a large crowd of Jews found out that Jesus was there and came, not only because of him, but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. **(10)** So the chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus as well, **(11)** for on account of him many of the Jews were going over to Jesus and putting their faith in him.

Mary's action came from her heart, from her affection for Jesus. Her action was so much the expression of deep affection that it had and has to be reported all around the world, as an example of absolutely selfish affection.

The plot against Jesus. Judas agrees to betray Jesus

[Mark 14:1-2;10-11 Matthew 26:1-5;14-16 Luke 22:1-6]

(Mt26:1) When Jesus had finished saying all these things, he said to his disciples, **(2)** "As you know, the Passover is two days away -and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified."

(Mk14:1-2)(Mt26:3-5)(Lk22:1-2) Now the Feast of Unleavened Bread, called the Passover, was approaching, only two days away. And then the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders of the people assembled in the palace of the High Priest, whose name was Caiaphas, and they plotted to arrest Jesus and were looking for some sly way to get rid of him and kill him. "But not during the Feast, or there may be a riot among the people," they said, for they were afraid of the people.

(Mk14:10)(Mt26:14)(Lk22:3-4) Then Satan entered Judas, the one called Iscariot, one of the Twelve. And Judas went to the chief priests and the officers of the temple guard and discussed with them how he might betray Jesus to them. **(Mk14:11)(Mt26:15-16)(Lk22:5-6)** And he asked, "What are you willing to give me if I hand him over to you?" They were delighted to hear this and promised to give him money. Judas consen-

ted, so they counted out for him thirty silver coins, and from then on he watched for an opportunity to hand Jesus over to them when no crowd was present.

The Lord's Last Supper

Jesus washes his disciples' feet and predicts his betrayal

[Mark 14:12-25 Matthew 26:17-29 Luke 22:7-23 John 13:1-30]

(Mk14:12-14)(Mt26:17-18)(Lk22:7-11) Then came the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, when it was customary to sacrifice the Passover lamb, and the disciples came to Jesus and asked him, "Where do you want us to go and make preparations for you to eat the Passover?"

So Jesus sent two of his disciples, Peter and John, telling them, **"Go into the city and make preparations for us to eat the Passover."**

"Where do you want us to prepare for it?" they asked.

He replied: **"As you enter the city, a certain man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him to the house that he enters, and say to the owner of the house, 'The Teacher says: My appointed time is near. I am going to celebrate the Passover with my disciples at your house. Where is my guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?'"** **(Mk14:15)(Lk22:12)** He will show you a large upper room, all furnished and ready. **Make preparations for us there."**

(Mk14:16)(Mt26:19)(Lk22:13) So the disciples left, did as Jesus had directed them, went into the city and found things just as Jesus had told them. So they prepared the Passover.

(Jn13:1) It was just before the Passover Feast, Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having been fond of his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his affection.

(Mk14:17)(Mt26:20)(Lk22:14) When evening came, Jesus and his Twelve apostles arrived and reclined at the table.

(Jn13:2) The evening meal was being served, and the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray Jesus. **(3)** Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from Yahweh and was returning to Yahweh; **(4)** so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. **(5)** After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

(6) He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"

(7) Jesus replied, **"You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand."**

(8) "No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet."

Jesus answered, **"Unless I wash you, you have no part with me."**

(9) "Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!"

(10) Jesus answered, **"A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you."** **(11)** For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean.

(12) When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. **"Do you understand what I have done for you?"** he asked them. **(13)** **"You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. (14) Now that I, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet.**

(15)I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. (16)I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. (17)Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.

(18)I am not referring to all of you; I know those I have chosen. But this is to fulfill the scripture: 'He who shares my bread has lifted up his heel against me.'

(19)I am telling you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe that I am he. (20)I tell you the truth, whoever accepts anyone I send accepts me; and whoever accepts me accepts the One who sent me."

(Mk14:18)(Mt26:21)(Jn13:21)After he had said this, Jesus was troubled in spirit and, while they were reclining at the table eating, he testified, "I tell you the truth, one of you is going to betray me -one who is eating with me."

(Mk14:19)(Mt26:22)(Lk22:23)(Jn13:22)His disciples were saddened, stared at one another, at a loss to know which of them he meant. They began to question among themselves which of them it might be who would do this, and one by one they began to say to him, "Surely not I, Lord?"

(Jn13:23)One of them, the disciple whom Jesus cherished, was reclining next to him. (24)Simon Peter motioned to this disciple and said, "Ask him which one he means."

(25)Leaning back against Jesus, he asked him, "Lord, who is it?"

(Mk14:20-21)(Mt26:23-24)(Lk22:21-22)(Jn13:26)"The hand of him who is going to betray me is with mine on the table. It is one of the Twelve." Jesus replied, "One who has dipped bread with his hand into the bowl with me will betray me. It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish. The Son of Man will go as it has been decreed, just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born." Then, dipping the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas Iscariot, son of Simon.

(Mt26:25)(Jn13:27)As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him.

Then Judas, the one who would betray him, said, "Surely not I, Rabbi?"

Jesus answered him, "Yes, it is you. What you are about to do, do quickly." (Jn13:28)But no one at the meal understood why Jesus said this to him. (29)Since Judas had charge of the money, some thought Jesus was telling him to buy what was needed for the Feast, or to give something to the poor. (30)As soon as Judas had taken the bread, he went out. And it was night.

(Lk22:15)And Jesus said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. (16)For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the Kingdom of Yahweh."

(Mk14:22)(Mt26:26)(Lk22:19)And while they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat it; this is my body given for you; do it in remembrance of me."

(Mk14:23-25)(Mt26:27-29)(Lk22:17-18;20)Then in the same way, after the supper he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for many of you for the forgiveness of sins. Take this and divide it among you. For I tell you the truth, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine from now on until that day when the Kingdom of Yahweh comes and I drink it anew with you in my Father's Kingdom." And they all drank from it.

On the night of this important meal together -shortly after the Triumphal Entry in Jerusalem- the disciples were surely in a state of competitive pride (they were still looking for the most important positions in Jesus' Kingdom). And Jesus gave them a lesson in humility, to set forth the principle of selfless service, that in Christianity there is only one greatness, the greatness of service, that Christians should be willing to perform in humility the most menial services for one another.

The mission of Jesus' followers was and is linked to his. The Christians have to take the message of Jesus out to the world, and when they do, they are the representatives of Yahweh Himself.

Jesus took two parts of the traditional Jewish ceremony -the breaking of the bread and the sharing of the cup of wine- and gave them a new symbolic meaning. The Christians have to meet together to break and eat the bread and drink of the cup remembering and proclaiming the deliverance of believers from the bondage of sin obtained by Jesus once for ever and for all. Important to note that the repetition of the ceremony is not the repetition of Jesus' sacrifice on the Cross -as many Churches came to believe- but -as asked by Jesus- a remembrance of it and a reminder of the "New Covenant" the new relationship between Yahweh and all men, a relationship based solely on affection.

Jesus predicts Peter's denial

[Mark 14:27-31 Matthew 26:31-35 Luke 22:31-38 John 13:31-38]

(Jn13:31)When he [Judas Iscariot] was gone, Jesus said, "Now is the Son of Man glorified and Yahweh is glorified in him. (32)If Yahweh is glorified in him, Yahweh will glorify the Son in Himself, and will glorify him at once.

(33)My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come.

(34)A new command I give you: Be fond of one another. As I had been fond of you, so you must be fond of one another. (35)By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you are fond of one another."

(36)Simon Peter asked him, "Lord, where are you going?"

Jesus replied, "Where I am going, you cannot follow now, but you will follow later."

(37)Peter asked, "Lord, why can't I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you."

(38a)Then Jesus answered, "Will you really lay down your life for me? (Lk22:31) Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. (32)But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers."

(Mk14:27)(Mt26:31)Then Jesus told them, "This very night you will all fall away on account of me, for it is written:

'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.'

(Mk14:28)(Mt26:32)But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee."

(Mk14:29)(Mt26:33)(Lk22:33)But Peter replied and declared, "Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will. Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death."

(Mk14:30)(Mt26:34)(Lk22:34)(Jn13:38b)"I tell you the truth, Peter," Jesus answered, " today -yes, this very night- before the rooster crows twice you yourself will deny three times that you know me!"

(Mk14:31)(Mt26:35)But Peter insisted emphatically and declared, "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you." And all the other disciples said the same.

(Lk22:35)Then Jesus asked them, "When I sent you without purse, bag or sandals, did you lack anything?"

"Nothing," they answered.

(36)He said to them, "But now if you have a purse, take it, and also a bag; and if you don't have a sword, sell your cloak and buy one. (37)It is written: 'And he was numbered with the transgressors;' and I tell you that this must be fulfilled in me. Yes, what is written about me is reaching its fulfillment."

(38)The disciples said, "See, Lord, here are two swords."

"That is enough," he replied.

The Christian standard of life is Jesus Christ's affection for his disciples; actually, for all men.

Peter's denial, all disciples' flight and Jesus' later full forgiveness give an important lesson: People who fall away from or repudiate Christianity and then repent and come back have to be accepted again in the Christian community -something that was and is seldom done!

Jesus comforts his disciples [John 14:1-4]

(Jn14:1)"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in Yahweh; trust also in me. (2) In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. (3)And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. (4)You know the way to the place where I am going."

Jesus sacrificial death on the Cross has opened once for ever the way for all men to follow him in Heaven and be in spiritual communion with Yahweh.

Jesus the way to the Father [John 14:5-14]

(Jn14:5)Thomas said to him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?"

(6)Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. (7)If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know Him and have seen Him."

(8)Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us."

(9)Jesus answered, "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? (10)Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing His work. (11)Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves. (12)I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. (13)And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. (14)You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it."

Through Jesus, and through Jesus alone, men can find access to Yahweh, as Jesus alone opens the way to Him. Between men and Yahweh there is no other intermediary

or intercessor -no priest or pastor, no angel, no recognized "saint," not even Jesus' mother. Jesus alone is the way to Yahweh. In him alone men can see what Yahweh is like.

The meaning of this passage is that there is a deep spiritual communion between and uniting the Son and the Father. Jesus' teaching was not of human origin, and the things he said and did came straight from Yahweh; not from Jesus, but throughout him.

Jesus promises the Spirit of Yahweh [John 14:15-31a]

(Jn14:15)"If you are fond of me, you will obey what I command. (16)And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another help to stay with you forever -(17)the help of the Spirit of Truth. The world cannot accept Him, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him. But you know Him, for He lives with you and will be in you. (18)I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. (19)Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. (20)On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. (21)Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who is fond of me. He who is fond of me will be cherished by my Father, and I too will cherish him and show myself to him."

(22)Then Judas (not Judas Iscariot) said, "But, Lord, why do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?"

(23)Jesus replied, "If anyone is fond of me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will cherish him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. (24)He who is not fond of me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me.

(25)All this I have spoken while still with you. (26)But the help of the Spirit of Yahweh, which the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. (27)Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

(28)You heard me say, 'I am going away and I am coming back to you.' If you were fond of me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. (29)I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe. (30)I will not speak with you much longer, for the prince of this world is coming. He has no hold on me, (31a)but the world must learn that I love the Father and that I do exactly what my Father has commanded me."

The meaning of this passage is that Jesus does not leave his followers to struggle with their Christian life alone. He is giving his help, which is the spiritual help of Yahweh -in effect, both in the Old and the New Testament, the Spirit of Yahweh is also referred to as "the Spirit of Truth" and "the Word of Yahweh" because in His essence (Spirit) and in His action (Word) Yahweh is characterized by Truth. The Spirit of Yahweh, by being in communion with Jesus and his followers, is "with" them and "in" them.

At the end of the passage, to strengthen what already said so many times, Jesus confirms his role; he is a man, not a "god," not a part of a trinity.

The vine and the branches [John 15:1-17]

(Jn15:1)"I am the true vine and my Father is the gardener. (2)He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit He prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. (3)You are already clean because of the Word I

have spoken to you. (4) *Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.* (5) *I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.* (6) *If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.* (7) *If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.* (8) *This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.*

(9) *As the Father has loved me, so had been fond of you. Now remain in my affection.* (10) *If you obey my commands, you will remain in my affection, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in His love.* (11) *I have told you this so my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.* (12) *My command is this: Be fond of each other as I had been fond of you.* (13) *No one can have greater affection than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.* (14) *You are my friends if you do what I command.* (15) *I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.* (16) *You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit -fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.* (17) *This is my command: Be fond of each other."*

Vine, gardener, branches: a symbolic picture, taken from the Old Testament, here representing the spiritual unity or communion among Jesus, Yahweh and all Christians.

The highest possible target to achieve is to feel, act and be fond like Jesus, whose greater demonstration of fondness was to lay down his own life for the salvation of all Christians, that is, at the end, of all men.

The world hates the disciples [John 15:18-27;16:1-4]

(Jn15:18) *"If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. (19) If you belonged to the world, it would like you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. (20) Remember the words I spoke to you: 'No servant is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. (21) They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the One who sent me. (22) If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin. Now, however, they have no excuse for their sin. (23) He who hates me hates my Father as well. (24) If I had not done among them what no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin. But now they have seen these miracles, and yet they have hated both me and my Father. (25) But this is to fulfill what is written in their Law: 'They hated me without reason.'*

(26) *When the help of the Spirit of Truth comes, which I will send to you from the Father, and which goes out from the Father, He will testify about me. (27) And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning.*

(16:1) *All this I have told you so that you will not go astray. (2) They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, a time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to Yahweh. (3) They will do such things because they have not known the Father or me. (4) I have told you this, so that when the time comes you will remember that I warned you. I did not tell you this at first because I was with you."*

Here, as many other times, is difficult to separate John and Jesus' words. Anyway, the meaning is that all Christians have to expect to be, in some way or another, persecuted.

Then there is the other reality: knowledge and privilege bring with them responsibility. The more knowledge a Christian has and the more privileges he enjoys, the greater the responsibility laid upon him. Until Jesus comes in his life a man never really has the opportunity to know Yahweh and which kind of life He wishes him to live, so he can scarcely be blamed for being such as he is. By his coming, Jesus opens the way to forgiveness for past sins, and provides the power to overcome sin and do the right, making the Christian fully responsible for his decisions.

And the persecution announced at the beginning of this passage will even come, too often, from other "Christian" people: it is a matter of fact that so many religious orthodox people have often persecuted others -Christians and not- in the strong conviction that this was right, that they were working for Yahweh, and not against Him.

The work of the Spirit of Yahweh [John 16:5-15]

(Jn16:5)"Now I am going to Him who sent me, yet none of you asks me, 'Where are you going?' (6)Because I have said these things, you are filled with grief. (7)But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the help of the Spirit of Yahweh will not come to you; but if I go, I will send It to you. (8)When It comes, It will expose the guilt of the world in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: (9)In regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; (10)in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; (11)and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.

(12)I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. (13)But when His Spirit of Truth comes, It will guide you into all truth. It will not speak on Its own; It will speak only what It hears, and It will tell you what is yet to come. (14)It will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. (15)All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit of Yahweh will take from what is mine and make it known to you."

In this passage Jesus explains to his disciples of any time why the spiritual communion of all men with Yahweh had not been possible until the completion of his saving work -his death on the Cross.

Here we have a clear explanation of the effects of the spiritual communion between men and Jesus and Yahweh. Jesus is in complete spiritual communion with the Father, so what belongs to the Father belongs to the Son as well. And the spiritual communion with the believers allows them to understand what belongs to Jesus, and so to Yahweh.

The disciples' grief will turn to joy [John 16:16-33]

(Jn16:16)"In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me."

(17)Some of his disciples said to one another, "What does he mean by saying, 'In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me,' and 'Because I am going to the Father'?" (18)They kept asking, "What does he mean by 'a little while'? We don't understand what he is saying."

(19)Jesus saw that they wanted to ask him about this, so he said to them, "Are you asking one another what I meant when I said, 'In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me'? (20)I tell you the truth, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy. (21)A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world. (22)So with you: Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy. (23)In that day you will no longer ask me anything. I tell you the truth, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. (24)Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.

(25)Though I have been speaking figuratively, a time is coming when I will no longer use this kind of language but will tell you plainly about my Father. (26)In that day you will ask in my name. I am not saying that I will ask the Father in your behalf. (27)No, the Father Himself is fond of you because you had been fond of me and have believed that I came from Yahweh. (28)I came from the Father and entered the world; now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father."

(29)Then Jesus' disciples said, "Now you are speaking clearly and without figures of speech. (30)Now we can see that you know all things and that you do not even need to have anyone ask you questions. This make us believe that you came from Yahweh."

(31)"You believe at last!" Jesus answered. (32)"But a time is coming, and has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home. You will leave me all alone. Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me.

(33)I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

This passage explains that the Christians can go directly to Yahweh in their prayers, making their requests in Jesus' name. Through Jesus, and through Jesus alone, men can find access to Yahweh, as Jesus alone opens the way to Him. Between men and Yahweh there is no other intermediary or intercessor -no priest or pastor, no angel, no recognized "saint," not even Jesus' mother.

Jesus prays for himself [John 17:1-5]

(Jn17:1)After Jesus said this, he looked toward Heaven and prayed:

"Father, the time has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son may glorify You. (2) For You granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those You have given him. (3)Now this is eternal life: that they may know You, the Only True God, and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent. (4)I have brought You glory on Earth by completing the work You gave me to do. (5)And now, Father, glorify me in Your presence with the glory I had with You before the world began."

The Greek word used here for "eternal" is "aionis," which has a meaning, not only of duration, but also of quality. The eternal life Jesus makes available to all men is a life having the same characteristic of duration and quality as the life of Yahweh.

Jesus prays for his disciples [John 17:6-19]

(Jn17:6)"I have revealed You to those whom You gave me out of the world. They were Yours; You gave them to me and they have obeyed Your Word. (7)Now they

know that everything You have given me comes from You. (8)For I gave them the words You gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from You, and they believed that You sent me. (9)I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those You have given me, for they are Yours. (10)All I have is Yours, and all You have is mine. And glory has come to me through them. (11)I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to You. Holy Father, protect them by the power of Your Name -the Name You gave me- so that they may be ones as we are one. (12)While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that Name You gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled.

(13)I am coming to You now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy with them. (14)I have given them Your Word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. (15)My prayer is not that You take them out of the world but that You protect them from the evil one. (16)They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. (17)Sanctify them by the Truth; Your Word is Truth. (18)As You sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. (19)For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified."

The form of address "Holy Father" is found only here in the whole New Testament. It refers to Yahweh only and, so, doesn't to be used by anybody else. Yet Roman Catholic Popes dare using it, beginning with Urban VI (1378 - 1389 AD).

This part of the passage strongly emphasizes the necessity of spiritual unity among Jesus' disciples. Their unity is to be like that between the Father and the Son. Where there are divisions and competition among the Churches and the men of Church, the cause of Christianity is harmed and the prayer of Jesus frustrated.

Jesus prays for all believers [John 17:20-26;14:31b]

(Jn17:20)"My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, (21)that all of them may be one, Father, just as You are in me and I am in You. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that You have sent me. (22)I have given them the glory that You gave me, that they may be one as we are one: (23)I in them and You in me. May them be brought to complete unity to let the world know that You sent me and had been fond of them even as You have loved me.

(24)Father, I want those You have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory You have given me because You loved me before the creation of the world.

(25)Righteous Father, though the world does not know You, I know You, and they know that You have sent me. (26)I have made You known to them, and will continue to make You known in order that the love You have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.

(14:31b)Come now; let us leave."

All future believers are included in this prayer, all men of every land and past, present and future age.

Jesus' prayer represent the target, the ultimate goal, of his Christian Church: that there would be full spiritual communion between all Christians, as there is between Yahweh and him. This is also a clear rebuke of the always groundless and often bitter divisions existing on Earth among believers. It is sad but clear that the Christians will never organize their Churches all in the same way; that they will never worship Yahweh all in the same way; that they will never even all believe precisely the same things. Yet Christian unit transcends all these differences and joins all men together in the affection of Jesus and Yahweh.

Jesus prays in the Gethsemane, on the Mount of Olives

[Mark 14:26;32-42 Matthew 26:30;36-46 Luke 22:39-46 John 18:1]

*(Mk14:26,32)(Mt26:30,36)(Lk22:39-40)(Jn18:1)When he had finished praying and they had sung a hymn, Jesus left with his disciples and crossed the Kidron Valley. On the other side there was an olive grove and Jesus, going as usual to the Mount of Olives, into it, went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and his disciples followed him. And then, on reaching the place, he said to his disciples, "**Sit here while I go over there and pray. Pray that you will not fall into temptation.**" (Mk14:33)(Mt26:37)He took Peter and James and John, the two sons of Zebedee, along with him, and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled. (Mk14:34)(Mt26:38)Then he said to them, "**My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.**"*

*(Mk14:35-36)(Mt26:39)(Lk22:41-42)Going a little farther, he withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down, fell with his face to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him. "Abba, my Father," he said, "**everything is possible for You. If it is possible, if You are willing, take this cup from me. Yet not as and what I will, but as and what You will be done.**" (Lk22:43)An angel from Heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. (44)And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.*

*(Mk14:37-38)(Mt26:40-41)(Lk22:45-46)Then, when he rose from prayer and went back to his disciples, he found them sleeping, exhausted from sorrow. "Simon," he asked Peter, "**are you asleep? Why are you sleeping? Could you men not keep watch with me for one hour? Get up, watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak.**"*

*(Mk14:39)(Mt26:42)He went away a second time and prayed the same thing, "**My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may Your will be done.**"*

(Mk14:40)(Mt26:43)When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. They did not know what to say to him. (Mt26:44)So he left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing.

*(Mk14:41)(Mt26:45-46)Then, returning to the disciples the third time, he said to them, "**Are you still sleeping and resting? Enough! The hour is near, has come. And look, the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. (Mk14:42)Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!**"*

Jesus, too, had to demonstrate his faith; he, too, had to accept what he could not fully understand. Here, in the Gethsemane, Jesus had his supreme struggle to submit to the will of Yahweh. A further demonstration that Jesus was a man, not a "god," not a part of a trinity, and that he needed to pray.

Jesus arrested [Mark 14:43-52 Matthew 26:47-56 Luke 22:47-53 John 18:2-11]

(Jn18:2) Now Judas, who betrayed him, knew the place, because Jesus had often met there with his disciples.

(Mk14:43-45)(Mt26:47-49)(Lk22:47)(Jn18:3) So, just as Jesus was still speaking, the man who was called Judas, one of the Twelve, arrived. With him was a large crowd which came up armed with swords and clubs. Judas came to the grove leading and guiding a detachment of soldiers and some officials sent from the chief priests, the Pharisees, the teachers of the law, and the elders of the people. They were carrying torches, lanterns and weapons.

Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: "The one I kiss is the man; arrest him and lead him away under guard." Going at once to Jesus, to kiss him, Judas said, "Greetings, Rabbi!" and kissed him.

(Mt26:50a)(Lk22:48) But Jesus replied, "Friend, do what you came for." And asked him, "Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?"

(Jn18:4) Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, went out and asked them, "Who is it you want?"

(5) "Jesus of Nazareth," they replied.

"I am he," Jesus said. (And Judas the traitor was standing there with them.) **(6)** When Jesus said, "I am he," they drew back and fell to the ground.

(7) Again he asked them, "Who is it you want?"

And they said, "Jesus of Nazareth."

(8) "I told you that I am he," Jesus answered. "If you are looking for me, then let these men go." **(9)** This happened so that the words he had spoken would be fulfilled: "I have not lost one of those You gave me." **(Mk14:46)(Mt26:50b)** Then the men stepped forward, seized Jesus and arrested him.

(Lk22:49) When Jesus' followers saw what was going to happen, they said, "Lord, should we strike with our swords?" **(Mk14:47)(Mt26:51)(Lk22:50)(Jn18:10)** Then, with that, one of Jesus' companions standing near, Simon Peter, who had a sword, reached for his sword, drew it out and struck the servant of the High Priest, cutting off his right ear. (The servant's name was Malchus.)

(Lk22:51) But Jesus answered, "**No more of this!**" And he touched the man's ear and healed him.

(Mt26:52-54)(Jn18:11) "**Put your sword away, back in its place,**" Jesus commanded Peter, "for all who draw the sword will die by the sword. Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and He will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way? Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?"

(Mk24:48-50)(Mt26:55-56)(Lk22:52-53) Then, at that time, Jesus said to the crowd, to the chief priests, the officers of the temple guard, and the elders, who had come for him, "Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me? Every day I was with you, I sat in the Temple courts teaching, and you did not arrest me, you did not lay a hand on me. But this has all taken place that the Scripture, the writings of the prophets, might be fulfilled. This is your hour -when darkness reigns." Then everyone, all the disciples, deserted him and fled.

(Mk14:51) A young man, wearing nothing but a linen garment, was following Jesus. When they seized him, **(52)** he fled naked, leaving his garment behind.

No weapon, no war, no retaliation, only forgiveness should be acceptable. Violence generates nothing else than violence; war settles nothing, but produces plenty of evil.

Before the Sanhedrin. Jesus taken to Annas. The High Priest questions Jesus

[Mark 14:53-65 Matthew 26:57-68 Luke 22:54;63-71 John 18:12-16;19-24]

(Jn18:12)Then the detachment of soldiers with his commander and the Jewish officials arrested Jesus. They bound him **(13)**and brought him first to Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the High Priest that year. **(14)**Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it would be good if one man died for the people.

(19)Then, the High Priest [Annas] questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching.

(20)"I have spoken openly to the world," Jesus replied. "I always taught in synagogues or at the Temple, where all the Jews come together. I said nothing in secret. **(21)** Why question me? Ask those who heard me. Surely they know what I said."

(22)When Jesus said this, one of the officials nearby struck him in the face. "Is this the way you answer the High Priest?" he demanded.

(23)"If I said something wrong," Jesus replied, "testify as to what is wrong. But if I spoke the truth, why did you strike me?"

(Mk14:53-54)(Mt26:57-58)(Lk22:54)(Jn18:15-16;24) And Annas sent him, still bound, to Caiaphas. Seizing him, those who had arrested Jesus led him away and took him to Caiaphas, the High Priest, into his house, where all the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders came and had assembled together. But Simon Peter and another disciple were following Jesus at a distance. Because this disciple was known to the High Priest, he went with Jesus into the High Priest's courtyard, but Peter had to wait outside at the door. The other disciple, who was known to the High Priest, came back, spoke to the girl on duty there and brought Peter in, right up into the courtyard of the High Priest. He entered there, sat down with the guards to see the outcome and warmed himself at the fire.

(Lk22:66)At daybreak the council of the elders of the people, both the chief priests and teachers of the law, met together, and Jesus was led before them.

(Mk14:55-58)(Mt26:59-61)The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for false evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death. But they did not find any, though many false witnesses came forward and testified falsely against him, but their statements did not agree.

Then finally some, two, came forward, stood up, gave this false testimony against him and declared: "We heard this fellow say, 'I am able to and I will destroy this man-made Temple of Yahweh and in three days will build another, not made by man.'" **(Mk14:59)** Yet even then their testimony did not agree.

(Mk14:60)(Mt26:62)Then the High Priest stood up before them and asked Jesus, "Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?" **(Mk14:61-62)(Mt26:63-64)(Lk22:67-69)**But Jesus remained silent and gave no answer.

Again the High Priest said to him, "I charge you under oath by [Yahweh] the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of [Yahweh] the Blessed One God."

"Yes, I am, it is as you say," Jesus replied. "If I tell you, you will not believe me, and if I asked you, you would not answer. But I say to all of you: In the future, from now on, you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of [Yahweh] the Mighty One God and coming on the clouds of Heaven."

(Lk22:70) They all asked, "Are you then the Son of Yahweh?"

He replied, "You are right in saying I am."

(Mk14:63-64)(Mt26:65-66)(Lk22:71) Then the High Priest tore his clothes and said, "He has spoken blasphemy! Why do we need any more witnesses, any more testimony? Look, now you have heard the blasphemy from his own lips. What do you think?"

They all condemned him and answered, "He is worthy of death." (Mk14:65)(Mt26:67-68)(Lk22:63-65) Then some of the men who were guarding Jesus began to spit at him in his face; they blindfolded him and struck him with their fists. Others began mocking and beating him, slapped him and said, "Prophecy to us, Christ. Who hit you?" And they said many other insulting things to him. And the guards took him and beat him.

Peter disowns Jesus. Peter's first, second and third denials

[Mark 14:66-72 Matthew 26:69-75 Luke 22:55-62 John 18:17-18;25-27]

(Lk22:55)(Jn18:18) It was cold, and the servants and officials were staying around a fire they had kindled in the middle of the courtyard to keep warm. And, when they had sat down together, Peter also sat down with them, warming himself. (Mk14:66-70)(Mt 26:69-73)(Lk22:56-59)(Jn18:17;25) Now, while Peter was below sitting out in the courtyard, one of the servant girls of the High Priest saw him seated there in the fire-light. When she saw Simon Peter warming himself, she came by to him, looked closely at him and said, "This man was with him. You also were with that Nazarene, Jesus of Galilee. You are not one of his disciples, are you?"

But he denied it before them all, "I am not. Woman, I don't know him. I don't know or understand what you are talking about," he said, and then he went out into the entryway and the rooster crowed.

A little later, someone else, another servant girl, the girl at the door, saw him there and said again to those people standing around there, "This fellow was with Jesus of Nazareth, is one of them. You also are one of them." And she asked Peter, "You are not one of his disciples, are you?" Again Peter denied it, with an oath: "I am not! I don't know the man!"

After a little while, about an hour later, another of those standing there near went up to Peter and said, "Certainly this fellow was with him. Surely you are one of them, for your accent gives you away, you are a Galilean." (Jn18:26) One of the high priest's servants, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked him, "Didn't I see you with him in the olive grove?"

*(Mk14:71-72)(Mt26:74-75)(Lk22:60-61)(Jn18:27) Then again Peter denied it, began to call down curses on himself, and he swore to them, "Man, I don't know what you're talking about. I don't know this man you're talking about." And immediately at that moment, just as he was speaking, the rooster began to crow the second time. The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord Jesus had spoken to him: "**Before the rooster crows twice today, you will disown me three times.**" (Lk 22:62) And he went outside, broke down and wept bitterly.*

Jesus, passing by, did not speak to Peter in anger but looked silently at him in sorrow. No accusation, no condemnation for human weakness; only sorrow. Peter's denial, all disciples' flight and Jesus' later full forgiveness give an important lesson: People who fall away from or repudiate Christianity and then repent and come back have to be accepted again in the Christian community -something that was and is seldom done!

Judas hangs himself [Matthew 27:3-10]

(Mt27:3) When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty silver coins to the chief priests and the elders. (4) "I have sinned," he said, "for I have betrayed innocent blood."

"What is that to us?" they replied. "That's your responsibility."

(5) So Judas threw the money into the Temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself.

(6) The chief priests picked up the coins and said, "It is against the law to put this into the Treasury, since it is blood money." (7) So they decided to use the money to buy the potter's field as a burial place for foreigners. (8) That is why it has been called the Field of Blood to this day. (9) Then what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled, "As the Lord commanded me: 'They took the thirty silver coins, the price set on him by the people of Israel, (10) and used them to buy the potter's field'".

Jesus before Pilate and Herod. The soldiers mock Jesus, sentenced to be crucified

[Mark 15:1-20 Matthew 27:1-2;11-31 Luke 23:1-25 John 18:28-40;19:1-16]

(Mk15:1)(Mt27:1-2)(Lk23:1)(Jn18:28) Very early in the morning, all the chief priests, with the elders of the people, the teachers of the law and the whole Sanhedrin, reached the decision to put Jesus to death. Then they bound Jesus, and the whole assembly of the Jews rose and led Jesus away from Caiaphas to the palace of the Roman governor, and handed him over to Pilate, the governor. By now it was early morning, and to avoid ceremonial uncleanness the Jews did not enter the palace; they wanted to be able to eat the Passover. (Jn18:29) So Pilate came out to them and asked, "What charges are you bringing against this man?"

(30) "If it were not a criminal," they replied, "we would not have handed him over to you." (Lk23:2) And they began to accuse him, saying, "We have found this man subverting our nation. He opposes payment of taxes to Caesar and claims to be Christ, a king."

(Jn18:31) Pilate said, "Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law."

"But we have no right to execute anyone," the Jews objected. (32) This happened so that the words Jesus had spoken indicating the kind of death he was going to die would be fulfilled.

(Mk15:2)(Mt27:11)(Lk23:3)(Jn18:33-37) Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus, and while Jesus stood before the governor, the governor asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?"

"Is that your own idea," Jesus asked, "or did others talk to you about me?"

"Am I a Jew?" Pilate replied. "It was your people and your chief priests who handed you over to me. What is it you have done?"

Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place."

"You are a king, then!" said Pilate.

"Yes, it is as you say," Jesus replied. "You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, **for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.**"

(Lk23:4)(Jn18:38) "What is truth?" Pilate asked. Then with this Pilate went out again to the Jews and announced to the chief priests and the crowd, "I find no basis for a charge against this man."

(Mk15:3)(Mt27:12)Then, when Jesus was accused of many things by the chief priests and the elders, he gave no answer. (Mk15:4)(Mt27:13)So again Pilate asked him, "Don't you hear the testimony they are bringing against you? Aren't you going to answer? See how many things they are accusing you of."

(Mk15:5)(Mt27:14)But Jesus still made no reply, not even to a single charge -to the great amazement of Pilate, the governor.

(Lk23:5)But they insisted, "He stirs up the people all over Judea by his teaching. He started in Galilee and has come all the way here."

(6)On hearing this, Pilate asked if the man was a Galilean. (7)When he learned that Jesus was under Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who was also in Jerusalem at that time.

(8)When Herod saw Jesus, he was greatly pleased, because for a long time he had been wanting to see him. From what he had heard about him, he hoped to see him perform some miracle. (9)He plied him with many questions, but Jesus gave him no answer. (10)The chief priests and the teachers of the law were standing there, vehemently accusing him. (11)Then Herod and his soldiers ridiculed and mocked him. Dressing him in an elegant robe, they sent him back to Pilate. (12)That day Herod and Pilate became friends -before this they had been enemies.

(13)Pilate called together the chief priests, the rulers and the people, (14)and said to them, "You brought me this man as one who was inciting the people to rebellion. I have examined him in your presence and have found no basis for your charges against him. (15)Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us; as you can see, he has done nothing to deserve death. (16)Therefore, I will punish him and then release him, (Mk15:6-9)(Mt27:15-17)(Lk23:17)(Jn18:39)for it is your custom for me to release to you a prisoner at the time of Passover." Now he was obliged, it was the governor's custom at the Feast, to release one man to them, a prisoner chosen and requested by the people. At the time they had a notorious prisoner, a man called Barabbas, who was in prison with the insurrectionists who had committed murder in the uprising. The crowd came up and asked Pilate to do for them what he usually did. So when the crowd had gathered, Pilate asked them, "Which one do you want me to release to you: Barabbas, or Jesus, the king of the Jews who is called Christ? Do you want me to release to you 'The King of the Jews'?" (Mk15:10)(Mt27:18)For he knew it was out of envy that the chief priests had handed Jesus over to him.

(Jn18:40)They shouted back, "No, not him! Give us Barabbas!" Now Barabbas had taken part in a rebellion.

(Mt27:19)While Pilate was sitting on the judge's seat, his wife sent him this message: "Don't have anything to do with that innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of him."

(Mk15:11)(Mt27:20)But the chief priests and the elders stirred up and persuaded the crowd to ask Pilate to release Barabbas instead and to have Jesus executed.

(Mt27:21)"Which of the two do you want me to release to you?" asked the governor. "Barabbas," they answered.

(Mk15:12-13)(Mt27:22)"What shall I do, then, with Jesus, the one you call Christ, the king of the Jews?" Pilate asked them.

They all answered and shouted, "Crucify him!"

(Mk15:14)(Mt27:23)"Why? What crime has he committed?" asked Pilate.

But they shouted all the louder, "Crucify him!"

(Lk23:18) *With one voice they cried out, "Away with this man! Release Barabbas to us!"* **(19)** *(Barabbas had been thrown into prison for an insurrection in the city, and for murder.)*

(20) *Wanting to release Jesus, Pilate appealed to them again. (21) But they kept shouting, "Crucify him! Crucify him!"*

(22) *For the third time he spoke to them: "Why? What crime has this man committed? I have found in him no grounds for the death penalty. Therefore I will have him punished and then release him."*

(23) *But with loud shouts they insistently demanded that he be crucified and their shouts prevailed.*

(Mt27:24)(Lk23:24) *So, when Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting, he decided to grant their demand. He took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. "I am innocent of this man's blood," he said. "It is your responsibility!"*

(Mt27:25) *All the people answered, "Let his blood be on us and on our children!"*

(Mk15:15)(Mt27:26)(Lk23:25)(Jn19:1) *Then, wanting to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released to them Barabbas, the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, the one they asked for, and surrendered Jesus to their will. But then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.*

(Mk15:16)(Mt27:27) *Then the governor's soldiers led Jesus away and took him into the palace (that is, the Praetorium) and called together the whole company of soldiers around him. **(Mk15:17-18)(Mt27:28-29)(Jn19:2-3)** They stripped him and clothed him in a purple robe, and then twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand, went up to him, knelt in front of him and mocked him. And they began to call out to him, saying, "Hail, king of the Jews!" And they struck him in the face.*

(Jn19:4) *Once more Pilate came out and said to the Jews, "Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no basis for a charge against him." **(5)** When Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe, Pilate said to them, "Here is the man!"*

(6) *As soon as the chief priests and their officials saw him, they shouted, "Crucify! Crucify!"*

But Pilate answered, "You take him and crucify him. As for me, I find no basis for a charge against him."

(7) *The Jews insisted, "We have a law, and according to that law he must die, because he claimed to be the Son of Yahweh."*

(8) *When Pilate heard this, he was even more afraid, **(9)** and he went back inside the palace. "Where do you come from?" he asked Jesus, but Jesus gave him no answer. **(10)** "Do you refuse to speak to me?" Pilate said, "Don't you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?"*

(11) *Jesus answered, "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin."*

(12) *From then on, Pilate tried to set Jesus free, but the Jews kept shouting, "If you let this man go, you are not friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be king opposes Caesar."*

(13) *When Pilate heard this, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judge's seat at a place known as the Stone Pavement (which in Aramaic is Gabbatha). **(14)** It was the day of Preparation of Passover Week, about the sixth hour.*

"Here is your king," Pilate said to the Jews.

(15) But they shouted, "Take him away! Take him away! Crucify him!"

"Shall I crucify your king?" Pilate asked.

"We have no king but Caesar," the chief priests answered.

(16) Finally Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified. So the soldiers took charge of Jesus. **(Mk15:19)(Mt27:30)** They took the staff and again and again they struck him on the head and spit on him. Falling on their knees, they paid homage to him. **(Mk 15:20)(Mt27:31)** And after they had mocked him, they took off the purple robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.

Jesus was a man, for only a man can be born at a certain point of time, not a "god," not a part of a trinity.

The Crucifixion

[Mark 15:21-32 Matthew 27:32-44 Luke 23:26-43 John 19:17-27]

(Mk15:21-22)(Mt27:32-33)(Lk23:26)(Jn19:17) When they led him away carrying the beam of his own cross, as they were going out, they met a certain man from Cyrene, named Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus, who was passing by on his way in from the country. And they seized him, put the beam of the cross on him, and forced him to carry the beam of the cross behind Jesus. They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which in Aramaic means The Place of the Skull).

(Mk15:23)(Mt27:34) Then there they offered Jesus wine to drink, mixed with gall and myrrh, but after tasting it, he refused to drink and did not take it.

(Lk23:27) A large number of people followed him, including women who mourned and wailed for him. **(28)** Jesus turned and said to them, "**Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children. (29) For the time will come when you will say, 'Blessed are the barren women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!' (30) Then 'they will say to the mountains, 'Fall on us!' and to the hills, 'Cover us!'' (31) For if men do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?'**"

(32) Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. **(Mk 15:27)(Mt27:38)(Lk23:33)(Jn19:18)** When they came to the place called the Skull, there they crucified him, and along with him they crucified the other two criminals, two robbers -one on each side; one on his right, the other on his left and Jesus in the middle. **(Mk15:28)** And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "He was counted with the lawless ones."

(Mk15:25) It was the third hour when they crucified him.

(Mk15:26)(Mt27:37)(Lk23:38)(Jn19:19) Pilate had a written notice with the charge against him prepared and fastened to the cross. They placed it above his head and it read: **THIS IS JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS. (Jn19:20)** Many of the Jews read this sign, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and the sign was written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek. **(21)** The chief priests of the Jews protested to Pilate, "Do not write 'The King of the Jews,' but that this man claimed to be king of the Jews."

(22) Pilate answered, "What I have written, I have written."

(Mk15:24)(Mt27:35)(Lk23:34)(Jn19:23-24) And when they had crucified him, Jesus said, "**Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.**"

And the soldiers took his clothes, dividing them up into four shares, one for each of them, with the undergarment remaining. This garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom.

"Let's not tear it," they said to one another. "Let's decide by lot who will get it." And they cast lots to see what each would get.

This happened that the Scripture, the word spoken by the prophet, might be fulfilled which said,

"They divided my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing."

So this is what the soldiers did. (Mt27:36) And sitting down, they kept watch over him there.

(Mk15:29-30)(Mt27:39-40) Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, "So! You who are going to destroy the Temple and build it in three days, come down from the cross and save yourself, if you are the Son of Yahweh!"

(Mk15:31-32)(Mt27:41-44)(Lk23:35) The people stood watching and, in the same way, even the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked him among themselves. "He saved others," they said, "but he can't save himself! He's the King of Israel! If he is the Son of Yahweh, the Chosen One, let this Christ, this King of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe in him. He trusts in Yahweh. Let Yahweh rescue him now if He wants, for he said, 'I am the Son of Yahweh.'" In the same way those robbers who were crucified with him also heaped insults on him.

(Lk23:36) The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar (37) and said, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself."

(39) One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!"

(40) But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear Yahweh," he said, "since you are under the same sentence? (41) We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man had done nothing wrong."

(42) Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom."

*(43) Jesus answered him, "**I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in Paradise.**"*

*(Jn19:25) Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. (26) When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he cherished standing nearby, he said to his mother, "**Dear woman, here is your son,**" (27) and to the disciple, "**Here is your mother.**" From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.*

This passage shows the final expression of the man Jesus' total forgiveness. He was forgiving all his tormentors and praying for them. Furthermore, he was even justifying them as they were not aware of the actual situation. In effect, the idea that this terrible action was done in ignorance runs all through the New Testament.

The case of the crucified criminal who, in his suffering and with his own death approaching, understood the wrong of his life and repented, and the fact that, immediately after he had asked for forgiveness, Jesus did grant it to him, tells above all that, from Jesus' point of view, it is never too late to turn to him, in this life or in the next one. (For a better understanding of this point, see "Thoughts. At the end of time, everybody will be with Yahweh. A direct consequence of Yahweh's justice and affection").

The passage of Jesus committing his mother to John and John to her is understood by some Churches -as the Roman Catholic- as the committing to her of the whole humanity, giving then to Mary the position of "Mediatrice of all Graces." But Jesus himself has declared a number of times to be the Way to the Father, the only intermediary between men and Yahweh. In effect, Jesus was thinking of his mother's future. He could not commit her to his brothers, for they were not in Jerusalem and at the time did not even believe in him. And John was his cousin, being the son of Salome, his mother's sister. And John took responsibility of her.

The death of Jesus

[Mark 15:33-42a Matthew 27:45-56 Luke 23:44-49 John 19:28-37]

(Mk15:33)(Mt27:45)(Lk23:44-45a)It was now about the sixth hour and from it darkness came all over the whole land until the ninth hour, for the sun stopped shining. **(Mk 15:34)(Mt27:46)**And at about the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "**Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?**" -which means, "**[Yahweh] my God, my God, why have You forsaken me?**"

(Jn19:28)Later, knowing that all was now completed, and so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, "**I am thirsty.**" **(Mk15:35)(Mt27:47)**When some of those standing near heard this, they said, "Listen, he's calling Elijah."

(Mk15:36)(Mt27:48-49)(Jn19:29)A jar of wine vinegar was there, so immediately one man, one of them, ran and got a sponge. He soaked the sponge in it, filled it with wine vinegar, and put the sponge on a stick, a stalk of the hyssop plant, lifted it to Jesus' lips, and offered it to him to drink. The rest said, "Now leave him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to take him down and to save him."

(Mk15:37)(Mt27:50)(Lk23:46)(Jn19:30)And when he had received the drink, Jesus said, "**It is finished,**" and he called out again with a loud voice, "**Father, into Your hands I commit my spirit.**" When he had said this, Jesus bowed his head, breathed his last and gave up his spirit.

(Mk15:38)(Mt27:51)(Lk23:45b)And at the moment the curtain of the Temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks split. **(Mt27:52)**The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. **(53)**They came out of the tombs, and after Jesus' resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many people.

(Mk15:39)(Mt27:54)(Lk23:47)And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, and those with him who were guarding Jesus, heard his cry and saw how he died, saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, praised Yahweh and exclaimed, "Surely this was a righteous man, a Son of Yahweh!" **(Lk23:48)**When all the people who had gathered to witness this sight saw what took place, they beat their breasts and went away.

(Mk15:40-41)(Mt27:55-56)(Lk23:49)But those who knew him, including the many women who had followed Jesus from Galilee and cared for his needs, stood there at a distance, watching these things. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salomè, the mother of Zebedee's sons. Many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem were also there.

(Mk15:42a)(Jn19:31)Now it was Preparation day (that is, the day before the Sabbath), and the next day was to be a special Sabbath. Because the Jews did not want the bodies left on the crosses during the Sabbath, they asked Pilate to have the legs broken and the bodies taken down. **(Jn19:32)**The soldiers therefore came and broke the legs of

the first man who had been crucified with Jesus, and then those of the other. (33)But when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. (34)Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water. (35)The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe. (36)These things happened so that the Scripture would be fulfilled: "Not one of his bones will be broken," (37)and, as another Scripture says, "They will look on the one they have pierced."

After having being scourged, beaten and crucified, Jesus died and then was buried. It was absolutely necessary for Jesus to die, as all human beings have to go through death. If Jesus was truly and completely man, then he had to experience it. Furthermore, his special communion with Yahweh was an obstacle to the doubtless demonstration of his faith - a rescue even a fraction of a moment before his death would have left open the doubt about the possibility of Jesus losing his battle against Satan just in that one moment- so Yahweh had to leave him alone to stand the last test, “[Yahweh]... why have You forsaken me?” And Jesus was able to withstand Satan alone, till the very last moment of his life. By dying on the cross, Jesus “sacrificed” himself by a fully voluntary “sacrifice.” With his “sacrifice,” Jesus gave Yahweh the final and complete possibility -demonstrating to Satan that there was a man fully and totally faithful to Him- to open forever His Reign to all people. By suffering and dying, Jesus paid for the cost of releasing the whole human race from Satan's domination; he paid the price of everybody's ransom. (For a deeper understanding of this point, see “Thoughts. Jesus Christ. Life, purpose, and message”).

Note. According to Jewish traditions, Rabbis could not teach women or even speak to them in public. Women could not even be considered in the count needed to establish a new synagogue. On the contrary, during Jesus Christ's ministry women played a most significant role. Many women practically and financially supported the ministry of Jesus Christ and of his disciples. Several women were the first to meet the resurrected Jesus Christ. Then they were numbered among the 120 believers and participated in the events at Pentecost at the same level as the male disciples. Furthermore, many women played active roles in the early Church, even calling one of them (Dorcas, or Tabitha) “disciple,” a term usually used only for men. Paul commends “sister Phoebe, a servant of the Church in Cenchrea,” that is, a deaconess and a number of times, in his letters, shows that he considered his equals, not subordinates, all who were actively associated with him in the cause of the Gospel (women as well as men).

The burial of Jesus

[Mark 15:42b-47 Matthew 27:57-61 Luke 23:50-56 John 19:38-42]

(Mk15:42b-46)(Mt27:57-60)(Lk23:50-54)(Jn18:38-42)Now there was a rich man named Joseph, a prominent member of the Council, a good and upright man, who had not consented to their decision and action. Joseph had himself become a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jews. He came from the Judean town of Arimathea and he was himself waiting for the Kingdom of Yahweh. So later, as evening approached, there came Joseph of Arimathea who went boldly to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body. Pilate was surprised to hear that he was already dead. Summoning the centurion, he asked him if Jesus had already died. When he learned from the centurion that it was so, Pilate ordered that the body be given to Joseph. So Joseph bought some linen

cloth and then, with Pilate's permission, he came, took down the body, and took it away. He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred litrai. Taking Jesus' body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of clean linen cloth. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs. At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid. Because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the Sabbath was about to begin, and since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there, in Joseph's own new tomb that he had cut out of the rock. Then he rolled a big stone in front of the entrance to the tomb and went away.

(Mk15:47)(Mt27:61)(Lk23:55) Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, the mother of Joseph, the women who had come with Jesus from Galilee, followed Joseph and, sitting opposite to the tomb, saw the tomb and where and how his body was laid in. **(Lk23:56)** Then they went home and prepared spices and perfumes. But they rested on the Sabbath in obedience to the commandment.

The guard at the tomb [Matthew 27:62-66]

(Mt27:62) The next day, the one after Preparation Day, the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate. **(63)** "Sir," they said, "we remember that while he was still alive that deceiver said, 'After three days I will rise again.' **(64)** So give the order for the tomb to be made secure until the third day. Otherwise, his disciples may come and steal the body and tell the people that he has been raised from the dead. This last deception will be worse than the first."

(65) "Take a guard," Pilate answered. "Go, make the tomb as secure as you know how." **(66)** So they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting the guard.

The Resurrection and after

The Resurrection. The empty tomb. Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene

[Mark 16:1-11 Matthew 28:1-10 Luke 24:1-12 John 20:1-18]

(Mk16:1) When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they must go to anoint Jesus' body. **(Mk16:2-4)(Mt 28:1-4)(Lk24:1-2)(Jn20:1)** After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary took the spices they had prepared and went to look at the tomb. Just after sunrise they were on their way to the tomb and they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?"

There had been a violent earthquake, for an angel of Yahweh came down from Heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.

The women went to the tomb and, when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been removed and rolled away from the entrance of the tomb. **(Mk 16:5)(Lk24:3)** When they entered the tomb, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus, but they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed.

(Mk16:6)(Mt28:5-6)"Don't be alarmed and afraid," the angel said to the women, "for I know you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is not here. He has risen, just as he said! Come and see the place where they laid him. (Mk16:7)(Mt28:7) Then go quickly and tell his disciples and Peter, 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.' Now I have told you."

(Mk16:8)(Mt28:8)So, trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples.

(Mt28:9)Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshipped him. (10)Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

(Lk24:9)(Jn20:2)So, when they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. [Mary Magdalene] came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one who Jesus cherished, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!" (Lk24:10)It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. (11)But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense.

(Lk24:12)(Jn20:3-5)Peter and the other disciple, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent over, looked in and saw the strips of linen lying there by themselves. But he did not go in and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened. (Jn20:6) Then Simon Peter, who was behind him, arrived and went into the tomb. He saw the stripes of linen lying there, (7)as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen. (8)Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. (9)(They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.) (10)Then the disciples went back to their homes.

(11)But Mary [Magdalene] stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb (12)and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. (Lk24:4)While they [Mary Magdalene and the other women,] were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. (5)In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? (6)He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: (7)'The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.'" (8)Then they remembered his words.

(Jn20:13)They asked her [Mary Magdalene], "Woman, why are you crying?"

"They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." (14)At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize it was Jesus.

(15)"Woman," he said, "why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?" Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him." (16)Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher).

(17) Jesus said, **"Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to [Yahweh] my God and your God.'"**

(Mk16:9) When Jesus rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had driven seven demons. **(Mk16:10)(Jn28:18)** Mary Magdalene went to the disciples and told the news to those who had been with him and who were mourning and weeping: **"I have seen the Lord!"** And she told them that he had said these things to her. **(Mk16:11)** When they heard that Jesus was alive and that she had seen him, they did not believe it.

Jesus' resurrection was an act of the will of Yahweh, who sent His angels to take the necessary actions. In effect Jesus, a dead man, could not have risen himself. The climax of the Gospels is the Resurrection, without which Jesus' death, though noble, would only have been tragic. But the Resurrection, due to the will of Yahweh, confirmed him to be His Son.

Mary Magdalene and the other women were the first to receive the news of the Risen Lord and, then to encounter him. They had been there at the Cross, they had been there when he was laid in the tomb; and now they were receiving their fondness' reward; they were the first to know the joy of the Resurrection.

One thing is certain, if Jesus had not risen from the dead, we would never have heard of him. Clearly, the women had come to pay the last tribute to a dead body. Clearly, the attitude of the disciples was that everything had finished in tragedy. By far the best proof of the Resurrection is the existence of Christianity. Nothing else could have changed a group of sad and despairing men and women into the people radiant with joy and flaming with courage we find later. In effect, the Resurrection is the central fact of the whole Christian faith.

Note. The news of the Resurrection and the encounter with Jesus did first convince and fill the women of joy but then, going back home, they lost their confidence as, even if they referred everything to the disciples, they concluded by saying that they did not know where Jesus' body could be.

The guards' report [Matthew 28:11-15]

(Mt28:11) While the women were on their way, some of the guards went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened. **(12)** When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money, **(13)** telling them, "You are to say, 'His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.' **(14)** If this reports gets to the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble." **(15)** So the soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed. And this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day.

On the road to Emmaus [Mark 16:12-13 Luke 24:13-33a]

(Mk16:12)(Lk24:13-15) Now that same day two of them were walking in the country, going to a village called Emmaus, about sixty stadia from Jerusalem. They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. Afterwards, as they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up, appeared in a different form and walked along with them; **(Lk24:16)** but they were kept from recognizing him.

(17) He asked them, **"What are you discussing together as you walk along?"**

They stood still, their faces downcast. (18)One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know the things that have happened there in these days?"

(19)"What things?" he asked.

"About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before Yahweh and all the people. (20)The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; (21)but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. (22)In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning (23)but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. (24)Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see."

(25)He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! (26)Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" (27)And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

(28)As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus acted as if he were going farther. (29)But they urged him strongly, "Stay with us, for it is near evening; the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them.

(30)When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. (31)Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him. And he disappeared from their sight.

(Lk24:32)They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"

(Mk16:13)(Lk24:33a)They got up, returned at once to Jerusalem and reported it to the rest; but they did not believe them either.

If they had not invited him in, Jesus would have continued on by himself. He would not have forced himself on them; he awaited their invitation to come in. Yahweh gave to men a great and perilous faculty, the capacity to decide; men can use it to invite Jesus Christ to enter their lives or to allow him to pass on.

Jesus appears to his disciples [Mark 16:14 Luke 24:33b-43 John 20:19-20;24-25]

(Mk16:14)(Lk24:36)(Jn20:19)Later, on the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, and while they were still talking about this, Jesus himself appeared to the Eleven as they were eating; he came and stood among them and said to them, "**Peace be with you.**" He rebuked them for their lack of faith and their stubborn refusal to believe those who had seen him after he had risen.

(Lk24:37)They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. (38)He said to them, "**Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? (39)Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.**"

(Lk24:40)(Jn20:20)After he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. (Lk24:41)And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, "**Do you have any-**

thing here to eat?" (42)They gave him a piece of broiled fish, (43)and he took it and ate it in their presence.

(33b)There they [the two who met Jesus on the road to Emmaus] found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together (34)and saying, "It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon." (35)Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.

(Jn20:24)Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. (25)So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!"

But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it."

The resurrected Jesus' hands, feet and side bore the mark of the most serious wounds. This is an indication that a man's resurrected body will carry in clear evidence, for eternity, those special particularities which could have characterized the most important part of a person's life.

Jesus appears to Thomas [John 20:26-31]

(Jn20:26)A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" (27)Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here: see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."

(28)Thomas said to him, "My Lord! My Master!"

(29)Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

(30)Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. (31)But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of Yahweh, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Words that, of course, apply to all future believers, not to those who, at the time, did see Jesus personally.

Jesus appears again to his disciples [John 21:1-14]

(Jn21:1)Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Tiberias. It happened this way: (2)Simon Peter, Thomas (called Didymus), Nathanael, from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. (3)"I'm going out to fish," Simon Peter told them, and they said, "We'll go with you." So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

(4)Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus.

(5)He called out to them, "Friends, haven't you any fish?**"**

"No," they answered.

(6)He said, "Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.**" When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.**

(7)Then the disciple whom Jesus cherished said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, "It is the Lord," he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water. (8)The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about two hundred

cubits. (9)When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread.

(10)Jesus said to them, "**Bring some of the fish you have just caught.**"

(11)Simon Peter climbed aboard and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn. (12)Jesus said to them, "**Come and have breakfast.**" None of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord. (13)Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. (14)This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.

There is a reason for writing exactly this numerical quantity. At the time, Jerome said that in the sea there were 153 different kinds of fish. In other words, John wrote that in that catch there were all the kinds of fish existing in the world. Therefore the number 153 symbolizes the fact that some day all men of all nations will be gathered together to Jesus Christ. Furthermore, the net stands for the Church because, as the net held all the fishes and was not broken, so there is room in the Christian Church for all men of all times, races and nations.

Jesus reinstates Peter [John 21:15-25]

(Jn21:15)When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "**Simon son of John, are you truly fond of me more than these?**"

"Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I am fond of you."

Jesus said, "**Feed my lambs.**"

(16)Again Jesus said, "**Simon son of John, are you truly fond of me?**"

He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I am fond of you."

Jesus said, "**Take care of my sheep.**"

(17)The third time he said to him, "**Simon son of John, are you fond of me?**"

Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Are you fond of me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things, you know that I am fond of you."

Jesus said, "**Feed my sheep.** (18)**I tell you the truth, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.** (19)Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify Yahweh. Then he said to him, "**Follow me!**"

(20)Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus cherished was following them. (This was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and said, "Lord, who is going to betray you?") (21)When Peter saw him, he asked, "Lord, what about him?"

(22)Jesus answered, "**If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me.**" (23)Because of this, the rumor spread among the brothers that this disciple would not die. But Jesus did not say that he would not die; he only said, "**If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?**"

(24)This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true. (25)Jesus did many other things as well. If everyone of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.

Peter's reply shows that Jesus perfectly knew his true sentiment. But it was necessary to ask the question and have the answer in front of all disciples, to reinstate Peter publicly and officially. This episode is the better example of what to do with people who fall away from or repudiate Christianity and then repent and ask to come back: they, after showing their sincerity, have to be fully accepted again in the Christian community -something that was and is seldom done!

The great commission [Mark 16:15-18 Matthew 28:16-20 Luke 24:44-48]

(Mt28:16)Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. (17)When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted.

(Lk24:44)He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."

(45)Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. (46)He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, (47)and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. (48)You are witnesses of these things."

(Mk16:15)(Mt28:18-20)Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in Heaven and on Earth has been given to me. Therefore go into all the world, preach the Good News to all Creation, and make disciples of all nations baptizing them, in the name of the Father and of the Son, by the Spirit of Yahweh, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age. (Mk16:16)Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. (17)And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; (18)they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well."

The commission confirmed [Luke 24:49 John 20:21-23]

(Jn20:21)Again Jesus said: "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." (22)And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Spirit of Yahweh. (23)If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

(Lk24:49)"I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on High.

Jesus had come with a message for all men and then his message has to be taken to all men by his disciples -by the Christian Church. This means that the Church -every one Christian- has to be a messenger and spread as much as possible the "Good News" of the Kingdom of Yahweh open to all men, that is, of the real possibility to be in spiritual communion with Jesus and Yahweh.

And, when a man accepts Jesus, it is appropriate -even if not strictly necessary- to have a ceremony -the baptism- to officially introduce that man to the Christian community. The baptism -whose ceremony can be performed in various ways, with or without immersion in or pouring of water- is actually "by the Spirit of Yahweh" as it indicates the spiritual communion between that man and Yahweh.

After believing in Jesus, repenting and entering -with or without the ceremony of baptism- in spiritual communion with Yahweh, a man is spiritually saved. On the contrary, a man who doesn't want to believe and repent is cutting himself out ("condemned") of

the possibility of being in spiritual communion with Yahweh and, consequently, of immediate spiritual salvation.

The true meaning of the passage about forgiving or not has to be carefully understood. The Apostles had to bring Jesus' message to men. So, if they knew that a man was really penitent, they could with absolute certainty proclaim to him the forgiveness of Jesus. But equally, if they knew that there was no penitence in his heart, they had to tell him that until his heart changed there was no Jesus' forgiveness for him. This passage does not mean that the power to forgive sins was ever entrusted to any man; it means that the power to proclaim the forgiveness was so entrusted; along with the power-duty to warn that forgiveness is not open to the impenitent.

The Ascension [Mark 16:19-20 Luke 24:50-53]

(Mk16:19)(Lk24:50-51)After the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, and when he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into Heaven and he sat at the right hand of Yahweh.

(Lk24:52)Then they worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy.

(Lk24:53)And they stayed continually at the Temple, praising Yahweh..

(Mk16:20)Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his Word by the signs that accompanied it.

It was essential that something of that kind should happen. In effect, it was unthinkable that the appearances of Jesus would continue for ever or would at a certain point simply stop. There had to come a day when the Jesus of Earth finally became the Christ of Heaven.

Teachings and deductions from:**THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES PETER AND PAUL**
at the beginning of the Christian Church**Jesus taken up into Heaven [Ac 1:1-11]**

(Ac 1:1) In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning (2) until the day he was taken up to Heaven, after giving instructions through the Spirit of Yahweh to the apostles he had chosen. (3) After his suffering, he showed himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the Kingdom of Yahweh. (4) On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. (5) John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Spirit of Yahweh.”

(6) And, all together, they asked him, “Lord Jesus, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?”

(7) He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by His own authority. (8) But you will receive power when His Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the Earth.”

(9) After he said this, he was taken up [to Heaven] before their eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

(10) They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. (11) “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken from you into Heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into Heaven.”

The “gift” or “baptism,” was and is the continuous spiritual communion Yahweh-Jesus-men, which gives men the necessary knowledge, understanding and power.

Only Yahweh knows the future, so it is totally wrong to make any forecast about the end of the world and Jesus' second coming.

The task of all Christians of any time is to teach and preach everywhere the Goods News of the Kingdom of Yahweh open to all men of any time, race and religion.

Matthias chosen to replace Judas [Ac 1:12-26]

(Ac 1:12) Then they [the apostles] returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day's walk from the city. (13) When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. There were Peter, John, James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. (14) They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.

(15) In those days Peter stood up among the believers (a group numbering about a hundred and twenty) (16) and said, “Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled which the Spirit of Yahweh spoke through the mouth of David concerning Judas [Iscaiot], who served as a guide for those who arrested Jesus - (17) he was one of our number and shared in this ministry.”

(18)(With the reward he got for his wickedness, Judas [Iscariot] bought a field; there he fell headlong, his body burst open and all his intestines spilled out. (19)Everyone in Jerusalem heard about this, so they called that field in their language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.)

(20)“For,” said Peter, “it is written in the book of Psalms,
‘May his place be deserted; let there be no one to dwell in it,’ and,

‘May another take his place of leadership.’

(21)Therefore it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, (22)beginning from John’s baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. One of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection.”

(23)They proposed two men: Joseph called Barsabbas (also known as Justus) and Matthias. (24)Then they prayed, “You, O Yahweh, know everyone’s heart. Show us which of these two You have chosen (25)to take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas [Iscariot] left to go where he belongs.” (26)Then they cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias; so he was added to the eleven apostles.

After Jesus' birth, fulfilled her “physical” mission, Joseph and Mary had four sons, -Jesus' half-brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas- and some daughters -Jesus' half-sisters, whose names are not known- as reported in Mark 6:3; Matthew 13:55-56; John 2:12; 7:3,5; Acts 1:14; 1Corinthians 9:5; Galatians 1:19.

The Spirit of Yahweh at Pentecost [Ac 2:1-13]

(Ac 2:1)When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. (2)Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from Heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. (3)And what seemed to be tongues of fire appeared to them, and separated and came to rest on each of them. (4)All of them were filled with the Spirit of Yahweh and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit of Yahweh enabled them.

(5)Now there were staying in Jerusalem Yahweh-fearing Jews from every nation under the sky. (6)When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. (7)Utterly amazed, they said: “Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? (8)Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language? (9)Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, (10)Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (11)(both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs -we hear them declaring the wonders of Yahweh in our own tongues!” (12)Amazed and perplexed, they all asked one another, “What does this mean?”

(13)Some, however, made fun of them and said, “They have had too much wine.”

This was the fulfillment of Jesus' promise (Ac 1:5,8). The disciples were put in full spiritual communion with Yahweh, under His spiritual control; and this enabled them to speak in languages they didn't actually know.

Peter addresses the crowd [Ac 2:14-41]

(Ac 2:14)Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed them: “Fellow Jews and all you who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you; listen care-

fully to my words. (15) *These men are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only the third hour of the day [9 AM]!* (16) *But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:*

(17) 'In the last days,' Yahweh says, 'I will pour out My Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. (18) For on My servants, both men and women, I will pour out My Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. (19) I will show wonders in the sky above and signs on the Earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. (20) The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious Day of the Lord Yahweh. (21) And everyone who calls on the Name of the Lord Yahweh will be saved.'

(22) Men of Israel, listen to my words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man, was accredited by Yahweh to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which Yahweh did among you through him, as you yourselves know. (23) This man was handed over to you by Yahweh's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, by the hands of those not having the Law, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. (24) But Yahweh raised him, freeing him from the pangs of death, because it was impossible for it to keep its hold on him. (25) As David said about him:

'I saw the Lord [Jesus Christ] always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. (26) Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest in hope, (27) because You will not abandon my soul to the grave, nor will You let Your Holy One see decay. (28) You have made known to me the paths of life; You will fill me with joy in Your presence.'

(29) Brothers, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day. (30) But he was a prophet and knew that Yahweh had promised him on oath that He would place one of his descendants on his throne. (31) Seeing what was ahead, he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ [Messiah], that he was not abandoned to the grave, nor did his body see decay. (32) Yahweh has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of that. (33) Exalted to the right hand of Yahweh, he has received from the Father His promised Spirit and has poured It out, as you see and hear. (34) For David did not ascend to Heaven, and yet he said,

'The Lord [Yahweh] said to my Lord [Jesus Christ]: "Sit at My right (35) hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet."

(36) Therefore let the whole house of Israel be assured of this: Yahweh has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ [Messiah]."

(37) When they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"

(38) Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Spirit of Yahweh. (39) The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off -for all whom the Lord [Yahweh] our God will call."

(40) With many other words he testified and exhorted them saying, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." (41) Those who accepted his word were baptized, and about three thousand souls were added that day.

Spiritual communion with Yahweh is for all people, without regard to nationality, age, sex or rank.

At the end of "the last days," after a period of social and cosmic destruction, the present world will end and -after Universal Resurrection and Judgment- everybody will li-

ve for ever in the Kingdom of Yahweh. (For a better understanding of this point, see “Thoughts. At the end of time, everybody will be with Yahweh”).

This passage states that everything was due to Yahweh’s initiative; that the Cross was not an accident, not an emergency measure taken by Yahweh when everything else had failed; that it had always been part of His plans and that, as such, the suffering, the death and, then, the resurrection of Jesus were the fulfillment of prophecy. In effect, Jesus was a man, not a “god,” not a part of a trinity, and he had no power at all to raise himself from death.

This passage confirms that baptism can't bring about forgiveness, as forgiveness is given because and if those undergoing the ceremony of baptism have already repented of their previous sins.

The fellowship of the believers [Ac 2:42-47]

(Ac 2:42)They [the believers] devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. (43)Awe was in every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. (44)All the believers were together and had everything in common. (45)Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. (46)Every day they continued to meet together in the Temple. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, (47)praising Yahweh and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord Yahweh added to their number daily those who were being saved.

To note that only the breaking of bread is mentioned, without the sharing of the cup. It was done at the end of the communal meal, in remembrance of Jesus Christ's -once for ever and for all- sacrifice and death for the spiritual salvation of all men. The repetition of this act is not the repetition of Jesus' sacrifice on the Cross -as many Churches came to believe- but -as asked by Jesus- a remembrance of it and a reminder of the “New Covenant,” the new “Christian” relationship between Yahweh and all men.

In the early -small- Church the believers shared voluntarily to provide for those who were in need. Something possible only for a small group of ardent believers and, unfortunately, totally impossible in a larger community.

Peter heals the crippled beggar [Ac 3:1-10]

(Ac 3:1)Peter and John were going up to the Temple at the time of prayer -at the ninth hour [3 PM]. (2)And a man crippled from birth was being carried to the Temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the Temple. (3)When he saw Peter and John about to enter into the Temple, he asked them for money. (4)Peter looked straight at him, as did John, and said, “Look at us!” (5)So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them.

(6)But Peter said, “Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, get up and walk.” (7)Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man’s feet and ankles became strong. (8)He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the Temple, walking and jumping, and praising Yahweh. (9)And all the people saw him walking and praising Yahweh. (10)Then they recognized him as the same man who used to sit begging at the Temple gate called Beautiful, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

The healing was not by Peter and John's own power, but by the power coming from their faith in, and spiritual communion with, Jesus and Yahweh. And, as later declared by Peter (Ac 3:16), the man had faith to be healed.

Peter speaks to the onlookers [Ac 3:11-26]

(Ac 3:11) While the beggar held on to Peter and John, all the people were astonished and came running to them in Solomon's Colonnade. (12) When Peter saw this, he said to the people, "Men of Israel, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? (13) [Yahweh] the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified His servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. (14) You disowned the Holy and Righteous One [Messiah] and asked that a murderer be released to you. (15) You killed the giver of true life, but Yahweh raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. (16) It is by faith in his name [Jesus] that this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is his [Jesus] name and the faith that comes through him that has given this complete healing to him, in front of you all.

(17) Now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders. (18) And this is how Yahweh fulfilled what He had foretold through all the prophets, saying that His Christ [Messiah] would suffer. (19) Repent, then, and turn to Yahweh, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord Yahweh, (20) and that He may send the Christ [Messiah] -that Jesus- who has been appointed for you. (21) He must remain in Heaven until the time comes for the restoration of everything, as Yahweh promised long ago through His holy prophets. (22) For Moses said, 'The Lord [Yahweh] your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your brothers; you must listen to everything he tells you. (23) Anyone who does not listen to that prophet will be completely cut off from among His people.'

(24) Indeed, all the prophets from Samuel on, as many as have spoken, have foretold these days. (25) And you are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant Yahweh made with your fathers. He said to Abraham, 'Through your offspring all peoples on Earth will be blessed.' (26) Yahweh, who has raised up His servant [Jesus Christ], sent him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways.'

Peter never doubted the real nature of Jesus; a man, not a "god," not a person of a trinity.

Peter and John before the Sanhedrin [Ac 4:1-22]

(Ac 4:1) Then, while Peter and John were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the Temple guard and the Sadducees came up to them, (2) greatly disturbed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. (3) They seized them and, because it was evening, they put them in jail until the next day. (4) But many who heard the Word believed, and the number of men grew to about five thousand.

(5) The next day the rulers, elders and teachers of the law met in Jerusalem, (6) with Annas the High Priest, Caiaphas, John, Alexander and the other men of the High Priest's family. (7) They had them [Peter and John] brought before them and questioned them: "By what power or what name did you do this?"

(8)Then Peter, filled with the Spirit of Yahweh, said to them, “Rulers and elders of the people! (9)Since we are being called to account today for an act of kindness to a cripple and by means of who he was healed, (10)then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, but whom Yahweh raised from the dead, that this man stands here, before you, healed. (11)He [Jesus Christ] is ‘the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone.’ (12)Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under Heaven given to men by which we can be saved.”

(13)When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished. And they took note that they had been with Jesus. (14)But since they could see the man who had been healed standing there with them, there was nothing they could say. (15)So they ordered them to withdraw from the Sanhedrin and then conferred together. (16)“What are we going to do with these men?” they asked. “Everybody living in Jerusalem knows that a miracle has been performed through them, and we cannot deny it. (17)But to stop this thing from spreading any further among the people, we must warn these men to speak no longer to anyone in this name.”

(18)Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. (19)But Peter and John replied, “Judge for yourselves whether it is right in Yahweh’s sight to obey you rather than Yahweh. (20)For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.”

(21)Then, after further threats they let them go. They could not decide how to punish them, because all the people were praising Yahweh for what had happened. (22)For the man who was miraculously healed was over forty years old.

The believers’ prayer [Ac 4:23-31]

(Ac 4:23)On their release, Peter and John went back to their own [brothers] and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them. (24)When they heard this, they raised their voices together to Yahweh. “Lord Yahweh,” they said, “You made the sky and the land and the sea, and everything in them. (25)You spoke by Your Spirit through the mouth of Your servant, our father David:

‘Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? (26)The kings of the Earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord Yahweh and against His Anointed One [Messiah].’

(27)Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed [Messiah]. (28)They did what Your hand and will had decided beforehand should happen. (29)Now, Lord Yahweh, consider their threats and enable Your servants to speak Your Word with great boldness. (30)Stretch Your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of Your holy servant Jesus.”

(31)After they prayed, the place where they were all meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Spirit of Yahweh and spoke the Word of Yahweh boldly.

Through Jesus, and through Jesus alone, men can find access to Yahweh, as Jesus alone opens the way to Him. Between men and Yahweh there is no other intermediary or intercessor -no priest or pastor, no angel, no recognized “saint,” not even Jesus' mother.

The believers share their possessions [Ac 4:32-37]

(Ac 4:32)The multitude of the believers had one heart and soul. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. (33)With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all. (34)There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the proceeds of the sales (35)and put them at the apostles' feet. Then it was distributed to anyone as he had need.

(36)Also Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means Son of Encouragement), (37)sold a field he owned and brought the proceeds and put it at the apostles' feet.

As a result of their faith and spiritual communion, they practiced a voluntary sharing to provide for those who were in need, something only possible in a small community of ardent believers.

Ananias and Sapphira [Ac 5:1-11]

(Ac 5:1)Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. (2)With his wife's full knowledge he kept back part of the proceeds, and brought the rest and put it at the apostles' feet.

(3)Then Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Spirit of Yahweh and have kept [some] of the proceeds of the land? (4)Didn't it belong to you before? And wasn't the proceeds yours? What made you think in your heart of doing such a thing? You have not lied to men but to Yahweh."

(5)When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened. (6)Then the young men came forward, wrapped up his body, and carried him out and buried him.

(7)About three hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. (8)Peter asked her, "Tell me, is it for so much that you and Ananias sold the land?"

"Yes," she said, "for so much."

(9)Peter said to her, "How could you agree to test the Spirit of the Lord Yahweh? Look! The feet of the men who buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out also."

(10)At that moment she fell down at his feet and died. Then the young men came in and, finding her dead, carried her out and buried her beside her husband. (11)Great fear seized the whole Church and all who heard about these events.

The lesson of this passage is that Ananias and Sapphira had lied not so much to their fellow-men as to Yahweh. And, even if the punishment of this sin looks "un-Christian," without it the believers could have concluded that Yahweh can be deceived.

The apostles heal many [Ac 5:12-16]

(Ac 5:12)Now many miraculous signs and wonders were done among the people by the hands of the apostles. And all [the believers] used to meet together in Solomon's Colonnade. (13)No one else dared join them, but they were highly regarded by the people. (14)And more and more believers in the Lord Jesus were added, a multitude of men

and women, (15)so that people brought the sick into the squares and laid them on beds and mats so that at least Peter's shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by. (16)Crowds gathered from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those tormented by evil spirits, and all of them were healed.

Not that the shadow -or any material object- could have miraculous qualities, but only because for most of the people it represented the only means of contact with the apostles. What made the healing possible was the faith of the apostles and the people.

The apostles persecuted [Ac 5:17-42]

(Ac 5:17)Then the High Priest and all his associates, who were members of the party of the Sadducees, rose up and were filled with jealousy. (18)They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail. (19)But during the night an angel of the Lord Yahweh opened the doors of the jail and brought them out. (20)“Go, stand in the Temple courts,” he said, “and tell the people all these Words of life.”

(21)At daybreak they entered the Temple, as they had been told, and began to teach.

When the High Priest and his associated arrived, they called together the Sanhedrin -the full assembly of the elders of Israel- and sent to the jail for the apostles. (22)But on arriving at the jail, the officers did not find them there. So they went back and reported, (23)“We found the jail securely locked, with the guards standing at the doors; but when we opened them, we found no one inside.” (24)On hearing this report, the captain of the Temple guard and the chief priests were puzzled, wondering what could have happened.

(25)Then someone came and said, “Look! The men you put in jail are standing in the Temple teaching the people.” (26)At that, the captain went with his officers and brought them. But they did not use force, because they feared that the people would stone them.

(27)Having brought them, they made them appear before the Sanhedrin. And the High Priest questioned them. (28)“We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name,” he said. “Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man’s blood.”

(29)Peter and the other apostles replied: “We must obey Yahweh rather than men! (30)[Yahweh] the God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead -whom you have killed by hanging him on a cross. (31)Yahweh exalted him to His own right hand as Master and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel. (32)We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Spirit of Yahweh, whom Yahweh has given to those who obey Him.”

(33)When they heard this, they were furious and wanted to put them to death. (34)But a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, who was honored by all the people, stood up in the Sanhedrin and ordered that the men [the apostles] be put outside for a little while. (35)Then he addressed them: “Men of Israel, consider carefully what you intend to do to these men. (36)Some time ago Theudas appeared, claiming to be somebody, and about four hundred men rallied to him. He was killed, all his followers were dispersed, and it all came to nothing. (37)After him, Judas the Galilean appeared in the day of the census and he persuaded the people to follow him. He too was killed, and all his follower were scattered. (38)Therefore, in the present case I advise you: Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail.

(39)But if it is from Yahweh, you will not be able to stop them; you will find yourselves fighting against Yahweh.”

(40)They took his advice. Then they called the apostles in and had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus and let them go.

(41)They [the apostles] left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering for the name [of Jesus].

(42)Day after day, in the Temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the Good News of Jesus, the Christ [Messiah].

The choosing of the Seven [Ac 6:1-7]

(Ac 6:1)In those days when the disciples were increasing in number, the Grecian Jews among them murmured against the [local] Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution. (2)So the Twelve summoned the assembly of the disciples and said, “It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the Word of Yahweh in order to wait on tables. (3)Brothers, choose from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit of Yahweh and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them (4)and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the Word.”

(5)This proposal pleased the whole assembly. They choose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Spirit of Yahweh; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch. (6)They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.

(7)So the Word of Yahweh spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.

The message is clear: priest and pastors should dedicate themselves to preaching and teaching, leaving all other activities -most of all the political ones- to lay people.

Stephen seized [Ac 6:8-15]

(Ac 6:8)Now Stephen, full of grace and power, did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people. (9)Opposition arose, however, from members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called) -Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria as well as of Cilicia and Asia. They began to argue with Stephen, (10)but could not stand up against his wisdom or the Spirit of Yahweh, by whom he spoke.

(11)Then they sent some men to say, “We have heard Stephen speak words of blasphemy against Moses and against Yahweh.”

(12)So they stirred up the people and the elders and the teachers of the law. They seized Stephen and brought him before the Sanhedrin. (13)They produced false witnesses, who testified, “This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place and against the law. (14)For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us.”

(15)All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel.

Stephen’s speech to the Sanhedrin [Ac 7:1-53]

(Ac 7:1)Then the High Priest asked him, “Are these charges true?”

(2)He replied: “Brothers and fathers, listen to me! [Yahweh] the God of glory appeared to our father Abraham while he was still in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran.

(3)‘Leave your country and your people,’ Yahweh said, ‘to the land I will show you.’

(4)So he left the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Haran. After the death of his father, Yahweh sent him to this land where you are now living. (5)He gave him no inheritance here, not even a foot of ground, but promised him that he and his descendants after him would possess the land, even though at that time Abraham had no child. (6)Yahweh spoke to him in this way: 'Your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years. (7)But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves,' Yahweh said, 'and afterward they will come out of that country and worship Me in this place.' (8)Then He gave him the covenant of circumcision. And [Abraham] became the father of Isaac and circumcised him on the eighth day. And Isaac [became the father] of Jacob, and Jacob of the twelve patriarchs.

(9)Because the patriarchs were jealous of Joseph, they sold him into Egypt. But Yahweh was with him (10)and rescued him from all his troubles. He gave him wisdom and grace before the Pharaoh king of Egypt, who made him ruler over Egypt and all his house.

(11)Then a famine struck all Egypt and Canaan, bringing great suffering, and our fathers could not find food. (12)When Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent our fathers a first time. (13)On their second visit, Joseph told his brothers who he was, and Pharaoh learned about Joseph's family. (14)After this, Joseph sent for his father Jacob and his whole family, seventy-five in all. (15)Then Jacob went down to Egypt, where he and our fathers died. (16)Their bodies were brought back to Shechem and placed in the tomb that Abraham had bought from the sons of Hamor at Shechem for a sum of silver.

(17)Then, as the time drew near for Yahweh to fulfill His promise to Abraham, our people in Egypt greatly increased. (18)Then another king, who knew nothing about Joseph, became ruler of Egypt. (19)He dealt treacherously with our people and oppressed our forefathers and forced them to expose their newborn babies so that they would not survive.

(20)At that time Moses was born, and he enjoyed Yahweh's favor. For three months he was cared for in his father's house. (21)When he was placed outside, Pharaoh's daughter took him and brought him up as her own son. (22)Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action.

(23)When Moses was forty years old, he felt the desire to visit his fellow Israelites. (24)When he saw one of them being mistreated, so he went to his defense and avenged him by striking the Egyptian. (25)He [Moses] thought that his brothers would realize that Yahweh was using him to rescue them, but they did not. (26)The next day Moses came upon [two] Israelites who were fighting. He tried to reconcile them by saying, 'Men, you are brothers; why do you want to hurt each other?'

(27)But the man who was mistreating the other pushed Moses aside and said, 'Who made you ruler and judge over us? (28)Do you want to kill me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday?' (29)When Moses heard this, he fled to Midian, where he settled as a foreigner and had two sons.

(30)After forty years had passed, an angel appeared to Moses in the flames of a burning bush in the desert near Mount Sinai. (31)When he saw this, he was amazed at the sight. As he went over to look more closely, he heard the Lord Yahweh's voice: (32)'I am [Yahweh] the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.' And Moses trembled with fear and did not dare to look.

(33)Then the Lord Yahweh said to him, 'Take off your sandals; the place where you are standing is holy ground. (34)I have seen the oppression of My people in Egypt. I

have heard their groaning and have come down to set them free. Now come, I will send you back to Egypt.'

(35) This is the same Moses whom they had rejected saying, 'Who made you ruler and judge?' Yahweh sent him to be their ruler and deliverer, through the angel who appeared to him in the bush. (36) He led them out of Egypt and did wonders and miraculous signs in Egypt, at the Red Sea and for forty years in the desert.

(37) This is the Moses who told the Israelites, 'Yahweh will send you a prophet like me from your own people.' (38) He [Moses] was in the assembly in the desert, with the angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and with our fathers; and he received living words to pass on to us.

(39) But our fathers refused to obey him. Instead, they rejected him and in their hearts turned back to Egypt. (40) They told Aaron, 'Make us gods who will go before us, for we don't know what has happened to this fellow Moses who led us out of Egypt!' (41) At that the time they made an idol in the form of a calf, brought sacrifices to it and held a celebration in honor of what their hands had made. (42) But Yahweh turned away and gave them over to the worship of the heavenly bodies, as it is written in the book of the prophets:

'Did you bring Me sacrifices and offerings for forty years in the desert, O house of Israel? (43) Instead, you have lifted up the shrine of Molech and the star of your god Rephan, the idols you made to worship. Therefore I will send you into exile beyond Babylon.'

(44) Our forefathers had the Tabernacle of the Testimony with them in the desert, made as He who spoke [Yahweh] directed Moses; according to the pattern he had seen. (45) Having received the Tabernacle in inheritance under Joshua, our fathers, until the time of David, brought it with them into the possessions of the Pagans, who Yahweh drove out before them. (46) He [David] enjoyed Yahweh's favor and asked that he might provide a dwelling place for [Yahweh] the God of Jacob. (47) But it was Solomon who built the house for Him.

(48) However, the Most High does not live in houses made by men. As the prophet says:

(49) 'Heaven is My throne, and the Earth is My footstool. What kind of house will you build for Me? -Says the Lord Yahweh- Or where will My resting place be? (50) Has not My hand made all these things?'

(51) You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Spirit of Yahweh! (52) Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One [Messiah], who now you have betrayed and murdered, (53) you who have received the Law that was put into effect through angels but have not obeyed it."

The stoning of Stephen [Ac 7:54-60; 8:1a]

(Ac 7:54) When they heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. (55) But [Stephen], full of the Spirit of Yahweh, looked up to Heaven and saw the glory of Yahweh, and Jesus standing at the right hand of Yahweh. (56) "Look," he said, "I see Heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of Yahweh."

(57) At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, (58) dragged him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.

(59)And they stoned Stephen, who prayed saying, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” (60)Then he fell on his knees and cried out, “Lord Yahweh, do not hold this sin against them.” When he had said this, he fell asleep.

(8:1a)And Saul was there, giving approval to his death.

The Church persecuted and scattered [Ac 8:1b-3]

(Ac 8:1b)On that day a great persecution broke out against the Church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria. (2)Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. (3)And Saul began to destroy the Church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison.

Philip in Samaria [Ac 8:4-8]

(Ac 8:4)Those who had been scattered went around preaching the Word. (5)Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed the Christ [Messiah] to them. (6)When the crowds heard Philip and saw the miraculous signs he did, they all paid close attention to what he said. (7)With shrieks, evil spirits came out of many, and many paralytics and cripples were healed. (8)So there was great joy in that city.

The lesson here is that many times what looks a local or personal evil event has higher and good consequences, for the persecution in Jerusalem (evil) had the (good) consequence of increasing and speeding up the diffusion of the Gospel.

Simon the sorcerer [Ac 8:9-25]

(Ac 8:9)Now for some time a man named Simon had practiced sorcery in the city and amazed all the people of Samaria. He boasted that he was someone great, (10)and all the people, both high and low, gave him their attention and exclaimed, “This man is that power of Yahweh which is called Great.” (11)They followed him because he had amazed them for a long time with his magic. (12)Then, when they believed Philip as he preached the Good News of the Kingdom of Yahweh and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. (13)Simon himself believed and was baptized. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw hap-pening.

(14)When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the Word of Yahweh, they sent Peter and John to them. (15)When they arrived, they prayed for them that they might receive the Spirit of Yahweh, (16)because It had not yet come upon any of them; they had been simply baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. (17)Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Spirit of Yahweh.

(18)When Simon saw that the Spirit of Yahweh was given at the laying on of the apostles’ hands, he offered them money (19)and said. “Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Spirit of Yahweh.”

(20)But Peter answered him: “May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of Yahweh with money! (21)You will have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before Yahweh. (22)Repent of this wickedness, pray to the Lord Yahweh, and perhaps you will be forgiven for such a thought in your heart. (23)For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin.”

(24)Then Simon answered, saying, “Pray to the Lord Yahweh for me so that nothing you have said may happen to me.”

(25)When they had testified and proclaimed the Word of the Lord Yahweh, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the Gospel in many Samaritan villages.

How many times ecclesiastical “positions” have been bought and sold for the money, power and prestige they would bring to the sellers and the buyers!

Philip and the Ethiopian [Ac 8:26-40]

(Ac 8:26)Now an angel of the Lord Yahweh spoke to Philip and said, “Go south to the road -the desert road- that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” (27)And he rose and went. And an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, had come to Jerusalem to worship, (28)and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading Isaiah the prophet. (29)The spirit [angel] told Philip, “Go up and join that chariot.”

(30)Philip run up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. “Do you understand what you are reading?” Philip asked.

(31)“How can I,” he said, “unless someone explains it to me?” So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

(32)The eunuch was reading this passage of Scripture:

‘As a sheep led to the slaughter or a lamb before the shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth. (33)In his humiliation he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the Earth.’

(34)The eunuch asked Philip, “Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?” (35)Then Philip opened his mouth, beginning from that Scripture, and told him the Good News about Jesus.

(36)As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, “Look, here is water. Why shouldn’t I be baptized?” (37)And Philip said, “If you believe with all your heart, you may.” The eunuch answered, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of Yahweh.” (38)And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. (39)When they came out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord Yahweh came on the eunuch and the spirit [angel] took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing. (40)Philip, then, found himself at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the Gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.

How simple a ceremony of baptism and how essential this Creed! In effect, nothing more is really needed.

Saul’s conversion [Ac 9:1-19a]

(Ac 9:1)Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord Jesus’ disciples. He went to the High Priest (2)and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. (3)As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from Heaven flashed around him. (4)He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?”

(5)“Who are you, Lord?” Saul asked.

“I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,” he replied. (6)“Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.”

(7)The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the voice but did not see anyone. (8)Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. (9)For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.

(10)In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord Jesus called to him in a vision, **“Ananias!”**

Yes, Lord Jesus,” he answered.

(11)The Lord Jesus told him, **“Get up and go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. (12)In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight.”**

(13)“Lord Jesus,” Ananias answered, “I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem. (14)And here he has the authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name.”

(15)But the Lord Jesus told him, **“Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles, the kings and the people of Israel. (16)I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.”**

(17)Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on him, he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here, has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Spirit of Yahweh.”

(18)Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, (19a)and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

Paul was chosen as in Old Testament time by, in this case, Jesus' direct intervention.

Saul in Damascus and Jerusalem [Ac 9:19b-31]

(Ac 9:19b)Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. (20)At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of Yahweh. (21)All those who heard him were astonished and asked, “Isn’t he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn’t he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?” (22)Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that he [Jesus] is the Christ [Messiah].

(23)After many days had gone by, the [chiefs of the] Jews conspired to kill him, (24)but Saul learned of their plan. Day and night they kept close watch on the city gates in order to kill him. (25)But his followers took him and, by night, lowered him in a basket through the wall.

(26)When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple. (27)But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord Jesus and that the Lord Jesus had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus. (28)So he stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus. (29)He talked and debated with the Grecian Jews, but they tried to kill him. (30)When the brothers heard of this, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.

(31)Then the Church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened and, encouraged by the Spirit of Yahweh, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord Yahweh.

Aeneas and Dorcas [Ac 9:32-43]

(Ac 9:32)As Peter traveled about the whole area, he went to the saints living in Lydda. (33)There he found a man named Aeneas, a paralytic who had been bedridden for eight years. (34)“Aeneas,” Peter said to him, “Jesus Christ heals you. Get up and make your bed.” Immediately he got up. (35)All those who lived in Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord Jesus.

(36)In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (which, when translated, is Dorcas [Gazelle]), who was always doing good and helping the poor. (37)About that time she became sick and died, and her body was washed and placed in an upstairs room. (38)Lydda was near Joppa; so the disciples, who heard that Peter was in Lydda, sent two men to him and urged him, “Please come at once!”

(39)Peter got up and went with them, and when he arrived he was taken to the upstairs room. All the widows stood around him, crying and showing him the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was still with them.

(40)Peter sent all out of the room; then he got down on his knees and prayed. Turning toward the dead woman, he said, “Tabitha, get up.” She opened her eyes, looked at Peter and sat up. (41)He took her by the hand and helped her to her feet. Then he called the saints and the widows and presented her to them alive. (42)This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord Jesus. (43)He [Peter] stayed in Joppa for many days with a tanner named Simon.

Cornelius calls for Peter [Ac 10:1-8]

(Ac 10:1)At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of the Cohort called Italian. (2)He was devout and Yahweh-fearing, with all his household; he gave generously to the people and prayed to Yahweh regularly. (3)One day at about the ninth hour [3 PM] he had a vision. He distinctly saw an angel of Yahweh, who came to him and said, “Cornelius!”

(4)Cornelius stared at him in fear. “What is it, sir?” he asked.

The angel answered, “Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before Yahweh. (5)Now send men to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon who is called Peter. (6)He is staying with Simon the tanner, whose house is by the sea.”

(7)When the angel who spoke to him had gone, He called two of his servants and a devout soldier who was one of his attendants. (8)He told them everything and sent them to Joppa.

Peter’s vision [Ac 10:9-23a]

(Ac 10:9)About the sixth hour [Noon] the following day, as they were going on their journey and approaching the city [Caesarea], Peter went up on the roof to pray. (10)He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. (11)He saw Heaven opened and a kind of vessel coming down, like a large sheet being led down to Earth by its four corners. (12)It contained all the four-footed animals and reptiles of the ground and the birds of the air. (13)Then a voice told him, “Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.”

(14)“Surely not, sir!” Peter replied. “I have never eaten anything impure or unclean.”

(15)The voice spoke to him a second time, “Do not call impure what Yahweh has made clean.”

(16)This happened three times, and immediately the vessel was taken back to Heaven.

(17)While Peter was wondering about the meaning of the vision, the men sent by Cornelius, having asked for Simon's house, stood at the door. (18)They called out, asking if Simon, called Peter, was staying there.

(19)While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit of Yahweh said to him, "There are three men who are looking for you. (20)So get up, go downstairs and do not hesitate to go with them, for I [Yahweh] have sent them."

(21)Peter went down to the men and said, "I'm the one you are looking for. Why have you come?"

(22)They replied, "Cornelius the centurion, a righteous and Yahweh-fearing man, who is respected by all the Jewish people, was ordered by a holy angel to have you come to his house so that he could listen to your words." (23a)Then Peter called them in to be his guests.

The overall message is that there is no food, no animal and no human being to be considered "unclean" or "impure," that is, non worthy to be considered good, for everything and everybody was created by Yahweh.

Peter at Cornelius' house [Ac 10:23b-48]

(Ac 10:23b)The next day [Peter] started out with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa went along. (24)The following day he arrived in Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. (25)As Peter entered the house, Cornelius met him and fell at his feet in reverence. (26)But Peter made him get up. "Stand up." he said, "I am only a man myself."

(27)Talking with him, he went inside and, founding a large gathering of people, (28) said to them: "You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or visit him. But Yahweh has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean. (29)So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection. Now I ask you, why do you sent for me?"

(30)Cornelius answered: "Four days ago I was in my house praying at this hour, at the ninth hour [three PM]. Suddenly a man in shining clothes stood before me (31)and said, 'Cornelius, Yahweh has heard your prayer and your gifts to the poor had been remembered before Yahweh. (32)Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. He is a guest in the home of Simon the tanner, who lives by the sea.' (33)So I sent for you immediately, and it was good of you to come. Now we are all here in the presence of Yahweh to listen to everything the Lord Yahweh has commanded you to tell us."

(34)Then Peter began to speak and said: "I now truly realize that Yahweh does not shows favoritism (35)but accepts men from every nation who fear Him and do what is right. (36)[Regarding] the message Yahweh sent to the people of Israel, telling the Good News of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all, (37)you know what has happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached. (38)Yahweh anointed Jesus of Nazareth with His Spirit and power, and he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because Yahweh was with him.

(39)We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a cross, (40)but Yahweh raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen, (41)not by all the people, but by witnesses whom Yahweh had already chosen by us who ate and drank with him after his

resurrection from the dead. (42)And he [Jesus] commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he was appointed by Yahweh as judge of the living and the dead. (43) And all the prophets testify about this: everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

(44)While Peter was still speaking these words, the Spirit of Yahweh came on all who were listening to the Word. (45)The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Spirit of Yahweh had been poured out even on the Gen-tiles. (46)For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising Yahweh.

Then Peter said, (47)“Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They have received the Spirit of Yahweh just as we have.” (48)So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked Peter to stay with them for a few days.

Cornelius was only intending to honor him, but Peter did not want to allow any possibility for a misunderstanding: no created being has to be worshipped. And this means that the habit of kneeling in front of high ranking prelates, kissing their ring and other similar acts are absolutely not justified. Not to speak of the kneeling and praying in front of the tomb of some officially recognized saint or high prelate!

All men of every time, country and religion can find access to Yahweh through Jesus, and through Jesus alone, as Jesus alone opens the way to Him. Between men and Yahweh there is no other intermediary or intercessor -no priest or pastor, no angel, no recognized “saint,” not even Jesus' mother.

As a further confirmation that Jesus was a man, not a “god,” not a part of a trinity, Peter points to the fact that Jesus was anointed Messiah, raised from the dead and appointed as judge of everybody by Yahweh, not by his own initiative.

The baptism -whose ceremony can be performed in various ways, with or without immersion in or pouring of water- is actually “by the Spirit of Yahweh” as it indicates the spiritual communion between that man and Yahweh. Here, the fact that they were baptized after entering in spiritual communion with Yahweh (after “receiving the Spirit of Yahweh”) shows what baptism truly is: a ceremony of introduction of a new believer in the Christian Community, symbolizing that, as the water cleanses the man’s body, so his soul is cleansed by Jesus Christ’s grace.

Peter explains his actions [Ac 11:1-18]

(Ac 11:1)The apostles and the brothers living in Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the Word of Yahweh. (2)So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him (3)and said, “You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them.”

(4)Then Peter explained to them precisely from the beginning; (5)“I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision. I saw a kind of vessel coming down, like a large sheet being let down from Heaven by its four corners, and it came down to where I was. (6)I looked into it and saw the four-footed animals, the wild beasts and the reptiles of the ground, and the birds of the sky. (7)Then I heard a voice telling me, ‘Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.’

(8)I replied, ‘Surely not, Sir! Nothing impure or unclean has ever entered my mouth.’

(9)And the voice spoke from Heaven a second time, ‘Do not call anything impure that Yahweh has made clean.’ (10)This happened three times, and then it was all pulled up to Heaven again.

(11)Right then three men who had been sent to me from Caesarea stopped at the house where I was staying. (12)The Spirit of Yahweh told me to have no hesitation about going with them. These six brothers also went with me, and we entered the man's house. (13)He told us how he had seen an angel appear in his house and say, 'Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. (14)He will tell you words through which you and all your household will be saved.'

(15)As I began to speak, the Spirit of Yahweh came on them as He had come on us at the beginning. (16)Then I remembered what the Lord Jesus had said: '**John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Spirit of Yahweh.**' (17)So if Yahweh gave them the same gift as He gave us, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could oppose Yahweh?"

(18)When they heard this, they became quiet and praised Yahweh, saying, "So then, Yahweh has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life."

The Church in Antioch [Ac 11:19-30]

(Ac 11:19)Now those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, telling the Word to none except Jews. (20)Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and spoke to Greeks also, telling them the Good News about the Lord Jesus. (21)The Lord Yahweh's hand was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord Yahweh.

(22)News of this reached the ears of the Church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. (23)When he arrived and he saw the grace of Yahweh, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord Yahweh with all their hearts. (24)He was a good man, full of the Spirit of Yahweh and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord Yahweh.

(25)Then he [Barnabas] went to Tarsus to look for Saul, (26)and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the Church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.

(27)In those days some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. (28)One of them, named Agabus, stood up and through the Spirit of Yahweh predicted that there would be a severe famine over the whole land [Palestine]. And this happened during the reign of Claudius. (29)Then the disciples, each according to his means, decided to provide help for the brothers living in Judea. (30)This they did, sending their gifts to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.

How near Christianity was to becoming only another kind of Judaism! All the first Christians were Jews and all their traditions would have convinced them to keep the Good News for themselves, excluding completely the Gentiles, that is, all other men.

Peter's miraculous escape from prison [Ac 12:1-19a]

(Ac 12:1)It was about this time that king Herod laid his hands on some who belonged to the Church, to persecute them. (2)He killed James, the brother of John, with the sword. (3)Then, when he saw that this pleased the [chiefs of the] Jews, he proceeded to size Peter also. This was during the Days of Unleavened Bread. (4)After arresting him, he put him in prison, handing him over to be guarded by four squads of four soldiers each, intending to bring him out to the people after the Passover.

(5) So Peter was kept in prison, and the Church was earnestly praying to Yahweh for him.

(6) The very night when Herod was to bring him out to the people, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries before the door were guarding the prison. (7) Suddenly an angel of the Lord Yahweh appeared and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up. "Quick, get up!" he said, and the chains fell off his hands.

(8) Then the angel said to him, "Put on your belt and sandals." And he did so. "Wrap your cloak around you and follow me," he told him. (9) Peter went out and followed him, but he did not know that what the angel was doing was real; he thought he was seeing a vision. (10) They passed the first and second guards and came to the iron gate leading to the city. It opened before them by itself. They went out and walked along one street; and suddenly the angel left him.

(11) Then Peter came to himself and said, "Now I know that the Lord Yahweh has really sent His angel and rescued me from Herod's hands and from everything the Jewish people were expecting."

(12) After he had thought over this, he went to the house of Mary the mother of John, called Mark, where many people had gathered and were praying. (13) When he knocked at the outer entrance, a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer. (14) When she recognized Peter's voice, in her joy she did not open the door but run in and told that Peter was standing at the door.

(15) "You're out of your mind," they told her. But she kept insisting that it was so. They said, "It is his angel."

(16) But Peter kept on knocking. And when they opened the door and saw him, they were astonished. (17) Motioning with his hand for them to be silent, he described to them how the Lord Yahweh had brought him out of prison. "Tell James and the brothers about this," he said, and then he left for another place.

(18) In the morning, there was no small commotion among the soldiers as to what had become of Peter. (19a) After Herod had a thorough search made for him and did not find him, he examined the guards and ordered that they be executed.

Herod Agrippa I's death [Ac 12:19b-25]

(Ac 12:19b) Then Herod went from Judea to Caesarea and stayed there a while. (20) At that time he had been quarreling with the people of Tyre and Sidon; they now joined together and sought an audience with him. Having secured the support of Blastus, the king's chamberlain, they asked for peace, because they depended on the king's country for their food supply.

(21) On the appointed day Herod, wearing his royal robes, sat on his throne and made an oration to them. (22) The people shouted, "This is the voice of a god, not of a man." (23) Immediately, because Herod did not give praise to Yahweh, an angel of the Lord Yahweh struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died.

(24) And the Word of Yahweh continued to increase and spread.

(25) Then Barnabas and Saul, having finished their mission, returned from Jerusalem taking with them John, also called Mark.

Barnabas and Saul sent off [Ac 13:1-3]

(Ac 13:1) In the Church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod

the tetrarch) and Saul. (2)While they were worshipping the Lord Yahweh and fasting, the Spirit of Yahweh said, "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." (3)So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.

On Cyprus [Ac 13:4-12]

(Ac 13:4)The two of them, sent on their way by the Spirit of Yahweh, went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus. (5)When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the Word of Yahweh in the Jewish synagogues. John [Mark] was with them as their helper.

(6)Then they traveled through the whole island until they came to Paphos. There they met a Jewish sorcerer and false prophet named Bar-Jesus, (7)who was an attendant of the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, an intelligent man. He sent for Barnabas and Saul because he wanted to hear the Word of Yahweh. (8)But Elymas the sorcerer (for that is what his name means) opposed them and tried to turn the proconsul from the Faith. (9)Then Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Spirit of Yahweh, looked straight at him and said, (10)"You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord Yahweh? (11)Now the hand of the Lord Yahweh is against you. You will be blind and you will not see the sun till the stated time."

Immediately mist and darkness came over him, and he groped about, seeking someone to lead him by the hand. (12)When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ.

In Pisidian Antioch [Ac 13:13-52]

(Ac 13:13)From Paphos, Paul and his companions sailed to Perga in Pamphylia, where John [Mark] left them to return to Jerusalem. (14)From Perga they went on to Antioch of Pisidia. On the Sabbath they entered the synagogue and sat down. (15)After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the synagogue rulers sent word to them saying, "Brothers, if you have a message of encouragement for the people, speak."

(16)Then Paul, standing up, motioned with his hand and said: "Men of Israel and you [Gentiles] who worship Yahweh, listen to me! (17)[Yahweh] the God of the people of Israel chose our fathers; He made the people prosper during their stay in Egypt, with mighty power he led them out of that country, (18)He endured their conduct and cared for them for about forty years in the desert, (19)He overthrew seven nations in Canaan and gave their land as inheritance [to His people]. (20)All this took about four hundred and fifty years.

After this, Yahweh gave them judges until the time of Samuel the prophet. (21)Then the people asked for a king, and He gave them Saul son of Kish, of the tribe of Benjamin, who ruled forty years. (22)After removing Saul, He made David their king. He testified concerning him: 'I have found David son of Jesse a man after My own heart; he will do everything I want him to do.'

(23)From this man's descendants Yahweh has brought to Israel the Savior Jesus, as He promised. (24)Before the coming of Jesus, John preached repentance and baptism to all the people of Israel. (25)As John was completing his work, he said: 'Who do you think I am? I am not that one. No, but one is coming after me, whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.'

(26)Brothers, children of Abraham, and you Yahweh-fearing [Gentiles], it is to us that this message of salvation has been sent. (27)The people of Jerusalem and their rulers did not recognize Jesus, yet in condemning him they fulfilled the words of the prophets that are read every Sabbath. (28)Though they found no proper ground for a death sentence, they asked Pilate to have him executed. (29)When they had carried out all that was written about him, they took him down from the cross and laid him in a tomb. (30) But Yahweh raised him from the dead, (31)and for many days he was seen by those who had traveled with him from Galilee to Jerusalem. They are now his witnesses to our people.

(32)We tell you the Good News: What He promised to our fathers (33)Yahweh has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus. As it is written in the second Psalm:

‘You are My Son; today I have become your Father.’

(34)The fact that Yahweh raised him from the dead, never to decay, is stated in these words:

‘I will give you the holy and sure blessing promised to David.’

(35)So it is stated elsewhere:

‘You will not let Your Holy One see decay.’

(36)For when David had served Yahweh’s purpose in his generation, he fell asleep; he was buried with his fathers and saw his body decay. (37)But the One whom Yahweh raised from the dead did not see decay.

(38)Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through him [Jesus] the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. (39)Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses. (40)Take care that what the prophets had said does not happen to you:

(41) ‘Look, you scoffers, wonder and perish, for I am going to do something in your days that you would never believe, even if someone told you.’

(42)As Paul and Barnabas were leaving the synagogue, they invited them to speak further about these things on the next Sabbath. (43)When the congregation was dismissed, many of the Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who talked with them and urged them to continue in the grace of Yahweh.

(44)On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the Word of the Lord Yahweh. (45)When the [chiefs of the] Jews saw the crowd, they were filled with jealousy and talked abusively against what Paul was saying.

(46)Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: “We had to speak the Word of Yahweh to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles. (47)For this is what the Lord Yahweh has commanded us:

‘I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the Earth.’”

(48)When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the Word of the Lord Yahweh; and all who believed were appointed for eternal life.

(49)The Word of the Lord Yahweh spread through the whole region. (50)But the [chiefs of the] Jews incited the Yahweh-fearing women of high standing and the leading men of the city. They stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region. (51)So they shook the dust from their feet in protest against them and went to Iconium. (52)And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Spirit of Yahweh.

Paul missed no occasion to affirm and confirm that Jesus, even if son of Yahweh, was actually a man, not a “god,” not a person of a trinity.

Forgiveness will be offered, by Jesus only, both in this life and after death and, in both cases, can be accepted or refused. Jesus is the only intermediary between men and Yahweh as there is no other intermediary or intercessor -no priest or pastor, no angel, no recognized “saint,” not even Jesus' mother. And Yahweh always forgives, every time the request of forgiveness is accompanied by repentance.

In Iconium [Ac 14:1-7]

(Ac 14:1) At Iconium Paul and Barnabas went as usual into the Jewish synagogue. There they spoke so effectively that a great number of Jews and Gentiles believed. (2) But the [chiefs of the] Jews, who refused to believe, stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers. (3) Yet Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there, speaking boldly of the Lord Yahweh, who confirmed His Word of grace by enabling them to do miraculous signs and wonders. (4) The people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews, others with the apostles. (5) When there was a plot among the Gentiles and the Jews, together with their leaders, to mistreat them and stone them, (6) they found out about it and fled to the Lycaonian cities of Lystra and Derbe and to the surrounding country, (7) where they continued to preach the Good News.

In Lystra and Derbe [Ac 14:8-20]

(Ac 14:8) In Lystra there sat a man crippled in his feet, who was lame from birth and had never walked. (9) He listened to Paul as he was speaking. Paul looked directly at him, saw that he had faith to be healed (10) and called out, “Stand up on your feet!” At that, the man jumped up and began to walk.

(11) When the crowd saw what Paul had done, they shouted in the Lycaonian language, “The gods have come down to us in human form!” (12) Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul they called Hermes because he was the chief speaker. (13) And the priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the city, brought bulls and wreaths to the city gates because he and the crowd wanted to offer sacrifices to them.

(14) When the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of this, they tore their clothes and rushed out into the crowd, shouting: (15) “Men, why are you doing this? We too are only men, human like you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to [Yahweh] the living God, who made the sky and the land and the sea and everything in them. (16) In the past generations, He let all nations go their own way.

(17) Yet He has not let Himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from the sky and crops in their seasons; He provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy.” (18) Even with these words, they had difficulty keeping the crowd from sacrificing to them.

(19) Then some Jews came from Pisidian Antioch and Iconium and won the crowd over. They stoned Paul and dragged him outside the city, thinking he was dead. (20) But when the disciples had gathered around him, he got up and went back into the city. The next day he and Barnabas left for Derbe.

As seen many times, to be healed is necessary to have faith, that is, to be convinced that the healing is actually possible. Nothing more is requested.

The return to Antioch in Syria [Ac 14:21-28]

(Ac 14:21) They preached the Good News in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Pisidian Antioch, (22) strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith, for it is necessary to go through many hardships to enter the Kingdom of Yahweh. (23) [Paul] and Barnabas [appointed elders for them in each Church] and, after praying and fasting, committed them to the Lord Yahweh, in whom they had put their trust. (24) After going through Pisidia, they came into Pamphylia, (25) and when they had preached the Word in Perga, they went down to Attalia.

(26) From Attalia they sailed back to Syrian Antioch, where they had been committed to the grace of Yahweh for the work they had completed. (27) On arriving there, they gathered the Church together and reported all that Yahweh had done through them and how He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. (28) And they stayed a long time with the disciples.

It is always necessary to put someone in charge of something -in this case of the proper teaching and the running of the Christian Community (the Local Church). Unfortunately, these men tend to feel important and in a position of power, and so often give rise to heavier and heavier organizations.

The Council at Jerusalem [Ac 15:1-21]

(Ac 15:1) Some men came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers: "Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved." (2) This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question. (3) The Church sent them on their way, and as they traveled through Phoenicia and Samaria, they told how the Gentiles had been converted, making all the brothers very glad. (4) When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the Church and the apostles and elders, to whom they reported everything Yahweh had done through them.

(5) Then some of the believers who had belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, "They must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses."

(6) The apostles and elders met to consider this question. (7) After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: "Brothers, you know that from the beginning Yahweh made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the Gospel and believe. (8) Yahweh, who knows the heart, showed that He accepted them by giving His Spirit to them, just as He did to us. (9) He made no distinction between us and them, for He purified their hearts by faith. (10) Now then, why do you try to test Yahweh by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear? (11) We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are."

(12) The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling about the miraculous signs and wonders Yahweh had done among the Gentiles through them. (13) When they finished, James spoke up: "Brothers, listen to me. (14) Simon has described to us how Yahweh came, first, to take out of the Gentiles a people for Himself. (15) The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written:

(16) 'After this I will return and rebuild David's fallen tent. Its ruins I will rebuild, and I will restore it, (17) that the remnant of [Israel's] men may seek the Lord Yahweh, and so all the Gentiles who bear My Name, says the Lord Yahweh, who does these things (18) that have been known for ages.'

(19) It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to Yahweh. (20) Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood. (21) For Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath."

The "Judaizers" insisted that before a Gentile could become a true Christian he had to keep the law of Moses, and the proof of such compliance was circumcision. What a risk for Christianity to become only another kind of Judaism! Circumcision -generally speaking, the keeping of Jewish religious traditions- was and is not a requirement for salvation; only faith in Jesus Christ as savior of everybody is, for both Jews and Gentiles.

The Council's letter to Gentile believers [Ac 15:22-35]

(Ac 15:22) Then the apostles and elders, with the whole Church, decided to choose some of their own men and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas: Judas (called Barsabbas) and Silas, two men who were leaders among the brothers, (23) after writing the following things:

*'The apostles and elders, your brothers,
To the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia.
Greetings.*

(24) We have heard that some went out from us without our authorization and disturbed you, troubling your minds by what they said. (25) So we all agreed to choose some men and to send them to you with our dear friends Barnabas and Paul -(26) men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. (27) Therefore we are sending Judas and Silas to confirm the same things. (28) It seemed good to the Spirit of Yahweh and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements: (29) You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid these things. Farewell.'

(30) They were sent off and went down to Antioch, where they gathered the Church together and delivered the letter. (31) The people read it and were glad for its encouraging message. (32) Judas and Silas, who were prophets, with many words did encourage and strengthen the brothers. (33) After spending some time there, they were sent off by the brothers with the blessing of peace to return to those who had sent them (34) But Silas decided to remain there and only Judas left. (35) Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, where they and many others taught and preached the Word of the Lord Yahweh.

At the end of what is known as the Council of Jerusalem (the first of the Christian Church) there was an unanimous agreement. The first and only time in the history of the Christian Church that a decision (of a Council or a Synod) was unanimous!

Disagreement between Paul and Barnabas [Ac 15:36-41]

(Ac 15:36) Some time later Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us go back and visit the brothers in all the towns where we preached the Word of the Lord Yahweh and see how

they are doing.” (37)Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them, (38) but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work. (39)They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, (40)but Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord Yahweh. (41) He went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the Churches.

Timothy joins Paul and Silas [Ac 16:1-5]

(Ac 16:1)He [Paul] came also to Derbe and Lystra, where a disciple named Timothy lived, whose mother was a Jewess and a believer, but whose father was a Greek. (2)The brothers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him. (3)Paul wanted to take him along on the journey, so he circumcised him because of the Jews who lived in that area, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. (4)As they traveled from town to town, they delivered the decisions reached by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem, for them to observe. (5)So the Churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers.

An expedient, to facilitate his missionary work with the Jews. In effect, the equivalent of having the Scriptures translated in local languages, without imposing the use of Greek and, later, of Latin.

Paul’s vision of the man of Macedonia [Ac 16:6-10]

(Ac 16:6)Then they traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Spirit of Yahweh from preaching the Word in Asia. (7)When they reached Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Yahweh would not allow them to. (8)So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. (9)During the night Paul had a vision. A man of Macedonia was standing and begging him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” (10)After having seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that Yahweh had called us to preach the Gospel to them.

Lydia’s conversion in Philippi [Ac 16:11-15]

(Ac 16:11)From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, and the next day on to Neapolis. (12)From there we traveled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia. And we stayed there several days.

(13)On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We set down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. (14)A woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshipper of Yahweh, was listening. The Lord Yahweh opened her heart to respond to Paul’s words. (15)When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us saying, “If you consider me a believer in the Lord Jesus, come and stay at my house.” And she persuaded us.

Paul and Silas in prison [Ac 16:16-40]

(Ac 16:16)Once when we were going to the prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. (17)This girl followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, “These men are servants of [Yahweh] the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved.” (18)She kept this up for many days. Finally Paul became so troubled that

he turned around and said to the spirit, "In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!" At that moment the spirit left her.

(19)When the owners of the slave girl realized that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities. (20)They brought them before the magistrates and said, "These men are Jews, and are throwing our city into an uproar (21)by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice."

(22)Then the crowd joined in the attack against them [Paul and Silas], and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten. (23)After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. (24)Upon receiving such orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

(25)About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to Yahweh, and the other prisoners were listening to them. (26)Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everybody's chains came loose. (27)The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. (28)But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!"

(29)He [the jailer] called a light, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. (30)He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

(31)They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved -you and your household." (32)Then they spoke the Word of the Lord Yahweh to him and to all the others in his house. (33)At that our of the night he took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized. (34)The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in Yahweh -he and his whole family.

(35)When it was daylight, the magistrates sent their officers to the jailer with the order: "Release those men." (36)The jailer told Paul, "The magistrates have ordered that you and Silas be released. Now you can leave. Go in peace."

(37)But Paul said to them: "They beat us publicly without a trial, even though we are Roman citizens, and threw us into prison. And now they want to get rid of us quietly? Absolutely not! Let them come themselves and escort us out."

(38)The officers reported this to the magistrates, and when they heard that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, they were alarmed. (39)They came to appease them and escorted them [from the prison], requesting them to leave the city. (40)After they came out of the prison, they went to Lydia's house, where they met with the brothers and encouraged them. Then they left.

In Thessalonica [Ac 17:1-9]

(Ac 17:1)When they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they [Paul and Silas] came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue. (2)As his custom was, Paul went there, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, (3)explaining and proving that the Christ [Messiah] had to suffer and rise from the dead, and that "This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ [Messiah]." (4)Some of them were persuaded and, as did a large number of Yahweh-fearing Greeks and not a few prominent women, joined Paul and Silas.

(5)But the [chiefs of the] Jews were jealous; so they rounded up some bad characters from the marketplace, formed a mob and started a riot in the city. They rushed to Jason's house in search of Paul and Silas in order to bring them out to the assembly of the people. (6)But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city officials, shouting: "These men who have caused trouble all over the Earth have now come here, (7)and Jason has welcomed them into his house. They are all defying Caesar's decrees, saying that there is another king, Jesus." (8)When they heard this, the crowd and the city officials were thrown into turmoil. (9)Then they made Jason and the others post bond and let them go.

In Berea [Ac 17:10-15]

(Ac 17:10)As soon as it was night, the brothers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea. On arriving there, they went to the synagogue of the Jews. (11)Now these were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, and they received the Word with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if the things were really so. (12)Many of them believed, as did also some of the prominent Greek women and not a few men.

(13)When the [chiefs of the] Jews in Thessalonica learned that Paul was preaching the Word of Yahweh at Berea, they went there too, agitating the crowds and stirring them up. (14)But the brothers immediately sent Paul to the coast, but Silas and Timothy stayed there. (15)The men who were escorting Paul brought him to Athens and then left with instructions for Silas and Timothy to join him as soon as possible.

In Athens [Ac 17:16-34]

(Ac 17:16)While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. (17)So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the Yahweh-fearing Greeks, as well in the marketplaces day by day with those who happened to be there. (18)A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to dispute with him. Some of them asked, "What is this babbler trying to say?" Others, because Paul was preaching the Good News about Jesus and the resurrection, "He seems to be advocating foreign gods." (19)Then they took him and brought him to the Aeropagus, saying, "May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? (20)You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we want to know what they mean." (21)(In effect, all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.)

(22)Paul then stood up in the middle of the Aeropagus and said: "Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. (23)For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you.

(24)Yahweh, the God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of Heaven and Earth and does not live in temples built by hands. (25)And He is not served by human hands, as if He needed anything, because He Himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. (26)From one man He made every nation of men that inhabit the whole Earth; and He determined the times set for them and the boundaries of their lands. (27)This so that they would seek -even if gropingly- and find Yahweh. In effect, He is not far from each one of us. (28)As some of your poets have said, 'For in Him we live and move and have our being. We are indeed His offspring.'

(29)Therefore, since we are Yahweh's offspring, we should not think that the Divine Being is like gold or silver or stone; an image made by man's design and skill. (30)Now Yahweh, overlooking the times of such ignorance, commands all people everywhere to convert. (31)For He has set a day when He will judge the world with justice by the man He has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by rising him from the dead."

(32)When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, "We want to hear you again on this subject." (33)At that, Paul left the meeting. (34)But a few men became followers of Paul and believed. Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Aeropagus, a woman named Damaris, and others with them.

There is only One God, Maker of everything, and any kind of temple service, with the use of "sacred" objects and stated rituals, is totally useless. The only essential -and necessary point- is to have faith in Him.

As a further confirmation that Jesus was a man, not a "god," not a part of a trinity, Paul points to the fact that Jesus was anointed as judge of everybody by Yahweh, not by his own initiative.

In Corinth [Ac 18:1-17]

(Ac 18:1)After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. (2)There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, (3)and because he was of the same trade, he stayed and worked with them, for they were tentmakers. (4)Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks.

(5)Then, when Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ [Messiah]. (6)But when they [their chiefs] opposed Paul and became abusive, he shook out his clothes in protest and said to them, "Your blood be on your own heads! I am clear of my responsibility. From now on I will go to the Gentiles." (7)Then Paul left the synagogue and went next door to the house of Titius Justus, a worshipper of Yahweh.

(8)Crispus, the Synagogue ruler, and his entire household believed in the Lord Jesus; and many of the Corinthians who heard him believed and were baptized.

(9)One night the Lord Jesus spoke to Paul in a vision: "Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. (10)For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city." (11)So he stayed for a year and a half, teaching them the Word of Yahweh.

(12)While Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, all the [chiefs of the] Jews made an attack on Paul and brought him into court. (13)"This man," they charged, "is persuading the people to worship Yahweh in ways contrary to the law."

(14)Just as Paul was about to speak, Gallio said to the [chiefs of the] Jews, "If you were making a complaint about some misdemeanor or serious crime, O Jews, I would listen to you following the law. (15)But since it involves questions about words and names and your own law -settle the matter yourselves. I will not be a judge of such things." (16)So he had them ejected from the court. (17)Then they all turned on Sosthenes the synagogue ruler and beat him in front of the court. But Gallio showed no concern whatever.

The return to Antioch in Syria [Ac 18:18-22]

(Ac 18:18) Paul stayed on in Corinth for many days. Then he left the brothers and sailed for Syria, accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila. He had his hair cut off at Cenchrea because of a vow he had taken. **(19)** Then they arrived at Ephesus, where he left them. He himself went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. **(20)** When they asked him to spend more time with them, he declined. **(21)** But as he left, he promised, "I will come back if it is Yahweh's will." Then he set sail from Ephesus. **(22)** When he landed at Caesarea, he went up and greeted the Church and then went down to Antioch.

Apollos [Ac 18:23-28]

(Ac 18:23) After spending some time [in Antioch], Paul set out from there and traveled from place to place throughout the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples.

(24) Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. **(25)** He had been instructed in the Way of the Lord Jesus, and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John. **(26)** He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him with them and explained to him the Way of Yahweh more accurately.

(27) When Apollos wanted to go to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples there to welcome him. On arriving, he was a great help to those who by grace had believed. **(28)** For he vigorously refuted the [chiefs of the] Jews in public debate, proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ [Messiah].

Paul in Ephesus [Ac 19:1-12]

(Ac 19:1) While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples **(2)** and asked them, "Did you receive the Spirit of Yahweh when you believed?"

They answered, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Spirit of Yahweh."

(3) So Paul asked, "Then what baptism did you receive?"

"John's baptism," they replied.

(4) Paul said, "John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus." **(5)** After hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. **(6)** And, when Paul placed his hands on them, the Spirit of Yahweh came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied. **(7)** There were about twelve men in all.

(8) Then, Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the Kingdom of Yahweh. **(9)** But some of them became obstinate; they refused to believe and publicly maligned the Way. So Paul left them, took the disciples with him and had discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. **(10)** This went on for two years, so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the Word of the Lord Yahweh.

(11) Yahweh did extraordinary miracles through Paul, **(12)** so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them.

How simple was the ceremony of baptism at that time! In effect, nothing more in terms of formula, acts or objects is really needed.

Not that the material objects could have miraculous qualities, but only because for most of the people they represented the only means of contact with Paul. What made the healing possible was the overall faith of Paul and the people.

The sons of Sceva [Ac 19:13-22]

(Ac 19:13) Also some Jews who went around driving out evil spirits tried to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who were demon-possessed. They would say, "In the name of Jesus, whom Paul preaches, I command you to come out." (14) The seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. (15) And the evil spirit answered them, "Jesus I know, and I know about Paul, but who are you?" (16) Then the man who had the evil spirit jumped on them and overpowered them all. He gave them such a beating that they run out of the house naked and bleeding.

(17) When this became known to the Jews and Greeks living in Ephesus, they were all seized with fear, and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honor. (18) Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed their evil deeds. (19) A number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly. When they calculated the value of the scrolls, the total came to fifty thousand silver coins. (20) In this way the Word of the Lord Yahweh spread widely and grew in power.

(21) After all this had happened, Paul decided to go to Jerusalem, passing through Macedonia and Achaia. "After I have been there," he said, "I must visit Rome also." (22) He sent two of his helpers, Timothy and Erastus, to Macedonia, while he stayed in the province of Asia a little longer.

The riot in Ephesus [Ac 19:23-41]

(Ac 18:23) About that time there arose a great disturbance about the Way. (24) A silversmith named Demetrius, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought in no little business for the craftsmen. (25) He called them together, along with the workmen in related trades, and said: "Men, you know we receive a good income from this business. (26) And you see and hear how this fellow Paul has convinced and led astray large numbers of people here in Ephesus and in practically the whole province of Asia. He says that man-made gods are no gods at all. (27) There is danger not only that our trade will lose its good name, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be discredited, and the goddess herself, who is worshipped through the province of Asia and the world, will be robbed of her majesty."

(28) When they heard this, they were furious and began shouting: "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" (29) And the whole city was in an uproar. The people seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul's traveling companions from Macedonia, and all of them rushed into the theater. (30) Paul wanted to appear before the crowd, but the disciples would not let him. (31) Even some of the Asiarchs, friends of Paul, sent him a message, begging him not to venture into the theater.

(32) In the meantime, the assembly was in confusion: Some were shouting one thing, some another. Most of the people did not even know why they were there. (33) The [chiefs of the] Jews pushed Alexander to the front, and some of the crowd shouted instructions to him. Alexander motioned for silence in order to make a defense before the people. (34) But when they realized he was a Jew, they all shouted in unison for about two hours: "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!"

(35) The city chancellor quieted the crowd and said: "Men of Ephesus, who is the man who doesn't know that the city of Ephesus is the guardian of the temple of the great Ar-

temis and of her image, which fell from the sky? (36)Therefore, since these facts are undeniable, you ought to be quiet and not do anything rash. (37)You have brought these men here, though they have neither robbed temples nor blasphemed our goddess. (38)If, then, Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen have a grievance against anybody, the courts are open and there are proconsuls. They can press charges. (39)If there is anything further you want to bring up, it must be settled in an ordinary assembly. (40)As it is, we are in danger of being charged with rioting because of today's events. In that case we would not be able to account for this commotion, since there is no reason for it." (41)After he had said this, he dismissed the assembly.

How similar is this situation to considering "sacred" the images, statues, etc. of Christian "saints," Jesus, his mother and Yahweh Himself!

Through Macedonia and Greece [Ac 20:1-6]

(Ac 20:1)When the uproar had ended, Paul sent for the disciples and, after encouraging them, said good-bye and set out for Macedonia. (2)He traveled through that area, speaking many words of encouragement, and finally arrived in Greece, (3)where he stayed three months. Because the [chiefs of the] Jews made a plot against him just as he was about to sail for Syria, he decided to go back through Macedonia. (4)He was accompanied by Sopater son of Pyrrhus from Berea, Aristarchus and Secundus from Thessalonica, Gaius from Derbe, Timothy also, and Tychicus and Trophimus from the province of Asia. (5)These men went on ahead and waited for us at Troas. (6)But we sailed from Philippi after the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and five days later joined the others at Troas, where we stayed seven days.

Paul's last night at Troas [Ac 20:7-12]

(Ac 20:7)On the first day of the week [Sunday], we came together to break bread. Paul spoke to the people and, because he intended to leave the next day, kept on talking until midnight. (8)There were many lamps in the upstairs room where we were meeting. (9)Seated in a window was a young man named Eutycus, who was sinking into a deep sleep as Paul talked on and on. When he was sound asleep, he fell to the ground from the third story and was picked up as dead. (10)Then Paul went down, threw himself on the young man and put his arms around him. "Don't be alarmed," he said. "His soul is still in him!" (11)Then he went upstairs again and broke bread and ate. After talking until daylight, he left. (12)They took the young man home alive and were greatly comforted.

To note that only the breaking of bread is mentioned, without the sharing of the cup. It was done at the end of the communal meal, in remembrance of Jesus Christ's -once for ever and for all- sacrifice and death for the spiritual salvation of all men. The repetition of this act is not the repetition of Jesus' sacrifice on the Cross -as many Churches came to believe- but -as asked by Jesus- a remembrance of it and a reminder of the "New Covenant," the new "Christian" relationship between Yahweh and all men.

From Troas to Miletus [Ac 20:13-16]

(Ac 20:13)We went on ahead to the ship and sailed for Assos, where we were going to take Paul aboard. He had made this arrangement because he was going there on foot. (14)When he met us at Assos, we took him aboard and went on to Mitylene. (15)The

next day we set from there and arrived off Kios. The day after that we crossed over to Samos, and on the following day we arrived at Miletus. (16)Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus to avoid spending time in the province of Asia, for he was in a hurry to reach Jerusalem, if possible, by the day of Pentecost.

Paul's farewell to the Ephesian elders [Ac 20:17-38]

(Ac 20:17)From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the Church. (18)When they arrived, he said to them: "You know how I lived when I was with you, from the first day I came into the province of Asia. (19)I served the Lord Yahweh with great humility and tears, although I was severely tested by the plots of the [chiefs of the] Jews. (20)I have never hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house. (21)I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to Yahweh in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus.

(22)And now, compelled by the Spirit of Yahweh, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. (23)I only know that the Spirit of Yahweh warns me that in every city prison and hardships are facing me. (24)However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, I only want to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me -the task of testifying to the Gospel of Yahweh's grace.

(25)Now I know that none of you among whom I have gone about preaching the Kingdom [of Yahweh] will ever see my face again. (26)Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of all men. (27)For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of Yahweh. (28)Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Spirit of Yahweh has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the Church of the Lord Jesus, which he bought with his own blood. (29)I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. (30)Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. (31)So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.

*(32)Now I commit you to Yahweh and to the Word of His grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. (33)I have not coveted anyone's silver or gold or clothing. (34)You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. (35)In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: '**It is more blessed to give than to receive.**'"*

(36)When he had said this, he knelt down with all of them and prayed. (37)They all wept as they embraced him and kissed him. (38)What grieved them most was his statement that they would never see his face again. Then they accompanied him to the ship.

Paul was a hard worker and a realist; he knew that the temptation of personal power and prestige is always there and that in every epoch many would succumb to it.

On to Jerusalem [Ac 21:1-16]

(Ac 21:1)After we had departed from them, we put out to sea and sailed straight to Cos. The next day we went to Rhodes and from there to Patara. (2)We found a ship crossing over to Phoenicia, went on board and set sail. (3)After sighting Cyprus and passing by the left side of it, we sailed on to Syria. We landed at Tyre, where our ship was to unload its cargo. (4)Finding the disciples there, we stayed with them seven days. Through the Spirit of Yahweh they told Paul not to go up to Jerusalem. (5)But after few

days, we left and continued on our way. All the disciples and their wives and children accompanied us out of the city, and there on the beach we knelt to pray. (6)After saying good-bye to each other, we went aboard the ship, and they returned home.

(7)We continued our voyage from Tyre and landed at Ptolemais, where we greeted the brothers and stayed with them for only a day. (8)Leaving the next day, we reached Caesarea and stayed at the house of Philip the evangelist, one of the Seven. (9)He had four unmarried daughters who prophesied.

(10)After we had been there a number of days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. (11)Coming over to us, he took Paul's belt, tied his own hand and feet with it and said, "The Spirit of Yahweh says, 'In this way the [chiefs of the] Jews of Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles.'"

(12)When we heard this, we and the people there pleaded with him not to go up to Jerusalem. (13)Then Paul answered, "Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." (14)When he would not be dissuaded, we gave up and said, "The Lord Yahweh's will be done."

(15)Few days later, we got ready and went up to Jerusalem. (16)Some of the disciples from Caesarea accompanied us and brought us to the home of Mnason, where we were to stay. He was a man from Cyprus and one of the early disciples.

Philip, as well as many other disciples and even some apostles, as Peter (Mk 1:29-30; Mt 8:14; Lk 4:38) was married. And so it has been for more than 1000 years of Church history.

Note. It was the Synod of Rome, called by Pope Gregory VII in AD 1075 that imposed clerical celibacy. Married priests were excommunicated. As a result, the priests of the Roman Church become a class apart, cut off from the most sacred and elevating experience of family life.

Paul's arrival at Jerusalem [Ac 21:17-26]

(Ac 21:17)When we arrived at Jerusalem, the brothers received us warmly. (18)The next day Paul went with us to see James, and all the elders were present. (19)Paul greeted them and reported in detail what Yahweh had done among the Gentiles through his ministry.

(20)When they heard this, they praised Yahweh. Then they said to Paul: "You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews have believed, and all of them are zealous for the law. (21)They have been informed that you teach all the Jews who live among the Gentiles to turn away from Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or live according to our customs. (22)What shall we do? They will certainly hear that you have come, (23)so do what we tell you. There are four men with us who have made a vow. (24)Take these men with you, join in their purification rites and pay their expenses, so that they can have their heads shaved. Then everybody will know there is no truth in these reports about you, but that you yourself are living in obedience to the law. (25)As for the Gentile believers, we have written to them our decision that they should abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality."

(26)So Paul took the men and the next day purified himself along with them. Then he went to the Temple to give notice of the date when the days of purification would end and the offering would be made for each of them.

Paul arrested [Ac 21:27-36]

(Ac 21:27) When the seven days were nearly over, some [chiefs of the] Jews from the province of Asia saw Paul at the Temple. They stirred up the whole crowd and seized him, (28) shouting, "Men of Israel, help us! This is the man who teaches all men everywhere against our people and our law and this place. And besides, he has brought Greeks into the Temple area and defiled this holy place." (29) (In effect, they had seen Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with him and assumed that Paul had brought him into the Temple.)

(30) The whole city was aroused, and the people came running. Seizing Paul, they dragged him from the Temple, and immediately the gates were shut. (31) While they were trying to kill him, news reached the tribune of the cohort that the whole city of Jerusalem was in an uproar. (32) He at once took centurions and soldiers and run down to them. When the rioters saw the tribune and his soldiers, they stopped beating Paul.

(33) The tribune came up and arrested him and ordered him to be bound with two chains. Then he asked who he was and what he had done. (34) Some in the crowd shouted one thing and some another, and since the tribune could not get at the truth because of the uproar, he ordered that Paul be taken into the barracks. (35) When Paul reached the steps, because of the violence of the mob he had to be carried by the soldiers. (36) And the crowd that followed kept shouting, "Away with him!"

Paul speaks to the crowd [Ac 21:37-40; 22:1-21]

(Ac 21:37) As they were about to take Paul into the barracks, he asked the tribune, "May I say something to you?"

"Do you know Greek?" he replied. (38) "Aren't you the Egyptian who started a revolt and led four thousand terrorists out into the desert some time ago?"

(39) Paul answered, "I am a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no ordinary city. Please let me speak to the people."

(40) Having received the commander's permission, Paul stood on the steps and motioned to the crowd. When they were all silent, he said to them in the language of the Jews: (22:1) "Brothers and fathers, listen now to my defense."

(2) When they heard him speak to them in the language of the Jews, they became very quiet.

Then he said: (3) "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city. Under Gamaliel I was thoroughly trained in the law of our fathers and was just as zealous for Yahweh as any of you are today. (4) I persecuted this Way to death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison, (5) as also the High Priest and all the Council of the elders can testify. I obtained letters from them to the brothers in Damascus, and went there to bring these people as prisoners to Jerusalem to be punished.

(6) About the sixth hour [noon] as I came near to Damascus, suddenly a bright light from Heaven flashed around me. (7) I fell to the ground and heard a voice say to me, 'Saul! Saul! Why do you persecute me?'

(8) 'Who are you, Lord?' I asked.

'I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting,' he replied. (9) My companions saw the light, but did not hear the voice of him who was speaking to me.

(10) 'What shall I do, Lord Jesus?' I asked.

'Get up,' the Lord Jesus said, 'and go into Damascus. There you will be told all that you have been assigned to do.' (11) Then my companions led me by hand into Damascus, because the brilliance of the light had blinded me.

(12) A man named Ananias came to see me. He was a devout observer of the law and highly respected by all the Jews living there. (13) He stood beside me and said, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight!' And at that very moment I was able to see him.

(14) Then he said: '[Yahweh] the God of our fathers has chosen you to know His will and to see the Righteous One and to hear words from his mouth. (15) You will be his witness to all men of what you have seen and heard. (16) And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.'

(17) Then, when I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the Temple, I fell into a trance (18) and saw the Lord Jesus, who told me, '**Quick, leave Jerusalem immediately, because they will not accept your testimony about me.**'

(19) 'Lord Jesus,' I replied, 'these men know that I went in every synagogue to imprison and beat those who believe in you. (20) And when the blood of your witness Stephen was shed, I stood there giving my approval and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.'

(21) Then the Lord Jesus said to me, '**Go; I will send you far away to the Gentiles.**'"

Paul the Roman citizen [Ac 22:22-29]

(Ac 22:22) The crowd listened to Paul until he said this. Then they raised their voices and shouted, "Rid the Earth of him! He's not fit to live!"

(23) As they were shouting and throwing off their cloaks and flinging dust into the air, (24) the tribune ordered Paul to be taken into the barracks. He directed that he be flogged and questioned in order to find out why they were shouting at him like this. (25) But when they had tied him up with the throngs, Paul said to the centurion standing there, "Is it legal for you to flog a Roman citizen who hasn't even been found guilty?"

(26) When he heard this, the centurion went to the tribune and reported it. "What are you going to do?" he asked. "This man is a Roman citizen."

(27) The tribune went to Paul and asked, "Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?"

"Yes," he answered.

(28) Then the tribune said, "I had to pay a big price for my citizenship."

"But I was born a citizen," Paul replied.

(29) Those who were about to question him withdrew immediately. The tribune himself was alarmed when he realized that he was a Roman citizen and that he had bound him.

Before the Sanhedrin [Ac 22:30; 23:1-11]

(Ac 22:30) [The tribune] unbound him and, since he wanted to find out exactly why Paul was being accused by the [chiefs of the] Jews, the next day he ordered the chief priests and all the Sanhedrin to assemble. Then he brought Paul and had him stand among them.

(23:1) Paul looked straight at the Sanhedrin and said, "Brothers, I have acted before Yahweh in all good conscience to this day." (2) At this the High Priest Ananias ordered those standing near Paul to strike him on the mouth. (3) Then Paul said to him, "Yahweh will strike you, you whitewashed wall! You sit there to judge me according to the law, yet you yourself violate the law by commanding that I be struck!"

(4) Those who were standing near Paul said, "You dare to insult Yahweh's High Priest?"

(5) Paul replied, "Brothers, I did not know that he was the High Priest; for it is written: 'Do not speak evil about the ruler of your people.'"

(6)Then Paul, knowing that some of them were Sadducees and the others Pharisees, called out in the Sanhedrin, “Brothers, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee. I stand on trial because of my hope in the resurrection of the dead.” (7)When he said this, a dispute broke out between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. (8)(The Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, and that there are neither angels nor spirits, but the Pharisees acknowledged them all.)

(9)There was a great uproar, and some of the teachers of the law, who were Pharisees, stood up and argued vigorously, “We find nothing wrong with this man,” they said. “What if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him?” (10)The dispute became so violent that the tribune was afraid Paul would be torn to pieces by them. He ordered the troops to go down and take him away and bring him to the barracks.

(11)The following night the Lord Jesus stood near Paul and said, “**Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome.**”

The plot to kill Paul [Ac 23:12-22]

(Ac 23:12)When it was day the [chiefs of the] Jews formed a conspiracy and [some Jews] bound themselves with an oath not to eat or drink until they had killed Paul. (13) There were more than forty who were involved in this plot. (14)They went to the chief priests and elders and said, “We have taken a solemn oath not to eat anything until we have killed Paul. (15)Now then, you and the Sanhedrin petition the tribune to bring him before you on the pretext of wanting more accurate information about his case. We are ready to kill him before he gets here.”

(16)But the son of Paul’s sister heard of this plot, went into the barracks and told Paul.

(17)Then Paul called one of the centurions and said, “Take this young man to the tribune; he has something to tell him.” (18)So he took him, brought him to the tribune and said, “Paul, the prisoner, sent for me and asked me to bring this young man to you because he has something to tell you.”

(19)The tribune took him by the hand and, going aside, asked, “What is it you want to tell me?”

(20)He said, “The [chiefs of the] Jews have agreed to ask you to bring Paul before the Sanhedrin tomorrow on the pretext of wanting more accurate information about him. (21)Don’t give in to them, because more than forty men are waiting in ambush for him. They have taken an oath not to eat or drink until they have killed him. They are ready now, waiting for your consent.”

(22)The tribune dismissed the young man and cautioned him, “Don’t tell anyone that you have reported this to me.”

First, religious leaders ready and ordering other men to kill in Yahweh's Name!

Second, some men taking an oath before Yahweh to officialize their criminal intent! They considered Paul a danger to public morals and life and regarded it legitimate to physically eliminate him. And how many time the same was done even by Christians!

Paul transferred to Caesarea [Ac 23:23-35]

(Ac 23:23)Then he called two of his centurions and ordered them, “Get ready two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen to go to Caesarea at the third hour of the night [9 PM]. (24)Provide mounts for Paul so that he may be taken safely to Governor Felix.”

(25)He wrote a letter as follows:

(26)‘Claudius Lysias,

To His Excellency, Governor Felix:

Greetings,

(27)This man was sized by the [chiefs of the] Jews and they were about to kill him, but I came with my troops and rescued him, for I had learned that he is a Roman citizen. (28)I wanted to know why they were accusing him, so I brought him to their Sanhedrin. (29)I found that the accusation had to do with a question about their law, but there was no charge against him that deserved death or imprisonment. (30)When I was informed of a plot to be carried out against the man, I sent him to you at once. I also ordered his accusers to present to you their case against him.’

(31)So the soldiers, carrying out their orders, took Paul with them during the night and brought him as far as Antipatris. (32)The next day they let the cavalry go on with him, while they returned to the barracks. (33)When the cavalry arrived in Caesarea, they delivered the letter to the governor and handed Paul over to him. (34)The governor read the letter and asked what province he was from. Learning that he was from Cilicia, (35)he said, “I will hear you when your accusers get here.” Then he ordered Paul to be kept under guard in Herod’s palace.

The trial before Felix [Ac 24:1-27]

(Ac 24:1)Five days later the High Priest Ananias went down to Caesarea with some of the elders and a lawyer named Tertullus, and they brought their charges against Paul before the governor. (2)When he [Paul] was called in, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying, “We have enjoyed a long period of peace under you and by the reforms your foresight has brought for the people. (3)Everywhere and in every way, most excellent Felix, we acknowledge this with profound gratitude. (4)But in order not to weary you further, I would request that you be kind enough to hear us briefly.

(5)We have found this man to be a troublemaker, stirring up riots among the Jews all over the world. He is a ringleader of the Nazarene sect (6)and even tried to desecrate the Temple; so we seized him and wanted to judge him according to our law. (7)But the tribune Lysias came and with the use of much force snatched him from our hands (8)and ordered his accusers to come before you. By examining him yourself on these things, you will be able to learn the truth about the things of which we accuse him.”

(9)The [chiefs of the] Jews joined in the accusation, asserting that these things were so.

(10)When the governor motioned for him to speak, Paul replied: “Knowing that for a number of years you have been a judge over this nation, I gladly make my defense. (11)You can verify that no more than twelve days ago I went up to Jerusalem to worship, (12)and they did not find me arguing with anyone at the Temple, or stirring up a crowd in the synagogues or in the city. (13)And they cannot prove to you the charges they are now making against me. (14)However, I admit that I worship [Yahweh] the God of our fathers as a follower of the Way, which they call a sect. I believe everything that agrees with the Law and that is written in the Prophets, (15)and I have the same hope in Yahweh as these men, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked. (16)So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before Yahweh and man.

(17)Now, after several years, I came to Jerusalem to bring alms to my people and to present offerings. (18)I was ceremonially clean when they found me in the Temple. Not in the crowd, nor in any disturbance. (19)But some [chiefs of the] Jews from Asia ought

to be here before you and bring charges, if they have anything against me. (20)Or these who are here should state what crime they found in me when I stood before the Sanhedrin -(21)unless it was this one thing I shouted as I stood in their presence: 'It is concerning the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial before you today.'"

(22)Then Felix, who was well acquainted with the Way, adjourned them, saying, "When Lysias the tribune comes, I will decide your case." (23)He ordered the centurion to keep Paul under guard but to give him some freedom and to permit his friends to take care of his needs.

(24)Several days later Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was a Jewess. He sent for Paul and listened to him as he spoke about faith in Christ Jesus. (25)But, as he discoursed on righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and said, "That's enough! Go! When I have an opportunity, I will send for you." (26)At the same time he was hoping that Paul would offer him some money, so he sent for him frequently and talked with him.

(27)When two years had passed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus. And, desiring to grant a favor to the Jews, Felix left Paul in prison.

The trial before Festus [Ac 25:1-12]

(Ac 25:1)Three days after arriving in the province, Festus went up from Caesarea to Jerusalem, (2)where the chief priests and Jewish leaders appeared before him against Paul; and they urged him, (3)asking, as a favor to them against Paul, to have him transferred to Jerusalem, so they could prepare an ambush to kill him along the way. (4)Festus answered that Paul was being held at Caesarea, and he himself was going there soon. (5)And said, "Let some of your leaders come with me and press charges against the man, if he has done anything wrong."

(6)After spending eight or ten days with them, he went down to Caesarea, and the next day he took his seat in the court and ordered that Paul be brought before him. (7)When Paul appeared, the [chiefs of the] Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood around him, bringing many serious charges, which they could not prove.

(8)Then Paul made his defense: "I have done nothing wrong against the law of the Jews or against the Temple or against Caesar."

(9)Then Festus, wishing to do the [chiefs of the] Jews a favor, said to Paul, "Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and stand trial before me there on these charges?"

(10)Paul answered: "I am now standing before Caesar's court, where I have to be tried. I have not done any wrong to the Jews, as you yourself know very well. (11)If, however, I am guilty of doing anything deserving death, I do not refuse to die. But if the charges they brought against me are not true, no one has the right to hand me over to them. I appeal to Caesar!"

(12)After Festus had conferred with his council, he declared: "You have appealed to Caesar. To Caesar you will go!"

Festus consults king Agrippa II [Ac 25:13-22]

(Ac 25:13)A few days later king Agrippa and Bernice arrived at Caesarea to pay their respects to Festus. (14)Since they were spending many days there, Festus discussed Paul's case with the king. He said: "There is a man here whom Felix left as a prisoner. (15)When I went to Jerusalem, the chief priests and elders of the Jews came and asked that he be condemned.

(16)I told them that it is not the Roman custom to hand over any man before he had

faced his accusers and has had an opportunity to defend him-self against their charges. (17)When they came here with me, I did not delay the case, but took my seat in the court the next day and ordered the man to be brought in. (18)In his presence, his accusers did not charge him with any of the crimes I had expected. (19)Instead, they had some points of dispute with him about their own religion and about a dead man named Jesus who Paul claimed was alive. (20)I was at a loss about a dispute on such things; so I asked if he would be willing to go to Jerusalem and stand trial there on these charges. (21)When Paul made his appeal to be held over for the Emperor's decision, I ordered him held until I could send him to Caesar."

(22)Then Agrippa said to Festus, "I would like to hear this man myself."
He replied, "Tomorrow you will hear him."

Paul before Agrippa II [Ac 25:23-27; 26:1-32]

(Ac 25:23)The next day Agrippa and Bernice came with great pomp and entered the audience room with the tribunes and the leading men of the city. At the command of Festus, Paul was brought in. (24)Festus said: "King Agrippa, and all who are present, you see this man! The whole Jewish community has petitioned me about him in Jerusalem and here, shouting that he ought not to live any longer. (25)I found that he had done nothing deserving of death, but because he made his appeal to August I decided to send him [to Rome]. (26)But I have nothing definite to write to my lord about him. Therefore I have brought him before all of you, and especially before you, king Agrippa, so that as a result of this investigation I may have something to write. (27)For I think it is unreasonable to send on a prisoner without specifying the charges against him." (26:1) Then Agrippa said to Paul, "You have permission to speak for yourself."

So Paul motioned with his hand and began his defense: (2)"King Agrippa, I consider myself fortunate to stand before you today as I make my defense, (3)especially so because you are well acquainted with all the Jewish customs and controversies. Therefore, I beg you to listen to me patiently.

(4)The [chiefs of the] Jews all know my manner of life from my youth, spent in my own country and in Jerusalem. (5)They have known me from then and can testify, if they are willing, that I lived as a Pharisee, according to the strictest sect of our religion. (6)And now it is because of my hope in what Yahweh has promised our fathers that I am on trial, (7)that promise the twelve tribes of Israel are hoping to see fulfilled as they earnestly serve [Yahweh] day and night. O king, it is because of this hope that the [chiefs of the] Jews are accusing me. (8)Why should you consider it incredible that Yahweh raises the dead?

(9)I too was convinced that I ought to do many things to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth. (10)And that is just what I did in Jerusalem. On the authority of the chief priests I put many of the saints in prison, and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. (11)And often, in all the synagogues, I had them punished, trying to force them to blaspheme. In my raging fury against them, I even went to foreign cities to persecute them.

(12)Thus, as I was going to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests, (13)at about the sixth hour of the day [noon], O king, as I was on the road, I saw a light from Heaven, brighter than the sun, blazing around me and my companions. (14)We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice saying to me in the language of the Jews, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.'

(15)Then I asked, 'Who are you, Lord?'

'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,' the Lord Jesus replied. (16)'Now get up and stand on your feet. This is why I have appeared to you: to appoint you as a servant and a witness of what you have seen of me and of what I will show you. (17)I will rescue you from the [Jewish] people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you, (18)to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to Yahweh, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among the saints who have faith in me.'

(19)So then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the vision from Heaven, (20)and to those in Damascus, in Jerusalem, in all Judea and to the Gentiles, I preached that they should repent and turn to Yahweh and perform deeds worthy of their repentance. (21)That is why the [chiefs of the] Jews seized me in the Temple courts and tried to kill me. (22)But I have had Yahweh's help to this very day, in which I stand here and testify both to small and great. I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen -(23)that the Christ [Messiah] would suffer and, the first among the risen from the dead, would proclaim light to the [Jewish] people and to the Gentiles."

(24)As he thus made his defence, Festus shouted, "You are out of your mind, Paul! Your great learning is driving you insane."

(25)"I am not insane, most excellent Festus," Paul replied. "What I am saying is true and reasonable. (26)The king is familiar with these things, and I can speak freely to him. I am convinced that none of this has escaped his notice, because this was not done in a corner. (27)King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you do."

(28)And Agrippa to Paul, "A short time more, and you can persuade me to be a Christian"

(29)Then Paul, "Short time or long -I pray Yahweh that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am, except for these chains."

(30)The king rose, and with him the governor and Bernice and those sitting with them. (31)They withdrew, and while talking with one another, they said, "This man is not doing anything that deserves death or imprisonment."

(32)Agrippa said to Festus, "This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar."

The Jewish religious leaders could not accept that Yahweh's salvation was for the Gentiles too. And the same was and is still valid for many Christian Denominations: they can't and don't want to accept that salvation is for all men, Christian or not. (For a better understanding of this point, see "Thoughts. At the end of time, everybody will be with Yahweh. A direct consequence of Yahweh's justice and affection.")

Paul sails for Rome [Ac 27:1-12]

(Ac 27:1)When it was decided that we would sail for Italy, Paul and some other prisoners were handed over to a centurion named Julius, of the Augustan Cohort. (2)We boarded ship from Adramyttium about to sail for the ports along the coast of Asia, and we put out to sea. Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica, was with us.

(3)The next day we landed at Sidon; and Julius, in kindness to Paul, allowed him to go to his friends so they might provide for his needs. (4)From there we put out to sea and passed to the lee of Cyprus because the winds were against us. (5)When we had sailed across the open sea off the coast of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we landed at Myra in Lycia. (6)There the centurion found an Alexandrian ship sailing for Italy and put us on

board. (7) *We made slow headway for many days and had difficulty arriving off Cnidus. Then, as the wind+ did not allow us to hold our course, we sailed to the lee of Crete, op-posite to Salmone. (8) We moved along the coast with difficulty and came to a place cal-led Fair Havens, near the town of Lasea.*

(9) *Much time had been lost, and sailing had already become dangerous because by now it was after the Fast. So Paul warned them (10) saying, "Men, I can see that our voyage is going to be risky and puts in great danger ship and cargo, and our own lives also." (11) But the centurion believed more to the pilot and the owner of the ship than to Paul's words. (12) Since the harbor was unsuitable to winter in, the majority decided that we should sail on, hoping to reach and winter at Phoenix, an harbor in Crete, fa-cing both Libeccio [south-west] and Mistral [northwest].*

The storm [Ac 27:13-26]

(Ac 27:13) *When a gentle Sirocco began to blow, they thought they had obtained their purpose; so they weighed anchor and sailed along the shore of Crete. (14) Before very long, a wind of hurricane force, called the Euraquilo, swept down from the island. (15) The ship was caught by it and could not head into the wind; so we gave way to it and were driven along. (16) As we passed to the lee of a small island called Cauda, we were hardly able to make the lifeboat secure. (17) After hoisting it aboard, they took emer-gency measures and passed ropes around the ship. Fearing that they would run aground on Syrtis, they lowered the sea anchor and let the ship be driven along. (18) As we were violently battered by the storm, the next day they threw the cargo overboard. (19) On the third day, they threw the ship's tackle overboard with their own hands. (20) When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days and the storm continued raging, we gave up all hope of being saved.*

(21) *After we had gone a long time without food, Paul stood up before them and said: "Men, you should have taken my advice not to sail from Crete; then you would have spared yourselves this danger and loss. (22) But now I urge you to keep up your coura-ge, because not one of you will be lost; only the ship. (23) Last night an angel of Yah-weh, whose I am and whom I serve, stood beside me (24) and said, 'Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand before Caesar; and Yahweh has granted you all who sail with you.' (25) So keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in Yahweh that it will happen just as I have been told. (26) But we must run aground on some island."*

The shipwreck [Ac 27:27-44]

(Ac 27:27) *On the fourteenth night that we were being driven across the Adriatic Sea, about midnight, the sailors sensed they were approaching land. (28) They took soun-dings and found twenty fathoms [36 meters]. A short time later they took soundings again and found fifteen fathoms [27 meters]. (29) Fearing that we would be dashed against the rocks, they dropped four anchors from the stern and prayed for daylight. (30) In an attempt to escape from the ship, the sailors let the lifeboat down into the sea, pretending they were going to lower some anchors from the bow. (31) Then Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, "Unless they stay with the ship, you cannot be saved." (32) So the soldiers cut the ropes that held the lifeboat and let it drift away.*

(33) *Just before dawn Paul urged them all to eat. "Today is the fourteenth day," he said, "that you have been in suspense and without food -you haven't taken anything. (34) Now I urge you to take some food. You need it for your salvation. Not one of you will lose a single hair from his head." (35) After he said this, he took some bread and*

gave thanks to Yahweh in front of them all. Then he broke it and began to eat. (36)Then they were all encouraged and ate some food themselves. (37)Altogether there were 276 of us on board. (38)When they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship by throwing the grain into the sea.

(39)When daylight came, they did not recognize the land, but they saw a bay with a beach, where they decided to run the ship aground if they could. (40)Cutting loose the anchors, they left them in the sea and at the same time untied the ropes that held the rudders. Then they hoisted the foresail to the wind and made for the beach. (41)But they struck a sandbar and run aground. The bow stuck fast and would not move, and the stern was broken to pieces by the pounding of the surf.

(42)The soldiers planned to kill the prisoners to prevent any of them for swimming away and escaping. (43)But the centurion wanted to save Paul and kept them from carrying out their plan. He ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first and get to land, (44)then to the others [to get there], who on planks, who on pieces of the ship. In this way everyone reached land in safety.

Ashore on Malta [Ac 28:1-10]

(Ac 28:1)Once safely on shore, we found out that the island was called Malta. (2)The islanders showed us unusual kindness. They built a fire and welcomed us all because it was raining and cold. (3)Paul gathered a pile of brushwood and, as he put it on fire, a viper, driven out by the heat, fastened itself on his hand. (4)When the islanders saw the snake hanging from his hand, they said to each other, “This man must be a murderer; for though he escaped from the sea, divine justice has not allowed him to live.” (5)But he shook the snake off into the fire and suffered no ill effects. (6)The people expected him to swell up or suddenly fall dead, but after waiting a long time and seeing nothing unusual happen to him, they changed their minds and said he was a god.

(7)Nearby there were estates belonging to Publius, the chief official of the island. He welcomed us to his home and for three days entertained us hospitably. (8)Then it happened that Publius’ father was sick in bed, caught by fever and dysentery. Paul went in to see him and, after prayer, placed his hands on him and healed him. (9)When this had happened, the rest of the sick on the island came and were cured. (10)They honored us in many ways and when we sailed, they furnished us with the supplies we needed.

Paul had received the “gift of healing” which he could use -after praying to Jesus and Yahweh- even if the sick was totally unaware of it. For what refers to the other sick of the island, they had faith in the possibility of being cured.

Arrival at Rome [Ac 28:11-16]

(Ac 28:11)After three months, we set sail in a ship that had wintered in the island. It was an Alexandrian ship with the figurehead of the Dioscuri. (12)We put in at Syracuse and stayed there three days. (13)From there we weighed anchor and arrived at Rhegium. After a day the Sirocco wind came up, and so in two days we reached Puteoli. (14)There we found some brothers who invited us to spend a week with them. And so we came to Rome. (15)The brothers there, having heard our news, came as far as Forum of Appius and the Three Taverns to meet us. At the sight of these men Paul thanked Yahweh and was encouraged. (16)Then, when we got to Rome, Paul was allowed to live by himself, with a soldier to guard him.

Paul preaches at Rome under guard [Ac 28:17-31]

(Ac 28:17) Three days later he called together the leaders of the Jews. When they had assembled, Paul said to them: "Brothers, although I have done nothing against our people or against the customs of our ancestors, I was arrested in Jerusalem and handed over to the Romans. (18) They examined me and wanted to release me, because I was not guilty of any crime deserving death. (19) But when the [chiefs of the] Jews objected, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar -not that I had any charge to bring against my own people. (20) For this reason I have asked to see you and talk with you. It is because of the hope of Israel that I am bound with this chain."

(21) They replied, "We have not received any letters from Judea concerning you, and none of the brothers who have come from there has reported or said anything bad about you. (22) But we want to hear what your views are, for we know that people everywhere are talking against this sect."

(23) Then, on an appointed day, many came to him to the place where he was staying. From morning till evening he gave explanations, testifying to the Kingdom of Yahweh and trying to convince them about Jesus from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets. (24) Some were convinced by what he said, but others would not believe. (25) So, as they disagreed among themselves and began to leave, Paul said only one thing: "The Spirit of Yahweh was right in speaking to our fathers through Isaiah the prophet:

(26) 'Go to this people and say, "You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving." (27) For this people's heart has become callused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Instead, if they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, I would heal them.'

(28) Therefore I want you to know that this salvation of Yahweh has been sent to the Gentiles, and that they will listen!" (29) After he said this, the [chiefs of the] Jews left, arguing vigorously among themselves.

(30) For two whole years [Paul] stayed there in his own house and welcomed all who came to see him. (31) Boldly and without hindrance he preached the Kingdom of Yahweh and taught the things of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The announcement of spiritual salvation is meant for all men. And Paul was chosen to bring Yahweh's Message to the Gentiles as well as to the Jews.

Teachings and deductions from:**THE LETTERS OF PETER, JAMES, JOHN AND JUDE
to the Christian Church****1 PETER****Introduction** [1Pe 1:1-2]

(1Pe 1:1) Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ,

To the elects, scattered as exiles in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, (2) chosen according to the foreknowledge of Yahweh the Father, through the sanctifying work of His Spirit, for the obedience to Jesus Christ and the sprinkling of his blood:

Grace and peace be yours in abundance.

Praise to Yahweh for a living hope [1Pe 1:3-12]

(1Pe 1:3) Praise be to Yahweh the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In His great mercy He [Yahweh] has regenerated us, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to a living hope, (4) to an inheritance imperishable, undefiled and unfading -kept in Heaven for you, (5) who through faith are shielded by Yahweh's power for the salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time. (6) Greatly rejoice for this, though now for a little while you will have had to suffer in various trials, (7) so that your faith -of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire- may result in praise, glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. (8) Though you have not seen him, you are fond of him; though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, (9) for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

(10) Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched with the greatest care, (11) trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Yahweh in them was pointing when He predicted the sufferings of Jesus Christ and the glory that would follow. (12) It was revealed to them that they were servants, not for themselves but for you, of the things that have now been announced to you by those who have preached the Gospel to you by the Spirit of Yahweh, sent from Heaven. Even angels long to look into these things.

A perfectly clear declaration -found so many other times in the New Testament- that there is only One God [Yahweh] and that Jesus Christ is subordinate to Him. Jesus Christ, the Son of Yahweh and of a human woman, the appointed Lord of the human race, is a man, not a "god", not even a part of a "trinity."

Be holy [1Pe 1:13-25; 2:1-3]

(1Pe 1:13) Therefore, get your minds ready; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed. (14) As obedient children, do not conform to the desires of your former ignorance. (15) But just as the saint [Jesus Christ] who called you is holy, be holy in all you do; (16) for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."

(17) And if you invoke as a Father Him who judges impartially according to each man's work, use with fear all the time of your wandering. (18) For you know that it was

not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, (19)but with the precious blood of Jesus Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. (20)He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but was made manifest in these last times for you (21)who, through him, believe in Yahweh, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, so that your faith and hope are in Yahweh.

(22)Now that you have purified your souls by obeying the truth, be fond of one another deeply, with pure heart, with a brotherly, sincere fondness. (23)For you have been born anew, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring Word of Yahweh. (24)For,

“Each man is like grass, and his glory is like a flower of the field; the grass withers and the flower falls, (25)but the Word of the Lord Yahweh stands forever.”

And this is the Word, the Gospel, that was preached to you.

(2:1)Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. (2)Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, (3)for you have tasted that the Lord Yahweh is good.

Yahweh knew before creation that it would be necessary for Jesus Christ to redeem men, but He has revealed -sent- Jesus Christ to men only in that particular moment of time.

Jesus didn't have any possibility of rising himself from death, for he was a man, not a “god,” not even a part of a “trinity.”

To be fond of one another is the shortest form, the essence, of Jesus Christ's teaching.

All men are “born anew” (or “again”) the moment they believe to the Gospel and become Christian.

The living stone and the chosen people [1Pe 2:4-12]

(1Pe 2:4)As you come to him [Jesus Christ], the living stone -rejected by men but chosen by Yahweh and precious- (5)you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood and offer spiritual sacrifices, pleasant to Yahweh, through Jesus Christ. (6)For in Scripture it says:

“See, I lay a cornerstone in Zion, chosen and precious. And he who believes in him [Jesus Christ] will not be put to shame.”

(7)Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe,

“The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,”

(8)and, “A stone who causes to stumble and a rock that makes fall.”

They stumble because they disobey the Word [of Yahweh] -which is what they were destined for.

(9)But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging [to Yahweh], that you may declare the wonderful deeds of Him who called you out of darkness in His wonderful light.(10)Once [you were] not a people, but now [you are] the people of Yahweh; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

(11)Dear friends, I urge you, as strangers and pilgrims [in the world], to abstain from carnal desires, which war against your soul. (12)Maintain good conduct among the pagans, so that, even though they speak against you, as wrongdoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify Yahweh on the day of visitation.

Submission to rulers and masters [1Pe 2:13-25]

(1Pe 2:13) Submit yourselves for the Lord Yahweh's sake to every human institution: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, (14) or to governors, who are sent by Him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. (15) For it is Yahweh's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorance of foolish men, (16) as free men, without using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but as servants of Yahweh. (17) Honor all men: Be fond of the brotherhood [of believers], fear Yahweh, honor the king.

(18) Slaves, submit yourselves to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh. (19) For it is commendable if one bears up suffering unjustly because of his knowledge of Yahweh. (20) For what credit is it, if you endure to receive a beating for doing wrong? But if you endure suffering for doing good, this is commendable before Yahweh. (21) To this you were called, because Jesus Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.

(22) "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth."

(23) Insulted, he did not retaliate; made suffer, he made no threats; but entrusted himself to Him [Yahweh] who judges justly. (24) He bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, taken away from our sins, we may live for righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed, (25) for you were like sheep gone astray, but now you have been brought back to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

The development of this request brought to the "doctrine" of all rulers being appointed and justified in all their actions by Yahweh.

All men are to be respected ("honored") -not only the rich and powerful- because every human being bears the image of Yahweh.

Peter, as all other New Testament's writers, does not attack slavery as an institution (it wasn't the proper time for that) but states down the moral principles which ultimately have uprooted slavery.

Wives and husbands [1Pe 3:1-7]

(1Pe 3:1) Likewise, wives, be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the Word, they may be won over by the behavior of their wives, without speaking, (2) seeing your pure and reverent behavior. (3) Your adorning should not be outward, from braided hair and wearing of gold jewelry and of clothes, (4) but inner, hidden in the heart, in the incorruptibility of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in Yahweh's sight. (5) For this is the way the holy women of the past that put their hope in Yahweh used to adorn themselves. They were submissive to their husbands, (6) like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him master. You are now her daughters if you do right and let nothing frighten you.

(7) Likewise, husbands, live considerately [with your wives], being the female body the weaker, and granting them honor as heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be rejected.

The saving grace of Yahweh is for women and men alike. Peter's recommendation takes into account the inferior position women had in those ancient societies.

Note 1: The Christian Church's seventeenth Ecumenical Council of Basel/Ferrara/Florence, held in AD 1431 to 1439, maintains (with the majority of two votes!!) that women, too, have a soul.

Note 2: For a deeper explanation of this point, see: “History of the Western Christian Church. Note on the religious role of women in Israel, during Jesus Christ’s ministry and in the Ancient Church -Apostolic Age.”

Suffering for doing good [1Pe 3:8-22]

(1Pe 3:8) Finally, all united, compassionate, fond of the brothers, (9) do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, bless, because to this you were called, so that you may inherit the blessing [of Yahweh]. (10) For,

“Whoever would be fond of life and see good days must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from deceitful speech. (11) He must turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it, (12) for the eyes of the Lord Yahweh are on the righteous and His ears attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord Yahweh is against those who do evil.”

(13) Who is going to harm you if you are zealous to do good? (14) But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. “Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened.” (15) But in your hearts sanctify the Lord Jesus Christ. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you the reason for your hope, but with gentleness and respect, (16) keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Jesus Christ may be ashamed of their slander. (17) For, it is better, if it is Yahweh’s will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. (18) For Jesus Christ also suffered for sins, once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the spirit, to bring you to Yahweh. (19) In this he went and preached also to the spirits in prison, (20) who disobeyed long ago when Yahweh waited patiently in the days of Noah, while the ark was being built. In it a few people, eight souls, were saved through the water. (21) And that water was the symbol of the [baptismal] immersion that now saves you also -not the removal of dirt from the body but the response of a good conscience toward Yahweh. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, (22) who has gone into Heaven and is at Yahweh’s right hand -with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.

Living for Yahweh [1Pe 4:1-11]

(1Pe 4:1) Therefore, since Jesus Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same thought, because he who has suffered in the flesh is done with sin, (2) so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer by human passions, but rather by the will of Yahweh. (3) For it’s enough the time in the past doing what pagans like to do -living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry. (4) For that they are surprised that you do not plunge with them into the same disorderly dissipation, and they heap abuse on you. (5) But they will have to give account to him [Jesus Christ] who is ready to judge the living and the dead. (6) For this is the reason the Gospel was preached even to the dead, so that they might be judged in the flesh according to men, but live according to Yahweh in the spirit.

(7) The end of all things is near. Therefore be self-controlled and sober so that you can pray. (8) Above all, be constantly fond of each other, because fondness covers over a multitude of sins. (9) Give hospitality to one another without grumbling. (10) Each one with the gift he has received should serve the others, as faithful administrators of Yahweh’s grace in its various forms. (11) If anyone speaks, he should speak with the very Words of Yahweh. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength Yahweh provides, so that in all things Yahweh may be praised through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.

After Jesus Christ's physical death, his spirit -his soul- went to the "Land of the Dead" to preach to the souls of all men who lived and died from the beginning of the human race and who never had the opportunity of hearing him, announcing the Gospel of salvation and declaring the remission of sins, which was received by those who believed in him, in the same way he did on Earth.

Yahweh -the only one who can perfectly judge- has delegated the task of judgment to Jesus Christ, who judges: during terrestrial life; at the moment of physical death; when offering his Gospel to those subject to -formative and redemptive- punishment in hell; at the Universal Judgment. All those who didn't hear of Jesus Christ and of his Gospel of salvation during their earthly life will be judged, at the moment of their physical death, following the moral standards of their society (clearly, the vast majority of them will have to undergo a formative and redemptive period in hell) and later -in hell- will be offered to accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

The water of baptism (at the time by immersion) represents salvation for those who believe in Jesus Christ. Anyway, it is clear that the believers are not saved by any ritual, but by the power of Jesus Christ's saving action (confirmed by his resurrection -an act of Yahweh.)

At the time, the Christians believed imminent Jesus Christ's second coming and the end of the world. And, in spite of Jesus' declarations (Mk 13:32; Mt 24:36), even presently many Christians continue to make forecast of those events.

Suffering for being a Christian [1Pe 4:12-19]

(1Pe 4:12)Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery fire [that broke out] among you, as though something strange were happening to you. (13)But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Jesus Christ, so you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. (14)If you are insulted because of the name of Jesus Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory, the Spirit of Yahweh, rests on you. (15)None of you should suffer as a murderer or a thief or a wrongdoer or a meddler. (16)However, if [you suffer] as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise Yahweh by that name. (17)For it is time for judgment to begin, by the family of Yahweh; but, if it begins with us, what will the outcome be with those who do not obey the Gospel of Yahweh? (18)And,

"If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?"

(19)So then, even those who suffer according to Yahweh's will should commit their souls to the faithful Creator through good deeds.

To elders and young men [1Pe 5:1-11]

(1Pe 5:1)So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder, a witness of Jesus Christ's sufferings and one who will share in the glory that is to be revealed: (2)Tend your flock of Yahweh overseeing it not because you must, but because you are willing, as is [the will of] Yahweh; not for greed, but eagerly; (3)not for lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. (4)And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

(5)Likewise you, younger people, be submissive to the elders. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because,

"Yahweh opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

(6)Humble yourselves, therefore, under Yahweh's mighty hand, that [He] may lift you up in [due] time. (7)Cast all your anxieties on Him because He cares for you.

(8) Be sober and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. (9) Resist him, firm in the faith, knowing that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same sufferings.

(10) And [Yahweh] the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Jesus Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will Himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. (11) To Him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.

Peter, the recognized chief of the apostles, did not consider himself more important or in a higher position than the other elders. Nothing to do with his -presumed- position of first Pope of the Christian Church at Rome.

Peter, although he had full apostolic authority, did not “lord it over” the elders he was writing to, but exemplified the virtues he recommended. And how different was and is the actual behavior of most of the “elders” of every Christian Denomination!

Final greetings [1Pe 5:12-14]

(1Pe 5:12) With the help of Silas, whom I regard as a faithful brother, I have written to you briefly, encouraging you and testifying that this in which you are is the true grace of Yahweh.

(13) The chosen [community] in Babylon and my son Mark send their greetings. (14) Greet one another with a kiss of affection.

Peace to all of you who are in Jesus Christ.

2 PETER

Introduction [2Pe 1:1-2]

(2Pe 1:1) Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ,

To those who have been given the same faith as ours in the righteousness of [Yahweh] our God and of our Savior Jesus Christ:

(2) Grace and peace be yours in abundance, in the knowledge of Yahweh and of Jesus Christ our Lord.

A perfectly clear declaration -found so many other times in the New Testament- that there is only One God [Yahweh] and that Jesus Christ is subordinate to Him. Jesus Christ, the Son of Yahweh and of a human woman, the appointed Lord of the human race, is a man, not a “god”, not even a part of a “trinity.”

Make your calling and election sure [2Pe 1:3-11]

(2Pe 1:3) With His divine power [Yahweh] has presented us with everything [we need] for life and godliness, through our knowledge of him [Jesus Christ] who called us by his own glory and goodness. (4) Through these he has presented us with his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption of the world caused by covetousness.

(5) And, for this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; (6) and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; (7) and to godliness, brotherly affection; and to brotherly affection, affection [for all]. (8) For these qualities, if are present and abound in you, will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. (9) But he who does not have these things, is nearsighted and blind, for he has forgotten the cleansing from his past sins.

(10)Therefore, brothers, do your best to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall, (11)and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal Kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Prophecy of Scripture [2Pe 1:12-21]

(2Pe 1:12)So I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have. (13)I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in this tent, (14)knowing that I will soon abandon my tent, as our Lord Jesus Christ showed me. (15)And I will see to it that even after my departure you will always be able to remember these things.

(16)We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ, because we were eye-witnesses of his majesty. (17)For he received honor and glory from Yahweh the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, "This is My Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." (18)We heard this voice that came from Heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain.

(19)And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, to which you will do well to pay attention, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. (20)Above all, you must know this, no prophecy of Scripture came about by a personal interpretation. (21)For prophecy was never due to the will of man, but men spoke from Yahweh, moved by His Spirit.

False teachers and their condemnation [2Pe 2:1-22]

(2Pe 2:1)But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying their Lord Jesus Christ who bought them -bringing swift destruction on themselves. (2)Many will follow their shameful ways and because of them the Way of Truth will be reviled. (3)And in their greed they will exploit you with false words. Their judgment has long been hanging over them, and their condemnation will not wait long.

(4)For Yahweh did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into the darkness of Tartarus, to be held for judgment; (5)He did not spare the ancient world when He brought the flood on the world of the ungodly, but protected Noah, as the eighth herald of righteousness; (6)He condemned to destruction the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes, and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; (7)and He rescued righteous Lot, distressed by the licentious conduct of the ungodly (8)(for that righteous man, who lived among them, was tormented day after day in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard.) (9)The Lord Yahweh knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for their punishment on the day of judgment, (10)especially those who follow the flesh with its lustful desire of shameful acts and despise the sovereignty [of Yahweh].

Bold and arrogant, these men are not afraid to revile [celestial] glories; (11)yet the angels, although they are greater in strength and power, do not bring slanderous accusations against those [glories] before the Lord Yahweh. (12)But these men, like irrational beasts, naturally born to be caught and destroyed, speak evil of the things they do not understand, will perish in their corruption, (13)and will be paid back with the punishment of their lawlessness.

They find their pleasure in daily carousing. Blotted and blemished, reveling in their deceits while they feast with you. (14)With eyes full of adultery, they never stop sinning; they seduce the unsteady souls; they have hearts expert in greed; they are accursed children. (15)They have left the straight way and wandered off to follow the way of

Balaam son of Beor, who liked the wages of wickedness, (16)and was then rebuked for his wrongdoing: a donkey -who is without speech- spoke with a man's voice and restrained the prophet's madness.

(17)These are springs without water and mists driven by a storm. Blackest darkness is reserved for them. (18)With empty and boastful words, appealing to the lustful desires of the flesh, they entice people who are just escaping from those who live in error. (19) They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity -for a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him. (20)For, if after they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning. (21)It would have been better for them not to have known the Way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn back from the sacred command passed on to them. (22) It has happened to them according to the true proverbs: "A dog returns to its vomit," and, "A sow that is washed [returns] to her wallowing in the mud."

The Day of the Lord Yahweh [2Pe 3:1-18]

(2Pe 3:1)Dear friends, this is now the second letter I have written to you. Both of them as reminders to arouse your sincere minds, (2)that you recall the words already spoken by the holy prophets and the command given by the apostles of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

(3)First of all, you must know that in the last days scoffers will come, following their own evil desires, (4)and saying, "Where is this 'coming' he [Jesus Christ] promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation." (5)But they deliberately forget that long ago by Yahweh's Word the sky existed and the Earth was formed out of water and by water. (6)By these same causes the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. (7)By the same Word the present sky and Earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.

(8)But now do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord Yahweh a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. (9)The Lord Yahweh is not slow in His promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

(10)But the Day of the Lord Yahweh will come like a thief. In it, the sky will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the Earth and the [human] works in it will be [burned up].

(11)Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, it is necessary that you conduct yourselves in holiness, with works of mercy, (12)as you look forward to and speed the coming of the Day of Yahweh, when the sky, set to fire, will be dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire. (13)But, according to His promise, we are looking forward to a new sky and a new Earth, in which righteousness dwells.

(14)So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to these things, make every effort to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless. (15)Consider our Lord Yahweh's patience as salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that Yahweh gave him. (16)And in all his letters, speaking of these matters, there are some points hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.

(17)Therefore, dear friends, you who already know, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position. (18)

But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.

What a difference, even if written by Peter few years after Jesus' preaching, between this sermon/admonition/scolding and Jesus' way of teaching, as seen in the Gospels! This letter is mainly a “negative” sermon, empty of Jesus' fondness and understanding and full of complains and scoldings. And, -unfortunately- most of Church sermons are always quite similar.

JAMES

Introduction [Jm 1:1]

*(Jm 1:1) James, a servant of Yahweh and of the Lord Jesus Christ,
To the twelve tribes scattered in the world:
Greetings.*

A clear declaration of James, the oldest of Jesus Christ's four brothers, -found so many other times in the New Testament- that there is only One God [Yahweh] and that Jesus Christ is subordinate to Him. Jesus Christ, the Son of Yahweh and of a human woman, the appointed Lord of the human race, is a man, not a “god”, not a part of a “trinity.”

Trials and temptations [Jm 1:2-18]

(Jm 1:2) Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face various trials, (3) because you know that your confirmation of the faith develops perseverance. (4) Perseverance then must finish its work so that you may be perfect and complete, not lacking anything. (5) If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask for it, with simplicity and without reproaching, to Yahweh, who gives to all; and it will be given to him. (6) But he must ask with faith and without doubting, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. (7) That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord Yahweh; (8) he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his things.

(9) The brother in humble circumstances ought to take pride in his exaltation. (10) But the one who is rich should take pride in his humiliation, because he will pass away like the flower of the grass. (11) For the sun rises and with scorching heat withers the grass; its flower withers and loses the beauty of its aspect. In the same way, the rich man will fade away in [the course of] his ways.

(12) Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that Yahweh has promised to those who are fond of Him.

(13) When tempted, no one should say, “Yahweh is tempting me.” For Yahweh cannot be tempted to evil, nor does He tempt anyone; (14) but each one is tempted by his own evil desire, by which he is dragged and enticed. (15) Then the desire, after having conceived, gives birth to sin; and sin, when accomplished, gives birth to death.

(16) Don't be deceived, my dear brothers. (17) Every good gift and perfect present is from above, coming from the Father of the lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. (18) Of His own will He gave us birth by the Word of Truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.

A letter-sermon, written with the intent of trying and giving help to the Christians of Jerusalem persecuted and scattered all around. And even here, what a difference between this sermon/admonition/scolding and Jesus' way of teaching, as seen in the Gospels!

This letter is mainly a “negative” sermon, empty of Jesus' fondness and understanding and full of requests, complains and scoldings.

Listening and doing [Jm 1:19-27]

(Jm 1:19) Know this, my dear brothers: Every man should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, (20) for man's anger does not work according to the righteousness of Yahweh. (21) Therefore, get rid of all filthiness and excess of wickedness and humbly accept the Word planted in you, which can save your souls.

(22) But be doers of the Word, not hearers only, so deceiving yourselves. (23) For anyone who listen to the Word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror (24) and who, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he was like. (25) But the man who looks into the perfect law, the law of freedom, and perseveres, not as a hearer that forgets, but doing it -he will be blessed in his doing.

(26) If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless. (27) Religion that is pure and faultless before Yahweh our Father is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

True Christianity is characterized by good deeds and by a faith that operates -genuine faith will always be accompanied by a consistent life-style.

A religion expressed in rituals, liturgies and ceremonies is not religion at all. Real worship does not consist in rich and elaborate rituals, but in the practical service of mankind (“look after orphans and widows”) and in the honesty of personal life (“keep oneself from being polluted by the world”).

Favoritism is forbidden [Jm 2:1-13]

(Jm 2:1) My brothers, your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ should be without favoritism. (2) If a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in, (3) and if you pay special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, “Here's a good seat for you,” but you say to the poor man, “Stand there” or “Sit at my feet,” (4) have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

(5) Listen, my dear brothers: Has not Yahweh chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the Kingdom He promised those who are fond of Him? (6) But you have insulted the poor. It is not the rich who are exploiting you and dragging you into court? (7) Are they not the ones who blaspheme the noble good name called upon you?

(8) If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, “You'll be fond of your neighbor as of yourself,” you are doing right. (9) But if you show favoritism, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. (10) For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at one [point] is guilty of all of it. (11) For He who said, “Do not commit adultery,” also said, “Do not murder.” Then, if you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker.

(12) Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law of freedom, (13) because judgment [will be] without mercy to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumph over judgment!

In an ideal Christian society all men are worthy the same respect, independently of a man's social status, prestige, power or wealth. An ever existing and never solved problem. Showing favoritism in the Church means judging believers for their wealth and not for their moral stand. And how different was and is the reality!

Faith and deeds [Jm 2:14-26]

(Jm 2:14)What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? (15)If a brother or sister is naked or without daily food, (16)and one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,” but does not give them the necessary for the body, what good is it? (17)So, even faith, by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

(18)But someone will say, “One has faith; another has deeds.” Show me your faith without deeds, and I by my deeds will show you my faith. (19)You believe that there is one God? Good! Even the demons believe that -and shudder.

(20)You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is barren? (21)Was not our father Abraham justified by his actions when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? (22)You see that his faith was working together with his actions, and that his faith was made perfect by his actions. (23)And the Scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed Yahweh, and it was credited to him as righteousness,” and he was called Yahweh’s friend. (24)You see that a man is justified by his deeds and not by faith alone.

(25)And, in the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute justified by deeds when she received the messengers and sent them off by another way? (26)So, as the body without the spirit is dead, even faith without deeds is dead.

Such a faith is not the genuine faith in Yahweh and in Jesus Christ, but a mere intellectual acceptance of certain truths. A man is a proper Christian -“justified” before Yahweh- not by faith alone, but by a faith that produces good deeds. And the claim that faith and deeds can exist independently of each other is clearly false.

Taming the tongue [Jm 3:1-12]

(Jm 3:1)Not many of you should be teachers, my brothers, knowing that we will be judged more strictly, (2)for we all stumble in many ways. If anyone never stumbles in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check.

(3)When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. (4)And the ships also, which are so large and driven by strong winds, are steered by a very small rudder where the pilot wants. (5)Likewise the tongue is a small member of the body, but it boasts of great things. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small fire. (6)The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil. The tongue is placed among our members, it corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of our life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.

(7)For all kinds of beasts, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been made docile by man, (8)but no man can tame men’s tongue, a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

(9)With it we praise Yahweh, Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in Yahweh’s likeness. (10)Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be. (11)Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the

same spring? (12)My brothers, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt [spring] produce fresh water.

A teacher, that is, a priest or a pastor, can have a great influence with his ideas, explanations and personality. And for willing to be a teacher and, as such, being learned, his responsibility is great and he will be held more accountable for his teaching. Even Jesus Christ has spoken of the severe punishment of the hypocritical teachers of the law of his time (Mk 12:38-40; Mt 23:14; Lk 20:45-47).

Two kinds of wisdom [Jm 3:13-18]

(Jm 3:13)Who is wise and experienced among you? Let him show by his good conduct and his deeds, in the humility of wisdom. (14)But if you harbor bitter jealousy and selfish envy in your hearts, do not boast about it denying the truth. (15)That is not the wisdom which comes down from high but is earthly, psychical, devilish. (16)For where there is jealousy and envy, there there is disorder and every evil practice.

(17)But the wisdom [that comes] from high is first of all pure; then peace-looking, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. (18)Then the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace for those who work for peace.

Submit yourselves to Yahweh [Jm 4:1-12]

(Jm 4:1)From where [come] wars and quarrels among you? It is not from your passions, that battle in your members? (2)You desire and do not have; you kill and covet, and cannot obtain; you fight and make war; you do not have, because you do not ask; (3)you ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to waist in your pleasures.

(4)You adulterous, don't you know that friendship with the world is enmity with Yahweh? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of Yahweh. (5)Or do you think Scripture says without reason: "The spirit Yahweh has made live in us yearns till jealousy?" (6)But [He] gives us more grace. That is why [Scripture] says: "Yahweh opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

(7)Submit yourselves, then, to Yahweh. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. (8)Come near to Yahweh and He will come near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. (9)Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. (10)Humble yourselves before the Lord Yahweh, and He will exalt you.

(11)Brothers, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the Law and judges it. But, if you judge the Law, you are not keeping it, but judging it. (12)There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, who saves and condemns. But you -who are you to judge your neighbor?

To speak against a brother is to scorn the law of fondness "Be fond of your neighbor as yourself."

Boasting about tomorrow [Jm 4:13-17]

(Jm 4:13)And now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." (14)But you don't even know what your life will be tomorrow. You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. (15)Instead, you ought to say, "If the Lord Yahweh wants, we will live and do this

or that.” (16) *As it is, now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. (17) Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn’t do it, sins.*

A self-evident truth, as the essential uncertainty of the future is a characteristic of life on Earth. The future is not in the hands of men and no man can arrogantly claim that he has the power to decide it. Yet this uncertainty doesn't have to be a cause either for fear or inaction.

Warning to rich oppressors [Jm 5:1-6]

(Jm 5:1) And now you, rich people. Weep and wail because of the miseries that are coming upon you. (2) Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes, (3) your gold and silver are corroded, and their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days. (4) Look! The wages of the workmen who mowed your fields, which you have defrauded, are crying out against you, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of [Yahweh] the Lord of hosts. (5) You have lived on Earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter. (6) You have condemned and murdered innocent men, who were not opposing you.

This chapter, written against the selfish rich who have gained their wealth by injustice, has two aims. First, to show the ultimate worthlessness of all earthly riches; second, to show the detestable character of those who possess them. By doing this it hopes to prevent its readers from placing all their hopes and desires on earthly things. But how many rich will be convinced this way?

Patience in suffering [Jm 5:7-12]

(Jm 5:7) Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord Jesus Christ’s coming. See, the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, being patient until it receives the first and the last rain. (8) You too, be patient and fortify your hearts, because the Lord Jesus Christ’s coming is near. (9) Don’t grumble against each other, brothers, or you will be judged. The judge is standing at the door!

(10) Brothers, as an example of suffering and patience, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord Yahweh. (11) As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job’s perseverance and have seen the conclusion the Lord Yahweh [brought about]. The Lord Yahweh is rich in compassion and mercy.

(12) Above all, my brothers, do not swear -not by Heaven or by Earth or by any other oath. Let your “Yes” be yes, and your “No” be no, that you will not fall under judgment.

At the time, even the apostles were convinced that Jesus Christ's second coming and the end of the world were imminent.

The prayer of faith [Jm 5:13-20]

(Jm 5:13) Is anyone of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise. (14) Is anyone of you sick? He should call the elders of the Church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord Yahweh. (15) And the prayer [offered] in faith will make the sick person well, and the Lord Yahweh will raise him up and, if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. (16) Therefore confess your

sins to each other and pray to each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.

(17)Elijah, a man in nature like us, prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. (18)Again he prayed, and the sky gave rain, and the land produced its crops.

(19)My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, (20)let him know that whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and cover over a multitude of sins.

From a religious point of view, a useless act, never performed by Jesus Christ or his followers during his preaching. Yet, almost from the beginning, unction and laying on of hands were -uselessly- part of the baptism ceremony. It is a characteristic of every institution -in this case the Church- to forget the initial simplicity and make every ceremony more and more complicated. To note that oil was one of the best known ancient medicines.

In effect, usually it is easier to confess sins to Yahweh than to men; so to confess them to another person represents a better proof of true repentance. Yet, this doesn't justify the compulsory confession of sins to a priest. (For a deeper understanding of this point, see: Miscellanea. The "secret" in the Roman Catholic confession. Is it justified by the Christian morality?")

1 JOHN

The Word of life [1Jn 1:1-4]

(1Jn1:1)That which happened from the beginning [of Christianity], which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched concerning the Word of life, (2)-and the life was manifested; and we have seen it and testify to it; and we proclaim to you the eternal life, that which is with Yahweh the Father and was manifested to us- (3)that which we have seen and heard, we proclaim also to you so that you also may have fellowship with us. And indeed our fellowship is with Yahweh the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ. (4)And we write this to you that your joy may be full.

A perfectly clear declaration -found so many other times in the New Testament- that there is only One God [Yahweh] and that Jesus Christ is subordinate to Him. Jesus Christ, the Son of Yahweh and of a human woman, the appointed Lord of the human race, is a man, not a "god", not even a part of a "trinity."

Walking in the light [1Jn 1:5-10; 2:1-14]

(1Jn 1:5)This is the message we have heard from him [Jesus Christ] and declare to you: Yahweh is light and in Him there is no darkness at all. (6)If we claim to have fellowship with Him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. (7)But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, purifies us from every sin.

(8)If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. (9)If we confess our sins, He [Yahweh], who is faithful and just, will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. (10)If we claim we have not sinned, we make Him [Yahweh] out to be a liar and His Word has no place in our lives.

(2:1) My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one Helper with Yahweh the Father -Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. (2) He himself is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the whole world.

(3) Now, by this we know that we have come to know him: if we obey his commands.

(4) He who says, "I know him," but does not keep his commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

(5) But whoever keeps his Word, Yahweh's affection is truly made complete in him. By this we know we are in Him. (6) He who says he abides in Him must walk as he [Jesus Christ] walked.

(7) Dear friends, I am not writing you a new command but an old command, which you have had since the beginning [of Christianity]. The old command is the Message you have heard from the beginning [of Christianity]. (8) Yet I am writing you a new command, which is true in him [Jesus Christ] and you, because the darkness is passing and the true light is already shining.

(9) Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness.

(10) Whoever is fond of his brother lives in the light, and there is no snare in him.

(11) But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness; he does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

(12) I write to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his [Jesus Christ's] name.

(13) I write to you, fathers, because you have known him [Jesus Christ] from the beginning [of Christianity].

I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one.

I write to you, dear children, because you have known Yahweh the Father.

(14) I have written to you, fathers, because you have known him [Jesus Christ] who is from the beginning [of Christianity].

I have written to you, young men, because you are strong and the Word of Yahweh abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one.

An essential truth, in two parts: No man can actually be without sin, and Yahweh is always ready to accept back a truly repentant sinner.

All men of every time, country and religion can find access to Yahweh through Jesus, and through Jesus alone, as Jesus alone opens the way to Him. Between men and Yahweh there is no other intermediary or intercessor -no priest or pastor, no angel, no recognized "saint," not even Jesus' mother. Jesus Christ sacrificed himself and died on the Cross -once for ever and for all- for the spiritual salvation of all men.

Do not get to like the world [1Jn 2:15-17]

(1Jn 2:15) Do not get to like the world or anything in the world. If anyone is fond of the world, the affection of the Father is not in him. (16) For everything in the world -the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes and the pride of life- comes not from the Father but from the world. (17) And the world and its desires pass away, but who does the will of Yahweh abides for ever.

Warning against the antichrists [1Jn 2:18-27]

(1Jn 2:18) Dear children, it is the last hour, when you have heard that the antichrist will come. And even now many antichrists have come: this is how we know it is the last

hour. (19)They went out from us, but they were not from us for, if they were from us, they would have remained with us. But [they went out of us] in order that it would be manifest that they are not from us.

(20)But you have an anointing from [Yahweh], the Holy One God, and you know all. (21)I do not write to you because you do not know the truth, but because you know it and because no lie comes from the truth. (22)Who is the liar if not he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, who denies the Father and the Son. (23)Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also.

(24)Therefore, let abide in you what you have heard from the beginning [of Christianity]. If what you have heard from the beginning [of Christianity] abides in you, you also will remain in the Son and in the Father. (25)And this is the promise that he [Jesus Christ] has promised us -eternal life.

(26)I have written these things to you about those who deceive you. (27)As for you, the anointing you received from him [Jesus Christ] remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. And, as the anointing itself teaches you about all things -and it is true and not a lie- you remain in him [Jesus Christ], just as it has taught you.

John, as the other New Testament writers, viewed the whole period beginning with Jesus Christ's birth as "the last days" and believed that Jesus' second coming and the end of the world were imminent. And, in spite of Jesus' declarations (Mk 13:32; Mt 24:36), even presently many Christians continue to make forecast of those events.

The children of Yahweh [1Jn 2:28-29; 3:1-10]

(1Jn 2:28)And now, dear children, abide in him [Jesus Christ], so that whenever he appears we may be confident and not be ashamed by him at his coming.

(29)If you know that he [Jesus Christ] is righteous, you know that everyone who does what is right has been born of him.

(3:1)Behold what great affection the Father has given us, that we should be called children of Yahweh! And that is what we are! For this the world does not know us, because it did not know him [Jesus Christ]. (2)Dear friends, we are now children of Yahweh, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he [Jesus Christ] appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. (3)Everyone who has this hope in him [Jesus Christ] purifies himself, is pure just as him.

(4)Everyone who does sin practice also lawlessness; in fact, sin is lawlessness. (5)But you know that he [Jesus Christ] appeared so that he may take away our sins, and that in him is no sin. (6)Everyone who abides in him does not keep on sinning; everyone who continues to sin has not seen him nor known him.

(7)Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as he [Jesus Christ] is righteous. (8)He who sins is of the devil, because the devil sins from the beginning. For this the Son of Yahweh appeared: To destroy the devil's works. (9)Everyone who is born of Yahweh does not continue to sin, because His [Yahweh's] seed remains in him; and he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of Yahweh. (10)By this the children of Yahweh and the children of the devil are manifest: Everyone who does not practice righteousness is not of Yahweh; and so is anyone who is not fond of his brother.

After Jesus' second coming and the end of the world, there will be the Universal Resurrection, and then all men will live for ever in Yahweh's Kingdom, not only with their soul, but with their resurrected body. (For a better comprehension of this point, see: "Thoughts. Soul, body, resurrection").

Be fond of one another [1Jn 3:11-24]

(1Jn 3:11) For this is the message you heard from the beginning [of Christianity]: We should be fond of one another. (12) Not like Cain, who was from the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his actions were evil and his brother's righteous. (13) Do not be surprised, my brothers, if the world hates you. (14) We know that we have passed from death to life, because we are fond of our brothers. Anyone who is not fond remains in death. (15) Who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him.

(16) By this we know affection: He [Jesus Christ] laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. (17) If anyone has world's goods and, seeing his brother in need, shuts off his heart to him, how can the affection of Yahweh be in him? (18) Dear children, let us not be fond with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. (19) By this we know that we are from the truth, and that our hearts will be assured in His presence: (20) Even if our hearts condemn us, Yahweh is greater than our hearts, and He knows everything.

(21) Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, and we have confidence in Yahweh, (22) we will receive from Him anything we ask, because we obey His commands and do what pleases Him. (23) And this is His command: To believe in the name of His Son, Jesus Christ. and to be fond of one another as he [Jesus Christ] commanded us. (24) He who obeys His commands abides in Him, and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us: From His Spirit, which He gave us.

Fine words will never take the place of fine actions; no amount of talk about Christian fondness will take the place of a kindly action to a man in need.

Test the spirits [1Jn 4:1-6]

(1Jn 4:1) Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test if the spirits are from Yahweh, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. (2) By this you can recognize the Spirit of Yahweh: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from Yahweh, (3) and every spirit that does not acknowledge that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not from Yahweh. And this [spirit] is that of the anti-christ, which you have heard is coming, and now is already in the world.

(4) You, dear children, are from Yahweh and have overcome them, because the one [Jesus Christ] who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. (5) They are from the world, therefore they speak of the world, and the world listens to them. (6) We are from Yahweh, and who knows Yahweh listens to us; but who is not from Yahweh does not listen to us. From this we recognize the spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood.

This chapter, in effect the whole letter, was written to contrast the gnostic heresy of that time. Yet, we can clearly see its full validity in every historical moment of the Christian Church, inclusive of the present one.

Note: The Gnosticism addressed to in the New Testament is an early form of the heresy, much simpler than the intricate system developed in the third century.

Central teaching: Spirit is entirely good, matter entirely evil.

The five main errors:

1. Man's body is only matter, therefore completely evil. Yahweh is pure spirit, therefore perfectly good.
2. Salvation of the soul is achieved escaping from the body; not by faith in Jesus Christ but by special knowledge (gnosis).
3. Jesus Christ's humanity was denied saying that the divine Christ joined the human Jesus at baptism and left him before he died.
4. Since the body is evil, it has to be treated harshly.
5. Since matter -and not the breaking of Yahweh's law- is considered evil, sinning by the body is of no moral consequence.

Yahweh's fondness and ours [1Jn 4:7-21]

(1Jn 4:7) Dear friends, let us be fond of one another, for fondness is of Yahweh. Everyone who is fond has been born of Yahweh and knows Yahweh. (8) Whoever is not fond does not know Yahweh, because Yahweh is fondness. (9) In this the fondness of Yahweh is manifested among us: Yahweh has sent His one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. (10) In this is fondness: Not that we were fond of Yahweh, but that He had been fond of us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. (11) Dear friends, since Yahweh had been so fond of us, we also ought to be fond of one another. (12) No one has ever seen Yahweh; but if we are fond of one another, Yahweh abides in us and His fondness is made perfect in us.

(13) By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us His Spirit. (14) And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world. (15) Anyone who acknowledges that Jesus Christ is the Son of Yahweh, Yahweh abides in him and he in Yahweh. (16) And we have known and have believed that the fondness of Yahweh is in us.

Yahweh is fondness, and who abides in fondness abides in Yahweh, and Yahweh in him. (17) In this way, fondness is made perfect in us, so that we may have confidence on the day of judgment, because, just as he [Jesus Christ] is, we also are like him in this world. (18) There is no fear in fondness. But perfect fondness drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment, and who fears is not perfect in fondness.

(19) We are fond of Him because He [Yahweh] first was fond of us. (20) If anyone says, "I am fond of Yahweh," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For who is not fond of his brother, whom he has seen, cannot be fond of Yahweh, whom he has not seen. (21) And we have [received] from him [Jesus Christ] this command: Who is fond of Yahweh must also be fond of his brother.

To be fond of one another is the shortest form, the essence, of Jesus Christ's teaching.

Faith in the Son of Yahweh [1Jn 5:1-12]

(1Jn 5:1) Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of Yahweh, and everyone who is fond of who bore [that is, Yahweh] is fond of who has been born of Him. (2) By this we know that we are fond of the children of Yahweh: When we are fond of Yahweh and keep His commands. (3) For this is to be fond of Yahweh: To keep His com-

mands. And His commands are not burdensome, (4)for everyone born of Yahweh overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world: Our faith. (5)Who is it that overcomes the world if not who believes that Jesus Christ is the Son of Yahweh?

(6)This is the one who came by water and blood: Jesus Christ. Not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit of Yahweh who testifies, because the Spirit of Yahweh is the truth. (7)For there are three that testify: (8)the Spirit of Yahweh, the water and the blood; and the three are unanimous. (9)If we accept man's testimony, Yahweh's testimony is greater; because this is the testimony of Yahweh, which He has given about His Son. (10)Anyone who believes in the Son of Yahweh has the testimony in himself. Anyone who does not believe Yahweh has made Him out to be a liar, because he has not believed the testimony Yahweh has given about His Son. (11)And this is the testimony: Yahweh has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. (12)He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of Yahweh does not have the life.

Concluding remarks [1Jn 5:13-21]

(1Jn 5:13)I write this to you who believe in the name of the Son of Yahweh so that you may know that you have eternal life. (14)And this is the confidence we have in Him [Yahweh]: If we ask anything according to His will, He hear us. (15)And if we know that He hear us -whatever we ask- we know that we can have what we asked of Him.

(16)If anyone sees his brother commit a sin that does not lead to death, he should ask and He [Yahweh] will give him life -to those who do not sin to death. There is a sin to death, and I am not saying that he should pray about that. (17)All wrongdoings are sins, and there are sins that do not lead to death.

(18)We know that anyone born of Yahweh does not continue to sin; but the one who was born of Yahweh [Jesus Christ] keeps him safe, and the evil one does not harm him. (19)We know that we are of Yahweh, and that the whole world lies under the evil one. (20)We know also that the Son of Yahweh has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know the True One [Yahweh]. And we are in the True One, and in His Son Jesus Christ. He [Jesus Christ] is the truth of Yahweh and the eternal life.

(21)Dear children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen.

Another declaration that this letter was written to contrast the gnostic heresy of that time (the "sin to death").

2 JOHN

Introduction [2Jn 1:1-3]

(2Jn 1:1)The elder,

To the chosen lady and her children, of whom I am fond in the truth -and not I only, but also all who have known the truth- (2)because of the truth, which lives in us and will be with us for ever.

(3)Grace, mercy and peace from Yahweh the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Father's Son, will be with us in truth and fondness.

Walk in truth and fondness [2Jn 1:4-11]

(2Jn 1:4)I rejoiced greatly that I have found some of your children walking in the truth, just as we received commandment from the Father. (5) And now I ask you, lady, not as writing you a new commandment but one we have had from the beginning [of

Christianity]; that we must be fond of one another. (6)And this is fondness: That we walk in obedience to His commandments. This is the commandment, just as you have heard from the be-ginning [of Christianity]: That you walk in it [fondness].

(7)Because many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. This is the deceiver and the antichrist. (8)Watch out to yourselves that we do not lose what we have worked for, but that we should receive a full reward. (9)Anyone who transgresses and does not abide in the teaching of Jesus Christ does not have Yahweh; who abides in the teaching of Jesus Christ has both the Father and the Son. (10)If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take him into your house and don't tell him, "Rejoice." (11)For who tells him, "Rejoice," shares in his evil works.

To be fond of one another is the shortest form, the essence, of Jesus Christ's teaching.

Even this chapter, in effect the whole letter, was written to contrast the gnostic heresy of that time. Yet, we can clearly see its full validity in every historical moment of the Christian Church, inclusive of the present one. (For more information about this heresy, see the chapter "Test the spirits" [1Jn 4:1-6]).

Greetings [2Jn 1:12-13]

(2Jn 1:12)I have much to write to you, but I do not want to use paper and ink. Instead, I hope to visit you and talk with you face to face, so that our joy may be complete.

(13)The children of your chosen sister send their greetings.

3 JOHN

Letter to Gaius [3Jn 1:1-12]

(3Jn 1:1)The elder,

To my dear friend Gaius, of whom I am fond in the truth.

(2)Dear friend, I pray that you prosper in all and enjoy good health, just as your soul prospers. (3)For I rejoiced greatly when some brothers came and witnessed to the truth which is in you, and how you continue to walk in the truth. (4)I have no greater joy than this: To hear that my children are walking in the truth.

(5)Dear friend, you are faithful in what you are doing for the brothers, strangers for you, (6)who have given their testimony to the Church about your fondness. You will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of Yahweh. (7)For it was for the sake of the Name [of Yahweh] that they went out, receiving nothing from the pagans. (8)We ought therefore to receive such [men] so that we may work together for the truth.

(9)I wrote to the Church, but Diotrephes, who rejoices of his preeminence over them, does not receive us. (10)So, if I come, I will call to mind what he is doing, slandering us with evil words. And, not satisfied with that, he does not receive the brothers, and hinders those who desire [to receive them], and puts them out of the Church.

(11)Dear friend, do not imitate the evil but the good. Anyone who does good is from Yahweh. Anyone who does evil has not seen Yahweh. (12)Demetrius has a good testimony with all, and even by the truth itself. We also testify, and you know that our testimony us true.

An always existing and never solved problem. A Church leader who was exercising dictatorial power in that Church. He was able to speak against John, to refuse to receive

the official missionaries, to oblige his fellow believers not to receive them and to exclude people from the Church fellowship. Clearly, it is always necessary to put someone in charge of something -in this case of the teaching and the running of the Christian Community (the Local Church). Unfortunately, these men tend to feel important and in a position of power.

Greetings [3Jn 1:13-14]

(3Jn 1:13)I have much to write you, but I do not want to do so with pen and ink. (14)I hope to see you soon, and we will talk face to face.

Peace to you. The friends send their greetings. Greet the friends there by name.

JUDE

Introduction [Jd 1:1-2]

(Jd 1:1)Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and a brother of James.

To those who have been called, who have been sanctified by Yahweh the Father and kept in Jesus Christ.

(2)Mercy, peace and affection be yours in abundance.

Usually called Judas, the youngest of Jesus Christ's four brothers.

The sin and doom of godless men [Jd 1:3-16]

(Jd 1:3)Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I had the necessity to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints. (4)For certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you; godless men, who change the grace of our Yahweh into licentiousness and deny Jesus Christ, our only Master and lord.

(5)But I want to remind you, you who already know all this, that the Lord Yahweh delivered His people out of Egypt, but later destroyed those who did not believe. (6)And the angels who did not keep their appointed positions but abandoned their own home -these He has kept in darkness, with everlasting bonds for the judgment on the Great Day. (7)And, as Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to prostitution and to another flesh, they are an example of the punishment of eternal fire.

(8)In the very same way even those [men], raving, defile the flesh, reject the authorities, slander the glories and blaspheme. (9)But when the archangel Michael was disputing with the devil about the body of Moses, he did not dare to bring a slanderous accusation against him, but said, "The Lord Yahweh rebuke you!" (10)Yet these [men] speak abusively against whatever they do not understand; and whatever they do understand by instinct, like the unreasoning animals, by these they are corrupted.

(11)Woe to them! Because they have taken the way of Cain; they have rushed for profit into Balaam's error; they have been destroyed in Korah's rebellion.

(12)These are blemishes at your celebrations, feasting with you without restraint -caring only for themselves; clouds without rain, blown along by the winds; late autumn trees, without fruit, twice dead, pulled up by the roots; (13)wild waves of the sea, foaming up their shame; wandering stars, for whom blackest darkness has been reserved forever.

(14)Now, also Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about them, saying, "See, the Lord [Jesus] is coming with his holy myriads (15)to perform judgment on everyone,

and to convict all the ungodly among them of all the ungodly acts they have impiously done, and of all the harsh words ungodly sinners have spoken against him.” (16) These are grumblers and complainers, they follow their own lusts; their mouth speaks proud words and flatters others for their own advantage.

Jesus Christ's teaching, given to his apostles, as it is clearly stated in the four Gospels. Everything else is, at the best, a useless accretion.

Even this letter was written to contrast the gnostic heresy of that time.

A call to persevere [Jd 1:17-23]

(Jd 1:17) But you, dear friends, remember the words foretold by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ. (18) They said to you, “In the last times there will be scoffers who will follow their own ungodly desires.” (19) These cause the divisions, are of the world and do not have the Spirit of Yahweh.

(20) But you, dear friends, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit of Yahweh, (21) keep yourselves in Yahweh's affection as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life.

(22) And, making a distinction, have mercy of some, (23) but save others with fear, snatching them from the fire -hating even the clothing stained by their flesh.

Jude, as the other New Testament writers, viewed the whole period beginning with Jesus Christ's birth as “the last days” and believed that Jesus' second coming and the end of the world were imminent. And, in spite of Jesus' declarations (Mk 13:32; Mt 24:36), even presently many Christians continue to make forecast of those events.

When trying to bring back an heretic to true faith, it is necessary to “make a distinction,” and use different methods for different people. There are the simple minded, who can be convinced by showing them mercy. And there are others, those who are strong in their errors, who need the intervention of people very strong in the true faith, for the rescue of those in serious error is not for everyone to attempt.

Praise to Yahweh [Jd 1:24-25]

(Jd 1:24) Now, to Him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before His glorious presence without fault and with great joy -(25) to [Yahweh] the Only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty and power, in all the ages, now and forevermore! Amen.

There is only One God, Yahweh, Maker of everything and everybody.

As a further confirmation that Jesus was a man, not a “god,” not a part of a “trinity,” Jude points to the fact that Jesus was anointed as Savior of everybody by Yahweh, not by his own initiative.

Teachings and deductions from:**PAUL's THOUGHT****From Paul's merged letters to the Thessalonians, Galatians, Corinthians, Romans, Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians, Hebrews and to Philemon, Timothy and Titus****Introduction****To the Thessalonians** [1 Th 1:1] [2 Th 1:1-2]

(1Th 1:1)(2Th 1:1)Paul, Silas and Timothy,

To the Church of the Thessalonians in Yahweh the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:

Grace and peace to you from Yahweh the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

To the Galatians [Gal 1:1-5]

(Gal 1:1)Paul, an apostle -sent not from men nor by man, but by Jesus Christ and Yahweh the Father, who raised him from the dead- (2)and all the brothers with me,

To the Churches of Galatia:

(3)Grace and peace to you from Yahweh our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, (4) who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of [Yahweh] our God and Father, (5)to Whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

To the Corinthians [1 Co 1:1-3] [2 Co 1:1-2]

(1Co 1:1-2)(2Co 1:1)Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of Yahweh, and our brother Sostenes, and Timothy our brother,

To the Church of Yahweh in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all the saints throughout Achaia, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ -their Lord and ours:

(1Co 1:3)(2Co 1:2)Grace and peace to you from Yahweh our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

To the Romans [Ro 1:1-7]

(Ro 1:1)Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle and set apart for the Gospel of Yahweh (2)-the Gospel He promised beforehand through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures (3)regarding His Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David, (4)and who as to his holy spirit was declared to be the mighty Son of Yahweh by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord. (5)Through him and for his name's sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith. (6)And you also are among those who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.

(7)To all in Rome who are cherished by Yahweh and called to be saints:

Grace and peace to you from Yahweh our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

To the Ephesians [Eph 1:1-2]

(Eph 1:1)Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of Yahweh,

To the saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus:

(2)Grace and peace to you from Yahweh our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

To the Colossians [Col 1:1-2]

(Col 1:1)Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of Yahweh, and Timothy our brother,

(2)To the holy and faithful brothers in Jesus Christ at Colosse:

Grace and peace to you from Yahweh our Father.

To Philemon [*Phm 1:1-3*]

(Phm 1:1) Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother,

To Philemon our dear friend and fellow worker, (2) to Apphia our sister, to Archippus our fellow soldier and to the Church that meets in your home:

(3) Grace to you and peace from Yahweh our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

To the Philippians [*Php 1:1-2*]

(Php 1:1) Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus,

To all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons:

(2) Grace and peace to you from Yahweh our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

To Timothy [*1 Ti 1:1-2*] [*2 Ti 1:1-2*]

(1Ti 1:1)(2Ti 1:1) Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will and command of Yahweh our Savior and according to the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus our hope,

(1Ti 1:2)(2Ti 1:2) To Timothy my dear true son in the faith:

Grace, mercy and peace from Yahweh the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

To Titus [*Tit 1:1-4*]

(Tit 1:1) Paul, a servant of Yahweh, and an apostle of Jesus Christ for the faith of Yahweh's elect and the knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness (2)-a faith and knowledge resting on the hope of eternal life, which Yahweh, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time, (3) and at His appointed season He brought His Word to light through the preaching entrusted to me by the command of Yahweh our Savior,

(4) To Titus, my true son in our common faith:

Grace and peace from Yahweh the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior.

A perfectly clear declaration -repeated to all Churches and found so many times in the New Testament- that there is only One God [Yahweh] Maker of everything and everybody and that Jesus Christ is subordinate to Him. Jesus Christ, the Son of Yahweh and of a human woman, the appointed Lord of the human race, is a man, not a "god", not even a part of a "trinity."

As a further confirmation that Jesus was a man, not a "god," not a part of a "trinity," Paul points to the facts that Jesus was anointed as Savior of everybody by Yahweh, not by his own initiative, and that he didn't have any possibility of rising himself from death.

Yahweh knew before creation that it would be necessary for Jesus Christ to redeem men, but He has revealed -sent- Jesus Christ to men only in that particular moment of time.

Introduction of himself**Paul called by Yahweh** [*Gal 1:11-24*]

(Gal 1:11) I want you to know, brothers, that the Gospel I preached is not something that man made up. (12) I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.

(13) For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the Church of Yahweh and tried to destroy it. (14) I was advancing in Judaism beyond many Jews of my own age and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers. (15) But when Yahweh, who set me apart from birth and called me by His grace, was pleased (16) to reveal His Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not consult any man, (17) nor did I go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apo-

stles before I was, but I went immediately into Arabia and later returned to Damascus.

(18)Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Peter and stayed with him fifteen days. **(19)**I saw none of the other apostles -only James, the Lord Jesus Christ's brother. **(20)**I assure you before Yahweh that what I am writing you is no lie. **(21)**Later I went to Syria and Cilicia. **(22)**I was personally unknown to the Churches of Israel that are in Jesus Christ. **(23)**They only heard the report: "The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy." **(24)**And they praised Yahweh because of me.

James, the oldest of Jesus Christ's four brothers. After Jesus' birth, fulfilled her "physical" mission, Joseph and Mary had four sons, -Jesus' half-brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas- and some daughters -Jesus' half-sisters, whose names are not known- as reported in Mark 6:3; Matthew 13:55-56; John 2:12; 7:3,5; Acts 1:14; 1Corinthians 9:5; Galatians 1:19.

Paul accepted by the apostles [Gal 2:1-10]

(Gal 2:1)Fourteen years later I went up again to Jerusalem, this time with Barnabas. I took Titus along also. **(2)**I went in response to a revelation and set before them the Gospel that I preach among the Gentiles. But I did this privately to those who seemed to be leaders, for fear that I was running or had run my race in vain. **(3)**Yet not even Titus, who was with me, was compelled to be circumcised, even though he was a Greek. **(4)**This matter arose because some false brothers had infiltrated our ranks to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus and to make us slaves. **(5)**We did not give in to them for a moment, so that the truth of the Gospel might remain with you.

(6)As for those who seemed to be important -whatever they were makes no difference to me; Yahweh does not judge by external appearance- those men added nothing to my message. **(7)**On the contrary, they saw that I had been entrusted with the task of preaching the Gospel to the Gentiles, just as Peter had been to the Jews. **(8)**For Yahweh, who was at work in the ministry of Peter as an apostle to the Jews, was also at work in my ministry as an apostle to the Gentiles. **(9)**James, Peter and John, those reputed to be pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me. They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the Jews. **(10)**All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do.

Paul opposes Peter [Gal 2:11-21]

(Gal 2:11)When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong. **(12)**Before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. **(13)**The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray.

(14)When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the Gospel, I said to Peter in front of them all, "You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?"

(15)We who are Jews by birth and not **(16)**'Gentile sinners' know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Jesus Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified.

(17)If, while we seek to be justified in Jesus Christ, it becomes evident that we ourselves are sinners, does that mean that Jesus Christ promotes sin? Absolutely not! (18)If I rebuild what I destroyed, I prove that I am a lawbreaker. (19)For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for Yahweh. (20)I have been crucified with Jesus Christ and I no longer live, but Jesus Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of Yahweh, who had been fond of me and gave himself for me. (21)I do not set aside the grace of Yahweh, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Jesus Christ died for nothing!”

False brothers, the “Judaizers,” Jews-Christians who held that Gentile converts should be circumcised and obey the traditional Jewish laws. They accepted Christianity but believed that Yahweh never gave any privilege to a man who was not a Jew; and that therefore, before a man could become Christian, he had to be circumcised and respect all Jewish customs. What a risk for Christianity to become only another kind of Judaism! Circumcision -generally speaking, the keeping of Jewish religious traditions- was and is not a requirement for salvation; only faith in Jesus Christ as savior of everybody is, for all men of every time, race and country.

Note on the Roman Catholic Dogma of Papal Infallibility: If even the apostle Peter (who is considered the first Pope of the Christian Church) was so much in the wrong, how can the Popes pretend to be infallible?

Jesus Christ's sacrifice on the Cross was for the spiritual salvation of all men.

The Lord Yahweh's grace to Paul [1 Ti 1:12-17]

(1Ti 1:12)I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service. (13)Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. (14)The grace of Yahweh our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and affection that are in Christ Jesus.

(15)Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners -of whom I am the worst. (16)But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life. (17)Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, [Yahweh] the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Thanksgiving and prayer

To the Thessalonians [1 Th 1:2-10] [2 Th 1:3-12]

(1Th 1:2)We always thank Yahweh for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers. (3)We continually remember before Yahweh our Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by devotion, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

(4)For we know, brothers cherished by Yahweh, that He has chosen you, (5)because our Gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with the power of Yahweh's Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake. (6)You became imitators of us and of the Lord Jesus Christ; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by Yahweh's Holy Spirit. (7)And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. (8)The Lord Yahweh's

message rang out of you not only in Macedonia and Achaia -your faith in Yahweh has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it, (9)for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to Yahweh from idols to serve the living and true God, (10)and to wait for His Son from Heaven, whom He raised from the dead -Jesus Christ, who rescues us from the coming wrath.

(2Te 1:3)We ought always to thank Yahweh for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the affection every one of you has for each other is increasing. (4)Therefore, among Yahweh's Churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring.

(5)All this is evidence that Yahweh's judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the Kingdom of Yahweh, for which you are suffering. (6)Yahweh is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you (7)and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus Christ is revealed from Heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. (8)He will punish those who do not know Yahweh and do not obey the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. (9)They will be punished with complete ruin, shut out from the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ and from the majesty of his power (10)on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you.

(11)With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that [Yahweh] our God may count you worthy of His calling, and that by His power He may fulfill every good purpose of yours and every act prompted by your faith. (12)We pray this so that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of [Yahweh] our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus' resurrection was an act of the will of Yahweh. In effect Jesus, a dead man, could not have risen himself. The climax of the Gospels is the Resurrection, without which Jesus' death, though noble, would only have been tragic. But the Resurrection, due to the will of Yahweh, confirmed him to be His Son.

To the Corinthians [1 Co 1:4-9]

(1Co 1:4)I always thank Yahweh for you because of His grace given you in Christ Jesus. (5)For in him you have been enriched in every way -in all your speaking and in all your knowledge- (6)because our testimony about Jesus Christ was confirmed in you. (7)Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. (8)Yahweh will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. (9)Yahweh, Who has called you into fellowship with His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful.

To the Romans [Ro 1:8-10]

(Ro 1:8)First, I thank [Yahweh] my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world. (9)Yahweh, whom I serve with my whole heart in preaching the Gospel of His Son, is my witness how constantly I remember you (10)in my prayers at all times; and I pray that now at last by Yahweh's will the way may be opened for me to come to you.

To the Ephesians [Eph 1:15-23]

(Eph 1:15) For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your affection for all the saints, (16) I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. (17) I keep asking that [Yahweh] the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you spiritual wisdom and revelation, so that you may know Him better. (18) I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which He has called you, the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints, (19) and the incomparable greatness of His power for us who believe. That power will work as the mighty strength (20) which He exerted in Christ Jesus when He raised him from the dead and seated him at His right hand in the heavenly realms, (21) far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age, but also in the one to come. (22) And Yahweh placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the Church, (23) which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

Distinguishing between Yahweh, the Father, and His human Son, who is also divine, yet not “God,” not even as a part of a “trinity.”

Jesus' resurrection was an act of the will of Yahweh. In effect Jesus, a dead man, could not have risen himself.

At His right hand: The symbolic place of highest honor and authority having given Jesus the responsibility of the whole human race.

To the Colossians [Col 1:3-14]

(Col 1:3) We always thank Yahweh, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, (4) because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the affection you have for all the saints (5) - the faith and affection that springs from the hope that is stored up for you in Heaven and that you have already heard about in the Word of Truth, the Gospel (6) that has come to you. All over the world this Gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood Yahweh's grace in all its truth. (7) You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ Jesus on our behalf, (8) and who also told us of your spiritual affection.

(9) For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking Yahweh to fill you with the knowledge of His will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. (10) And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord Jesus Christ and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of Yahweh, (11) being strengthened with all power according to His glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully (12) giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the Kingdom of Light. (13) For He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the Kingdom of the Son He loves, (14) in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

A perfectly clear declaration -repeated so many times in the New Testament- that there is only One God [Yahweh] Maker of everything and everybody and that Jesus Christ is subordinate to Him. Jesus Christ, the Son of Yahweh and of a human woman, the appointed Lord of the human race, is a man, not a “god”, not even a part of a “trinity.”

To Philemon [Phm 1:4-7]

(Phm 1:4) I always thank [Yahweh] my God as I remember you in my prayers, **(5)** because I hear about your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and your affection for all the saints. **(6)** I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Jesus Christ. **(7)** Your affection has given me great joy and encouragement, because you, brother, have refreshed the hearts of the saints.

To the Philippians [Php 1:3-11]

(Php 1:3) I thank [Yahweh] my God every time I remember you. **(4)** In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy **(5)** because of your partnership in the Gospel from the first day until now, **(6)** being confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

(7) It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart; for whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the Gospel, all of you share in Yahweh's grace with me. **(8)** Yahweh can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.

(9) And this is my prayer: that your affection may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, **(10)** so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ Jesus, **(11)** filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ -to the glory and praise of Yahweh.

To Timothy [2 Ti 1:3]

(2Ti 1:3) I thank Yahweh, Whom I serve, as my forefather did, with a clear conscience, as night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers.

Praise to Yahweh**To the Corinthians: [Yahweh] the God of all comfort** [2 Co 1:3-11]

(2Co 1:3) Praise be to [Yahweh] the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, **(4)** who comfort us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from Yahweh. **(5)** For just as the sufferings of Jesus Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Jesus Christ our comfort overflows. **(6)** If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer. **(7)** And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort.

(8) We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. **(9)** Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on Yahweh, who raises the dead. **(10)** He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and He will deliver us. On Him we have set our hope that He will continue to deliver us, **(11)** as you help us by your prayers. Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favor granted us in answer to the prayers of many.

To the Romans [Ro 11:33-36] [Ro 16:25-27]

(Ro 11:33) *Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of Yahweh! How unsearchable His judgments, and His paths beyond tracing out!*

(34) *“Who has known the mind of the Lord Yahweh? Or who has been His counselor?”*

(35) *“Who has ever given to Yahweh, that Yahweh should repay him?”*

(36) *For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him the glory for ever! Amen!*

(Ro 16:25) *Now to Him who is able to establish you by my Gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, (26)but revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of [Yahweh] the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey Him (27)-to [Yahweh] the only wise God be glory for ever through Jesus Christ! Amen.*

To the Ephesians: Spiritual blessings in Jesus Christ [Eph 1:3-14] [Eph 3:20-21]

(Eph 1:3) *Praise be to [Yahweh] the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Jesus Christ. (4) For He chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight. (5)In affection He predestined us to be adopted as His sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with His pleasure and will (6)-to the praise of His glorious grace, which He has freely given us in Jesus Christ, the One He loves. (7)In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of Yahweh’s grace (8)that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. (9)And He made known to us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure, which He purposed in Jesus Christ, (10)to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment -to bring all things in Heaven and on Earth together under one head, under Christ.*

(11) *In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of Him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of His will, (12)in order that we, who were the first to hope in Jesus Christ, might be for the praise of His glory. (13)And you also were included in Jesus Christ when you heard the Word of Truth, the Gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit of Yahweh, (14)who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are Yahweh’s possession -to the praise of His glory.*

(Eph 3:20) *Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us, (21)to Him be glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.*

Jesus Christ's death on the Cross brought forgiveness of sins and spiritual salvation to all men.

Paul’s thought**Yahweh’s punishment of the wicked [Ro 1:18-32]**

(Ro 1:18) *The punishment of Yahweh is being revealed from Heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, (19)since what may be known about Yahweh is plain to them, because Yahweh has made it plain to them. (20)For since the creation of the world Yahweh’s invisible qualities -His eternal power and divine nature- have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.*

(21)For also they knew Yahweh, they neither glorified Him as God nor gave thanks to Him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. (22)Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools (23)and exchanged the glory of Yahweh the immortal God for images made to look like mortal men, birds, four-footed animals and reptiles.

(24)Therefore Yahweh gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. (25)They exchanged the truth of Yahweh for a lie, and worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator -who is forever praised. Amen.

(26)Because of this, Yahweh gave them over to shameful lust. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. (27)In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.

(28)Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of Yahweh, He gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done. (29)They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, (30)slanderers, Yahweh-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; (31)they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. (32)Although they know Yahweh's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things, but also approve of those who practice them.

Yahweh's righteous judgment [Ro 2:1-16]

(Ro 2:1)You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things. (2)Now we know that Yahweh's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth. (3)So when you, a mere man, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape Yahweh's judgment? (4)Or do you show contempt for the riches of His kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that Yahweh's kindness leads you toward repentance?

(5)But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up penalty against yourself for the day of Yahweh's judgment, when His righteous judgment will be revealed. (6)Yahweh will give to each person according to what he has done. (7)To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, He will give eternal life. (8)But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be severe punishment. (9)There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; (10)but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. (11)For Yahweh does not show favoritism.

(12)All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law. (13)For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in Yahweh's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous. (14)Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are the law for themselves, even though they do not have the law. (15)They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their inner thoughts now accusing, now de-

fending them. **(16)** This will take place on the day when Yahweh will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my Gospel declares.

Even if Paul was writing about the Jews, these considerations have general validity. Yahweh is just, so each person will be judged according to the reality of his life, religion, country, culture, etc. not by a rigid rule valid for ever and everybody.

The Jews and the law [Ro 2:17-29]

(Ro 2:17) Now you, if you call yourself a Jew, if you rely on the law and brag about your relationship to Yahweh; **(18)** if you know His will and approve of what is superior because you are instructed by the law; **(19)** if you are convinced that you are a guide for the blind, a light for those who are in the dark, **(20)** an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of infants, because you have in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth **(21)**-you, then, who teach others, do you not teach yourself? You who preach against stealing, do you steal? **(22)** You who say that people should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? **(23)** You who brag about the law, do you dishonor Yahweh by breaking the law? **(24)** As it is written: "Yahweh's Name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you."

(25) Circumcision has value if you observe the law, but if you break the law, you have become as though you have not been circumcised. **(26)** If those who are not circumcised keep the law's requirements, will they not be regarded as though they were circumcised? **(27)** The one who is not circumcised physically and yet obeys the law will condemn you who, even though you have the written code and circumcision, are a law-breaker.

(28) A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. **(29)** No, a man is a Jew if he is only inwardly; and circumcision is the spiritual circumcision of the heart, not by the written code. Such a man's praise is not from men, but from Yahweh.

The true sign of belonging to Yahweh is not given by an external mark on the physical body, or by following and performing set ceremonies, rituals, prayers, etc. but by the spiritual attitude -what Paul called "circumcision of the heart."

Yahweh's faithfulness [Ro 3:1-8]

(Ro 3:1) What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew, or what value is there in circumcision? **(2)** Much in every way! First of all, they have been entrusted with the very words of Yahweh.

(3) What if some did not have faith? Will their lack of faith nullify Yahweh's faithfulness? **(4)** Not at all! Let Yahweh be true, and every man a liar. As it is written:

"So that You may be proved right when You speak and prevail when You judge."

(5) But if our unrighteousness brings out Yahweh's righteousness more clearly, what shall we say? That Yahweh is unjust in bringing His punishment on us? (I am using a human argument.) **(6)** Certainly not! If that were so, how could Yahweh judge the world? **(7)** Someone might argue, "If my falsehood enhances Yahweh's truthfulness and so increases His glory, why am I still condemned as a sinner?" **(8)** Why not say -as we are being slanderously reported as saying and some claim that we say- 'Let us do evil that good may result?'" Their condemnation is deserved.

No one is righteous [Ro 3:9-20]

(Ro 3:9) *What shall we conclude then? Are we any better? Not at all! We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin. (10)As it is written:*

“There is not one righteous, not even one;

(11)*there is no one who understands, no one who seeks Yahweh.*

(12)*All have turned away, they have together become worthless;*

there is no one who does good, not even one.”

(13)*“Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit.”*

“The poison of vipers is on their lips.”

(14)*“Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness.”*

(15)*“Their feet are swift to shed blood; (16)ruin and misery mark their ways,*

(17)*and the way of peace they do not know.”*

(18)*“There is no fear of Yahweh before their eyes.”*

(19)*Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to Yahweh.*

(20)*Therefore no one will be declared righteous in His sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.*

Righteousness through faith [Ro 3:21-31]

(Ro 3:21)*But now a righteousness from Yahweh, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. (22)This righteousness from Yahweh comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, (23)for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of Yahweh, (24)and are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. (25)Yahweh presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He, Yahweh, did this to demonstrate His justice, because in His forbearance He had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished (26)-He did it to demonstrate His justice at the present time, so as to be just and the One who justifies those who have faith in Jesus Christ.*

(27)*Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith. (28)For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law. (29)Is Yahweh the God of Jews only? Is He not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too, (30)since there is only One God, Who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through the same faith. (31)Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law.*

Abraham justified by faith [Ro 4:1-25]

(Ro 4:1)*What then shall we say about Abraham, our forefather, in this matter? (2)If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had sometimes to boast about -but not before Yahweh. (3)What does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed Yahweh, and it was credited to him as righteousness.”*

(4)*Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. (5)However, to the man who does not depend on work but trusts Yahweh Who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness. (6)David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom Yahweh credits righteousness apart from works:*

(7)*“Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.*

(8)*Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him.”*

(9)Is this blessedness only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? We have been saying that Abraham's faith was credited to him as righteousness. (10)Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised, or before? It was not after, but before! (11)And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness that he had received by faith while he was still uncircumcised. So then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness might be credited to them. (12)And he is also the father of the circumcised who not only are circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.

(13)It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith. (14)For if those who live by law are heirs, faith has no value and the promise is worthless, (15)because law brings judgment. And where there is no law there is no transgression.

(16)Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring -not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. (17)As it is written: "I have made you a father of many nations." He is our father in the sight of Yahweh, in whom he believed -the God who gives life to the dead and calls to existence things that are not.

(18)Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, "So shall your offspring be." (19)Without weakening his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead -since he was about a hundred years old- and that Sarah's womb was also dead. (20)Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of Yahweh, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to Yahweh, (21)being fully persuaded that Yahweh had power to do what He had promised. (22)This is why "it was credited to him as righteousness." (23) The words "it was credited to him" were written not for him alone, (24)but also for us, to whom Yahweh will credit righteousness -for us who believe in Him who raised Jesus Christ our Lord from the dead. (25)He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.

Peace and joy [Ro 5:1-11]

(Ro 5:1)Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with Yahweh through our Lord Jesus Christ, (2)through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of Yahweh. (3)Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; (4)perseverance, character; and character, hope. (5) And hope does not disappoint us, because Yahweh has poured out His affection into our hearts by His Holy Spirit, whom He has given to us.

(6)You see, at just the right time, when we were still helpless, Jesus Christ died for the ungodly. (7)Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. (8)But Yahweh demonstrates His own affection for us in this: While we were still sinners, Jesus Christ died for us.

(9)Since we have been now justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from Yahweh's punishment through him! (10)For if, when we were Yahweh's enemies, we were reconciled to Him through the death of His Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life. (11)Not only is this so, but we also rejo-

ce in Yahweh through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Death through Adam, life through Jesus Christ [Ro 5:12-21]

(Ro 5:12)Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned (13)-for before the law was given, sin was in the world. But sin is not taken into account when there is no law. (14)Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who was a pattern of the One to come.

(15)But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died for the trespass of the one man, how much more did Yahweh's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many! (16)Again, the gift of Yahweh is not like the result of the one man's sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification. (17)For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through the one man, how much more will Yahweh's abundant grace and the gift of righteousness reign in the life of those who receive them through the one man, Jesus Christ.

(18)Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of the one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. (19)For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.

(20)The law was added, and so the trespass had to increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more, (21)so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Adam and Eve (here Paul totally ignores Eve!) did not obey to the command given them by Yahweh and were banished from the Garden of Eden. By not obeying they introduced sin in the human race ("in the world"); by being banished, and not allowed any more to eat from the tree of life, they introduced physical death (in the human race). The sin of Adam and Eve (the "Original Sin" -committed at the beginning of mankind, for which only Adam and Eve were responsible and bore the punishment) was and is not the sin of all mankind, but all mankind -which did not and does not have any moral involvement nor responsibility- had to suffer the consequences of what they had done and had to live -and die- out of the Garden of Eden.

Yahweh's grace -spiritual salvation- is given to each man -even to the worst sinner- who wants to accept it.

Dead to sin, alive in Jesus Christ [Ro 6:1-14]

(Ro 6:1)What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? (2)By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? (3)Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? (4)We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Jesus Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

(5)If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. (6)For we know that our old self was crucified with

him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin (7)-because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.

(8)Now if we died with Jesus Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. (9)For we know that since Jesus Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. (10)The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to Yahweh.

(11)In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to Yahweh in Christ Jesus. (12)Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. (13)Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to Yahweh, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to Him as instruments of righteousness. (14)For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.

At the beginning of Christianity conversion of adults and their baptism were parts of the same event, which made official the new Christians' spiritual communion with Jesus Christ and Yahweh, that is, their entrance in a "new life," being "born again."

Slaves to righteousness [Ro 6:15-23]

(Ro 6:15)What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! (16)Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey -whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? (17)But thanks be to Yahweh that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. (18)You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.

(19)I put this in human terms because you are weak in your natural selves. Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness. (20)When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness. (21)What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death! (22)But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to Yahweh, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. (23)For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of Yahweh is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

An illustration from marriage [Ro 7:1-6]

(Ro 7:1)Do you not know, brothers, -for I am speaking to men who know the law- that the law has authority over a man only as long as he lives? (2)For example, by law a married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive, but if her husband dies, she is released from the law of marriage. (3)So then, if she marries another man while her husband is still alive, she is called an adulteress. But if her husband dies, she is released from that law and is not an adulteress, even though she marries another man.

(4)So, my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Jesus Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit to Yahweh. (5)For when we were controlled by the sinful nature, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our bodies, so that we bore fruit for death. (6)But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new spiritual way, and not in the old way of the written code.

Struggling with sin [Ro 7:7-25]

(Ro 7:7)What shall we say, then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, "Do not covet." (8)But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of covetous desire. For apart from the law, sin is dead. (9)Once I was alive apart from law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died. (10)I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death. (11)For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death. (12)So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good.

(13)Did that which is good, then, become death to me? By no means! But in order that sin might be recognized as sin, it produced death in me through what was good, so that through the commandment sin might become absolutely sinful.

(14)We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. (15)I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. (16)And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. (17)As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. (18)I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. (19)For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do -this I keep on doing. (20)Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.

(21)So I find this principle at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. (22)For in my inner being I delight in Yahweh's law; (23)but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. (24)What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? (25)Thanks be to Yahweh -through Jesus Christ our Lord!

So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to Yahweh's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.

Life by means of Yahweh's Spirit [Ro 8:1-17]

(Ro 8:1)Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, (2)because through Christ Jesus the law of Yahweh's Spirit of Life set me free from the law of sin and death. (3)For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, Yahweh did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so He condemned sin in sinful man, (4)in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fulfilled in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to His Spirit.

(5)Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with Yahweh's Spirit have their minds set on what Yahweh's Spirit desires. (6)The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by Yahweh's Spirit is life and peace. (7)The sinful mind is hostile to Yahweh. It does not submit to Yahweh's law, nor can it do so. (8)Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please Yahweh.

(9)You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by Yahweh's Spirit, if the Spirit of Yahweh lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Jesus Christ, he does not belong to Jesus Christ. (10)But if Jesus Christ is in you, your body is dead be-

cause of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. (11)And if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus Christ from the dead is living in you, He who raised Jesus Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies thorough His Spirit, who lives in you.

(12)Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation -but it is not to it- to live according to the sinful nature. (13)For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by Yahweh's Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, (14)because those who are led by the Spirit of Yahweh are sons of Yahweh. (15)For you did not receive a Spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by this we cry, "Abba, Father." (16)Yahweh's Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are Yahweh's children. (17)Now if we are children, then we are heirs -heirs of Yahweh and co-heirs with Jesus Christ- if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

Future glory [Ro 8:18-27]

(Ro 8:18)I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. (19)The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of Yahweh to be revealed. (20)For the creation was subjected to frustration -not by its own choice, but by the will of the One who subjected it- but in hope (21)that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of Yahweh.

(22)We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. (23)Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of Yahweh's Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. (24)For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? (25)But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we have to wait for it patiently.

(26)In the same way, Yahweh's Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit of Yahweh Himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. (27)And Yahweh, who searches our hearts, knows what to say by His Spirit, because His Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with His will.

More than winners [Ro 8:28-39]

(Ro 8:28)And we know that in all things Yahweh works for the good of those who are fond of Him, who have been called according to His purpose. (29)For those Yahweh foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of His Son, that he might be the first-born among many brothers. (30)And those He predestined, He also called; those He called, He also justified; those He justified, He also glorified.

(31)What, then, shall we say in response to this? If Yahweh is for us, who can be against us? (32)He who did not spare His own Son, but gave him up for us all -how will He not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? (33)Who will bring any charge against those whom Yahweh has chosen? It is Yahweh who justifies. (34)Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died -more than that, who was raised to life- is at the right hand of Yahweh and is interceding for us. (35)Who shall separate us from the affection of Jesus Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? (36)As it is written:

“For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”

(37)No, in all these things we are more than winners through him who had been fond of us. (38) For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, (39)neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the affection of Yahweh that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

From ever Yahweh knows who are those who by faith would be His people during their terrestrial life. Furthermore, Yahweh wants (and knows that, at the end of time, it will be so) all men to be in spiritual communion with Him and Jesus Christ. In other terms, all men are “predestined” to live in spiritual communion with Yahweh and Jesus. (For more information about universal spiritual communion, see “Thoughts. At the end of time everybody will be with Yahweh).

Yahweh’s sovereign choice [Ro 9:1-29]

(Ro 9:1)I speak the truth in Jesus Christ -I am not lying, my conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit of Yahweh- (2)I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. (3)For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Jesus Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, (4)the people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the Temple worship and the promises. (5)Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Jesus Christ, who is Son of Yahweh over all, forever praised! Amen.

(6)It is not as though Yahweh’s word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. (7)Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham’s children. On the contrary, “It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.” (8)In other words, it is not the natural children who are Yahweh’s children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham’s offspring. (9)For this was how the promise was stated: “At the appointed time I will return, and Sarah will have a son.”

(10)Not only that, but Rebekah’s children had one and the same father, our father Isaac. (11)Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad -in order that Yahweh’s purpose in election might stand: (12)Not by works but by Him who calls-she was told, “The older will serve the younger.” (13)Just as it is written:

“Jacob, I had been fond of, but Esau I hadn’t been fond of.”

(14)What then shall we say? Is Yahweh unjust? Not at all! (15)For He says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.”

(16)It does not, therefore, depend on man’s desire or effort, but on Yahweh’s mercy. (17)For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: “I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display My power in you and that My Name might be proclaimed in all the Earth.” (18)Therefore Yahweh has mercy on whom He wants to have mercy, and He hardens whom He wants to harden.

(19)One of you will say to me: “Then why does Yahweh still blames us? For who resists His will?” (20)But who are you, O man, to talk back to Yahweh? “Shall what is formed say to Him who formed it, ‘Why did you make me like this?’” (21)Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use?

(22)What if Yahweh, choosing to show His wrath and make His power known, bore with great patience the objects of His wrath -prepared for destruction? (23)What if He did this to make the riches of His glory known to the objects of His mercy, whom He prepared in advance for glory- (24)even us, whom He called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles? (25)As He says in Hosea:

“I will call them ‘My people’ who are not My people;
And I will call her ‘My cherished one’ who is not My cherished one.”

(26)And,

“It will happen that in the very place where it was said to them, ‘You are not My people,’ they will be called ‘sons of [Yahweh] the living God.’”

(27)Isaiah cries out concerning Israel:

“Though the number of the Israelites be like the sand by the sea,
only the remnant will be saved.

(28)For the Lord Yahweh will carry out His sentence on Earth
with speed and finality.”

(29)It is just as Isaiah said previously:

“Unless Yahweh the Lord Almighty had left us descendants, we
would have become as Sodom, we would have been like Gomorrah.”

Israel’s unbelief [Ro 9:30-33;10:1-21]

(Ro 9:30)What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; (31)but Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it. (32)Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works. They stumbled over the “stumbling stone.” (33)As it is written:

“See, I lay in Zion a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.”

(10:1)Brothers, my heart’s desire and prayer to Yahweh for the Israelites is that they may be saved. (2)For I can testify about them that they are zealous for Yahweh, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. (3)Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from Yahweh and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to Yahweh’s righteousness. (4)Jesus Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

(5)Moses describes in this way the righteousness that is by the law: “The man who does this things will live by them.” (6)But of the righteousness that is by faith he says: “Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into Heaven?’” (that is, to bring Jesus Christ down) (7)“or ‘Who will descend into the deep?’” (that is, to bring Jesus Christ up from the dead). (8)But what does he say? “The Word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart,” that is, the Word of faith we are proclaiming: (9)That if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus Christ is Lord,” and believe in your heart that Yahweh raised him from the dead, you will be saved. (10)For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. (11)As the Scripture says, “Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame.” (12)For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile -the same Lord Jesus Christ is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, (13)for, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ will be saved.”

(14)How, then, can they call on the One they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the One of whom they have not heard? (15)And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"

(16)But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, "Lord Yahweh, who has believed our message?" (17)Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message heard carries the Word of Jesus Christ. (18)But I ask: Did they not hear? Of course they did:

"Their voice has gone out into all the Earth, their words to the end of the world."

(19)Again I ask: Did Israel not understand? First, Moses says,

"I will make you envious by those who are not a nation; I will make you angry by a nation that has no understanding."

(20)And Isaiah boldly says:

"I was found by those who did not seek Me; I revealed Myself to those who did not ask for Me."

(21)But concerning Israel he says,

"All day long I have held out My hands to a disobedient and obstinate people."

The Jews pursued the letter of the Law developing religious traditions and trying to obtain salvation by "works," that is, by acts, ceremonies, set prayers, rules "do" and "do not," religious organizations, buildings and objects of cult, etc. (exactly as the Christians have done, in all their Denominations).

"Jesus Christ is Lord" and "Yahweh raised him from the dead" represent the earliest Christian profession of faith, the first Creed. Furthermore, this is a further declaration that Jesus was a man, not a "god," not a part of a "trinity," for he was resurrected and anointed as Savior of everybody by Yahweh, not by his own initiative.

Christian faith has to be only in the "Word of Jesus Christ," that is, in Jesus' teaching, as it is reported in the four Gospels, not in any other book or comment or whatever else!

The remnant of Israel [Ro 11:1-10]

(Ro 11:1)I ask then: Did Yahweh reject His people? By no means! I am an Israelite myself, a descendant from Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin. (2)Yahweh did not reject His people, whom He foreknew. Don't you know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah -how he appealed to Yahweh against Israel: (3)"Lord Yahweh, they have killed Your prophets and torn down Your altars; I am the only one left, and they are trying to kill me"? (4)And what was Yahweh's answer to him? "I have reserved for Myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal." (5)So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace. (6)And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace.

(7)What then? What Israel sought so earnestly it did not obtain, but the elect did. The others were hardened, (8)as it is written:

"Yahweh gave them a spirit of lethargy, eyes so that they could not see and ears so that they could not hear, to this very day."

(9)And David says:

"May their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a retribution for them. (10)May their eyes be darkened so they cannot see, and their backs be bent forever."

Ingrafted branches [Ro 11:11-24]

(Ro 11:11) Again I ask: Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious. (12) But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their fullness bring!

(13) I am talking to you Gentiles, since I am the apostle to the Gentiles. I make much of my ministry (14) in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them. (15) For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? (16) If the part of the dough offered as first-fruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy; if the root is holy, so are the branches.

(17) If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, (18) do not boast over those branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you. (19) You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in." (20) Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but be afraid. (21) For if Yahweh did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you either.

(22) Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of Yahweh: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in His kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off. (23) And if they do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for Yahweh is able to graft them again. (24) After all, if you were cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature, and contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much more readily will these, the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree!

All Israel will be saved [Ro 11:25-32; 12:1-2]

(Ro 11:25) I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. (26) And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written:

"The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob. (27) And this will be My covenant with them when I take away their sins."

(28) As far as the Gospel is concerned, they are enemies of Yahweh on your account; but as far as election is concerned, they are cherished on account of the patriarchs, (29) for Yahweh's gift and His call are irrevocable. (30) Just as you who were at one time disobedient to Yahweh have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience, (31) so they too have now become disobedient in order that they too may receive mercy as a result of Yahweh's mercy to you. (32) For Yahweh has bound all men over to disobedience so that He may have mercy on them all.

(12:1) Therefore I urge you, brothers, in view of Yahweh's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to Yahweh -this is your spiritual act of worship. (2) Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what Yahweh's will is -His good, pleasing and perfect will.

The Son superior to angels [Heb 1:1-14]

(Heb 1:1) In the past Yahweh spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, (2) but in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son Jesus Christ, whom He appointed heir of all things, and for whom He made the world.

(3)The Son is the radiance of Yahweh’s glory and the exact representation of His being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty of Yahweh in Heaven. (4)So he became as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs.

*(5)For to which of the angels did Yahweh ever say,
“You are My Son; today I have become your Father”?*

Or again,

“I will be His Father, and he will be My Son”?

(6)And again, when Yahweh brings His firstborn into the world, He says,

“Let all Yahweh’s angels worship him.”

(7)In speaking of the angels He says,

“He makes His angels winds, His servants flames of fire.”

(8)But about the Son He says,

“Your throne, O Lord Jesus Christ, will last for ever and ever, and righteousness will be the scepter of your kingdom. (9)You have liked righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore Yahweh, your God, has set you above all companions by anointing you with the oil of joy.”

(10)He also says,

“In the beginning I, the Lord Yahweh, laid the foundations of the Earth, and the Heavens are the work of My hands. (11)They will perish, but you remain. They will all wear out like a garment; (12)you will roll them up like a robe, like a garment they will be changed. But you remain the same, and your years will never end.”

(13)To which of the angels did Yahweh ever say,

“Sit at My right hand that I make your enemies a footstool for your feet”?

(14)Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?

Yahweh knew before creation that it would be necessary for Jesus Christ to come and redeem all men, but He has revealed -sent- Jesus Christ to men only in that particular moment of time. In effect, the Old Testament revelation of Jesus Christ's coming was fragmentary and occasional, lacking fullness and finality.

And Jesus -a man, not a “god,” not a part of a “trinity”- was anointed as Savior of all men by Yahweh, not by his own initiative.

Note: It is clear that all Scriptures (Old and New Testament) speak of and refer to the human race only, not of and to all other intelligent and spiritual races that, surely, exist around the universe. This is because the world (universe) as it was understood at the time included only the Earth (at the center, with the sun and the moon rotating around it). This means that the saving action of Jesus Christ, the human son of Yahweh and a woman, was and is for the human race only.

A perfectly clear declaration -found so many times in the New Testament- that there is only One God [Yahweh] Maker of everything and everybody and that Jesus Christ is subordinate to Him, ruling in His behalf as Lord, Judge and Savior of all men. (For a deeper understanding of this point, see: “Thoughts. The Creed of the Universal Communion. Who is second only to the Father, who gave him the task to improve the human physical and spiritual condition, and to administer justice to the living and the dead thus making everybody suitable to enter His kingdom”).

Warning to pay attention [Heb 2:1-4]

(Heb 2:1) We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away. (2) For if the message spoken by angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, (3) how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord Jesus Christ, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. (4) Yahweh also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of His Holy Spirit distributed according to His will.

Jesus Christ made like his brothers [Heb 2:5-18]

(Heb 2:5) It is not to angels that He [Yahweh] has subjected the world to come, about which we are speaking. (6) But there is a place where someone has testified:

“What is man that You are mindful of him? Or the Son of Man that You care for him? (7) You made him a little lower than the angels, You crowned him with glory and honor (8) and put everything under his feet.”

In putting everything under him, Yahweh left nothing that is not subject to him. Yet at present we do not see everything subject to him. (9) But we see that Jesus Christ, who was made a little lower than the angels, is now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of Yahweh he might taste death for everyone.

(10) In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that Yahweh, for Whom and through Whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering. (11) Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus Christ is not ashamed to call them brothers. (12) He says,

“I will declare Your Name to my brothers; in the presence of the congregation I will sing Your praises.”

And again,

“I will put my trust in Him.”

(13) And again he says,

“Here am I, and the children Yahweh has given me.”

(14) Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death -that is, the devil- (15) and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. (16) For surely it is no angels he helps, but Abraham descendants. (17) For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to Yahweh, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. (18) Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

Jesus Christ greater than Moses [Heb 3:1-6]

(Heb 3:1) Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus Christ, the apostle and high priest whom we confess. (2) He was faithful to the One who appointed him, just as Moses was faithful in all Yahweh's house. (3) Jesus Christ has been found worthy of greater honor than Moses, just as the builder of a house has greater honor than the house itself. (4) For every house is built by someone, but Yahweh is the builder of everything. (5) Moses, who was faithful as a servant in all Yahweh's house, has testified to what would be said in the future. (6) But Jesus Christ, who is faithful as a son, is over Yahweh's house. And we are His house, if we hold on to our courage and the hope of which we boast.

Warning against unbelief [Heb 3:7-19]

(Heb 3:7) So, as Yahweh's Holy Spirit says:

"Today, if you hear his voice, **(8)** do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion, during the time of testing in the desert, **(9)** where your fathers tested and tried Me; and for forty years saw what I did. **(10)** That is why I was angry with that generation, and I said, 'Their hearts are always going astray, and they have not known My ways.' **(11)** So I declared on oath in My anger, 'They shall never enter My Rest.'"

(12) See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from [Yahweh] the living God. **(13)** But encourage one another day by day, as long as it is still "today," so none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. **(14)** We have come to share in Jesus Christ, if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first. **(15)** As has just been said:

"Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion."

(16) Who were they who heard and rebelled? Were they not all those Moses led out of Egypt? **(17)** And with whom was He angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the desert? **(18)** And to whom did Yahweh swear that they would never enter His Rest if not to those who disobeyed? **(19)** So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief.

A Sabbath-Rest for the people of Yahweh [Heb 4:1-13]

(Heb 4:1) Therefore, since the promise of entering His Rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it. **(2)** For we also have had the Gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith. **(3)** And now we, who have believed, enter that Rest, just as Yahweh has said,

"So I declared on oath in My anger, 'They shall never enter My rest.'"

And truly His work has been finished since the creation of the world, **(4)** for somewhere He has spoken about the seventh day in these words: "And on the seventh day Yahweh rested from all His work." **(5)** And again in the passage above He says, "They shall never enter My rest."

(6) It still remains that some will enter His Rest, but those who formerly had the Gospel preached to them did not go in, because of their disobedience. **(7)** Therefore Yahweh again set a certain day, calling it "today," when a long time later He spoke through David, as was said before:

"Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts."

(8) For if Joshua had given them rest, Yahweh would not have spoken later about another day. **(9)** There remains, then, a Sabbath-Rest for the people of Yahweh; **(10)** for anyone who enters Yahweh's Rest also rests from his own work, just as Yahweh did from His. **(11)** Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that Rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience.

(12) For the Word of Yahweh is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. **(13)** Nothing in all creation is hidden from Yahweh's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.

Jesus Christ the great high priest [Heb 4:14-16;5:1-10]

(Heb 4:14)Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone into the Heavens, Jesus Christ the Son of Yahweh, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. **(15)**For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are -yet he was without sin. **(16)**Let us then approach the Throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

(5:1)Every high priest is selected from among men and is appointed to represent them in matters related to Yahweh, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. **(2)**He is able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and are going astray, since he himself is subject to weakness. **(3)**This is why he has to offer sacrifices for his own sins, as well as for the sins of the people.

(4)No one takes this honor upon himself; he must be called by Yahweh, just as Aaron was. **(5)**So Jesus Christ also did not take upon himself the glory of becoming a high priest. But Yahweh said to him,

“You are My Son; today I have become your Father.”

(6)And He says in another place,

“You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.”

(7)During the days of Jesus Christ’s life on Earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the One who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. **(8)**Although he was Son, he learned obedience from what he suffered **(9)**and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him **(10)**and was designated by Yahweh to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek.

The certainty of Yahweh’s promise [Heb 6:13-20]

(Heb 6:13)When Yahweh made His promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for Him to swear by, He swore by Himself, **(14)**saying, “I will surely bless you and give you many descendants.” **(15)**And so after waiting patiently, Abraham received what was promised.

(16)Men swear by someone greater than themselves, and the oath confirms what is said and puts an end to all arguments. **(17)**Because Yahweh wanted to make the unchanging nature of His purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, He confirmed it with an oath. **(18)**Yahweh did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for Yahweh to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged. **(19)**We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, **(20)**where Jesus Christ, who went before us, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.

Melchizedek the priest [Heb 7:1-10]

(Heb 7:1)This Melchizedek was king of Salem and priest of Yahweh Most High. He met Abraham returning from the defeat of the kings and blessed him, **(2)**and Abraham gave him a tenth of everything. First, his name means “king of righteousness;” then also, “king of Salem,” which means “king of peace.” **(3)**Without father and mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, like the Son of Yahweh he remains a priest forever.

(4)Just think how great he was: Even the patriarch Abraham gave him a tenth of the plunder! (5)Now the law requires the descendants of Levi who become priests to collect a tenth from the people -that is, their brothers- even though their brothers are descended from Abraham. (6)This man, however, did not trace his descent from Levi, yet he collected a tenth from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises. (7)And without doubt the lesser person is blessed by the greater. (8)In the one case, the tenth is collected by men who die; but in the other case, by him who is declared to be living. (9)One might even say that Levi, who collects the tenth, paid the tenth through Abraham, (10) because when Melchizedek met Abraham, Levi was still in the body of his ancestor.

Jesus Christ like Melchizedek [Heb 7:11-28]

(Heb 7:11)If perfection could have been attained through the Levitical priesthood (for on the basis of it the law was given to the people), why was there still need for another priest to come -one in the order of Melchizedek, not in the order of Aaron? (12) For when there is a change of the priesthood, there must also be a change of the law. (13)He of whom these things are said belonged to a different tribe, and no one from that tribe has ever served at the altar. (14)For it is clear that our Lord Jesus Christ descended from Judah, and in regard to that tribe Moses said nothing about priests. (15)And what we have said is even more clear if another priest like Melchizedek appears, (16) one who has become a priest not on the basis of a regulation as to his ancestry but on the basis of the power of an indestructible life. (17)For it is declared:

(18)“You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.”

The former regulation is set aside because it was weak and useless (19)(for the law made nothing perfect), and a better hope is introduced, by which we draw near to Yahweh.

(20)And it was not without an oath! Others became priests without any oath, (21)but he became a priest with an oath when Yahweh said to him:

“The Lord Yahweh has sworn and will not change His mind: ‘You are a priest forever.’”

(22)Because of this oath, Jesus Christ has become the guarantee of a better covenant.

(23)Now there have been many of those priests, since death prevented them from continuing in office; (24)but because Jesus Christ lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. (25)Therefore he is able to save for ever those who come to Yahweh through him, because he always lives and intercedes for them.

(26)Such a high priest meets our need -one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the Heavens. (27)Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself. (28)For the law appoints as high priests men who are weak; but the oath, which came after the law, appointed the Son, who has been made perfect forever.

Jesus Christ offered and sacrificed himself once for ever for all men. This means that the breaking of bread and the sharing of the cup done at the end of the communal meal (or during a Mass), is in remembrance of Jesus Christ's -once for ever and for all- sacrifice and death for the spiritual salvation of all men. The repetition of this act is not the repetition of Jesus' sacrifice on the Cross -as many Churches came to believe- but -as asked by Jesus- a remembrance of it and a reminder of the “New Covenant,” the new “Christian” relationship between Yahweh and all men.

The high priest of a new covenant [Heb 8:1-13]

(Heb 8:1)The point of what we are saying is this: We do have such a high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the Throne of the Majesty of Yahweh in Heaven, (2)and who serves in the Sanctuary, the true Tabernacle set up by the Lord Yahweh, not by man.

(3)Every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices, and so it was necessary for this one also to have something to offer. (4)If he were on Earth, he would not be a priest, for there are already men who offer the gifts prescribed by the law. (5)They serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in Heaven. This is why Moses was warned when he was about to build the tabernacle: “See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.” (6)But the ministry Jesus Christ has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, and it is founded on better promises.

(7)For if there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no other would have been sought for. (8)But Yahweh found fault with the people and said:

“The time is coming, declares the Lord Yahweh, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. (9)It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they did not remain faithful to My covenant, and I turned away from them, declares the Lord Yahweh. (10)This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord Yahweh. I will put My laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be My people. (11)No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord Yahweh,’ because they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest. (12)For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.”

(13)By calling this covenant “new,” He has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear.

Worship in the earthly tabernacle [Heb 9:1-10]

(Heb 9:1)Now the first covenant had regulations for worship and also an earthly sanctuary. (2)A tabernacle was set up. In its first rooms were the lampstand, the table and the consecrated bread; this was called the Holy Place. (3)Behind the second curtain was a room called the Most Holy Place, (4)which had the golden altar of incense and the gold-covered ark of the covenant. This ark contained the gold jar of manna, Aaron’s staff that had budded, and the stone tablets of the covenant. (5)Above the ark were the cherubim of the Glory, overshadowing the mercy seat. But we cannot discuss these things in detail now.

(6)When everything had been arranged like this, the priests entered regularly into the outer room to carry on their ministry. (7)But only the high priest entered the inner room, and that only once a year, and never without blood, which he offered for himself and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance. (8)Yahweh’s Holy Spirit was showing by this that the way into the Most High Place had not yet been disclosed as long as the first tabernacle was still standing. (9)This illustration is for the present time, indicating that the gifts and sacrifices being offered were not able to clear the consciences of the worshippers. (10)For they were only a matter of food and drink and various ceremonial washings -external regulations applying until the time of the new order.

The blood of Jesus Christ [Heb 9:11-28]

(Heb 9:11) *When Jesus Christ came as high priest of the good things that are already here, he went through the greater and more perfect Tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say, not a part of this creation. (12) He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption. (13) The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. (14) How much more, then, will the blood of Jesus Christ, who by means of the eternal Spirit of Yahweh offered himself unblemished to Yahweh, cleanse our consciences from useless rituals, so that we may serve [Yahweh] the living God!*

(15) *For this reason Jesus Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance -now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.*

(16) *In the case of a will, it is necessary to prove the death of the one who made it, (17) because a will is in force only when somebody has died; it never takes effect while the one who made it is living. (18) This is why even the first covenant was not put into effect without blood. (19) When Moses had proclaimed every commandment of the law to all people, he took the blood of calves, together with water, scarlet wool and branches of hyssop, and sprinkled the scroll and all the people. (20) He said, "This is the blood of the covenant, which Yahweh has commanded you to keep." (21) In the same way, he sprinkled with the blood both the tabernacle and everything used in its ceremonies. (22) In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood; and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.*

(23) *It was necessary, then, for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these sacrifices, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. (24) For Jesus Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; but he entered Heaven itself, to appear for us in Yahweh's presence. (25) Nor did he enter Heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own. (26) Then Jesus Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But now he has appeared once for all till the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. (27) Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, (28) so Jesus Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of all people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.*

Another clear declaration that Jesus Christ offered and sacrificed himself once for ever for all men. This means that the breaking of bread and the sharing of the cup done at the end of the communal meal (or during a Mass), is in remembrance of Jesus Christ's -once for ever and for all- sacrifice and death for the spiritual salvation of all men. The repetition of this act is not the repetition of Jesus' sacrifice on the Cross -as many Churches came to believe- but -as asked by Jesus- a remembrance of it and a reminder of the "New Covenant," the new "Christian" relationship between Yahweh and all men.

Jesus' second coming at the end of the world will be followed by the Universal Resurrection, and then all men will live for ever in Yahweh's Kingdom, not only with their soul, but with their resurrected body. (For a better comprehension of this point, see: "Thoughts. Soul, body, resurrection").

Jesus Christ's sacrifice once for all [Heb 10:1-18]

(Heb 10:1) *The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming -not the things themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifice repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. (2) If it could, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. (3) But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins, (4) because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.*

(5) *Therefore, when Jesus Christ came into the world, he said:*

"Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but a body You prepared for me; (6) with burnt offerings and sin offerings You were not pleased. (7) Then I said, 'Here I am -it is written about me in the scroll- I have come to do Your will, O Yahweh.'"

(8) *First he said, "Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings You did not desire, nor were You pleased with them" (although the law required them to be made).*

(9) *Then he said, "Here I am, I have come to do Your will." He sets aside the first to establish the second. (10) And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.*

(11) *Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. (12) But when this priest has offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of Yahweh. (13) Since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool, (14) because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.*

(15) *Yahweh's Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this. First He says:*

(16) *"This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord Yahweh. I will put My laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds."*

(17) *Then He adds:*

"Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more." (18) And where these have been forgiven, there is no longer any sacrifice for sin.

Another clear declaration that Jesus Christ offered and sacrificed himself once for ever for all men. This means that the breaking of bread and the sharing of the cup done at the end of the communal meal (or during a Mass), is in remembrance of Jesus Christ's -once for ever and for all- sacrifice and death for the spiritual salvation of all men. The repetition of this act is not the repetition of Jesus' sacrifice on the Cross -as many Churches came to believe- but -as asked by Jesus- a remembrance of it and a reminder of the "New Covenant," the new "Christian" relationship between Yahweh and all men.

A call to persevere [Heb 10:19-39]

(Heb 10:19) *Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus Christ, (20) by a new and living way opened to us through the curtain, that is, his body, (21) and since we have a great priest over the House of Yahweh, (22) let us draw near to Yahweh with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. (23) Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for He who promised is faithful. (24) And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward fondness and good deeds. (25) Let us not give up meeting together, as some are*

in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another -and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

(26)If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sin is left, (27)but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of Yahweh. (28)Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. (29)How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of Yahweh under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted Yahweh's spiritual grace? (30)For we know Him who said, "It is Mine to avenge; I will repay," and again, "The Lord Yahweh will judge His people." (31)It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of [Yahweh] the living God.

(32)Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you stood your ground in a great struggle in the face of suffering. (33)Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. (34)You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions.

(35)So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. (36)You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of Yahweh, you will receive what He has promised. (37)For in just a very little while,

"He who is coming will come and will not delay. (38)But My righteous will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him."

(39)But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved.

By faith [Heb 11:1-40]

(Heb 11:1)Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. (2)This is what the ancients were commended for.

(3)By faith we understand that the universe was formed by Yahweh's Word, so that what is seen was not made out of what is visible.

(4)By faith Abel offered Yahweh a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man, when Yahweh spoke well of his offerings. And by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead.

(5)By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death; he could not be found, because Yahweh had taken him away. For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased Yahweh. (6)And without faith it is impossible to please Yahweh, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him.

(7)By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of that righteousness that comes by faith.

(8)By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. (9)By faith he made his home in the Promised Land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. (10)For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is Yahweh.

(11)By faith Abraham, even though he was past age -and Sarah herself was barren- was enabled to become a father because he considered Him faithful who had made the promise. (12)And so from this one man, and he was good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore.

(13)All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were strangers and sojourners on Earth. (14)People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. (15)If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. (16)Instead, they were longing for a better country -a heavenly one. Therefore Yahweh is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.

(17)By faith Abraham, when Yahweh tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promise was about to sacrifice his one and only son, (18)even though Yahweh had said to him, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." (19)Abraham reasoned that Yahweh could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death.

(20)By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau in regard to their future.

(21)By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of Joseph's sons, and prayed as he leaned on the top of his staff.

(22)By faith Joseph, when his end was near, spoke about the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and gave instructions about his bones.

(23)By faith Moses' parents hid him for three months after he was born, because they saw he was not ordinary child, and they were not afraid of the king's edict.

(24)By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. (25)He chose to be mistreated along with the people of Yahweh rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. (26)He regarded disgrace for the sake of the Messiah as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward. (27)By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger; he persevered because he saw Him who is invisible. (28)By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, so that the destroyer would not touch the firstborn of Israel.

(29)By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as on dry land; but when the Egyptians tried to do so, they were drowned.

(30)By faith the walls of Jericho fell, after the people had marched around them for seven days.

(31)By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were unbelieving.

(32)And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets, (33)who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, (34)quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. (35)Women received back their dead, raised to life again. Other were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection. (36)Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. (37)They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated (38)-the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground.

(39)These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. (40)Yahweh had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.

Yahweh disciplines His sons [Heb 12:1-13]

(Heb 12:1)Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. (2)Let us fix our eyes on Jesus Christ, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the Cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the Throne of Yahweh. (3)Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

(4)In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. (5)And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons:

“My son, do not make light of the Lord Yahweh’s discipline, and do not lose heart when He rebukes you, (6)because the Lord Yahweh disciplines those He is fond of, and He punishes everyone He accepts as a son.”

(7)Endure hardship as discipline; Yahweh is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? (8)If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. (9)Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! (10)Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but Yahweh disciplines us for our good, that we may share in His holiness. (11)No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

(12)Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees. (13)“Make level paths for your feet,” so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ [1 Co 15:1-11]

(1Co 15:1)Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the Gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. (2)By this Gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the Word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.

(3)For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Jesus Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, (4)that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, (5)and that he appeared to Peter and then to the Twelve. (6)After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. (7)Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, (8)and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

(9)For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the Church of Yahweh. (10)But by the grace of Yahweh I am what I am, and His grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them -yet not I, but the grace of Yahweh that was with me. (11)Whether, then, it was I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed.

The resurrection of the dead [1 Co 15:12-34]

(1Co 15:12)But if it is preached that Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? (13)If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Jesus Christ has been raised. (14)And if Jesus Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. (15)More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about Yahweh, for we have testified about Yahweh that He raised Jesus Christ from the dead. But He did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. (16)For if the dead are not raised, then Jesus Christ has not been raised either. (17)And if Jesus Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. (18)Then those also who have fallen asleep in Jesus Christ are lost. (19)If only for this life we have hope in Jesus Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.

(20)But Jesus Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. (21)For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. (22)For as in Adam all die, so in Jesus Christ all will be made alive. (23)But each in his own turn: Jesus Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. (24)Then the end will come, when he hands over the Kingdom to Yahweh the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. (25)For he must reign until He has put all his enemies under his feet. (26)The last enemy to be destroyed is death. (27)For He “has put everything under his feet.” Now when it says that “everything” has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include Yahweh Himself, who put everything under Jesus Christ. (28)When He has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to Him who put everything under him, so that Yahweh may be all in all.

(29)Now if there is no resurrection, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized for them? (30)And as for us, why do we endanger ourselves every hour? (31)I die every day -I mean that, brothers- just as surely as I glory over you in Christ Jesus our Lord. (32)If I fought wild beasts in Ephesus for merely human reasons, what have I gained? If the dead are not raised,

“Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.”

(33)Do not be misled: “Bad company corrupts good character.” (34)Come back to your senses as you ought, and stop sinning; for there are some who are ignorant of Yahweh -I say this to your shame.

The resurrection of the dead, of all the dead, in the central point of the Christian religion, which is based on Jesus Christ's physical death and subsequent physical resurrection. To deny one, or both, means to deny the whole Christian religion.

An already and always clear point: after the end of time all men will live in spirit and resurrected body in the Kingdom of Yahweh, in spiritual communion with Jesus Christ, Yahweh and all His other spiritual creatures.

The resurrection body [1 Co 15:35-58]

(1Co 15:35)But someone may ask: “How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?” (36)How foolish! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. (37)When you sow, you do not sow the plant that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else. (38)But Yahweh gives it a body as He has determined; to each kind of seed He gives its own body. (39)All bodies are not the same: Men have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds another and fish another. (40)There are also

heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies; but the splendor of the heavenly bodies is one kind, and the splendor of the earthly bodies is another. (41)The sun has one kind of splendor, the moon another and the stars another; and star differs from star in splendor.

(42)So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, and it is raised imperishable; (43)it is sown in dishonor, and it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, and it is raised in power; (44)it is sown a natural body, and it is raised a spiritual body.

As there is a material body, there is also a spiritual body. (45)So it is written: "The first man Adam became a living being;" the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. (46)The spiritual did not come first, but the material, and after that the spiritual. (47)The first man was of the dust of the Earth, the second man from Heaven. (48)As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the Earth; and as is the man from Heaven, so also are those who are of Heaven. (49)And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from Heaven.

(50)I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of Yahweh, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. (51)Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all die, but we will all be changed (52)-in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. (53)For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. (54)When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory."

(55) "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death is your sting?" (56)The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. (57)But thanks be to Yahweh! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

(58)Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord Jesus Christ, because you know that your labor in the Lord Jesus Christ is not vain.

The resurrected body will not be a non-material body but a physical one, similar to the present yet radically different in that it will be fit to live in eternal universal communion with Yahweh. (For a deeper understanding of this point, see: "Thoughts. Soul, body, resurrection").

The glory of the new covenant [2 Co 3:7-18]

(2Co 3:7)Now if the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, fading though it was, (8)will not the spiritual ministry be even more glorious? (9)If the ministry that condemns men was glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness! (10)For what was glorious has no glory now in comparison with the surpassing glory. (11)And if what was fading away came with glory, how much greater is the glory of that which lasts!

(12)Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold. (13)We are not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face to keep the Israelites from gazing at it while the radiance was fading away. (14)But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Jesus Christ is it taken away. (15)Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers

their hearts. (16)But whenever anyone turns to the Lord Jesus Christ, the veil is taken away. (17)Now the Lord Yahweh is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord Yahweh is, there is freedom. (18)And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord Jesus Christ's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord Yahweh, who is the Spirit.

Treasures in jars of clay [2 Co 4:1-18]

(2Co 4:1)Therefore, since through Yahweh's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. (2)Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the Word of Yahweh. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of Yahweh. (3)And even if our Gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. (4)The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the Gospel of the glory of Jesus Christ, who is the image of Yahweh. (5)For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus Christ's sake. (6)For Yahweh, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made His light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the Glory of Yahweh in the face of Jesus Christ.

(7)But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from Yahweh and not from us. (8)We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; (9)persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. (10)We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus Christ, so that the life of Jesus Christ may also be revealed in our body. (11)For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus Christ's sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body. (12)So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.

(13)It is written: "I believed; therefore I have spoken." With that same spirit of faith we also believe and therefore speak, (14)because we know that [Yahweh] the One God who raised the Lord Jesus Christ from the dead will also raise us with Jesus Christ and present us with you in His presence. (15)All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow, to the glory of Yahweh.

(16)Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. (17)For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. (18)So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

Our heavenly dwelling [2 Co 5:1-10]

(2Co 5:1)Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from Yahweh, an eternal house in Heaven, not built by human hands. (2)Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, (3)because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked. (4)For while we are in this tent, we groan and we are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. (5)Now it is Yahweh who has made us for this very purpose and has given us His Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.

(6)Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord Jesus Christ. (7)We live by faith, not by sight. (8)We

are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord Jesus Christ. (9) So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. (10) For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Jesus Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

The ministry of reconciliation [2 Co 5:11-21; 6:1-2]

(2Co 5:11) Since, then, we know that we have to fear the Lord Jesus Christ, we try to persuade men. What we are is plain to Yahweh, and I hope it is also plain to your conscience. (12) We are not trying to commend ourselves to you again, but are giving you an opportunity to take pride in us, so that you can answer those who take pride in what is seen rather than in what is in the heart. (13) If we are out of our mind, it is for the sake of Yahweh; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. (14) For Jesus Christ's affection compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. (15) And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

(16) So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Jesus Christ in this way, we do so no longer. (17) Therefore, if anyone is in Jesus Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! (18) All this is from Yahweh, who reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: (19) For Yahweh has reconciled the world to Himself in Jesus Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. (20) We are therefore Jesus Christ's ambassadors, as though Yahweh were making His appeal through us. We implore you on Jesus Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to Yahweh. (21) Yahweh made him who had no sin to be a sin offering for all of us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of Yahweh

(6:1) As Yahweh's fellow workers we urge you not to receive Yahweh's grace in vain. (2) For He says,

"In the time of My favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you."
I tell you, now is the time of Yahweh's favor, now is the day of salvation.

All Christians have to spread the message of reconciliation -the Gospel- throughout the world.

Do not be yoked with unbelievers [2 Co 6:14-18; 7:1]

(2Co 6:14) Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? (15) What harmony is there between Jesus Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? (16) What agreement is there between the temple of Yahweh and idols? For we are the temple of [Yahweh] the living God. As Yahweh has said:

"I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be My people."

(17) "Therefore come out from them and be separate," says the Lord Yahweh.

"Touch no unclean things, and I will receive you."

(18) "I will be a Father to you, and you will be My sons and daughters," says Yahweh the Lord Almighty.

(7:1) Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for Yahweh.

Made alive in Jesus Christ [Eph 2:1-10]

(Eph 2:1) Now to you, who were dead in your transgressions and sins, (2) in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. (3) All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of judgment. (4) But because of His great affection for us, Yahweh, who is rich in mercy, (5) made us alive with Jesus Christ even when we were dead in transgressions -it is by grace you have been saved. (6) And Yahweh raised us up with Jesus Christ and seated us with Him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, (7) in order that in the coming ages He might show the incomparable riches of His grace, expressed in His kindness to us in Christ Jesus. (8) For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith -and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of Yahweh- (9) not by works, so that no one can boast. (10) For we are Yahweh's workmanship, created to do good works in Christ Jesus, which Yahweh prepared in advance for us to do.

One in Jesus Christ [Eph 2:11-22]

(Eph 2:11) Therefore, remember that you who are Gentiles by birth and formerly called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" -that done in the body by the hands of men-, (12) remember that at that time you were separate from Jesus Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without Yahweh in the world. (13) But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Jesus Christ.

(14) For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, (15) by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, (16) and in this one body to reconcile both of them to Yahweh through the Cross, by which he put to death their hostility. (17) He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. (18) For through him we both have access to the Father in the unity of His Spirit.

(19) Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with Yahweh's people and members of Yahweh's household, (20) built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. (21) In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple of the Lord Yahweh. (22) And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which Yahweh lives by His Spirit.

Paul the preacher to the Gentiles [Eph 3:1-13]

(Eph 3:1) For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles...

(2) Surely you have heard about the administration of Yahweh's grace that was given to me for you, (3) that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. (4) In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Jesus Christ, (5) which was not made known to men in other generations

as it has now been revealed by His Spirit to Yahweh's holy apostles and prophets. (6) This mystery is that through the Gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Jesus Christ.

(7) I became a servant of this Gospel by the gift of Yahweh's grace given to me through the working of His power. (8) Although I am less than the least of all Yahweh's people, this grace was given to me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Jesus Christ, (9) and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in Yahweh, who created all things. (10) His intent was that now, through the Church, the manifold wisdom of Yahweh should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, (11) according to His eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. (12) In him and through faith in him we may approach Yahweh with freedom and confidence. (13) I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory.

A prayer for the believers [Eph 3:14-19]

(Eph 3:14) For this reason I kneel before the Father, (15) from whom all fatherhood in Heaven and on Earth derives its name. (16) I pray that out of the riches of His glory He may strengthen you with His power through His Spirit in your inner being, (17) so that Jesus Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in affection, (18) may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the affection of Jesus Christ, (19) and to know this affection that surpasses knowledge -that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of Yahweh.

Unity in the body of Jesus Christ [Eph 4:1-16]

(Eph 4:1) As a prisoner for the Lord Jesus Christ, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. (2) Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in affection. (3) Make every effort to keep the spiritual unity through the bond of peace. (4) There is one body and one spiritual unity -just as you were called to one hope when you were called. (5) There is one Lord Jesus Christ, one faith, one baptism; (6) One God, [Yahweh], Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

(7) But to each one of us grace has been given as Jesus Christ apportioned it. (8) This is why it says:

"When he ascended on High, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men."

(9) (What does "he ascended" mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? (10) He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the Heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.) (11) It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, (12) to prepare Yahweh's people for works of service, so that the body of Jesus Christ may be built up (13) until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of Yahweh and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Jesus Christ.

(14) Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by the wind of every teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. (15) Instead, speaking the truth in affection, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Jesus Christ. (16) From him the whole

body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in affection, for each part does its work.

All believers are united in one “body,” the Christian Church, by the spiritual communion among all of them.

After his death, Jesus Christ went to Hades to preach to the souls of the dead and, at his Resurrection, he led out of Hades to the Kingdom of Yahweh the souls of all those who did believe in him (For a deeper understanding of this point, see: “Thoughts. The Creed of the universal communion. Who went to preach when dead to the souls of the dead”).

All of Yahweh's people -the Christians- have to use His gifts and work for the diffusion of the Gospel and the Christian faith, that is, to build up the Christian Church, the community of all believers.

Spiritual gifts [1 Co 12:1-11]

(1Co 12:1)Now about spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant. (2) You know that when you were Pagans, somehow or other you were influenced and led astray to mute idols. (3)Therefore I tell you that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of Yahweh says, “Jesus Christ be cursed,” and no one can say, “Jesus Christ is Lord,” except by Yahweh’s Holy Spirit.

(4)There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit of Yahweh. (5)There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord Jesus Christ. (6)There are different kinds of working, but the same Lord Yahweh works all of them in all men.

(7)Now to each one the manifestation of Yahweh’s Spirit is given for the common good. (8)To one there is given through Yahweh’s Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit of Yahweh, (9)to another faith by the same Spirit of Yahweh, to another gifts of healing by the Spirit of [Yahweh] the One God, (10)to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. (11)All these are the work of the One and Same Spirit of Yahweh, and He gives them to each one, just as He determines.

One body, many parts [1 Co 12:12-31]

(1Co 12:12)The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Jesus Christ. (13)For we were all baptized by the Spirit of [Yahweh], the One God, into one body -whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free- and we were all given the Spirit of [Yahweh], the One God, to drink.

(14)Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. (15)If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. (16)And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. (17)If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? (18)But in fact Yahweh has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as He wanted them to be. (19)If they were all one part, where would the body be? (20)As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

(21)The eye cannot say to the hand, “I don’t need you!” And the head cannot say to the feet, “I don’t need you!” (22)On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, (23)and the parts that we think are less honorable we

treat with special honor. And the parts that are unrepresentable are treated with special modesty, (24)while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But Yahweh has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, (25)so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. (26)If one part suffers, every part will suffer with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

(27)Now you are the body of Jesus Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. (28)And in the Church Yahweh has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues. (29)Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? (30)Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? (31)Do all interpret? But you are eagerly desiring the greater gifts.

Every member of the Christian community has been given some spiritual or physical gift to be able and carry on his assigned service or work. And all those gifts come from Yahweh, who determines which gift or gifts each believer should have and use for the build up of the Christian community and not for selfish advantage. Important to remember that not everyone has the same gift, nobody has all the gifts and nobody should expect a particular gift.

Affection [1 Co 13:1-13]

(1Co 13:1)And now I will show you the most excellent way. If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have no affection, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. (2)If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have no affection, I am nothing. (3)If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have no affection, I am nothing.

(4)Affection is patient, affection is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. (5)It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. (6)Affection does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. (7)It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

(8)Affection never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. (9)For we know in part and we prophesy in part, (10a)but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears.

(10b)When I was a child, I talked like a child, I reasoned like a child. (11)When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. (12)Now we see but a poor reflection in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

(13)And now these three remain: faith, hope and affection. But the greatest of these is affection.

Gifts of prophecy and tongues [1 Co 14:1-25]

(1Co 14:1)Follow the way of affection and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy. (2)For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to Yahweh. Indeed, no one understands him; he utters mysteries with his spirit. (3)But everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort.

(4)He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the Church. (5)I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, but I would rather have you prophesy. He who prophesies is greater than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the Church may be edified.

(6)Now, brothers, if I come to you and speak in tongues, what good will I be to you, unless I bring you some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or word of instruction? (7)Even in the case of lifeless things that make sounds, such as the flute or harp, how will any one know what tune is being played unless there is a distinction in the notes? (8)Again, if the trumpet does not sound a clear call, who will get ready for battle? (9)So it is with you. Unless you speak intelligible words with your tongue, how will anyone know what you are saying? You will just be speaking into the air. (10)Undoubtedly there are all sorts of languages in the world, yet none of them is without meaning. (11)If then I do not grasp the meaning of what someone is saying, I am a foreigner to the speaker, and he is a foreigner to me. (12)So it is with you. Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, try to excel in gifts that build up the Church.

(13)For this reason anyone who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret what he says. (14)For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful. (15)So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my mind; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my mind. (16)If you are praising Yahweh with your spirit, how can one who finds himself among those who do not understand say "Amen" to your thanksgiving, since he does not know what you are saying? (17)You may be giving thanks well enough, but the other man is not edified.

(18)I thank Yahweh that I speak in tongues more than all of you. (19)But in the Church I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue.

(20)Brothers, stop thinking like children. In regard to evil be infants, but in your thinking be adults. (21)In the Law is written: "Through men of strange tongues and through the lips of foreigners I will speak to this people, but even then they will not listen to Me," says the Lord Yahweh.

(22)Tongues, then, are a sign, not for believers but for unbelievers; prophecy, however, is for believers, not for unbelievers. (23)So if the whole Church comes together and everyone speaks in tongues, and some who do not understand or some unbelievers come in, will they not say that you are out of your mind? (24)But if an unbeliever or someone who does not understand comes in while everybody is prophesying, he will be convinced by all that he is a sinner and will be judged by all, (25)and the secrets of his heart will be laid bare. So he will fall down and worship Yahweh, exclaiming, "Yahweh is really among you!"

In this case, an ecstatic, not a foreign language. At the time, a highly regarded gift, supposed to be due to the direct influence of Yahweh's Spirit. And it happens even today that someone would fall into ecstasy pouring out a torrent of unintelligible sounds which only a person having the gift of interpretation can understand, and with plenty of people blindly believing to the interpretation!

Orderly worship [1 Co 14:26-40]

(1Co 14:26)What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. And all of these must be done for the strengthening of the Church. (27)If anyone speaks in a ton-

gue, two -or at most three- should speak, one at a time, and someone must interpret. (28)If there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet in the Church and speak to himself and Yahweh.

(29)Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said. (30)And if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, the first speaker should stop. (31)For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged. (32)The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets. (33a)For Yahweh is not a God of disorder but of peace.

(33b)As in all the congregations of the saints, (34)women should remain silent in the Churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. (35)If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husband at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the Church.

(36)Did the Word of Yahweh originate with you? Or are you the only people it has reached? (37)If anybody thinks he is a prophet or spiritually gifted, let him acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord Jesus Christ's command. (38)If he ignores this, he himself will be ignored.

(39)Therefore, my brothers, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. (40)But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.

Every member of the congregation should have the possibility to take active part in the service, not just the appointed priests or pastors. Yet they have to speak in turn, to have an orderly service.

Speaking of women, Paul had to take into account the accepted social practices of that time and society. But there were occasions, even in that culture, for women to speak in Church (see: Propriety in worship. 1 Co 11:2-16). Here, Paul's actual purpose was not to define the role of women but to establish a "fitting and orderly way" of worship.

In both above cases, what Paul was actually forbidding was disorderly speaking.

Living as children of light [Eph 4:17-32;5:1-20]

(Eph 4:17)So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord Jesus Christ, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. (18)They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of Yahweh because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. (19)Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.

(20)You, however, did not come to know of Jesus Christ that way, (21)as surely you heard of him and were taught about him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus Christ. (22)You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; (23)to be made new in the attitude of your minds; (24)and to put on the new self, created to be like Yahweh in true righteousness and holiness.

(25)Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body. (26)"In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, (27)and do not give the devil a foothold. (28)He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need.

(29) Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. (30) And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of Yahweh, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. (31) Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. (32) Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Jesus Christ Yahweh forgave you.

(5:1) Be imitators of Yahweh, therefore, as dearly cherished children (2) and live a life of affection, just as Jesus Christ had been fond of us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to Yahweh.

(3) But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for Yahweh's holy people. (4) Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. (5) For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person -such a man is an idolater- has any inheritance in the Kingdom of Jesus Christ and of Yahweh. (6) Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things Yahweh's judgment comes on those who are disobedient. (7) Therefore do not be partners with them.

(8) For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord Jesus Christ. Live as children of light (9) (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) (10) and find out what pleases the Lord Yahweh. (11) Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. (12) For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. (13) But everything exposed by the light becomes visible, (14) for it is light that makes everything visible. This is why it is said:

"Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Jesus Christ will shine on you."

(15) Be very careful, then, how you live -not as unwise but as wise, (16) making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. (17) Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord Yahweh's will is. (18) Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with Yahweh's Spirit, (19) addressing to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord Yahweh, (20) always giving thanks to Yahweh the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Warning against refusing Yahweh [Heb 12:14-29]

(Heb 12:14) Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord Yahweh. (15) See to it that no one misses the grace of Yahweh and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many. (16) See that no one is sexually immoral, or is godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son. (17) Afterwards, as you know, when he wanted to inherit his blessing, he was rejected. He could bring about no change of mind, though he sought the blessing with tears.

(18) You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom and storm; (19) to a trumpet blast or to a voice speaking such words that those who heard it begged that no further word be spoken to them, (20) because they could not bear what was commanded: "Even an animal, if it touches the mountain, must be stoned." (21) The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, "I am trembling with fear."

(22)But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of [Yahweh] the living God. You have come to thousand upon thousand of angels in joyful assembly, (23)to the Church of the firstborn, whose names are written in Heaven. You have come to Yahweh, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, (24)to Jesus Christ the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks of a better Word than the blood of Abel.

(25)See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks. If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on Earth, how much less will we, if we turn away from him who warns us from Heaven? (26)At that time Yahweh's voice shook the Earth, and now He has promised, "Once more I will shake not only the Earth but also the Heavens." (27)The words "once more" indicate the removing of what can be shaken -that is, created things- so that what cannot be shaken may remain.

(28)Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and worship Yahweh acceptably with reverence and awe, (29)for our "Yahweh is a consuming fire."

The coming of the Lord Jesus Christ [1 Th 4:13-18;5:1-11]

(1Th 4:13)Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. (14)We believe that Jesus Christ died and rose again and we believe as well that Yahweh will bring with Jesus Christ those who have fallen asleep in him. (15)According to the Lord Jesus Christ's own words, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. (16)For the Lord Jesus Christ himself will come down from Heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of Yahweh, and the dead in Jesus Christ will rise first. (17)After that, those of us who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord Jesus Christ in the air. And so we will be with the Lord Jesus Christ for ever. (18)Therefore encourage each other with these words.

(5:1)Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, (2)for you know very well that the Day of the Lord Jesus Christ will come like a thief in the night. (3)While people are saying, "Peace and safety," destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.

(4)But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. (5)You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. (6)So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled. (7)For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. (8)But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and affection as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. (9)For Yahweh did not appoint us to suffer punishment but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. (10)He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. (11)Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

The date of Jesus Christs' return (second coming) and of the end of the world is totally unknown. And, in spite of Jesus' declarations (Mk 13:32; Mt 24:36), even presently many Christians continue to make forecasts of those events.

After Jesus' second coming and the end of the world, there will be the Universal Resurrection, and then all men will live for ever in Yahweh's Kingdom, not only with their soul, but with their resurrected body. (For a better comprehension of this point, see: "Thoughts. Soul, body, resurrection"). Jesus Christ died to save all men, both the believers and the unbelievers. With his death and resurrection he made all men enter a relationship that nothing can destroy.

The rebellion before Jesus Christ's coming [2 Th 2:1-12]

(2Th 2:1) Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers, (2) not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord Jesus Christ has already come. (3) Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. (4) He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called god or is worshipped, so that he sets himself up in Yahweh's Temple, proclaiming himself to be God.

(5) Don't you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things? (6) And now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. (7) For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the power that now holds it back will continue to do so till it is taken out of the way. (8) And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus Christ will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming. (9) The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan -displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, (10) and in every sort of evil- that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to follow the truth and so be saved. (11) For this reason Yahweh sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie (12) and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness.

At the end of time, at the second coming of Jesus Christ, all believers -that is, all men- will be accepted into Heaven in spiritual communion with Jesus Christ and Yahweh. (For a better comprehension of this point, see: "Thoughts. At the end of time everybody will be with Yahweh").

Jesus Christ the wisdom and power of Yahweh [1 Co 1:18-31;2:1-5]

(1Co 1:18) For the message of the Cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of Yahweh. (19) For it is written:

"I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate."

(20) Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not Yahweh made foolish the wisdom of the world? (21) For since in the wisdom of Yahweh the world through its wisdom did not know Him, Yahweh was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. (22) Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, (23) but we preach Jesus Christ crucified: a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, (24) but to those whom Yahweh has called, both Jews and Greeks, Jesus Christ is the power of Yahweh and the wisdom of Yahweh. (25) For the foolishness of Yahweh is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of Yahweh is stronger than man's strength.

(26)Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. (27)But Yahweh chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; Yahweh chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. (28)He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things -the things that are not- to nullify the things that are, (29)so that no one may boast before Him. (30)It is because of Him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from Yahweh -that is, our righteousness, holiness, and redemption. (31)Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord Yahweh."

(2:1)When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about Yahweh. (2)For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. (3)I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. (4)My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the power of Yahweh's Spirit, (5)so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on Yahweh's power.

Wisdom from the Spirit of Yahweh [1 Co 2:6-16]

(1Co 2:6)We do, however, speak a message of wisdom to the mature, but not of the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. (7)No, we speak of Yahweh's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that Yahweh destined for our glory before time began. (8)None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. (9)For, as it is written:

"No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what Yahweh has prepared for those who are fond of Him."

(10)But Yahweh has revealed it to us by His Spirit, which knows all things, even the deep things of Yahweh. (11)For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of Yahweh except the Spirit of Yahweh. (12)We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit which is from Yahweh, that we may understand what Yahweh has freely given us. (13)This is what we speak about, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by Yahweh's Spirit, expressing spiritual truth in spiritual words. (14)The non-spiritual man does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of Yahweh, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are to be spiritually discerned. (15)The spiritual man can make judgments about all things, but he himself is not subject to any man's judgment:

(16)"For who has known the mind of the Lord Yahweh that he may instruct Him?" But we have the mind of Jesus Christ.

The supremacy of Jesus Christ [Col 1:15-23]

(Col 1:15)He, Jesus Christ, is the image of [Yahweh] the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. (16)Because for him all things were created: things in Heaven and on Earth, visible and invisible; whether thrones or powers, or rulers or authorities; all things were created because of him and for him. (17)He is above all things, and in him all things hold together. (18)And he is the head of the body, the Church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. (19)For Yahweh was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in him, (20)and

through him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether things on Earth or things in Heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the Cross.

(21)Once you were alienated from Yahweh and enemies in mind as shown by your evil behavior. (22)But now He has reconciled you by the death of Jesus Christ's physical body to present you holy in His sight, without blemish and free from accusation (23)-if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not shifting from the hope offered in the Gospel. This is the Gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under Heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.

In effect, after his death and resurrection, Jesus Christ was given by Yahweh complete responsibility over the world and the human race (he was "seated at the right hand of the Father"). Anyway, it is clear that all Scriptures (Old and New Testament) speak of and refer to the human race only, not of and to all other intelligent and spiritual races that, surely, exist around the universe. This is because the world (universe) as it was understood at the time included only the Earth (at the center, with the sun and the moon rotating around it). This means that the saving action of Jesus Christ, the human son of Yahweh and a woman, was and is for the human race only.

At the end of time, after the end of the human race and after the conversion to Christianity of the last man, Hell -the place where Yahweh is not and Satan reigns- will be an empty space and, for that, the reason itself of its existence will end. At that point even Lucifer, convinced of his mistake, will repent and enter for ever -accompanied by all his angels- the Kingdom of Yahweh, that is, Heaven. (For a better understanding of this point, see: "Thoughts. ...everybody's final access to the Reign of Yahweh").

Freedom from human regulations through life with Jesus Christ [Col 2:6-23]

(Col 2:6)So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, (7)rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

(8)See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the principles of this world rather than on Jesus Christ.

(9)For in Jesus Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, (10)and you have been given fullness in Jesus Christ, who is the head over every power and authority. (11)In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Jesus Christ, (12)having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of Yahweh, who raised him from the dead.

(13)When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, Yahweh made you alive with Jesus Christ. He forgave us all our sins, (14)having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; He took it away, nailing it to the Cross. (15)And having disarmed the powers and authorities, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the Cross.

(16)Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. (17)These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Jesus Christ. (18)Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize. Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puffs him with idle notions. (19)He has lost connection with the Head,

from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as Yahweh causes it to grow.

(20) Since you died with Jesus Christ to the principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: (21) “Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!”? (22) These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings. (23) Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.

Here Paul was counteracting the belief that for salvation men need to combine faith in Jesus Christ with man-made regulations concerning such physical and external practices as circumcision, eating and drinking, and observance of religious ceremonies and festivals.

True Christian faith is complete (“fulness in Jesus Christ”) and men don't need man-made regulations (“written code”) to gain spiritual salvation.

Jesus Christ will not judge Christians by their observance to legalistic requirements but by their observance to his fundamental teaching to be fond of one another, as all those “Do and Do not” rules, so much characteristic of the human laws developed by all religious hierarchies, were canceled once for ever by his action of salvation.

Rules for holy living [Col 3:1-17]

(Col 3:1) Since, then, you have been raised with Jesus Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Jesus Christ is seated at the right hand of Yahweh. (2) Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. (3) For you died, and your life is now hidden with Jesus Christ in Yahweh. (4) When Jesus Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

(5) Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. (6) Because of these, the judgment of Yahweh is coming. (7) You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. (8) But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. (9) Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices (10) and have put on the new self, which is being renewed, in knowledge, in the image of Yahweh, its Creator. (11) Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Jesus Christ is all, and is in all.

(12) Therefore, as Yahweh's chosen people, holy and dearly cherished, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. (13) Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord Jesus Christ forgave you. (14) And over all these virtues put on fondness, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

(15) Let the peace of Jesus Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. (16) Let the word of Jesus Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to Yahweh. (17) And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks to Yahweh the Father through him.

After his death and resurrection, Jesus Christ was given by Yahweh complete responsibility over the world and the human race (“seated at the right hand of the Yahweh”).

Christianity transcends all barriers and unifies people from all cultures, races and nations in their spiritual communion with Jesus Christ and Yahweh.

Imitating Jesus Christ’s humility [Php 2:1-11]

(Php 2:1) If you have any encouragement from being united with Jesus Christ, if any comfort from his affection, if any fellowship with Yahweh’s Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, (2) then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same affection, being one in spirit and purpose. (3) Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. (4) Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

(5) Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

(6) Who, having the very nature of Yahweh, did not consider equality with Yahweh something to be grasped, (7) but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. (8) And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death -even death on a cross!

(9) Therefore Yahweh exalted him to the highest place and gave him the Name that is above every name, (10) that at the name of Jesus Christ every knee should bow, in Heaven and on Earth and under the Earth, (11) and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of Yahweh the Father.

Living to please Yahweh [1 Th 4:1-12]

(1Th 4:1) Finally, brothers, we instructed you how to live in order to please Yahweh, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus Christ to do this more and more. (2) For you know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ.

(3) It is Yahweh’s will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; (4) that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, (5) not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know Yahweh; (6) and that in this matter no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him. The Lord Yahweh will punish men for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you. (7) For Yahweh did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. (8) Therefore, he who rejects this instruction does not reject man but Yahweh, who gives you His Holy Spirit.

(9) Now about brotherly affection we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by Yahweh to be fond of each other. (10) And in fact, you are fond of all the brothers throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers, to do so more and more.

(11) Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you, (12) so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody.

Warnings from Israel’s history [1 Co 10:1-13]

(1Co 10:1) For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. (2) They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. (3) They all ate the same food (4) and drank the same drink that Yahweh’s Spirit gave them; for they drank from the rock

that accompanied them by the action of Yahweh's Spirit, and that rock was Jesus Christ. (5)Nevertheless, Yahweh was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert.

(6)Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. (7)Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written: "The people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in pagan revelry." (8)We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did -and in one day twenty-three thousand of them died. (9)We should not test the Lord Yahweh, as some of them did -and were killed by snakes. (10)And do not grumble, as some of them did -and were killed by the destroying angel.

(11)These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come. (12)So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall! (13)No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And Yahweh is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

Idol feasts and the Lord Jesus Christ's Supper [1 Co 10:14-22]

(1Co 10:14)Therefore, my dear friends, flee from idolatry. (15)I speak to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. (16)Is not the cup of thanksgiving, for which we give thanks, a participation in the blood of Jesus Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Jesus Christ? (17)Because there is only one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.

(18)Consider the people of Israel: Do not those who eat the sacrifices participate in the altar? (19)Do I mean then that a sacrifice offered to an idol is anything, or that an idol is anything? (20)No, but the sacrifices of Pagans are offered to demons, not to Yahweh, and I don't want you to be participants with demons. (21)You cannot drink the cup of the Lord Jesus Christ and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in both the Lord Jesus Christ's table and the table of demons. (22)Are we trying to arouse the Lord Jesus Christ's jealousy? Are we stronger than he?

A memorial, a symbol of fellowship with the crucified Jesus Christ, not a literal drinking of his blood and eating of his flesh. It was done at the end of the communal meal, in remembrance of Jesus Christ's -once for ever and for all- sacrifice and death for the spiritual salvation of all men. The repetition of this act is not the repetition of Jesus' sacrifice on the Cross -as many Churches came to believe- but -as asked by Jesus- a remembrance of it and a reminder of the "New Covenant," the new "Christian" relationship between Yahweh and all men.

The armor of Yahweh [Eph 6:10-18]

(Eph 6:10)Finally, be strong in the Lord Yahweh and in His mighty power. (11)Put on the full armor of Yahweh so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. (12)For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. (13)Therefore put on the full armor of Yahweh, so that, after you have set everything, when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, standing. (14)Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, (15)and with your feet fitted with the

readiness that comes from the Gospel of peace. **(16)**In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. **(17)**Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of Yahweh's Spirit, which is the Word of Yahweh. **(18)**And pray the Spirit of Yahweh on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.

Different talents by grace [Ro 12:3-8]

(Ro 12:3)And by the grace given me I say to everyone of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith Yahweh has given you. **(4)**Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not have the same function, **(5)**so in Jesus Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. **(6)**We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. **(7)**If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; (8)if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.

High self-esteem is contrary to Jesus Christ's teaching about being humble and serving the others. How different always was and is the behavior of so many priests and pastors, not to speak of high prelates!

Every member of the Christian community has been given some spiritual or physical gift to be able and carry on his assigned service or work. And all those gifts come from Yahweh, who determines which gift or gifts each believer should have and use for the build up of the Christian community and not for selfish advantage. Important to remember that not everyone has the same gift, nobody has all the gifts and nobody should expect a particular gift. Anyway, the existence of the gift -which comes from Yahweh- has to be acknowledged and the gift used.

Exhortation to affection [Ro 12:9-21]

(Ro 12:9)Affection must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. **(10)**Be devoted to one another in brotherly affection. Honor one another above yourselves. **(11)**Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord Yahweh. **(12)**Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. **(13)**Share with Yahweh's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

(14)Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. **(15)**Rejoice with those who rejoice: mourn with those who mourn. **(16)**Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

(17)Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. **(18)**If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. **(19)**Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for Yahweh's judgment, for it is written:

"It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord Yahweh.

(20)On the contrary:

"If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.

In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."

(21)Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

You must be fond, for the day is near [Ro 13:8-14]

(Ro 13:8) Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to be fond of one another, for he who is fond of his fellow-man has fulfilled the law. **(9)** The commandments, "Do not commit adultery, Do not murder, Do not steal, Do not covet," and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: "You'll be fond of your neighbor as of yourself." **(10)** Fondness does no harm to his neighbor. Therefore fondness is the fulfillment of the law.

(11) And do this, understanding the present time. The hour has come for you to wake up from your sleep, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. **(12)** The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. **(13)** Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. **(14)** Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

Exhortations [Heb 13:1-17]

(Heb 13:1) Keep on being fond of each other as brothers. **(2)** Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it. **(3)** Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.

(4) Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for Yahweh will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral. **(5)** Keep your lives free from the greed for money and be content with what you have, because Yahweh has said,

"Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."

(6) So we say with confidence,

"The Lord Yahweh is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?"

(7) Remember your leaders, who spoke the Word of Yahweh to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. **(8)** Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

(9) Do not be carried away by all those strange teachings. It is good for our hearts to be strengthened by grace, not by ceremonial foods, which are of no value to those who eat them. **(10)** We have an altar from which those who minister at the tabernacle have no right to eat.

(11) The high priest carries the blood of animals into the Most Holy Place as a sin offering, but the bodies are burned outside the camp. **(12)** And so Jesus Christ also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood. **(13)** Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore. **(14)** For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come.

(15) Through Jesus Christ, therefore, let us continually offer to Yahweh a sacrifice of praise -the fruit of lips that confess His Name. **(16)** And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices Yahweh is pleased.

(17) Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.

Request for prayer [2 Th 3:1-5]

(2Th 3:1) Finally, brothers, pray for us that the message of the Lord Jesus Christ may spread rapidly and be honored, just as it was with you. **(2)** And pray that we may be de-

livered from wicked and evil men, for not everyone has faith. (3) But the Lord Yahweh is faithful, and He will strengthen and protect you from the evil one. (4) We have confidence in the Lord Jesus Christ that you are doing and will continue to do the things we command. (5) May the Lord Jesus Christ direct your hearts into Yahweh's affection and Jesus Christ's perseverance.

Forgiveness for the sinner [2 Co 2:5-11]

(2Co 2:5) If anyone has caused grief, he has not so much grieved me as he has grieved, to some extent -not to over-stress it- all of you. (6) The punishment inflicted on him by the majority is sufficient for him. (7) Now instead, you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. (8) I urge you, therefore, to reaffirm your affection for him. (9) The reason I wrote you was to see if you would stand the test and be obedient in everything. (10) If you forgive anyone, I also forgive him. And what I have forgiven -if there was anything to forgive- I have forgiven in the sight of Jesus Christ for your sake, (11) in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes.

In this passage Paul, taking the particular case of a person who had been the cause of a serious offense in the Church of Corinth, gives a general rule of conduct for the application of discipline and Christian forgiveness in the Church. An how different has been the actual application of Church discipline and punishment during the whole history of Christianity!

The weak and the strong [Ro 14:1-23; 15:1-13]

(Ro 14:1) Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters. (2) One man's faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. (3) The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for Yahweh has accepted him. (4) Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord Yahweh is able to make him stand.

(5) One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. (6) He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord Yahweh. He who eats meat, eats to the Lord Yahweh, for he gives thank to Yahweh; and he who abstains, does so to the Lord Yahweh and gives thanks to Yahweh. (7) For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone. (8) If we live, we live to the Lord Yahweh; and if we die, we die to the Lord Yahweh. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord Yahweh.

(9) For this very reason, Jesus Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living. (10) You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before Yahweh's judgment seat. (11) It is written:

"As surely as I live, every knee will bow before Me; every tongue will confess to Yahweh," says the Lord Yahweh."

(12) So, then, each of us will give an account of himself to Yahweh.

(13) Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way. (14) As one who is in the Lord Jesus Christ, I am fully convinced that no food is unclean in itself. But if

anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it is unclean. (15)If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in affection. Do not by your eating destroy your brother for whom Jesus Christ died. (16)Do not allow what you consider good to be spoken of as evil. (17)For the Kingdom of Yahweh is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in His Holy Spirit, (18) because anyone who serves Jesus Christ in this way is pleasing to Yahweh and approved by men.

(19)Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. (20)Do not destroy the work of Yahweh for the sake of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong for a man to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble. (21)It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall.

(22)So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and Yahweh. Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves. (23)But the man who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin.

(15:1)We who are strong ought to bear with the failing of the weak and not to please ourselves. (2)Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. (3)For even Jesus Christ did not please himself but, as it is written:

“The insults of those who insult You have fallen on me.”

(4)For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

(5)May [Yahweh] the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, (6)so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify [Yahweh] the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

(7)Accept one another, then, just as Jesus Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to Yahweh. (8)For I tell you that Jesus Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of Yahweh’s truth to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs (9)so that the Gentiles may glorify Yahweh for His mercy, as it is written: “Therefore I will praise You among the Gentiles; I will sing hymns to Your Name.”

(10)Again, it says, “Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people.”

(11)And again, “Praise the Lord Yahweh, all you Gentiles, and sing praises to Him, all of you peoples.”

(12)And again, Isaiah says, “The root of Jesse will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the nations; the Gentiles will hope in him.”

(13)May [Yahweh] the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of His Holy Spirit.

Food sacrificed to idols [1 Co 8:1-13]

(1Co 8:1)Now about food sacrificed to idols. We know that we all possess knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but affection builds up. (2)And the man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know. (3)But the man who is fond of Yahweh is known by Yahweh.

(4)So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols. We know that an idol is nothing at all in the world and there is no God but [Yahweh] the One. (5)For even if there are so-called gods, whether in Heaven or on Earth (as indeed there are many “gods” and many “lords”), (6)yet for us there is but One God, [Yahweh] the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, for whom all things came and through whom we live.

(7)But not everyone knows this. Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat such food they think of it as having been sacrificed to an idol, and since their conscience is weak, it is defiled. (8)But food does not bring us near to Yahweh; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do.

(9)Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak. (10)For if anyone with a weak conscience sees you who have this knowledge eating in an idol's temple, won't he be emboldened to eat what has been sacrificed to idols? (11)So this weak brother, for whom Jesus Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge. (12)When you sin against your brothers in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Jesus Christ. (13)Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause him to fall.

The believer's freedom [1 Co 10:23-33;11:1]

(1Co 10:23) "Everything is permissible" -but not everything is beneficial. "Everything is permissible" -but not everything is constructive. (24)Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others.

(25)Eat anything sold in the meat market without raising questions of conscience, (26)for, "The Earth is the Lord Yahweh's, and everything in it."

(27)If some unbeliever invites you to a meal and you want to go, eat whatever is put before you without raising questions of conscience. (28)But if anyone says to you, "This has been offered in sacrifice," then do not eat it, both for the sake of the man who told you and for conscience's sake (29)-the other man's conscience, I mean, not yours. For why should my freedom be judged by another's conscience? (30)If I take part in the meal with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of something I thank Yahweh for?

(31)So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of Yahweh. (32)Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the Church of Yahweh, (33)just as I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved. (11:1)Follow my example, as I follow the example of Jesus Christ.

In these passages Paul gives clear instructions on how to properly consider dietary religious restrictions and the keeping of holy days by taking in due consideration the level of Christian maturity of a believer, so introducing the concept of "weak" and "strong" Christians. The "strong" Christian's understanding of the Gospel allows him to recognize that one's diet and the keeping or nor of some religious festival has no spiritual significance. The "weak" Christian understanding doesn't. And even if in such disputable matters the only essential point is full personal conviction, it is clear that the strong Christian has to have regard for a weak brother's scruples and accept his weak points without imposing his points of view, without giving a negative judgment and without giving what, for the weak one, is a bad example. A strong Christian has always to consider if his actions can damage another man's faith in Jesus Christ.

The rights of an apostle [1 Co 9:1-27]

(1Co 9:1)Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? Are you not the result of my work in the Lord Jesus Christ? (2)Even though I may not be an apostle to others, surely I am to you! For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord Jesus Christ.

(3) This is my defense to those who sit in judgment on me. (4) Don't we have the right to food and drink? (5) Don't we have the right to take a believing wife along with us, as do the other apostles and the Lord Jesus Christ's brothers and Peter? (6) Or is it only I and Barnabas who must work for a living?

(7) Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its grapes? Who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk? (8) Do I say this merely from a human point of view? Doesn't the Law say the same thing? (9) For it is written in the Law of Moses: "Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain." It is about oxen that Yahweh is concerned? (10) Surely He says this for us, doesn't He? Yes, this was written for us, because when the plowman plows and the thresher threshes, they ought to do so in the hope of sharing the harvest. (11) If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you? (12) If others have this right of support from you, shouldn't we have it all the more?

But we did not use this right. On the contrary, we put up with anything rather than hinder the Gospel of Jesus Christ. (13) Don't you know that those who work in the Temple get their food from the Temple, and those who serve at the altar share in what is offered on the altar? (14) In the same way, the Lord Jesus Christ has commanded that those who preach the Gospel should receive their living from the Gospel.

(15) But I have not used any of these rights. And I am not writing this in the hope that you will do such things for me. I would rather die than have anyone deprive me of this boast. (16) Yet when I preach the Gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel! (17) If I preach voluntarily, I have a reward; if not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me. (18) What then is my reward? Just this: that in preaching the Gospel I may offer it free of charge, and so not make use of my rights in preaching it.

(19) Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. (20) To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. (21) To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from Yahweh's law but am under Jesus Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. (22) To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. (23) I do all this for the sake of the Gospel, that I may share in its blessings.

(24) Do you not know that in the race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. (25) Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. (26) Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. (27) No, I beat my body and make it my slave so after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.

All of Yahweh's workers have the right to have their food and other physical needs supplied by the local Christian community, but only if their "work" -which should be a spiritual mission- is appropriate and satisfactory, as it has to be for all human works and activities. Paul well knew the privileges and the luxury of priests' lives, he knew how they used religion as a means to get rich and powerful!

Paul asserted his right -the right of each one of Yahweh's workers- to be married, if he wished to. In effect, even some apostles, as Peter, were married. And so it has been for more than 1000 years of Church history.

Note. It was the Synod of Rome, called by Pope Gregory VII in AD 1075 that imposed clerical celibacy. Married priests were excommunicated. As a result, the priests of the Roman Church became a class apart, cut off from the most sacred and elevating experience of family life.

After Jesus' birth, fulfilled her "physical" mission, Joseph and Mary had four sons, -Jesus' half-brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas- and some daughters -Jesus' half-sisters, whose names are not known- as reported in Mark 6:3; Matthew 13:55-56; John 2:12; 7:3,5; Acts 1:14; 1Corinthians 9:5; Galatians 1:19.

Instructions on worship [1 Ti 2:1-15]

(1Ti 2:1)I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone (2)-for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. (3)This is good, and pleases Yahweh our Savior, (4)who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. (5) For there is one God, [Yahweh], and one mediator between Yahweh and men, the man Christ Jesus, (6)who gave himself as a ransom for all men -the testimony given in its proper time. (7)And for this purpose I was appointed a herald and an apostle -I am telling the truth, I am not lying- and a teacher of the true faith to the Gentiles.

(8)I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing.

(9)I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, (10)but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship Yahweh.

(11)A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. (12)I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. (13)For Adam was formed first, then Eve. (14)And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. (15)But women will be saved through childbearing -if they continue in faith, affection and holiness with propriety.

All men have to know the truth that, through Jesus Christ's action of salvation (he always followed his Father's will), they all will be saved. (For a better understanding of this point, see "Thoughts. At the end of time everybody will be with Yahweh").

The basic belief of Christianity. It is of fundamental importance not to confuse Yahweh -the Father, the Only Eternal God Creator Almighty- with Jesus Christ -the Son, who has both the divine nature of his Father and the human nature of his mother, and who is not God, not even as a part of a trinity. (For a deeper understanding of this point, see "Thoughts. Jesus Christ, the Son of Yahweh, a man").

All men of every time, country and religion can find access to Yahweh through Jesus, and through Jesus alone, as Jesus alone opens the way to Him. Between men and Yahweh there is no other intermediary or intercessor -no priest or pastor, no angel, no recognized "saint," not even Jesus' mother. Jesus Christ sacrificed himself and died on the Cross -once for ever and for all- for the spiritual salvation of all men.

Yahweh knew before creation that it would be necessary for Jesus Christ to come and redeem all men, but He has revealed -sent- Jesus Christ to men only in that particular moment of time.

Speaking of women, Paul had to take into account the accepted social practices of that time and society. This means that this part of the passage cannot be understood out of its historical context and social situation. In Israel a woman was under the absolute authority of her father or of her husband, had no active part in the synagogue service and

was not obliged to attend the sacred festivals. This means that what Paul wrote here and elsewhere about women is historically conditioned, not universal and timeless. And, furthermore, here Paul is expressing some of his own personal opinions (that is, not fully valid for everybody and in every place even at the time).

Propriety in worship [1 Co 11:2-16]

(1Co 11:2) I praise you for remembering me in everything and for holding to the teachings, just as I passed them on to you.

(3) Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Jesus Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Jesus Christ is Yahweh. (4) Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head. (5) And every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head -it is just as though her head were shaved. (6) If a woman does not cover her head, she should have her hair cut off; and if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut or shaved off, she should cover her head. (7) A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of Yahweh; but the woman is the glory of man. (8) For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; (9) neither was man created from woman, but woman from man. (10) For this reason, and because of the angels, the woman ought to have a sign of authority on her head.

(11) In the Lord Jesus Christ, however, woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. (12) For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. (13) But everything comes from Yahweh. Judge for yourselves: Is it proper for a woman to pray to Yahweh with her head uncovered? (14) Does not the very nature of things teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him, (15) but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For long hair is given to her as a covering. (16) If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we have no other practice -nor do the Churches of Yahweh.

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Overseers and deacons [1 Ti 3:1-16]

(1Ti 3:1) Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task. (2) Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, (3) not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not greedy for money. (4) He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. (5) (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of Yahweh's Church?) (6) He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. (7) He must also have a good reputation with outsiders so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap.

(8) Deacons, likewise, are to be men worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. (9) They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. (10) They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons.

(12) A deacon must be the husband of but one wife and must manage his children and his household well. (13) Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus.

(11) In the same way, the women are to be women worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything.

(14) Although I hope to come to you soon, I am writing you these instructions so that, (15) if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in Yahweh's household, which is the Church of [Yahweh] the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth. (16) Beyond all question, great is the mystery of godliness:

Jesus Christ appeared with a body, was vindicated by Yahweh, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed all over the world, was taken up in glory.

The "overseer," initially called "elder," then "bishop" is a man overseeing a local congregation, whose duties are to teach and preach, to direct the affairs of the Church, to shepherd the flock of Yahweh and to guard the local Church from errors. In this passage, Paul has given a very clear indication of the qualities needed to be a proper overseer. Further than being married and with children, an overseer has to be a strong, mature Christian, not to risk to become too proud of his own importance. A man who has gained the respect of other men in the day-to-day matters of life, a man who respects even outside the Church the faith he professes and the precepts he teaches. Yet, going through the history of the Christian Church, what a difference with the position of authority, power and privilege of all bishops and high prelates!

The "deacons" had the duty to free the elders from daily practical matters, giving them more time for the ministry of the Church. Even for them Paul has given a very clear indication of the qualities needed to be a proper deacon. Presently this position and duty correspond to the parish priest or pastor. And even here, what a difference!

To note that in the early Church there were even deaconesses, engaged in Church service, having the duty of instructing female converts and of presiding and attending at their baptism, which was by total immersion. And Paul has given an indication of the essential characteristics needed to be a good deaconess. To note that this office disappeared at the end of the fifth century to reappear in the nineteenth century in the Protestant Denominations only (what a loss for Cristianity!)

What must be taught to various groups [Tit 2:1-15] [1Ti 6:1-2]

(Tit 2:1) You must teach what is in accord with sound doctrine. (2) Teach the older men to be temperate, worthy of respect, self-controlled, and sound in faith, in affection and in endurance.

(3) Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. (4) Then they can train the younger women to love their husbands and children, (5) to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the Word of Yahweh.

(6) Similarly, encourage the young men to be self-controlled. (7) In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness (8) and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us.

(9) Teach slaves to be subject to their masters in everything, to try to please them, not to talk back to them, (10) and not to steal from them, but to show that they can be fully trusted, so that in everything they will make the teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ our Savior attractive.

(1Ti 6:1) All who are under the yoke of slavery should consider their masters worthy of full respect, so that Yahweh's Name and our teaching may not be slandered. (2) Those who have believing masters are not to show less respect for them because they are brothers. Instead, they are to serve them even better, because those who benefit from their service are believers, and dear to them. These are the things you are to teach and urge on them.

(Tit 2:11) For the grace of Yahweh that brings salvation has appeared to all men. (12) It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, (13) while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great Master and Savior, Jesus Christ, (14) who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

(15) These, then are the things you should teach. Encourage and rebuke with all authority. Do not let anyone despise you.

Paul, as all other New Testament's writers, does not attack slavery as an institution (it wasn't the proper time for that) but states down the moral principles which ultimately have uprooted slavery. Slavery was a basic element of Greek and Roman society. It could not be eliminated at the time, so guidance in the conduct of Christian slaves was essential as they could give a unique and powerful testimony to the Gospel by their willing faithfulness and obedience, attracting their masters to Christianity. Paul considered slavery a social situation which was the result of the hardness of men's hearts. The commands he gave to Christian slaves were not meant to encourage or condone such situations but practical ways of dealing with the realities of the day.

Doing what is good [Tit 3:1-11]

(Tit 3:1) Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, (2) to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and to show true humility towards all men.

(3) At one time we too were foolish and disobedient; deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. (4) But when the kindness and affection of Yahweh, our Savior, appeared, (5) He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy. He saved us by the work of His Holy Spirit, the washing of rebirth and renewal, (6) which He poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, (7) so that, having been justified by His grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. (8) This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in Yahweh may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone.

(9)But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law, because these are unprofitable and useless. (10)Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him. (11)You may be sure that such a man is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned.

New Testament teaching is not confined to personal salvation but includes much instruction about practical living and how to improve the well-being of the community.

Jesus Christ's duty was and is to bring salvation, that is, eternal life in the Kingdom of Yahweh, to all men, inclusive of those which were and still are lost, to the men who have wandered away from Yahweh, without any exception; that is, to all men of all races, countries and religions of the past, present and future.

Generally, discussions about not important points of Scripture. Christians don't have to sit discussing theological questions when the simple tasks of Christian life are left unattended. A discussions which does not end in Christian action is a wastage of time and only generates divisions based on un-essential matters.

Advice about widows and elders [1 Ti 5:1-22;24-25]

(1Ti 5:1)Do not rebuke and older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers, (2)older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity.

(3)Give proper recognition to those widows who are really in need. (4)But if a widow has children or grandchildren, these should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family and so repaying their parents and grand-parents, for this is pleasing to Yahweh. (5)The widow who is really in need and left all alone puts her hope in Yahweh and continues night and day to pray and to ask Yahweh for help. (6)But the widow who lives for pleasure is dead even while she lives. (7)Give the people these instructions, too, so that no one may be open to blame. (8)If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

(9)No widow may be put on the list of widows unless she is over sixty, has been faithful to her husband, (10)and is well known for her good deeds, such as bringing up children, showing hospitality, washing the feet of the saints, helping those in trouble and devoting herself to all kinds of good deeds.

(11)As for younger widows, do not put them on such a list. For when their sensual desires overcome their dedication to Jesus Christ, they want to marry. (12)Thus they bring judgment on themselves, because they have broken their first pledge. (13)Besides, they get into the habit of being idle and going about from house to house. And not only do they become idlers, but also gossips and busybodies, saying things they ought not to. (14)So I counsel younger widows to marry, to have children, to manage their homes and to give the enemy no opportunity for slander. (15)Some have in fact already turned away to follow Satan.

(16)If any woman who is a believer has widows in her family, she should help them and not let the Church be burdened with them, so that the Church can help those widows who are really in need.

(17)The elders who direct the affairs of the Church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. (18)For the Scripture says, "Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain," and "The worker deserves his

wages.” (19)Do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is brought by two or three witnesses. (20)Those who sin are to be rebuked publicly, so that the others may take warning.

(21)I charge you, in the sight of Yahweh and Christ Jesus and the elect angels, to keep these instructions without partiality, and to do nothing out of favoritism.

(22)Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, and do not share in the sins of others. Keep yourself pure.

(24)The sins of some men are obvious, reaching the place of judgment ahead of them; the sins of others trail behind them. (25)In the same way, good deeds are obvious, and even those that are not cannot be hidden.

Most of the orders, advices and rules found in this passage correspond to Paul's own ideas; some are of general validity, some not, some questionable, some valid only for the society of his time, some even today. To note that “do” and “do not” rules are given, sometimes in contrast with his own previous teaching! (Col 2:6-23)

Rules for Christian households

Wives and husbands [Eph 5:21-33] [Col 3:18-19]

(Eph 5:21)Submit to one another out of reverence for Jesus Christ.

(Eph 5:22, Col 3:18)Wives, submit to your husbands as is fitting in the Lord Jesus Christ. (Eph 5:23)For the husband is the head of the wife as Jesus Christ is the head of the Church, which is his body, of which he is the Savior. (5:24)Now, as the Church submits to Jesus Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

(Eph 5:25, Col 3:19)Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them, just as Jesus Christ had been fond of the Church and gave himself up for her (Eph 5:26)to make her holy; cleansing her by the washing with water, through the Word, (5:27)to present her to himself as a radiant Church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. (5:28)In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife is fond of himself. (5:29)After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Jesus Christ does for the Church (5:30)-for we are members of his body. (5:31)“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” (5:32)This is a profound mystery -but I am talking about Jesus Christ and the Church. (5:33)However, each one of you also must love his wife as he is fond of himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

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Rules for Christian households

Children and parents [Eph 6:1-4] [Col 3:20-21]

(Eph 6:1; Col 3:20)Children, obey your parents in everything, for this is right and pleases the Lord Jesus Christ. (Eph 6:2)“Honor your father and mother” -which is the first commandment with a promise- (Eph 6:3)“that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the Earth.”

(Eph 6:4; Col 3:21) *Fathers, do not exasperate and do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord Jesus Christ.*

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Rules for Christian households

Slaves and masters [Eph 6:5-9] [Col 3:22-25;4:1]

(Eph 6:5-6; Col 3:22) *Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Jesus Christ. Obey them, and do it not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Jesus Christ, with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord Jesus Christ, doing the will of Yahweh from your heart. **(Eph 6:7-8; Col 3:23-24)** *Whatever you do, serve and work at it with all your heart, as if you were serving and working for the Lord Jesus Christ, not for men, because you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord Yahweh and that the Lord Jesus Christ will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free. It is the Lord Jesus Christ you are serving. **(Col 3:25)** Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for his wrong, and there is no favoritism.**

(Eph 6:9; Col 4:1) *And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Provide your slaves with what is right and fair, and do not threaten them, because you know that you also have a Master in Heaven, who is both their Master and yours, and there is no favoritism with him.*

Both the Old and the New Testament include regulations for slavery, a social situation they did not encourage or condone. Such regulations were only practical advices for dealing with the realities of the time.

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Rules for Christian households

Submission to the authorities [Ro 13:1-7]

(Ro 13:1) *Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which Yahweh has established. The authorities that exist have been established by Yahweh. **(2)** *Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what Yahweh has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. **(3)** For the rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. **(4)** For he is Yahweh's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is Yahweh's servant, an agent of justice to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. **(5)** Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience.**

(6) This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are Yahweh's servants, who give their full time to governing. (7) Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.

The development of this request brought to the “doctrine” of all rulers being appointed and justified in all their actions by Yahweh. And even the possibility of a persecuting state did not shake Paul's conviction that all civil governments were ordained by Yahweh.

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Marriage [1 Co 7:1-40]

(1Co 7:1) Now for the matters you wrote about: It is good for a man not to marry. (2) But since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband. (3) The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. (4) The wife's body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband's body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife. (5) Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. (6) I say this as a concession, not as a command. (7) I wish that all men were as I am. But each man has his own gift from Yahweh; one has this gift, another has that.

(8) Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I am. (9) But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

(10) To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord Yahweh): A wife must not separate from her husband. (11) But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife.

(12) To the rest I say this (I, not the Lord Yahweh): If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her. (13) And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him. (14) For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy.

(15) But if the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances; Yahweh has called us to live in peace. (16) How do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or, how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?

(17) Nevertheless, each one should retain the place in life that the Lord Yahweh assigned to him and to which Yahweh has called him. This is the rule I lay down in all the Churches. Was a man already circumcised when he was called? He should not become uncircumcised. (18) Was man uncircumcised when he was called? He should not be circumcised. (19) Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. Keeping Yahweh's command is what counts. (20) Each one should remain in the situation which he was in when Yahweh called him. (21) Where you a slave when you were called? Don't let it trouble you -although if you can gain your freedom, do so. (22) For he who was a

slave when he was called by the Lord Jesus Christ is the Lord Jesus Christ's freedman; similarly, he who was a free man when he was called is Jesus Christ's slave. (23) You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men. (24) Brothers, each man, as responsible to Yahweh, should remain in the situation Yahweh called him to.

(25) Now about virgins: I have no command from the Lord Yahweh, but I give a judgment as one who by the Lord Yahweh's mercy is trustworthy. (36) If anyone thinks he is acting improperly toward the virgin he is engaged to, and if she is getting along in years and he feels he ought to marry, he should do as he wants. He is not sinning. They should get married. (37) But the man who has settled the matter in his own mind, who is under no compulsion but has control over his own will, and who has made up his mind not to marry the virgin - this man also does the right thing. (38) So then, he who marries the virgin does right, but he who does not marry her does even better.

(26) Because of the present crisis, I think that it is good for you to remain as you are. (27) Are you married? Do not seek a divorce. Are you unmarried? Do not look for a wife. (28) But if you do marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. But those who marry will face many troubles in this life, and I want to spare you this.

(29) What I mean, brothers, is that the time is short. From now on those who have wives should live as if they had none; (30) those who mourn, as if they did not; those who are happy, as if they were not; those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep; (31) those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them. For the world in this present form is passing away.

(32) I would like you to be free from concern. An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord Yahweh's affairs - how he can please the Lord Yahweh. (33) But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world - how he can please his wife - (34) and his interests are divided. An unmarried woman or virgin is concerned about the Lord Yahweh's affairs: Her aim is to be devoted to the Lord Yahweh in both body and spirit. But a married woman is concerned about the affairs of this world - how she can please her husband. (35) I am saying this for your own good, not to restrict you, but that you may live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord Yahweh.

(39) A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, but he must belong to the Lord Jesus Christ. (40) In my judgment, she is happier if she stays as she is - and I think that I too have the Spirit of Yahweh.

Most of the orders, advices and rules found in this passage correspond to Paul's own ideas; some are of general validity, some not, some questionable, some valid only for the society of his time, some even today. To note that "do" and "do not" rules are given, sometimes in contrast with his own previous teaching! (Col 2:6-23)

Expel the immoral brother [1 Co 5:1-13]

(1Co 5:1) It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that does not occur even among Pagans: A man has his father's wife! (2) And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this? (3) Even though I am not physically present, I am spiritually with you. And I have already passed judgment on the one who did this, just as if I were present. (4) When you will be assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,

and I will be spiritually with you and the power of our Lord Jesus Christ will be present, **(5)**hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his soul saved on the day of the Lord Jesus Christ.

(6)Your boasting is not good. Don't you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough? **(7)**Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast -as you really are. For Jesus Christ, our Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed. **(8)**Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth.

(9)I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people **(10)**-not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral-, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world. **(11)**But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who call himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat.

(12)What business it is of mine to judge those outside the Church? Are you not to judge those inside? **(13)**Yahweh will judge those outside. "Expel the wicked man from among you."

The expulsion of the man from the Church was leaving him fully under Satan's influence. And Paul's expectation was that the fact of being officially ostracized from the Church would cause the man such anguish that he would repent and, then, be spiritually saved for ever, after a period of expiatory and corrective punishment in Hell.

There is only one thing worse than a sin: to be proud of it!

Sexual immorality [1 Co 6:12-20]

(1Co 6:12)"Everything is permissible for me" -but not everything is beneficial. "Everything is permissible for me" -but I will not be mastered by anything. **(13)**"Food for the stomach and the stomach for the food" -but Yahweh will destroy them both. The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord Yahweh, and the Lord Yahweh for the body. **(14)**By His power Yahweh raised the Lord Jesus Christ from the dead, and He will raise us also. **(15)**Do you know that your bodies are members of Jesus Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Jesus Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! **(16)**Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, "The two will become one flesh." **(17)**But he who unites himself with the Lord Jesus Christ is spiritually one with him.

(18)Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. **(19)**Do you not know that your body is a temple of Yahweh's Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from Yahweh? You are not your own; **(20)**you were bought at a price. Therefore honor Yahweh with your body.

Personal freedom and desire for one's rights don't have to be the only considerations. A believer could become enslaved by those actions in which he freely indulges.

To note that in every moment of the Jewish and Christian religions' history, too much relevance was and is still given to sexual conduct, much more than to social problems and injustice.

Lawsuits among believers [1 Co 6:1-11]

(1Co 6:1) If any of you has a dispute with another, dare he take it before the ungodly for judgment instead of before the saints? **(2)** Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases? **(3)** Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life! **(4)** Therefore, if you have disputes about such matters, you can appoint as judges even men of little account in the Church! **(5)** I say this to shame you. Is it possible that there is nobody among you wise enough to judge a dispute between believers? **(6)** But instead, one brother goes to law against another -and this in front of unbelievers!

(7) The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means that you have been completely defeated already. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated? **(8)** Instead, you yourselves cheat and do wrong, and you do this to your brothers.

(9) Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the Kingdom of Yahweh? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders **(10)** nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the Kingdom of Yahweh. **(11)** And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, by the Spirit of [Yahweh] our God.

Particular addresses**To the Thessalonians****Paul's ministry in Thessalonica** [1 Th 2:1-16]

(1Th 2:1) You know, brothers, that our visit to you was not a failure. **(2)** We had previously suffered and been insulted in Philippi, as you know, but with the help of [Yahweh] our God we dared to tell you His Gospel in spite of strong opposition. **(3)** For the appeal we made does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you. **(4)** On the contrary, we speak as men approved by Yahweh to be entrusted with the Gospel. We are not trying to please men but Yahweh, who tests our hearts. **(5)** You know we never used flattery nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed -Yahweh is our witness. **(6a)** We were not looking for praise from men, not from you or anyone else.

(6b) As apostles of Jesus Christ we could have been a burden to you, **(7)** but we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children. **(8)** We were so much fond of you that we were delighted to share with you not only the Gospel of Yahweh but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us. **(9)** Surely you remember, brothers, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the Gospel of Yahweh to you.

(10) You are witnesses, and so is Yahweh, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed. **(11)** For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, **(12)** encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of Yahweh, who calls you into His Kingdom and Glory.

(13) And we also thank Yahweh continually because, when you received the Word of Yahweh, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the Word of Yahweh, which is at work in you who believe. **(14)** For you, brothers, became imitators of Yahweh's Churches in Israel, which are in Christ Jesus: You suffered from your own countrymen the same things those Churches suffered from the Jews, **(15)** who killed the Lord Jesus Christ and the prophets and also drove us out. They displease Yahweh and are hostile to all men **(16)** in their effort to keep us from

speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. In this way they always heap up their sins to the limit. The punishment of Yahweh has come upon them fully.

Paul's longing to see the Thessalonians [1 Th 2:17-20;3:1-5]

(1Th 2:17)But, brothers, when we were torn away from you for a short time (in person, not in thought), out of our intense longing we made every effort to see you. (18)For we wanted to come to you -certainly I, Paul, did, again and again- but Satan stopped us. (19)For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ when he comes? It is not you? (20)Indeed, you are our glory and joy.

(3:1)So when we could stand it no longer, we thought it best to be left by ourselves in Athens. (2)We sent Timothy, who is our brother and Yahweh's fellow-worker in spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ, to strengthen and encourage you in your faith, (3)so that no one would be unsettled by these trials. You know quite well that we were destined for them. (4)In fact, when we were with you, we kept telling you that we would be persecuted. And it turned out that way, as you well know. (5)For this reason, when I could stand it no longer, I sent [Timothy] to find out about your faith. I was afraid that in some way the tempter might have tempted you and our efforts might have been useless.

Timothy's encouraging report [1 Th 3:6-13]

(1Th 3:6)But Timothy has just now come to us from you and has brought good news about your faith and affection. He has told us that you always have pleasant memories of us and that you long to see us, just as we also long to see you. (7)Therefore, brothers, in all our distress and persecution we were encouraged about you because of your faith. (8)For now we really live, since you are standing firm in the Lord Yahweh. (9)How can we thank Yahweh enough for you in return for all the joy we have in the presence of [Yahweh] our God because of you? (10)Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith.

(11)Now may [Yahweh] our God and Father Himself and our Lord Jesus Christ clear the way for us to come to you. (12)May the Lord Jesus Christ make your affection increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. (13)May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of [Yahweh] our God and Father when our Lord Jesus Christ comes with all his holy ones.

Stand firm [2 Th 2:13-17]

(2Th 2:13)But we ought always to thank Yahweh for you, brothers cherished by the Lord Jesus Christ, because from the beginning Yahweh chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of His Spirit and through belief in the truth. (14)He called you to this through our Gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. (15)So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter.

(16)May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and Yahweh our Father, who cherished us and by His grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, (17)encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.

Final instructions [1 Th 5:12-22]

(1Th 5:12) Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord Jesus Christ and who admonish you. (13) Hold them in the highest regard in affection because of their work. Live in peace with each other. (14) And we urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone. (15) Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else.

(16) Be joyful always; (17) pray continually; (18) give thanks in all circumstances, for this is Yahweh's will for you in Christ Jesus.

(19) Do not put out your spiritual fire; (20) do not treat prophecies with contempt. (21) Test everything. (22) Hold on to the good. Avoid every kind of evil.

Warning against idleness [2 Th 3:6-15]

(2Th 3:6) In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers, to keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live according to the teaching you received from us. (7) For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you, (8) nor did we eat anyone's food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you. (9) We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to make ourselves a model for you to follow. (10) For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: "If a man will not work, he shall not eat."

(11) We hear that some among you are idle. They are not busy; they are busy-bodies. (12) Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the bread they eat. (13) And as for you, brothers, never tire of doing what is right.

(14) If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of him. Do not associate with him, in order that he may feel ashamed. (15) Yet do not regard him as enemy, but warn him as a brother.

To the Galatians**No other Gospel** [Gal 1:6-10]

(Gal 1:6) I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Jesus Christ and are turning to a different gospel (7)-which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the Gospel of Jesus Christ. (8) But even if one of us or an angel from Heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! (9) As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!

(10) Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of Yahweh? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Jesus Christ.

Faith or observance of the law [Gal 3:1-14]

(Gal 3:1) You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Jesus Christ crucified was clearly portrayed before your very eyes. (2) I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive Yahweh's Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? (3) Are you so foolish? After beginning with Yahweh's Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort? (4) Have you suffered so much for nothing -if it re-

ally was for nothing? (5) Does Yahweh give you His Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard?

(6) Consider Abraham: "He believed in Yahweh, and it was credited to him as righteousness." (7) Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. (8) The Scripture foresaw that Yahweh would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the Gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you." (9) So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

(10) All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law." (11) Clearly no one is justified before Yahweh by the law, because, "The righteous will live by faith." (12) The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, "The man who does these things will live by them." (13) Jesus Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree." (14) He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of Yahweh's Spirit.

The law and the promise [Gal 3:15-25]

(Gal 3:15) Brothers, let me take an example from everyday life. Just as no one can set aside or add to a human covenant that has been duly established, so it is in this case. (16) The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say "and to seeds," meaning many people, but "and to your seed," meaning one person, who is Jesus Christ. (17) What I mean is this: The law, introduced 430 years later, does not set aside the covenant previously established by Yahweh and thus do away with the promise. (18) For if the inheritance depends on the law, then it no longer depends on a promise; but Yahweh in His grace gave it to Abraham through a promise.

(19) What, then, was the purpose of the law? It was added because of transgressions until the "Seed" to whom the promise referred had come. The law was put into effect through angels by a mediator. (20) A mediator, however, does not represent just one party... But Yahweh is one.

(21) Is the law, therefore, opposed to the promises of Yahweh? Absolutely not! For if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law. (22) But the Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe.

(23) Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed. (24) So the law was put in charge to lead us to Jesus Christ that we might be justified by faith. (25) Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law.

Sons of Yahweh [Gal 3:26-29; 4:1-7]

(Gal 3:26) You are all sons of Yahweh through faith in Christ Jesus, (27) for all of you who were baptized into Jesus Christ have clothed yourselves with Jesus Christ. (28) There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Jesus Christ. (29) If you belong to Jesus Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

(4:1) What I am saying is that as long as the heir is a child, he is no different from a slave, although he owns the whole estate. (2) He is subject to guardians and trustees un-

til the time set by his father. (3)So also, when we were children, we were in slavery under the basic principles of the world. (4)But when the time had fully come, Yahweh sent His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, (5)to redeem those under the law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. (6)Because you are sons, Yahweh sent the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." (7)So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, Yahweh has made you also an heir.

Unity in Jesus Christ has to transcend any ethnic, social, sexual and denominational distinction. Spiritual salvation is open to all men. (For a deeper understanding of this point, see: "Thoughts. At the end of time, everybody will be with Yahweh. A direct consequence of Yahweh's justice and affection").

Paul's concern for the Galatians [Gal 4:8-20]

(Gal 4:8)Formerly, when you did not know Yahweh, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods. (9)But now that you know Yahweh -or rather are known by Yahweh- how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again? (10)You are observing special days and months and seasons and years! (11)I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you.

(12)I plead with you, brothers, become like me, for I became like you. (13)You have done me no wrong. As you know, it was because of an illness that I first preached the Gospel to you. (14)Even though my illness was a trial to you, you did not treat me with contempt or scorn. Instead, you welcomed me as if I were an angel of Yahweh, as if I were Christ Jesus himself. (15)What has happened to all your joy? I can testify that, if you could have done so, you would have torn your eyes and given them to me. (16)Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth?

(17)Those people are zealous to win you over, but for no good. What they want is to alienate you from us, so that you may be zealous for them. (18)It is fine to be zealous, provided the purpose is good, and to be so always and not just when I am with you. (19)My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Jesus Christ is formed in you, (20)how I wish I could be with you now and change my tone, because I am perplexed about you!

Hagar and Sarah [Gal 4:21-31]

(Gal 4:21)Tell me, you who want to be under the law, are you not aware of what the law says? (22)For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and the other by the free woman. (23)His son by the slave woman was born in the ordinary way; but his son by the free woman was born as the result of a promise.

(24)These things may be taken figuratively, for the women represent two covenants. One covenant is from Mount Sinai and bears children who are to be slaves: This is Hagar. (25)Now Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present city of Jerusalem, because she is in slavery with her children. (26)But the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother. (27)For it is written:

"Be glad, O barren woman, who bears no children; break forth and cry aloud, you who have no labor pains; because more are the children of the desolate woman than of her who has a husband."

(28)Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. (29)At that time the son born in the ordinary way persecuted the son born by the power of Yahweh's Spirit. It is

the same now. (30)But what does the Scripture say? “Get rid of the slave woman and her son, for the slave woman’s son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman’s son.” (31)Therefore, brothers, we are not children of the slave woman, but of the free woman.

Freedom in Jesus Christ [Gal 5:1-15]

(Gal 5:1)It is for freedom that Jesus Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

(2)Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Jesus Christ will be of no value to you at all. (3)Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. (4)You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Jesus Christ; you have fallen away from grace. (5)But by faith we eagerly await through Yahweh’s Spirit the righteousness for which we hope. (6)For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through affection.

(7)You were running a good race. Who cut in on you and kept you from obeying the truth? (8)That kind of persuasion does not come from the One who calls you. (9)“A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough.” (10)I am confident in the Lord Yahweh that you will take no other view. The one who is throwing you into confusion will pay the penalty, whoever he may be. (11)Brothers, if I am still preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the Cross has been abolished. (12)As for those agitators, I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves!

(13)You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in affection. (14)The entire law is summed up in a single command: “you’ll be fond of your neighbor as of yourself.” (15)If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.

Life by the Spirit of Yahweh [Gal 5:16-26]

(Gal 5:16)So I say, live by the Spirit of Yahweh, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. (17)For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to Yahweh’s Spirit, and Yahweh’s Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. (18)But if you are led by Yahweh’s Spirit, you are not under law.

(19)The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; (20)idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions (21)and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the Kingdom of Yahweh.

(22)But the fruit of Yahweh’s Spirit is affection, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, (23)gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. (24)Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. (25)Since we live by Yahweh’s Spirit, let us keep in step with His Spirit. (26)Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

Doing good to all [Gal 6:1-10]

(Gal 6:1)Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. (2)Carry each other’s bur-

dens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Jesus Christ. (3) If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. (4) Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else, (5) for each one should carry his own load.

(6) Anyone who receives instructions in the Word must share all good things with his instructor.

(7) Do not be deceived: Yahweh cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. (8) The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please Yahweh's Spirit, from Yahweh's Spirit will reap eternal life. (9) Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. (10) Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of the believers.

Not circumcision but a new creation [Gal 6:11-17]

(Gal 6:11) See what large letters I use as I write to you with my own hand!

(12) Those who want to make a good impression outwardly are trying to compel you to be circumcised. The only reason they do this is to avoid being persecuted for the Cross of Jesus Christ. (13) Not even those who are circumcised obey the law, yet they want you to be circumcised that they may boast about your flesh. (14) May I never boast except in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. (15) Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation. (16) Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule, who are the Israel of Yahweh.

(17) Finally, let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my own body the marks of Jesus Christ.

To the Corinthians

Divisions in the Church [1 Co 1:10-17]

(1Co 1:10) I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought. (11) My brothers, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. (12) What I mean is this: One of you says, "I follow Paul"; another, "I follow Apollos"; another, "I follow Peter"; still another, "I follow Jesus Christ."

(13) Is Jesus Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized in the name of Paul? (14) I am thankful that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius, (15) so no one can say that you were baptized in my name. (16) (Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I don't remember if I baptized anyone else.) (17) For Jesus Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the Gospel -not with words of human wisdom, lest the Cross of Jesus Christ be emptied of its power.

On divisions in the Church [1 Co 3:1-23]

(1Co 3:1) Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly -mere infants in Jesus Christ. (2) I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. (3) You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men? (4) For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not mere men?

(5)What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe -as the Lord Yahweh has assigned to each his task. (6)I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but Yahweh made it grow. (7)So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only Yahweh, who makes things grow. (8)The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor. (9)For we are Yahweh's fellow workers; you are Yahweh's field, Yahweh's building.

(10)By the grace Yahweh has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. (11)For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. (12)If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, (13)his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. (14)It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. (15)If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.

(16)Don't you know that you yourselves are Yahweh's temple and that Yahweh's Spirit lives in you? (17)If anyone destroys Yahweh's temple, Yahweh will destroy him; for Yahweh's temple is sacred, and you are that temple.

(18)Do not deceive yourselves. If any one of you thinks he is wise by the standards of this age, he should become a "fool" so that he can become wise. (19)For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in Yahweh's sight. As it is written: "He catches the wise in their craftiness;" (20)and again, "The Lord Yahweh knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile." (21)So then, no more boasting about men! All things are yours, (22)whether Paul or Apollos or Peter or the world of life or death or the present or the future -all are yours, (23)and you are of Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ is of Yahweh.

The believers in Jesus Christ were and are united by their spiritual communion with him and Yahweh and constitute the Christian Church. So whatever denominational division could exist, it has to be considered unessential and irrelevant as far as their Christian faith is founded only on Jesus Christ and on his sacrifice for the spiritual salvation of all men.

It is the community of all Christians (all of them in spiritual communion with Jesus Christ and Yahweh) which constitute the Temple of Yahweh, the Christian Church, not the more or less "sacred" buildings or places where the community could gather for common prayer.

Apostles of Jesus Christ [1 Co 4:1-21]

(1Co 4:1)So then, men ought to regard us as servants of Jesus Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of Yahweh. (2)Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful. (3)I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself. (4)My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord Yahweh who judges me. (5)Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord Jesus Christ comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from Yahweh.

(6)Now, brothers, I have applied these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, so that you may learn from us the meaning of the saying, "Do not go beyond what is written." Then you will not take pride in one man over against another.

(7)For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?

(8)Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! You have become kings -and that without us! How I wish that you really had become kings so that we might be kings with you! (9)For it seems to me that Yahweh has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like men condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to men. (10)We are fools for Jesus Christ, but you are so wise in Jesus Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are honored, we are dishonored! (11)To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless. (12)We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; (13)when we are slandered, we answer kindly. Up to this moment we have become the scum of the Earth, the refuse of the world.

(14)I am not writing this to shame you, but to warn you, as my dear children. (15)You may have thousands of tutors in Jesus Christ, but you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the Gospel. (16)Therefore I am urge you to imitate me. (17)For this reason I am sending to you Timothy, my son whom I am fond of, who is faithful in the Lord Jesus Christ. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every Church.

(18)Some of you have become arrogant, as if I were not coming to you. (19)But I will come to you very soon, if the Lord Yahweh is willing, and then I will find out not only how these arrogant people are talking, but what power they have. (20)For the Kingdom of Yahweh is not a matter of talk but of power. (21)What do you prefer? Shall I come to you with a whip, or in affection and with a gentle spirit?

The Lord Jesus Christ's Supper [1 Co 11:17-34]

(1Co 11:17)In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good. (18)In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a Church, there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it. (19)No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have Yahweh's approval. (20)When you come together, it is not the Lord Jesus Christ's Supper you eat, (21)for as you eat, each of you goes ahead without waiting for anybody else. One remains hungry, another gets drunk. (22)Don't you have homes to drink and eat in? Or do you despise the Church of Yahweh and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you for this? Certainly not!

(23)For I received from the Lord Jesus Christ what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus Christ, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, (24)and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." (25)In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." (26)For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord Jesus Christ's death until he comes.

(27)Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord Jesus Christ in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. (28)A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. (29)For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord Jesus Christ eats and drinks judgment on himself. (30)That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. (31)But if we

judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment. (32)When we are judged by the Lord Jesus Christ, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world.

(33)So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for each other. (34)If anyone is hungry, he should eat at home, so that when you meet together it may not result in judgment.

And when I come, I will give further directions.

The Lord Jesus Christ's Supper was and is a commemorative communal meal, of deep spiritual significance, recalling Jesus Christ's death for the spiritual salvation of all men. Christians have to meet together to break and eat the bread and to drink of the cup remembering and proclaiming the deliverance of believers from the bondage of sin obtained by Jesus once for ever and for all. Important to note that the repetition of the ceremony is not the repetition of Jesus' sacrifice on the Cross -as many Churches came to believe- but -as asked by Jesus- a remembrance of it and a reminder of the "New Covenant," the new relationship between Yahweh and all men, a relationship based solely on love. Clearly, the commemorative Supper should be held periodically, even if Jesus Christ did not leave any explicit instruction as to how often.

The collection for Yahweh's people [1 Co 16:1-4]

(1Co 16:1)Now about the collection for Yahweh's people: Do what I told the Galatian Churches to do. (2)On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collection will have to be made. (3)Then, when I arrive, I will give letters of introduction to the men you approve and send them with your gift to Jerusalem. (4)If it seems advisable for me to go also, they will accompany me.

Personal requests [1 Co 16:5-18]

(1Co 16:5)After I go through Macedonia, I will come to you -for I will be going through Macedonia. (6)Perhaps I will stay with you a while, or even spend the winter, so that you can help me on my journey, wherever I go. (7)I do not want to see you now and make only a passing visit; I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord Yahweh permits. (8)But I will stay on at Ephesus until Pentecost, (9)because a great door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many who oppose me.

(10)If Timothy comes, see to it that he has nothing to fear while he is with you, for he is carrying on the work of the Lord Jesus Christ, just as I am. (11)No one, then, should refuse to accept him. Send him on his way in peace so that he may return to me. I am expecting him along with the brothers.

(12)Now about our brother Apollos: I strongly urged him to go to you with the brothers. He was quite unwilling to go now, but he will go when he has the opportunity.

(13)Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong. (14)Do everything with affection.

(15)You know that the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia, and they have devoted themselves to the service of the saints. I urge you, brothers, (16)to submit to such as these and to everyone who joins in the work, and labors at it. (17)I was glad when Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaius arrived, because they have supplied what was lacking from you. (18)For they refreshed my spirit and you also. Such men deserve recognition.

Paul's change of plans [2 Co 1:12-24;2:1-4]

(2Co 1:12)Now, this is our boast: Our conscience testifies that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, in the holiness and sincerity that are from Yahweh. We have done so not according to worldly wisdom, but according to Yahweh's grace. **(13)**For we do not write you anything you cannot read or understand. And I hope that, **(14)**as you have understood us in part, you will come to understand fully that you can boast of us just as we will boast of you in the day of the Lord Jesus Christ.

(15)Because I was confident of this, I planned to visit you first so that you might benefit twice. **(16)**I planned to visit you on my way to Macedonia and to come back to you from Macedonia, and then to have you send me on my way to Judea. **(17)**When I planned this, did I do it lightly? Or do I make my plans in a worldly manner so that in the same breath I say, "Yes, yes" and "No, no"?

(18)But as surely as Yahweh is faithful, our message to you is not "Yes" and "No." **(19)**For the Son of Yahweh, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by me and Silas and Timothy, was not "Yes" and "No," but in him it has always been "Yes." **(20)**For no matter how many promises Yahweh has made, they are "Yes" in Jesus Christ. That is why through him the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of Yahweh. **(21)**Now it is Yahweh who makes both us and you stand firm in Jesus Christ. He anointed us, **(22)** set His seal of ownership on us, and put His Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.

(23)I call Yahweh as my witness that it was in order to spare you that I did not return to Corinth. **(24)**Not that we lord it over your faith, but we work with you for your joy, because it is by faith you stand firm. **(2:1)**So I made up my mind that I would not make another painful visit to you. **(2)**For if I grieve you, who is left to make me glad but you whom I have grieved? **(3)**I wrote as I did so that when I came I should not be distressed by those who ought to make me rejoice. I had confidence in all of you, that you would all share my joy. **(4)**For I wrote you out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to grieve you but to let you know the depth of my affection for you.

Ministers of the new covenant [2 Co 2:12-17;3:1-6]

(2Co 2:12)Now when I went to Troas to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ and found that the Lord Yahweh had opened a door for me, **(13)**I still had no peace of mind, because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I said goodbye to them and went on to Macedonia.

(14)But thanks to Yahweh, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Jesus Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him. **(15)**For we are to Yahweh the aroma of Jesus Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. **(16)**To the one we are the fragrance of life, to the other, the smell of death. And who is equal to such a task? **(17)**Unlike so many, we do not go around selling the Word of Yahweh for profit. On the contrary, in Jesus Christ we speak before Yahweh with sincerity, like men sent from Yahweh. **(3:1)**Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, like some people, letters of recommendation to you or from you? **(2)**You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everybody. **(3)**You show that you are a letter from Jesus Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of [Yahweh] the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.

(4)Such confidence as this is ours through Jesus Christ before Yahweh. (5)Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from Yahweh. (6)He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant -not written but spiritual; for the letter kills, but the Spirit of Yahweh gives life.

This passage refers to the “false teachers” who had infiltrated the Corinthian Church. Their main interest was to make a profit from their teaching, not seeing it as a moral and spiritual mission. From the beginning of the Christian Church there always were (and unfortunately there always are) too many priests and pastors (non to speak of the higher hierarchical positions) looking for the social status coming with their position (prestige, authority, power and money).

Paul's hardship [2 Co 6:3-13]

(2Co 6:3)We put no stumbling block in anyone's path, so that our ministry will not be discredited. (4)Rather, as servants of Yahweh we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardship and distress; (5)in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger; (6)in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in Yahweh's spiritual holiness and in sincere affection; (7)in truthful speech and in the power of Yahweh; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left; (8)through glory and dishonor, bad report and good report; genuine, yet regarded as impostors; (9)known, yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; (10)sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything.

(11)We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians, and opened wide our hearts to you. (12)We are not withholding our affection from you, but you are withholding yours from us. (13)As a fair exchange, -I speak as to my children- open wide your hearts also.

Paul's joy [2 Co 7:2-16]

(2Co 7:2)Make room for us in your hearts. We have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have exploited no one. (3)I do not say this to condemn you; I have said before that you have such a place in our hearts that we would live or die with you. (4)I have great confidence in you; I take great pride in you. I am greatly encouraged; in all our troubles my joy knows no bounds.

(5)For when we came into Macedonia, this body of ours had no rest, but we were harassed at every turn -conflicts on the outside, fears within. (6)But Yahweh, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, (7)and not only by his coming but also by the comfort you had given him. He told us about your longing for me, your deep sorrow, your ardent concern for me, so that my joy was greater than ever.

(8)Even if I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it. Though I did regret it -I see that my letter hurt you, but only for a little while- (9)yet now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance. For you became sorrowful as Yahweh intended and so were not harmed in any way by us. (10)Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. (11)See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done. At every point you have proved yourselves to be innocent in this matter. (12)So even though I wrote to you, it was

not on account of the one who did the wrong or of the injured party, but rather that before Yahweh you could see for yourselves how devoted to us you are. **(13)**By all this we are encouraged.

In addition to our own encouragement, we were especially delighted to see how happy Titus was, because his spirit has been refreshed by all of you. **(14)**I had boasted to him about you, and you have not embarrassed me. But just as everything we said to you was true, so our boasting about you to Titus has proved to be true as well. **(15)**And his affection for you is all the greater when he remembers that you were all obedient, receiving him with fear and trembling. **(16)**I am glad I can have complete confidence in you.

Paul's defense of his ministry [2 Co 10:1-18]

(2Co 10:1)By the meekness and the gentleness of Jesus Christ, I appeal to you -I, Paul, who am "timid" when face to face with you, but "bold" when away! **(2)**I beg you that when I come I may not have to be as bold as I expect to be toward some people who think that we live by the standards of this world. **(3)**For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. **(4)**The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. **(5)**We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of Yahweh, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Jesus Christ. **(6)**And we will be ready to punish every act of disobedience, once your obedience is complete.

(7)You are looking only on the surface of things. If anyone is confident that he belongs to Jesus Christ, he should also consider that we belong to Jesus Christ just as much as he. **(8)**For even if I boast somewhat freely about the authority the Lord Yahweh gave us for building you up rather than pulling you down, I will not be ashamed of it. **(9)**I do not want to seem to be trying to frighten you with my letters. **(10)**For some say, "His letters are weighty and forceful, but in person he is unimpressive and his speaking amounts to nothing." **(11)**Such people should realize that what we are in our letters when we are absent, we will be in our actions when we are present.

(12)We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise. **(13)**We, however, will not boast beyond proper limits, but will confine our boasting to the field Yahweh has assigned to us, a field that reaches even to you. **(14)**We are not going too far in our boasting, as would be the case if we had not come to you, for we did get as far as you with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. **(15)**Neither do we go beyond our limits by boasting of work done by others. Our hope is that, as your faith continues to grow, our area of activity among you will greatly expand, **(16)**so that we can preach the Gospel in the regions beyond you. For we do not want to boast about work already done in another man's territory. **(17)**But, "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord Yahweh." **(18)**For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord Yahweh commends.

Paul and the false apostles [2 Co 11:1-15]

(2Co 11:1)I hope you will put up with a little of my foolishness; but you are already doing that. **(2)**I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Jesus Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him. **(3)**But I am

afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Jesus Christ. (4)For if someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus Christ other than the Jesus Christ we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it easily enough. (5)But I do not think I am in the least inferior to those "super-apostles." (6)I may not be a trained speaker, but I do have knowledge. We have made this perfectly clear to you in every way.

(7)Was it a sin for me to lower myself in order to elevate you by preaching the Gospel of Yahweh to you free of charge? (8)I robbed other Churches by receiving support from them so as to serve you. (9)And when I was with you and needed something, I was not a burden to anyone, for the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied what I needed. I have kept myself from being a burden to you in any way, and will continue to do so. (10)As surely as the truth of Jesus Christ is in me, nobody in the regions of Achaia will stop this boasting of mine. (11)Why? Because I am not fond of you? Yahweh knows I do! (12)And I will keep on doing what I am doing in order to cut the ground from under those who want an opportunity to be considered equal with us in the things they boast about.

(13)For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Jesus Christ. (14)And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. (15)It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve.

Paul boasts about his sufferings [2 Co 11:16-33]

(2Co 11:16)I repeat: Let no one take me for a fool. But if you do, then receive me just as you would a fool, so that I may do a little boasting. (17)In this self-confident boasting I am not talking as the Lord Jesus Christ would, but as a fool. (18)Since many are boasting in the way the world does, I too will boast. (19)You gladly put up with fools since you are so wise! (20)In fact, you even put up with anyone who enslaves you or exploits you or takes advantage of you or pushes himself forward or slaps you in the face. (21)To my shame I admit that we were too weak for that!

What anyone else dares to boast about -I am speaking as a fool- I also dare to boast about. (22)Are they Hebrew? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. (23)Are they Abraham's descendants? So am I. Are they servants of Jesus Christ? (I am out of mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. (24)Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. (25)Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. (26)I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. (27)I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. (28)Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the Churches. Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? (29)Who is led to sin, and I do not inwardly burn?

(30)If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. (31)[Yahweh] the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is to be praised forever, knows that I

am not lying. (32)In Damascus the governor under King Aretas had the city of the Damascenes guarded in order to arrest me. But I was lowered in a basket from a window in the wall and slipped through his hands.

Paul's vision and his thorn [2 Co 12:1-10]

(2Co 12:1)I must go on boasting. Although there is nothing to be gained, I will go on to visions and revelations from the Lord Yahweh. (2)I know a man in Jesus Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know -Yahweh knows. (3)And I know that this man -whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but Yahweh knows- (4)was caught up to Paradise. He heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell. (5)I will boast about a man like that, but I will not boast about myself, except about my weaknesses. (6)Even if I should choose to boast, I would not be a fool, because I would be speaking the truth. But I refrain, so no one will think more of me than is warranted by what I do or say.

(7)To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. (8)Three times I pleaded with the Lord Jesus Christ to take it away from me. (9)But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Jesus Christ's power may rest on me. (10)That is why, for Jesus Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Paul's concern for the Corinthians [2 Co 12:11-21]

(2Co 12:11)I have made a fool of myself, but you drove me to it. I ought to have been commended by you, for I am not in the least inferior to the "super-apostles," even though I am nothing. (12)The things that mark an apostle -signs, wonders and miracles- were done among you with great perseverance. (13)In what were you inferior to the other Churches, except that I was never a burden to you? Forgive me this offense!

(14)Now I am ready to visit you for the third time, and I will not be a burden to you, because what I want is not your possessions but you. After all, children should not have to save up for their parents, but parents for their children. (15)So I will very gladly spend for you everything I have and expend myself as well. If I am fond of you more, will you be fond of me less? (16)Be that as it may, I have not been a burden to you. Yet, crafty fellow that I am, I caught you by trickery! (17)Did I exploit you through any of the men I sent you? (18)I urged Titus to go to you and I sent our brother with him. Titus did not exploit you, did he? Did we not act in the same spirit and follow the same course?

(19)Have you been thinking all along that we have been defending ourselves to you? We have been speaking in the sight of Yahweh as those in Jesus Christ; and everything we do, dear friends, is for your strengthening. (20)For I am afraid that when I come I may not find you as I want you to be, and you may not find me as you want me to be. I fear that there may be quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, factions, slander, gossip, arrogance and disorder. (21)I am afraid that when I come again [Yahweh] my God will humble me before you, and I will be grieved over many who have sinned earlier and have not repented of the impurity, sexual sin and debauchery in which they have indulged.

Generosity encouraged [2 Co 8:1-15]

(2Co 8:1) And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that Yahweh has given the Macedonian Churches. (2) Out of the most severe trial and their extreme poverty, their overflowing joy welled up in rich generosity. (3) For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, (4) they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. (5) And they did not do as we expected, by they gave themselves first to the Lord Jesus Christ and then to us in keeping with Yahweh's will. (6) So we urged Titus, since he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part. (7) But just as you excel in everything -in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your affection for us- see that you also excel in the grace of this giving.

(8) I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your affection by comparing it with the earnestness of others. (9) For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.

(10) And here is my advice about what is best for you in this matter: Last year you were the first not only to give but also to have the desire to do so. (11) Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means. (12) For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have.

(13) Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. (14) At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. Then there will be equality, (15) as it is written: "He who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little did not have too little."

Titus sent to Corinth [2 Co 8:16-24;9:1-5]

(2Co 8:16) I thank Yahweh, who put into the heart of Titus the same concern I have for you. (17) For Titus not only welcomed our appeal, but he is coming to you with much enthusiasm and on his own initiative. (18) And we are sending along with him the brother who is praised by all the Churches for his service to the Gospel. (19) What is more, he was chosen by the Churches to accompany us as we carry the offering, which we administer in order to honor the Lord Jesus Christ himself and to show our eagerness to help. (20) We want to avoid any criticism on the way we administer this liberal gift. (21) For we are taking pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord Yahweh, but also in the eyes of men.

(22) In addition, we are sending with them our brother who has often proved to us in many ways that he is zealous, and now even more so because of his great confidence in you. (23) As for Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker among you; as for our brothers, they are representatives of the Churches and an honor to Jesus Christ. (24) Therefore show these men the proof of your affection and the reason for our pride in you, so that the Churches can see it.

(9:1) There is no need for me to write to you about this service to the saints. (2) For I know your eagerness to help, and I have been boasting about it to the Macedonians, telling them that since last year you in Achaia were ready to give; and your enthusiasm has stirred most of them to action. (3) But I am sending the brothers in order that our boasting about you in this matter should not prove hollow, but that you may be ready, as I said you would be. (4) For if any Macedonians come with me and find you unprepa-

red, we -not to say anything about you- would be ashamed of having been so confident. (5) So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to visit you in advance and finish the arrangements for the generous gift you have promised. Then it will be ready as a generous gift, not as one grudgingly given.

Sowing generously [2 Co 9:6-15]

(2Co 9:6) Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. (7) Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for Yahweh is fond of a cheerful giver. (8) And Yahweh is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. (9) As it is written:

“He has scattered abroad His gifts to the poor; His righteousness endures forever.”

(10) Now He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. (11) You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to Yahweh.

(12) This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of Yahweh’s people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to Yahweh. (13) Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, men will praise Yahweh for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. (14) And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace Yahweh has given you. (15) Thanks be to Yahweh for His indescribable gift!

Final warnings [2 Co 13:1-10]

(2Co 13:1) This will be my third visit to you. “Every matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.” (2) I already gave you a warning when I was with you the second time. I now repeat it while absent: On my return I will not spare those who sinned earlier or any of the others, (3) since you are demanding proof that Jesus Christ is speaking through me. He is not weak in dealing with you, but is powerful among you. (4) For to be sure, he was crucified in weakness, yet he lives by Yahweh’s power. Likewise, we are weak in him, yet by Yahweh’s power we will live with him to serve you.

(5) Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Jesus Christ is in you -unless, of course, you fail the test? (6) And I trust that you will discover that we have not failed the test. (7) Now we pray to Yahweh that you will not do anything wrong. Not that people will see that we have stood the test but that you will do what is right even though we may seem to have failed. (8) For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth. (9) We are glad whenever we are weak but you are strong; and our prayer is for your perfection. (10) This is why I write these things when I am absent, that when I come I may not have to be harsh in my use of authority -the authority the Lord Yahweh gave me for building you up, not for tearing you down.

To the Romans

Paul’s longing to visit Rome [Ro 1:11-17]

(Ro 1:11) I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you

strong (12)-that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith. (13)I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that I planned many times to come to you (but have been prevented from doing so until now) in order that I might have a harvest among you, just as I have had among the other Gentiles.

(14)I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish. (15)That is why I am so eager to preach the Gospel also to you who are at Rome.

(16)I am not ashamed of the Gospel, because it is the power of Yahweh for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. (17)For in the Gospel a righteousness from Yahweh is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."

Paul the minister to the Gentiles [Ro 15:14-22]

(Ro 15:14)I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another. (15)I have written you quite boldly on some points, as if to remind you of them again, because of the grace Yahweh gave me (16)to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles with the priestly duty of proclaiming the Gospel of Yahweh, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to Yahweh, sanctified by His Holy Spirit.

(17)Therefore I glory in Jesus Christ in my service to Yahweh. (18)I will not venture to speak of anything except what Jesus Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey Yahweh by what I have said and done (19)-by the power of signs and miracles, through the power of His Spirit. So from Jerusalem all the way around Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the Gospel of Jesus Christ. (20)It has always been my ambition to preach the Gospel where Jesus Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation. (21)Rather, as it is written:

"Those who were not told about him will see, and those who have not heard will understand."

(22)This is why I have often been hindered from coming to you.

Paul's plan to visit Rome [Ro 15:23-33;16:1-2,17-20]

(Ro 15:23)But now that there is no more place for me to work in these regions, and since I have been longing for many years to see you, (24)I plan to do so when I go to Spain. I hope to visit you while passing through and to have you assist me on my journey there, after I have enjoyed your company for a while. (25)Now, however, I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the saints there. (26)For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saint in Jerusalem. (27)They were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews' spiritual blessing, they owe it to the Jews to share with them the material blessings. (28)So after I have completed this task and have made sure that they have received this fruit, I will go to Spain and visit you on the way. (29)I know that when I come to you, I will come in the full measure of the blessing of Jesus Christ.

(30)I urge you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the benevolence of Yahweh's Spirit, to join me in the struggle by praying to Yahweh for me. (31)Pray that I may be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea and that my service in Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints there, (32)so that by Yahweh's will I may come to you with joy and together with you be refreshed. (33)Yahweh, the God of peace, be with you all. Amen.

(16:1)I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the Church in Cenchrea. (2)I

ask you to receive her in the Lord Yahweh in a way worthy of the saints and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been a great help to many people, including me.

(17)I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them.

(18)For such people are not serving our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people. (19)Everyone has heard about your obedience, so I am full of joy over you; but I want you to be wise about what is good, and innocent about what is evil.

(20)Yahweh, the God of peace, will soon crush Satan under your feet.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

To the Ephesians

Final instructions [Eph 6:19-22]

(Eph 6:19)Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the Gospel, (20)for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.

(21)Tychicus, the dear brother and faithful servant in the Lord Jesus Christ, will tell you everything, so that you also may know how I am and what I am doing. (22)I am sending him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are, and that he may encourage you.

To the Colossians

Paul's labor for the Church [Col 1:24-29;2:1-5]

(Col 1:24)Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Jesus Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the Church. (25)I have become his servant by the commission Yahweh gave me to present to you the Word of Yahweh in its fullness (26)-the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints. (27)To them Yahweh has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Jesus Christ in you, the hope of glory.

(28)We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Jesus Christ. (29)To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me.

(2:1)I want you to know how much I am struggling for you and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not met me personally. (2)My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in affection, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of Yahweh, namely, Jesus Christ, (3)in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. (4)I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments. (5)For though I am absent from you in body, I am present with you in spirit and delight to see how orderly you are and how firm your faith in Jesus Christ is.

Further instructions [Col 4:2-9,16]

(Col 4:2)Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. (3)And pray for us, too, that Yahweh may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Jesus Christ, for which I am in chains. (4)Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. (5)Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every

opportunity. **(6)**Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

(7)Tychicus will tell you all the news about me. He is a dear brother, a faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord Jesus Christ. **(8)**I am sending him to you for the express purpose that you may know about our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts. **(9)**He is coming with Onesimus, our faithful and dear brother, who is one of you. They will tell you everything that is happening here.

(16)After this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in the Church of the Laodiceans and that you in turn read the letter from Laodicea.

To Philemon

Paul's plea for Onesimus [Phm 1:8-22]

(Phm 1:8)Therefore, although in Jesus Christ I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do, **(9)**yet I appeal to you on the basis of affection. I then, as Paul -an old man and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus- **(10)**I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, who became my son when I was in chains. **(11)**Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me.

(12)I am sending him -who is my very heart- back to you. **(13)**I would have liked to keep him with me so that he could take your place in helping me while I am in chains for the Gospel. **(14)**But I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that any favor you do will be spontaneous and not forced. **(15)**Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back for good **(16)**-no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother. He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a man and as a brother in the Lord Jesus Christ.

(17)So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. **(18)**If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me. **(19)**I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand. I will pay it back -not to mention that you owe me your very self. **(20)**I do wish, brother, that I may have some benefit from you in the Lord Jesus Christ; refresh my heart in Jesus Christ. **(21)**Confident of your willingness, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I ask.

(22)And one thing more: Prepare a guest room for me, because I hope to be restored to you in answer to your prayers.

To the Philippians

Paul's chains advance the Gospel [Php 1:12-30]

(Php 1:12)Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the Gospel. **(13)**As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Jesus Christ. **(14)**Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord Jesus Christ have been encouraged to speak the Word of Yahweh more courageously and fearlessly.

(15)It is true that some preach Jesus Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of good-will. **(16)**The latter do so in affection, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the Gospel. **(17)**The former preach Jesus Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, sup-posing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. **(18)**But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Jesus Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice.

Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, **(19)**for I know that through your prayers and the spiritual help given by Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my sal-

vation. (20)I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Jesus Christ will be glorified in my body, whether by life or by death. (21)For to me, to live is Jesus Christ and to die is gain. (22)If I have to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? (23)I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Jesus Christ, which is better by far; (24)but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. (25)Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, (26)so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me.

(27)Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the Gospel (28)without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved -and that by Yahweh. (29)For it has been granted to you on behalf of Jesus Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him, (30)since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.

Shining as stars [Php 2:12-18]

(Php 2:12)Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed -not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence- continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, (13)for it is Yahweh who works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose.

(14)Do everything without complaining or arguing, (15)so that you can become blameless and pure, children of Yahweh without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe (16)as you hold on to the Word of life -in order that I may boast on the day of Jesus Christ that I did not run or labor for nothing. (17)But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you. (18)So you too should be glad and rejoice with me.

Timothy and Epaphroditus [Php 2:19-30]

(Php 2:19)I hope in the Lord Jesus Christ to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. (20)I have no one else like him, who takes a genuine interest in your welfare. (21)For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. (22)But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the Gospel. (23)I hope, therefore, to send him as soon as I see how things go with me. (24)And I am confident in the Lord Jesus Christ that I myself will come soon.

(25)But I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger, whom you sent to take care of my needs. (26)For he longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill. (27)Indeed he was ill, and almost died. But Yahweh had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, to spare me sorrow upon sorrow. (28)Therefore I am all the more eager to send him, so that when you see him again you may be glad and I may have less anxiety. (29)Welcome him in the Lord Jesus Christ with great joy, and honor men like him, (30)because he almost died for the work of Jesus Christ, risking his life to make up for the help you could not give me.

No confidence in the flesh [Php 3:1-11]

(Php 3:1) Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord Jesus Christ! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you.

(2) Watch out for those dogs, those men who do evil, those mutilators of the flesh. **(3)** For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of Yahweh, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh **(4a)**-though I myself have reasons for such confidence.

(4b) If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: **(5)** circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; **(6)** as for zeal, persecuting the Church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.

(7) But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Jesus Christ. **(8)** What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all these things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Jesus Christ **(9)** and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Jesus Christ -the righteousness that comes from Yahweh and is by faith. **(10)** I want to know Jesus Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, **(11)** and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Pressing on toward the goal [Php 3:12-21;4:1]

(Php 3:12) Not that I have already obtained all this, or I have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. **(13)** Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have obtained it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, **(14)** I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which Yahweh has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

(15) All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too Yahweh will make clear to you. **(16)** Only let us live up to what we have already attained.

(17) Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you. **(18)** For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the Cross of Jesus Christ. **(19)** Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things. **(20)** But our citizenship is in Heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, **(21)** who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

(4:1) Therefore, my brothers, you whom I am fond of and long for, my joy and crown, that is how you should stand firm in the Lord Jesus Christ, dear friends!

Exhortations [Php 4:2-9]

(Php 4:2) I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord Jesus Christ. **(3)** Yes, and I ask you, loyal yokefellow, help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the Gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the Book of Life.

(4) Rejoice in the Lord Jesus Christ always. I will say it again: Rejoice! **(5)** Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord Jesus Christ is near. **(6)** Do not be anxious about

anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to Yahweh. (7)And the peace of Yahweh, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

(8)Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is beautiful, whatever is admirable -if anything is excellent or praiseworthy- think about such things. (9)Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen me -put it into practice. And [Yahweh] the God of peace will be with you.

Thanks for their gifts [Php 4:10-20]

(**Php 4:10**)I rejoice greatly in the Lord Jesus Christ that at last you have renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you have been concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. (11)I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. (12)I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. (13)I can do with everything through him who gives me strength.

(14)Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles. (15)Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the Gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one Church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; (16)for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need. (17)Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account. (18)I have received full payment and even more; I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to Yahweh. (19)And [Yahweh] my God will meet all your needs according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus.

(20)To [Yahweh] our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

To Timothy

Warning against false teachers of the law [1 Ti 1:3-11,18-20]

(1Ti 1:3)As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer (4)nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies. These promote controversies rather than Yahweh's work -which is by faith. (5)The goal of this command is affection, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. (6)Some have wandered away from these and turned to meaningless talk. (7)They want to be teachers of the law, but they do not know what they are talking about or what they so confidently affirm.

(8)We know that the law is good if one uses it properly. (9)We also know that law is made not for the righteous but for law-breakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, (10)for adulterers and perverts, for slave traders and liars and perjurers -and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine (11)that conforms to the glorious Gospel of the blessed Yahweh, which He entrusted to me.

(18)Timothy, my son, I give you this instruction in keeping with the prophecies once made about you, so that by following them you may fight the good fight, (19)holding on to faith and a good conscience. Some have rejected these and so have shipwrecked

their faith. (20)Among them are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan to be taught not to blaspheme.

“False teachers” were and are all those priests and pastors who, instead of teaching the true Gospel of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ, “invent” useless doctrines, rules and myths (for example about the lives of the “saints”), teach and explain the Gospel in wrong ways, so actually bringing incomprehensions and divisions into the Christian Church.

Instructions to Timothy [1 Ti 4:1-16]

(1Ti 4:1)The Spirit of Yahweh clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. (2)Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron. (3)They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which Yahweh created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth. (4)For everything Yahweh created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, (5)because it is consecrated by the Word of Yahweh and prayer.

(6)If you point these things out to the brothers, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, brought up in the truths of the faith and of the good teaching that you have followed. (7)Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, train yourself to be godly. (8)For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.

(9)This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance (10)(and for this we labor and strive), that we have put our hope in [Yahweh] the living God, who is the Savior of all men, and especially of those who believe.

(11)Command and teach these things. (12)Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in affection, in faith and in purity. (13)Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching. (14)Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you.

(15)Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress. (16)Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.

Yahweh, through Jesus Christ, at the end of time will have all men saved. That is, in everybody's spiritual communion. Clearly, those who had believed during their physical life will be saved earlier -at the moment of their physical death. (For a deeper explanation of this point, see: “Thoughts. At the end of time, everybody will be with Yahweh”).

Greed for money [1 Ti 6:3-10]

(1Ti 6:3)If anyone teaches false doctrines and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, (4)he is conceited and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicion (5)and constant friction between men of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain.

(6)But godliness with contentment is great gain. (7)For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. (8)But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. (9)People who want to get rich fall into the temptation and the trap of many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. (10)For the greed for money is the root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

Paul's charge to Timothy [1 Ti 6:11-21;5:23]

(1Ti 6:11)But you, man of Yahweh, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, affection, endurance and gentleness. (12)Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses. (13)In the sight of Yahweh, who gives life to everything, and of Christ Jesus, who while testifying before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, I charge you (14)to keep this command without spot or blame until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, (15)which Yahweh will bring about in His own time -Yahweh, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, (16)who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To Him be honor and might forever. Amen.

(17)Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in Yahweh, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. (18)Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. (19)In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.

(20)Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to your care. Turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge, (21)which some have professed and in so doing have wandered from the faith.

(5:23)Stop drinking only water, and use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses.

Grace be to you.

Just as Jesus Christ's first coming occurred at the precise time Yahweh wanted, so will be with his second coming, and nobody knows when. To note that, in spite of Jesus' declarations (Mk 13:32; Mt 24:36), even presently many Christians continue to make forecasts of that event.

Further instructions to Timothy [2 Ti 1:4-18;2:1-13]

(2Ti 1:4)Recalling your tears, I long to see you, so that I may be filled with joy. (5)I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also. (6)For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of Yahweh, which is in you through the laying of my hands. (7)For Yahweh did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of affection and of self-discipline.

(8)So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord Jesus Christ, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the Gospel, by the power of Yahweh, (9)who has saved us and called us to a holy life -not because of anything we have done but because of His own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the

beginning of time, (10)but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel. (11)And of this Gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher. (12)That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day.

(13)What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith in and devotion for Christ Jesus. (14)Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you -guard it with the help of Yahweh's Holy Spirit who lives in us.

(15)You know that everyone in the province of Asia has deserted me, including Phygelus and Hermogenes.

(16)May the Lord Yahweh show mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, because he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains. (17)On the contrary, when he was in Rome, he searched hard for me until he found me. (18)May the Lord Jesus Christ grant that he will find mercy from the Lord Yahweh on the last day! You know very well in how many ways he helped me in Ephesus.

(2:1)You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. (2)And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others. (3)Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. (4)No one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs -he wants to please his commanding officer. (5)Similarly, if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not receive the victor's crown unless he competes according to the rules. (6)The hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops. (7)Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord Yahweh will give you insight into all this.

(8)Remember that Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my Gospel, (9)for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But Yahweh's Word is not chained. (10)Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory.

(11)Here is a trustworthy saying:

If we died with him, we will also live with him; (12)if we endure, we will also reign with him. If we disown him, he will also disown us; (13)if we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself.

A workman approved by Yahweh [2 Ti 2:14-26]

(2Ti 2:14)Keep reminding them of these things. Warn them before Yahweh against quarreling about words; it is of no value, and only ruins those who listen. (15)Do your best to present yourself to Yahweh as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the Word of truth. (16)Avoid godless chatter, because those who indulge in it will become more and more ungodly. (17)Their teaching will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, (18)who have wandered away from the truth. They say that the resurrection has already taken place, and they destroy the faith of some. (19)Nevertheless, Yahweh's solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: "The Lord Yahweh knows those who are His," and, "Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord Yahweh must turn away from wickedness."

(20)In a large house there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay; some are for noble purposes and some for ignoble. (21)If a man cleanses himself from the latter, he will be an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work.

(22)Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, affection and peace, along with those who call on the Lord Yahweh out of a pure heart. (23)Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels. (24)And the Lord Yahweh's servant must not quarrel; instead he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. (25)Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that Yahweh will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, (26)and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.

Godlessness in the last days [2 Ti 3:1-9]

(2Ti 3:1)But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. (2)People will be egoist, greedy for money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, (3)without affection, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, with no regard for the good, (4)treacherous, rash, conceited, greedy for pleasure rather than fond of Yahweh (5)-maintaining the outform of religion but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them.

(6)They are the kind who worm their way into homes and gain control over weak-willed women, who are loaded down with sins and are swayed by all kinds of evil desires, (7)always learning but never able to acknowledge the truth. (8)Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so also these men oppose the truth -men of depraved minds, who, as far as the faith is concerned, are rejected. (9)But they will not get very far because, as in the case of those men, their folly will be clear to everyone.

Paul's charge to Timothy [2 Ti 3:10-17;4:1-8]

(2Ti 3:10)You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, affection, endurance, (11)persecutions, sufferings -what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecutions I endured. Yet the Lord Yahweh rescued me from all of them. (12)In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, (13)while evil men and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. (14)But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, (15)and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. (16)All Scripture is Yahweh-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, (17)so that the man of Yahweh may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

(4:1)In the presence of Yahweh and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his Kingdom, I give you this charge: (2)Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season to correct, rebuke and encourage -with great patience and careful instruction. (3)For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.

(4)They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. (5)But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.

(6)For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. (7)I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. (8)Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord Jesus Christ, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day -and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

Personal remarks [2 Ti 4:9-18]

(2Ti 4:9)Do your best to come to me quickly, (10)for Demas, because he liked this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, and Titus to Dalmatia. (11)Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry. (12)I sent Tychicus to Ephesus. (13)When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, and my scrolls, especially the parchments.

(14)Alexander the metalworker did me a great deal of harm. The Lord Yahweh will repay him for what he has done. (15)You too should be on your guard against him, because he strongly opposed our message.

(16)At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them. (17)But the Lord Jesus Christ stood at my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. And I was delivered from the lion's mouth. (18)The Lord Jesus Christ will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly Kingdom. To him be the glory for ever and ever. Amen.

To Titus

Titus' task on Crete [Tit 1:5-16]

(Tit 1:5)The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you. (6)An elder must be blameless, the husband of but one wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. (7)Since an overseer is entrusted with Yahweh's work, he must be blameless -not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. (8)Rather he must be hospitable, one who likes what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. (9)He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.

(10)For there are many rebellious people, mere talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision group. (11)They must be silenced, because they are ruining whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach -and that for the sake of dishonest gain. (12)Even one of their own poets has said, "Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons." (13)This testimony is true. Therefore, rebuke them sharply, so that they will be sound in the faith (14)and will pay no attention to Jewish myths or to the commands of those who reject the truth. (15)To the pure, all the things are pure, but to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure. In fact, both their minds and consciences are corrupted. (16)They claim to know Yahweh, but by their actions they deny Him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good.

To note that, in Paul's letters, the terms "Elder" and "Overseer" (presently "Bishop") are used interchangeably. Generally speaking, "Elder" indicates qualification (maturity and experience), while "overseer" indicates responsibility (watching over Yahweh's people). Anyway, those are men overseeing a local congregation, whose duties are to teach and preach, to direct the affairs of the Church, to shepherd the flock of Yahweh and to guard the local Church from errors. And Paul gives a clear indication of the qualities needed. Further than being married and with children, they have to be strong, mature Christians, not to risk to become too proud of their importance. Men who have gained the respect of the other men in the day-to-day matters of life, men who respect even outside the Church the faith they profess and the precepts they teach. Yet, going through the history of the Christian Church, what a difference with the position of authority, power and privilege of all bishops and high prelates!

Final remarks [Tit 3:12-14]

(Tit 3:12) As soon as I send Artemas or Tychicus to you, do your best to come to me at Nicopolis, because I have decided to winter there. (13) Do everything you can to help Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their way and see that they have everything they need. (14) Our people must learn to devote themselves to doing what is good, in order that they may provide for daily necessities and not live unproductive lives.

To the Hebrews

Warning against falling away [Heb 5:11-14; 6:1-12]

(Heb 5:11) We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. (12) In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of Yahweh's Word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! (13) Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. (14) But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.

(6:1) Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Jesus Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in Yahweh, (2) instruction about baptism, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. (3) And Yahweh permitting, we will do so.

(4) For it is not possible to bring back to repentance those who have once been enlightened, (5) who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in Yahweh's Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the Word of Yahweh and the powers of the coming age, (6) and who then fall away, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of Yahweh all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace.

(7) Land that drinks the rain often falling on it and that produces a crop useful to those for whom it is farmed receives the blessing of Yahweh. (8) But land that produces thorns and thistles is worthless and is in danger of being cursed. In the end it will be burned.

(9) Even though we speak like this, dear friends, we are confident of better things in your case - things that accompany salvation. (10) Yahweh is not unjust; He will not forget your work and the affection you have shown Him as you have helped His people and continue to help them. (11) We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure. (12) We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.

The fundamental aspects and acts of the Christian Church (to note that only “laying on of hands” is cited as an “official act” and that no “holy water” and no “holy chrism” are ever taken into account). For a better explanation of these points, see: “Paul’s Thought. Letter to the Hebrews. Warning against falling away.” Comment to vv. 6:1-2).

Final exhortations [*Heb 13:18-23*]

(Heb 13:18) *Pray for us. We are sure that we have a clear conscience and desire to live honorably in every way. (19)I particularly urge you to pray so that I may be restored to you soon.*

(20) *May [Yahweh] the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, (21)equip you with everything good for doing His will, and may He work in us what is pleasing to Him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

(22) *Brothers, I urge you to bear with my word of exhortation, for I have written you only a short letter.*

(23) *I want you to know that our brother Timothy has been released. If he arrives soon, I will come with him to see you.*

Benediction and final greetings

To the Thessalonians [*1 Th 5:23-28*] [*2 Th 3:16-18*]

(1Th 5:23)(2Th 3:16) *Now may Yahweh Himself, the Lord God of peace, sanctify you through and through and give you peace all times and in every way. May your whole spirit, mind and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord Yahweh will be with all of you. (1Th 5:24)The One who calls you is faithful and He will do it.*

(2Th 3:17) *I, Paul, write these greetings in my own hand, which is the distinguishing mark in all my letters. This is how I write.*

(1Th 5:25) *Brothers, pray for us. (26)Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss. (27)I charge you before the Lord Jesus Christ to have this letter read to all the brothers.*

(1Th 5:28)(2Th 3:18) *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.*

To the Galatians [*Gal 6:18*]

(Gal 6:18) *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers. Amen.*

To the Corinthians [*1 Co 16:19-24*] [*2 Co 13:11-14*]

(1Co 16:19) *The Churches in the province of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord Yahweh, and so does the Church that meets at their house. (1Co 16:20)(2Co 13:12-13)All the brothers here, the saints, send you their greetings. Greet one another with a holy kiss.*

(1Co 16:21) *I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand.*

(22) *If anyone is not fond of the Lord Jesus Christ, a curse is on him. Come, O Lord Jesus Christ!*

(1Co 16:23)(2Co 13:14) *May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the affection of Yahweh, and the fellowship of Yahweh’s Holy Spirit be with you all.*

(2Co 13:11) *Finally, brothers, goodbye. Aim for perfection, listen to my appeal, be of one mind, live in peace. And [Yahweh] the God of affection and peace will be with you.*

(1Co 16:24) *My affection to all of you in Christ Jesus. Amen.*

To the Romans [*Ro 16:3-16,21-24*]

(Ro 16:3) *Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus. (4)They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the Churches of the Gentiles are grateful to*

them. (5) Greet also the Church that meets at their house. Greet my dear friend Epene-tus, who was the first convert to Jesus Christ in the province of Asia. (6) Greet Mary, who worked very hard for you. (7) Greet Adronicus and Junias, my relatives who have been in prison with me. They are outstanding among the apostles, and they were in Je-sus Christ before I was. (8) Greet Ampliatus, whom I cherish in the Lord Jesus Christ. (9) Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Jesus Christ, and my dear friend Stachys. (10) Greet Apelles, tested and approved in Jesus Christ. Greet those who belong to the hou-sehold of Aristobulos. (11) Greet Herodion, my relative. Greet those in the household of Narcissus who are in the Lord Jesus Christ. (12) Greet Tryphena and Tryphosa, those women who work hard in the Lord Jesus Christ. Greet my dear friend Persis, another woman who has worked very hard in the Lord Jesus Christ. (13) Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord Jesus Christ, and his mother, who has been a mother to me, too. (14) Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas and the brothers with them. (15) Greet Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas and all the saints with them. (16) Greet one another with a holy kiss.

All the Churches of Jesus Christ send greetings. (21) Timothy, my fellow worker, sends his greeting to you, as do Lucius, Jason and Sosipater, my relatives.

(22) I, Terzius, who wrote down this letter, greet you in the Lord.

(23) Gaius, whose hospitality I and the whole Church enjoy, sends you his greetings. Erastus, who is the city's director of public works, and our brother Quartus send you their greetings.

(24) May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with all of you. Amen.

To the Ephesians [Eph 6:23-24]

(Eph 6:23) Peace to the brothers, and affection with faith from Yahweh the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (24) Grace to all who are fond of our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying affection.

To the Colossians [Col 4:10-15;17-18]

(Col 4:10) My fellow prisoner Aristarchus sends you his greetings, as does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas. (You have received instructions about him; if he comes to you, wel-come him.) (11) Jesus, who is called Justus, also sends greetings. These are the only Jews among my fellow workers for the Kingdom of Yahweh, and they have proved a comfort to me. (12) Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends greetings. He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of Yahweh, mature and fully assured. (13) I testify that he is working hard for you and for those at Laodicea and Hierapolis. (14) Our dear friend Luke, the doctor, and Demas send greetings. (15) Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nym-pha and the Church in her house.

(17) Tell Archippus: "See to it that you complete the work you have received in the Lord."

(18) I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you.

To Philemon [Phm 1:23-25]

(Phm 1:23) Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends you greetings. (24) And so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke, my fellow workers.

(25) The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

To the Philippians [*Php 4:21-23*]

(Php 4:21) Greet all the saints in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me send greetings. **(22)** All the saints send you greetings, especially those who belong to Caesar's household.

(23) The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.

To Timothy [*2 Ti 4:19-22*]

(2Ti 4:19) Greet Priscilla and Aquila and the household of Onesiphorus. **(20)** Erastus stayed in Corinth, and I left Trophimus sick in Miletus. **(21)** Do your best to get here before winter. Eubulus greets you, and so do Pudens, Linus, Claudia and all the brothers.

(22) The Lord Yahweh be with your spirit. Grace be with you.

To Titus [*Tit 3:15*]

(Tit 3:15) Everyone with me sends you greetings. Greet those who are fond of us in the faith.

Grace be with you all.

To the Hebrews [*Heb 13:24-25*]

(Heb 13:24) Greet all your leaders and all Yahweh's people. Those from Italy send you their greetings.

(25) Grace be with you all.

Teachings and deductions from:**THE REVELATION OF JOHN****Disclosed****Prologue. (1:1-3)**

(1:1)The revelation of Jesus Christ, which Yahweh gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending His angel to His servant John, (2)who testifies to everything he saw -that is, the Word of Yahweh and the testimony of Jesus Christ. (3)Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.

In essence, this is the announcement of a foretelling of the near future, the proof that it is wrong to use the Revelation as a kind of mysterious timetable of what is going to happen thousands of years later (too many people did use and are still using it to draw celestial time tables of what is to come). The things it deals with are to happen in the immediate future and, so, the Revelation has to be interpreted against the background of its own time. The main aim of the Revelation was to encourage and to strengthen the faith of the contemporary Christians, who were suffering under the harsh persecution launched by the Roman Emperor Domitian -and, before of him, by Nero- assuring them that the hostile power of Rome would fall in a not too far future. Only then it gives a description of what will happen at the end of time, with the final defeat of evil and Satan, and with the full establishment of Yahweh's Kingdom.

The letters to the Churches in Asia**Greetings and praise to Yahweh <Doxology> (1:4-8)**

(1:4)John,

To all the Churches in the Province of Asia:

Grace and peace to you from He who is, was, and will be, and from all the spirits before His Throne, (5)and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the first reborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the Earth.

To him who is fond of us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, (6)and has made us to be a kingdom of priests to serve [Yahweh] his God and Father -to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.

(7)Look, he is coming with the clouds,

and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him;

and all the people of the Earth will mourn because of him.

So shall it be! Amen.

(8)"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says Yahweh the Lord, "He who is, was, and will be, the Almighty."

A clear reference to Jesus Christ's resurrection and to his action of salvation.

One like a Son of Man. (1:9-20)

(1:9)I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering, the Kingdom, and the patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the Word of Yahweh and the testimony of Jesus. (10)On the Lord's Day I was lifted up by

the Spirit of Yahweh, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet, (11)which said: "Write on a scroll what you see and send it to these Churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea."

(12)I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw the symbols of the Churches, (13)and among the symbols was someone "like a Son of Man," dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. (14)His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were blazing like fire. (15)His feet were glowing like bronze in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. (16)At his right hand he had the angels of the Churches, and out of his mouth came the perfect judgment. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.

(17)When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. (18)I am the Living One; I was dead and, look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.

(19)Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later. (20)The mystery of the angels that you saw at my right hand and of the symbols is this: The angels are the angels of the Churches, and the symbols are the Churches."

When, after his death, Jesus descended into Hades, he opened its doors and brought out all Yahweh's faithful people who had lived and died in the generations before.

The word "mystery" here, as throughout all the New Testament, corresponds to the Greek "musterion," which means something meaningless to the outsider but meaningful to the initiate who possesses the interpretation key.

To the Church in Ephesus. (2:1-7)

(2:1)"To the angel of the Church in Ephesus write:

These are the words of him who has the angels of the Churches at his right hand and walks among the symbols of the Churches: (2)I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. (3)You have persevered and have endured hardship for my name, and have not grown weary.

(4)Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first priority, affection. (5)Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your symbol from its place. (6)But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

(7)He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit of Yahweh says to the Churches. To him who gets through, I will give the right to eat from the Tree of Life, which is in the Paradise of Yahweh."

To the Church in Smyrna. (2:8-11)

(2:8)"To the angel of the Church in Smyrna write:

These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again. (9)I know your afflictions and your poverty -yet you are rich! I know the calumny of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. (10)Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for a while. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.

(11)He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit of Yahweh says to the Churches. He who gets through will not be hurt at all by the second death."

To the Church in Pergamum. (2:12-17)

(2:12)"To the angel of the Church in Pergamum write:

These are the words of him who delivers the perfect judgment. (13)I know where you live -where Satan has his throne. Yet you remain true to my name. You did not renounce your faith in me, even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city -where Satan lives.

(14)Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to instigate the Israelites to sin eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality. (15)Likewise you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. (16)Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the Word of my mouth.

(17)He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit of Yahweh says to the Churches. To him who gets through, I will grant my spiritual communion. I will also grant him the protection of my name."

To the Church in Thyatira. (2:18-29)

(2:18)"To the angel of the Church in Thyatira write:

These are the words of the Son of Yahweh, whose eyes are blazing like fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze. (19)I know your deeds, your affection and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first.

(20)Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols. (21)I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling. (22)So I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who follow her suffer intensely, unless they repent of her ways. (23)I will punish severely her followers. Then all the Churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds. (24)Now I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, to you who do not hold to her teaching and have not learned Satan's so-called deep secrets (I will not test you any further): (25)Only hold on to what you have until I come.

(26)To him who gets through and does my will to the end, I will give the position of authority, just as I have received the position of authority from my Father. (27)'He will shepherd the faithful with his protective strength; he will completely defeat their enemies.' (28)I will also give him myself. (29)He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit of Yahweh says to the Churches."

To the Church in Sardis. (3:1-6)

(3:1)"To the angel of the Church in Sardis write:

These are the words of him who has all the spirits of Yahweh and all the angels of the Churches at his right hand. I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. (2)Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of [Yahweh] my God. (3)Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you.

(4) Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not lost their faith. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy. (5) He who gets through will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never erase his name from the Book of Life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and His angels. (6) He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit of Yahweh says to the Churches."

To the Church in Philadelphia. (3:7-13)

(3:7) "To the angel of the Church in Philadelphia write:

These are the words of him who is Holy and True, who holds the key of David. What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open. (8) I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. (9) I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars -I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have had been fond of you. (10) Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the Earth.

(11) I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown. (12) Him who gets through I will make a pillar in the Temple of [Yahweh] my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the Name of [Yahweh] my God and the name of the City of [Yahweh] my God, the New Jerusalem, which is coming down out of Heaven from [Yahweh] my God; and I will also write on him my new name. (13) He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit of Yahweh says to the Churches."

To the Church in Laodicea. (3:14-22)

(3:14) "To the angel of the Church in Laodicea write:

These are the words of the Truth, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of Yahweh's creation. (15) I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! (16) So, because you are lukewarm -neither hot nor cold- I am about to expel you out of my Church. (17) You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. (18) I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and ointment to put on your eyes, so you can see.

(19) Those whom I am fond of I rebuke and discipline. So be zealous and repent. (20) Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.

(21) To him who gets through, I will give the right to seat with me on my throne, just as I got through and sat down with my Father on His throne. (22) He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit of Yahweh says to the Churches."

The prophetic visions

The Throne in Heaven. (4:1-11)

(4:1) After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in Heaven. And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this." (2) At once I was lifted up by the Spirit of Yahweh, and there before me was a Throne in Heaven with Someone sitting on it. (3) And the One who sat there had the luminous appearance of precious gems. A rainbow,

resembling an emerald, encircled the Throne. (4) Surrounding the Throne were many other thrones, and seated on them were many elders. They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads. (5) From the Throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder. Before the Throne, the symbols of all the Churches were blazing. These are all the spirits of Yahweh. (6a) Also before the Throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal.

(6b) In the center, around the Throne, were all the cherubs, and they watched over everything, all around. (7) A first cherub was like a lion, a second was like an ox, a third had a face like a man, a fourth was like a flying eagle. (8) Each of the cherubs had six wings and watched over everything all around, even under his wings. Day and night they never stop saying:

"Holy, holy, holy is Yahweh the Lord Almighty, who was, is, and will be."

(9) Whenever the cherubs give glory, honor and thanks to Him who sits on the Throne and who lives for ever and ever, (10) the elders adore Him who sits on the Throne, and worship Him who lives for ever and ever. They make act of submission before the Throne and say:

(11) "You are worthy, [Yahweh] our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for You created all things, and by Your ill they were created and have their being."

The scroll and the Christ <Lamb>. (5:1-14)

(5:1) Then I saw in the right hand of Him who set on the Throne a scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with absolutely unbreakable seals. (2) And I saw a powerful angel proclaiming in a loud voice, "Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?" (3) But no one in Heaven or on Earth or under the Earth could open the scroll or even look inside it. (4) I wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll and look inside. (5) Then one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and all its seals."

(6) Then I saw a gentle but powerful man, looking as if he had been killed, standing in the center of the Throne, encircled by the cherubs and the elders. He had all the powers and honors and the power of seeing everything, which is the power of all the angels of Yahweh sent out into all the Earth. (7) He came and took the scroll from the right hand of Him who sat on the Throne. (8) And when he had taken it, all the cherubs and all the elders adored the Christ. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, consisting of the prayers of the faithful. (9) And they sang a new song: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were sacrificed and with your blood you purchased men for Yahweh from every tribe and language and nation. (10) You have made them to be a kingdom of priests to serve [Yahweh] our God, and they will reign on the Earth."

(11) Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the Throne and the cherubs and the elders. (12) In a loud voice they sang: "Worthy is the Christ, who was sacrificed, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!"

(13) Then I heard every creature in Heaven and on Earth and under the Earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: "To Him who sits on the Throne and to the

Christ be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!" (14)The cherubs said, "Amen," and the elders adored and worshipped.

The seals. (6:1-17)

(6:1)I watched as the Christ opened the first of the unbreakable seals. Then I heard one of the cherubs say in a voice like thunder, "Come!" (2)I looked, and there before me was a white horse! Its rider was a powerful warrior, a king, and a great conqueror.

(3)When the Christ opened the second seal, I heard the second cherub say, "Come!"

(4)Then another horse came out, a fiery red one. Its rider was taking peace from the Earth and making men slay each other. He killed many with a large sword.

(5)When the Christ opened the third seal, I heard the third cherub say, "Come!" I looked, and there before me was a black horse! Its rider was spreading famine with his hand. (6)Then I heard what sounded like a voice among the cherubs, saying, "A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius, and do not affect the oil and the wine!"

(7)When the Christ opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth cherub say, "Come!" (8)I looked and there before me was a pale horse! Its rider was named Plague, and Hades was following close behind him. They killed a fourth of the Earth by sword, famine and plague, and by the wild beasts of the Earth.

(9)When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the Word of Yahweh and the testimony they had maintained. (10) They called out in a loud voice, "How long, Sovereign Lord, Holy and True, until You judge the inhabitants of the Earth and avenge our blood?"

(11)Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had been was completed.

(12)I watched as he opened the sixth seal. There was a great earthquake. The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair, the whole moon turned blood red, (13)and the stars in the sky fell to Earth, as late figs drops from a tree when shaken by a strong wind. (14)The sky receded like a scroll, rolling up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place.

(15)Then the kings of the Earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. (16) They called to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the Throne and from the judgment of the Christ! (17)For the great day of their judgment has come, and who can stand?"

The great number <144,000> sealed. (7:1-8)

The great multitude in white robes. (7:9-17)

(7:1)After that I saw four angels standing at the four corner of the Earth, holding back the four winds of the Earth to prevent any wind from blowing on the land or on the sea or on any tree. (2)Then I saw another angel coming up from the east, having the seal of [Yahweh] the Living God. He called out in a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm the land and the sea: (3)"Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of Yahweh."

(4)Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: a great number from all the tribes of Israel. (5)From the tribe of Judah many were sealed, from the tribe of Reuben, from the tribe of Gad, (6)from the tribe of Asher, from the tribe of Naphtali, from the

tribe of Manasseh, (7)from the tribe of Simeon, from the tribe of Levi, from the tribe of Issachar, (8)from the tribe of Zebulun, from the tribe of Joseph, from the tribe of Benjamin.

(9)After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the Throne and in front of the Christ. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. (10)And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to [Yahweh] our God, who sits on the Throne, and to the Christ."

(11)All the angels were standing around the Throne and around the elders and the cherubs. They adored and worshipped Yahweh, (12)saying: "Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to [Yahweh] our God for ever and ever. Amen!"

(13)Then one of the elders asked me, "These in white robes -who are they, and where did they come from?" (14)I answered, "Sir, you know."

And he said, "These are those who have come out of the great tribulation; they have been faithful and made themselves pure keeping the Word of the Christ. (15)Therefore, they are before the Throne of Yahweh and serve Him day and night in His Temple; and He who sits on the Throne will spread His tent over them. (16)Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. (17)For the Christ at the center of the Throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And Yahweh will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

Jesus Christ's salvation is open to all men the moment, in this life or the next one, they accept him and his teaching. To ensure of this both the Jew- and the Pagan-Christians, the two are taken into account. For the Jews, a small portion of mankind, the number 144,000 stands, not for limitation, but for completeness and perfection (it is made up of the perfect square -12 multiplied by 12- rendered all-inclusive by being multiplied by 1,000; and this means all). For the Pagans, the vast majority of mankind, the number of the Pagan-Christians saved will simply be uncountable; and this, again, means all.

The last <seventh> seal and the golden censer (8:1-5)

(8:1)When he opened the last seal, there was silence in Heaven for about half an hour.

(3)Another angel, who had a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense to offer, consisting of the prayers of all the faithful, on the golden altar before the Throne. (4)The smoke of the incense, consisting of the prayers of the faithful, went up before Yahweh from the angel's hand. (5)Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and hurled it on the Earth: and there came peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning and an earthquake.

(2)And I saw the angels who stand before Yahweh, and to them were given trumpets.

The trumpets. (8:6-13;9:1-21)

(8:6)Then the angels who had the trumpets prepared to sound them.

(7)The first angel sounded his trumpet, and there came hail and terrible lightning, and it struck with great force the Earth. A part of the Earth was hit, many of the trees were stripped, and all the green grass was beat down.

(8)The second angel sounded his trumpet, and a flaming star was thrown into the sea. A part of the sea was turned red as blood, (9)many of the living creatures in the sea died, and many of the ships were destroyed.

(10)The third angel sounded his trumpet, and a great star, blazing like a torch, fell from the sky pulverizing on many of the rivers and on the springs of water - (11)the star of Bitterness. A part of the water turned bitter, and many people died from the waters that had become bitter.

(12)The fourth angel sounded his trumpet, and a part of the sun was struck, a part of the moon, and a part of the stars, so that many of them turned dark. A part of the day was without light, and also a part of the night.

(13)As I watched, I heard an eagle that was flying in midair call out in a loud voice: "Woe! Woe! Woe to the inhabitants of the Earth, because of the trumpet blast about to be sounded by the other three angels!"

(9:1)The fifth angel sounded his trumpet, and I saw an angel who had fallen from Heaven to the Earth. The angel was given the key to the shaft of the Abyss. (2)When he opened the Abyss, smoke rose from it like the smoke from a gigantic furnace. The sun and the sky were darkened by the smoke from the Abyss. (3)And out of the smoke locusts came down upon the Earth and were dangerous like the scorpions of the Earth. (4)They were told not to harm the grass of the Earth or any plant or tree, but only those people who did not have the seal of Yahweh on their foreheads. (5)They were not given power to kill them, but only to torture them for five months. And the agony they suffered was like that of the sting of a scorpion when he strikes a man. (6)During those days men will seek death, but will not find it; they will long to die, but death will elude them.

(7)The locusts looked like horses prepared for battle. On their heads they wore something like crowns of gold, and they resembled human soldiers. (8)Their hair was like women's hair, and their teeth were like lions' teeth. (9)They had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the sound of their wings was like the thundering of many horses and chariots rushing into battle. (10)They were dangerous like scorpions, and with their bites they did torment people for five months. (11)They had as king over them the angel of the Abyss, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek, Apollyon.

(12)The first woe is past; two other woes are yet to come.

(13)The sixth angel sounded his trumpet, and I heard a voice coming from the horns of the golden altar that is before Yahweh. (14)It said to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, "Recall the four angels who are guardians at the great river Euphrates." (15)And the four angels who had been kept on duty till this very hour and day and month and year were recalled, for the destruction of a part of mankind. (16)The number of the mounted troops was immense. I heard their number.

(17)The horses and riders I saw in my vision looked like this: Their breastplates were fiery red, dark blue, and yellow as sulfur. The heads of the horses looked very dangerous, and really frightening. (18)A part of mankind was killed by the terrifying cavalry. (19)The power of the horses was in their heads and in their tails; for they were drawing ropes with stones, with which they inflict injury.

(20)The rest of mankind that were not killed by these plagues still did not repent of the work of their hands; they did not stop worshipping demons, and idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood -idols that cannot see or hear or walk. (21)Nor did they repent of their murders, their magic arts, their sexual immorality or their thefts.

The angel and the little scroll. (10:1-11)

(10:1)Then I saw another powerful angel coming down from Heaven. He was robed in a cloud, with a rainbow above his head; his face was luminous as the sun, and his legs were like blazing pillars. (2)He was holding a little scroll, which lay open in his hand. He planted his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land, (3)and he gave a loud shout like the roar of a lion. When he shouted, the voice of the Lord spoke. (4)And when the Lord spoke, I was about to write; but I heard a voice from Heaven say, "Seal up what the Lord has said and do not write it down."

(5)Then the angel I had seen standing on the sea and on the land raised his right hand to Heaven. (6)And he swore by Him who lives for ever and ever, who created the Heavens and all that is in them, the Earth and all that is in it, and the sea and all that is in it, and said, "There will be no more delay! (7)But in the days when the last angel will sound his trumpet, the plan of Yahweh will be accomplished, just as He announced to His servants the prophets."

(8)Then the voice that I had heard from Heaven spoke to me once more: "Go, take the scroll that lies open in the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and on the land."

(9)So I went to the angel and asked him to give me the little scroll. He said to me, "Take it and read it. It will turn you sad, but to you it will be a bliss." (10)I took the little scroll from the angel's hand and read it. It was a bliss to me, but when I had read it, I turned sad. (11)Then I was told, "You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, languages and kings."

The <two> witnesses. (11:1-14)**The last <seventh> trumpet. (11:15-19)**

(11:1)I was given a reed like a measuring rod and was told, "Go and measure the Temple of Yahweh and the altar, and count the worshippers there. (2)But exclude the outer court; do not measure it, because it has been given to the Pagans. They will trample on the Holy City for a number of months. (3)And I will give power to my witnesses, and they will prophesy for a number of days, clothed in sackcloth." (4)These are the olive trees and the lampstands that stand before the Lord of the Earth. (5)If anyone tries to harm them, Yahweh will punish their enemies. For anyone who wants to harm them must be judged. (6)Yahweh will shut up the sky so that it will not rain during the time they are prophesying; and He will turn the waters into blood and strike the Earth with every kind of plague as often as He wants.

(7)Now when they have finished their testimony, the Antichrist will attack them, and overpower and kill them. (8)Their bodies will lie in the street of the Great City, which is figuratively called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified. (9)For a number of days men from every people, tribe, language and nation will gaze on their bodies and refuse them burial. (10)The inhabitants of the Earth will gloat over them and will celebrate by sending each other gifts, because these martyrs had tormented those who live on the Earth.

(11)But after a number of days a breath of life from Yahweh will enter them, and they will stand on their feet, and terror will strike those who see them. (12)Then they will hear a loud voice from Heaven saying to them, "Come up here." And they will go up to Heaven in a cloud, while their enemies will look on.

(13)At that very hour there will be a severe earthquake and a tenth of the City will collapse. Many thousand people will be killed in the earthquake, and the survivors will be terrified and will give glory to [Yahweh] the God of Heaven.

(14)The second woe has passed; the third woe is coming soon.

(15)The last angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in Heaven, which said: "The kingdom of the world will become the Kingdom of [Yahweh] our Lord and of His Christ, and He will reign for ever and ever."

(16)And the elders, who were seated on their thrones before Yahweh, adored and worshipped Yahweh, (17)saying: "We give thanks to You, [Yahweh] Lord Almighty, the One who is and who was, because You will take Your great power and will begin to reign.

(18)The nations will be angry; and Your judgment will come. The time will come for judging the dead, and for rewarding Your servants the martyrs and Your saints and those who reverence Your Name, both small and great, and for destroying those who destroy the Earth."

(19)Then Yahweh's Temple in Heaven will be opened, and within His Temple will be seen the Ark of His Covenant. And there will come flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake and a great hail-storm.

Christ's Mother <the Woman> and Satan <the Dragon>. (12:1-17)

(12:1)A great and wondrous sign appeared in Heaven: a Woman luminous as the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of stars on her head. (2)She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth. (3)Then another sign appeared in Heaven: a terrible figure, Satan, endowed with total knowledge and huge powers and absolute control over the kingdoms. (4)His actions swept a part of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the Earth. Satan stood near the Woman who was about to give birth, so that he might kill her child the moment he was born. (5)She gave birth to a Son, a male child, who will rule all the nations with protective strength. And her child was taken up to Yahweh and to His Throne. (6)The Woman fled into the desert to a place prepared for her by Yahweh, where she might be taken care of for a number of days.

(7)And there was war in Heaven. Michael and his angels fought against Satan, and Satan and his angels fought back. (8)But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in Heaven. (9)The Evil One was hurled down -that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the Earth, and his angels with him.

(10)Then I heard a loud voice in Heaven say: "Now have come the salvation and the power and the Kingdom of [Yahweh] our God, and the authority of His Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before [Yahweh] our God day and night, has been hurled down.

(11)They overcame him by the Blood of the Christ and by the Word of their testimony; they were not fond of their lives so much as to shrink from death.

(12)Therefore rejoice, you Heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the Earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short."

(13)When Satan saw that he had been hurled to the Earth, he pursued the Woman who had given birth to the male child. (14)The Woman was protected by the arms of Yahweh, so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the desert, where she would be taken care of for a period of time, out of Satan's reach. (15)At that time from

his own Satan sent a great many, to overtake the Woman and kill her. (16)But the Earth helped the Woman by opening its mouth and swallowing all that Satan had sent. (17) Then Satan was enraged at the Woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring -those who obey Yahweh's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus.

Undoubtedly, the woman is the Mother of Jesus Christ, Yahweh's Messiah and this is the picture which justifies the titles of "Regina Coeli" and "Regina Mundi" given by the Roman Catholic Church to Mary, the Mother of Jesus Christ.

The emblem of Rome <beast> out of the sea. (13:1-10)

The emblem of the Antichrist <beast> out of the land. (13:11-18)

(13:1)And I stood on the shore of the sea. And I saw an emblem of Rome coming out of the sea. It had the symbols of great knowledge and great power with absolute authority, and on each symbol a blasphemous name. (2)The emblem I saw symbolized Rome's cruelty, huge strength and high pride. Satan gave Rome his power and his throne and great authority. (3)One of the symbols of power of the emblem seemed to have had a fatal wound, but the fatal wound had been healed. The whole world was astonished and followed Rome. (4)Men worshipped Satan because he had given authority to Rome, and they also worshipped Rome and asked, "Who is like Rome? Who can make war against her?"

(5)Rome was given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies and to exercise her authority for a period of time. (6)She opened her mouth to blaspheme Yahweh, and to slander His Name and His dwelling place and those who live in Heaven. (7)She was given power to make war against the saints and to conquer them. And she was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation. (8)All inhabitants of the Earth worshipped Rome -all whose names have not been written from the creation of the world in the Book of Life belonging to the Christ that was sacrificed.

(9)He who has an ear, let him hear. (10)If anyone is to go into captivity, into captivity he will go. If anyone is to be killed with the sword, with the sword he will be killed. This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of the faithful.

(11)Then I saw another emblem, of the Antichrist, coming out of the land. It had the symbols of gentle power, but it spoke like a devil. (12)The Antichrist exercised all the authority of Rome on her behalf, and made the Earth and its inhabitants worship Rome. (13)And he performed great and miraculous signs, even causing fire to come down from Heaven to Earth in full view of men. (14)Because of the signs he was given power to do on behalf of Rome, he deceived the inhabitants of the Earth. He ordered them to set up an image in honor of Rome. (15)He was given power to enforce the cult of Rome, so that he could charge and cause all who refused to worship the image to be killed. (16)He also forced everyone, small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a certificate of compliance, (17)so that no one could buy or sell unless he had the certificate, which is the name of the Antichrist or the number of his name.

(18)This calls for wisdom. If anyone has insight, let him calculate the number of the Antichrist, for it is man's number. His number is 666.

This passage, with the "emblem of the Antichrist" and the following images -from "symbols of gentle power" to "certificate of compliance"- clearly describes the religious organizations of the past and the present (unfortunately, all Christian Denominations) with all their rules, that are mainly interested in keeping their terrestrial power.

The Christ <Lamb> and the great number <144,000>. (14:1-5)

(14:1) Then I looked, and there before me there was the Christ, standing on the New Jerusalem, and with him a great number who had his Name and his Father's Name written on their foreheads. (2) And I heard a sound from Heaven like the roar of rushing waters and like a loud peal of thunder. The sound I heard was like that of harpists playing their harps. (3) And they sang a new song before the Throne and before the cherubs and the elders. No one could learn the song except the great number who had been redeemed from the Earth. (4) These are those who have been faithful, for they kept themselves pure. They follow the Christ wherever he goes. They were purchased from among men and offered as firstfruits to Yahweh and the Christ. (5) No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless.

The three angels. (14:6-13)

(14:6) Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal Gospel to proclaim to those who live on the Earth -to every nation, tribe, language and people. (7) He said in a loud voice, "Fear Yahweh and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come. Worship Him who made the Heavens, the Earth, the seas and the springs of water."

(8) A second angel followed and said, "Fallen! Fallen is Rome the Great, which made all the nations follow her immoralities."

(9) A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice, "If anyone worships Rome and her Emperor and receives the certificate of compliance, (10) he, too, will have to face Yahweh's punishment, which has been set to the full severity of His justice. He will be severely punished before the holy angels and the Christ. (11) And their punishment will last for very, very long. There is no rest day or night for those who worship Rome and her Emperor, or for anyone who receives the certificate of compliance." (12) This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey Yahweh's commandments and remain faithful to Jesus.

(13) Then I heard a voice from Heaven say, "Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on."

"Yes," says the Spirit of Yahweh, "they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them."

The harvest of the Earth. (14:14-20)

(14:14) I looked, and there before me was a white cloud, and seated on the cloud was one "like a Son of Man" with a crown of gold on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand. (15) Then another angel came out of the Temple and called in a loud voice to him who was sitting on the cloud, "Take your sickle and reap, because the time to reap has come, for the harvest of the Earth is ripe." (16) So he who was seated on the cloud swung his sickle over the Earth, and the Earth was harvested.

(17) Another angel came out of the Temple in Heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle. (18) Still another angel, who had charge of the fire, came from the altar and called in a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle, "Take your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of grapes from the Earth's vine, because its grapes are ripe." (19) The angel swung his sickle on the Earth, gathered its grapes and threw them into the great winepress of Yahweh's justice. (20) They were trampled in the winepress outside the City, and the essence of their sins flowed out of the press, rising as high as men's heads for all over the Earth.

The <seven> angels with the last <seven> plagues. (15:1-8)

(15:1)I saw in Heaven another great and marvelous sign: the angels with the last plagues -last, because with them Yahweh's justice is completed. (2)And I saw what looked like a sea of glass alight as fire and, standing beside the sea, those who had been victorious over Rome and her Emperor and over the Antichrist's name. They held harps given them by Yahweh (3)and sang the Song of Moses the servant of Yahweh and the Song of the Christ: "Great and marvelous are Your deeds, [Yahweh] Lord Almighty. Just and true are Your ways, King of the ages. (4)Who will not fear You, O Lord, and bring glory to Your Name? For You alone are Holy. All nations will come and worship before You. For Your righteous acts have been revealed."

(5)After this I looked and in Heaven the Temple, that is, the Tabernacle of the Testimony, was opened. (6)Out of the Temple came the angels with the last plagues. They were dressed in clean, shining linen and wore golden sashes around their chests. (7)Then one of the cherubs gave to the angels the golden bowls filled with the justice of Yahweh, who lives for ever and ever. (8)And the Temple was filled with smoke from the Glory of Yahweh and from His power, and no one could enter the Temple until the last plagues of the angels were completed.

The <seven> bowls of Yahweh's justice <wrath>. (16:1-21)

(16:1)Then I heard a loud voice from the Temple saying to the angels, "Go, pour out the bowls of Yahweh's justice on the Earth."

(2)The first angel went and poured out his bowl on the land, and ugly and painful sores broke out on the people who had the certificate of Rome and worshipped her Emperor.

(3)The second angel poured out his bowl on the sea, and it turned red as blood, like that of a dead man, and every living thing in the sea died.

(4)The third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and they turned red as blood.

(5)Then I heard the angel in charge of the waters say: "You are just in these judgments, You who are and who were, the Holy One, because You have so judged; (6)for they have shed the blood of Your faithful and witnesses, and You have given them the punishment they deserve." (7)And I heard the altar respond: "Yes, [Yahweh] Lord Almighty, true and just are Your judgments."

(8)The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and the sun was so strong to scorch people with intense heat. (9)They were seared by the intense heat and they cursed the Name of Yahweh, who had control over these plagues, but they refused to repent and glorify Him.

(10)The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the kingdom of Satan, and his kingdom was plunged into darkness. Men gnawed their tongues in agony (11)and cursed [Yahweh] the God of Heaven because of their pains and their sores, but they refused to repent of what they had done.

(12)The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up to prepare the way for the kings from the East. (13)Then I saw three evil spirits, unclean like frogs; they came out of the mouth of Satan, out of the mouth of Rome and out of the mouth of the Antichrist. (14)They are demonic spirits performing miraculous signs, and they go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them for the battle against [Yahweh] the Almighty.

(15)"Behold, I come like a thief! Blessed is he who stay awake and keeps his clothes with him, so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed."

(16)Then they gathered the kings together to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon.

(17)The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and out of the Temple came a loud voice from the Throne, saying, "It is done!" (18)Then there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder and a severe earthquake. No earthquake like it has ever occurred since man has been on Earth, so tremendous was the quake. (19)The great Rome split apart, and the cities of the nations collapsed. Yahweh remembered Rome the Great and gave her the severe punishment of His justice. (20)Every island fled away and the mountains could not be found. (21)From the sky huge hail-stones of about a talent each fell upon men. And they cursed Yahweh on account of the plague of hail, because the plague was so terrible.

The punishment of Rome <Babylon>

The image of Rome <woman> on the emblem of the Antichrist <beast>. (17:1-18)

(17:1)One of the angels who had the bowls came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the punishment of the great Rome, who rules on many nations. (2)With her the kings of the Earth went along and the inhabitants of the Earth followed her immoralities."

(3)Then the angel carried me away, lifted up by the Spirit of Yahweh, into a desert. There I saw an image of Rome set on a scarlet emblem of the Antichrist that was covered with blasphemous names and had the symbols of great knowledge and great power.

(4)The image of Rome was dressed in purple and scarlet, and was glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls. She held a golden cup in her hand, filled with abominable actions and the corruption of her immoralities. (5)This mysterious title was written on her forehead: "Rome the Great, the mother of prostitutes, and of the abominations of the Earth." (6)I saw that the image of Rome was covered with the blood of the faithful, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus.

When I saw her, I was greatly astonished. (7)Then the angel said to me: "Why are you astonished? I will explain to you the mystery of the image of Rome and of the emblem of the Antichrist she rides, which has the symbols of great knowledge and great power. (8)The Antichrist, which you saw, once was, now is not, and will come up out of the Abyss and go to his destruction. The inhabitants of the Earth whose names have not been written in the Book of Life from the creation of the world will be astonished when they see the Antichrist, because he once was, now is not, and yet will come.

(9)This calls for a mind with wisdom. The symbols of great knowledge are the hills on which Rome sits. (10)They are also the Roman kings. Some have fallen, one is, the others have not yet come; but when they do come, they must remain for a little while. (11)The Antichrist who once was, and now is not, is also a king. He belongs to all of them and is going to his destruction.

(12)The symbols of great power you saw are the kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but who for a while will receive authority as kings along with the Antichrist. (13)They have one purpose and will give their power and authority to the Antichrist. (14)They will make war against the Christ, but the Christ will overcome them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings -and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers."

(15)Then the angel said to me, "The nations you saw, where Rome rules, are peoples, multitudes, nations and languages. (16)The Antichrist and the kings you saw will hate Rome. They will bring her to ruin and leave her defeated; they will destroy her Empire and burn her with fire. (17)For Yahweh has put it into their hearts to accomplish His purpose by agreeing to give the Antichrist their power to rule, until Yahweh's words are fulfilled. (18)The image you saw is the great Rome that rules over the kings of the Earth."

The fall of Rome <Babylon>. (18:1-24)

(18:1)After this I saw another angel coming down from Heaven. He had great authority, and the Earth was illuminated by his splendor. (2)With a powerful voice he shouted: "Fallen! Fallen is Rome the Great! She has become a home for demons and a haunt for every evil spirit, a haunt for every unclean and detestable bird. (3)For all the nations have followed her immoralities. The kings of the Earth went along with her, and the merchants of the Earth grew rich from their excessive luxuries."

(4)Then I heard another voice from Heaven say: "Come out of her, my people, so that you will not share in her sins, that you will not receive any of her plagues; (5)for her sins are piled up to Heaven, and Yahweh has remembered her crimes. (6)Give back to her as she has given; pay her back double for what she has done. Mix her a double portion from her own cup. (7)Give her as much torture and grief as the glory and luxury she gave herself. In her heart she boasts, 'I sit as a queen; I am not a widow, and I will never mourn.' (8)Therefore in one day her plagues will overtake her: death, mourning and famine. She will be consumed by fire, for mighty is [Yahweh] the Lord who judges her.

(9)When the kings of the Earth who went along with her and shared her luxury see the smoke of her burning, they will weep and mourn over her. (10)Terrified at her torment, they will stand far off and cry: 'Woe! Woe, O Great City, O Rome, city of power! In one hour your doom has come!'

(11)The merchants of the Earth will weep and mourn over her because no one buys their cargoes any more -(12)cargoes of gold, silver, precious stones and pearls; fine linen, purple, silk and scarlet cloth; every sort of citron wood, and articles of every kind made of ivory, costly wood, bronze, iron and marble; (13)cargoes of cinnamon and spice, of incense, myrrh and frankincense, of wine and olive oil, of fine flour and wheat; cattle and sheep; horses and carriages; and bodies and souls of men.

(14)They will say, 'The fruit you longed for is gone from you. All your riches and splendor have vanished, never to be recovered.' (15)The merchants who sold these things and gained their wealth from her will stand far off, terrified at her torment. They will weep and mourn (16)and cry out: 'Woe! Woe O Great City, dressed in fine linen, purple and scarlet, and glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls! In one hour such great wealth has been brought to ruin!'

(17)Every sea captain, and all who travel by ship, the sailors, and all who earn their living from the sea, will stand far off. (18)When they see the smoke of her burning, they will exclaim, 'Was there ever a city like this Great City?' (19)They will throw dust on their heads, and with weeping and mourning cry out: 'Woe! Woe O Great City, where all who had ships on the sea became rich through her wealth! In one hour she has been brought to ruin!

(20)Rejoice over her, O Heaven! Rejoice faithful and apostles and prophets! Yahweh has judged her for the way she treated you!"

(21)Then a powerful angel picked up a boulder the size of a large millstone and threw it into the sea, and said: "With such violence the Great City of Rome will be thrown down, never to be found again. (22)The music of harpists and musicians, flute players and trumpeters, will never be heard in you again. No workman of any trade will ever be found in you again. The sound of a millstone will never be heard in you again. (23)The light of a lamp will never shine in you again. The voice of bridegroom and bride will never be heard in you again. Your merchants were the world's great men. By your magic spell all the nations were led astray. (24)She was guilty of the blood of prophets and of the faithful, and of all who have been killed on the Earth."

Hallelujah! (19:1-10)

(19:1)After this I heard what sounded like the roar of a great multitude in Heaven shouting: "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to [Yahweh] our God, (2)for true and just are His judgments. He has condemned the great Rome who corrupted the Earth by her immoralities. He has avenged on her the blood of His servants." (3)And again they shouted: "Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up for ever and ever." (4)All the elders and the cherubs adored and worshipped Yahweh, Who was seated on the Throne. And they cried: "Amen! Hallelujah!"

(5)Then a voice came from the Throne, saying: "Praise [Yahweh] our God, all you His servants, you who fear Him, both small and great!"

(6)Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: "Hallelujah! For [Yahweh] our Lord Almighty reigns. (7)Let us rejoice and be glad and give Him glory! For the Communion of the Christ has come, and his people have made themselves ready. (8)Fine linen, bright and clean, was given them to wear." (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the faithful).

(9)Then the angel said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are invited to the Communion Supper of the Christ!'" And he added, "These are the true Words of Yahweh."

(10)At this I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, "Do not do it! I am a fellow servant as you and as your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship Yahweh! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."

It is a human instinct to worship all "superior" beings. In the early Church there was a tendency to worship angels, who were seen not only as Yahweh's messengers but also as intermediaries between men and Yahweh, forgetting that with the coming of Jesus Christ no other intermediary between Yahweh and men is necessary -no priest or pastor, no angel, no recognized "saint," not even Jesus' mother- and that only Yahweh and Jesus Christ must be worshipped.

The rider on the white horse [the fall of Rome]. (19:11-21)

(19:11)I saw Heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is Christ, the Faithful and True. With justice he judges and condemns. (12)His eyes are blazing like fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. (13)He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is Word of Yahweh. (14)The inhabitants of Heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. (15)Out of his mouth comes the perfect judgment with which to condemn the nations. "He will rule them with protective

strength." He treads the winepress of the execution of the justice of Yahweh the Almighty. (16)On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: King of kings and Lord of lords.

(17)And I saw an angel standing in the sun, who cried in a loud voice to all the faithful, "Come, gather together for the Great Battle of Yahweh, (18)so that you may fight against kings, generals, and mighty men, and horses and their riders, and against all people, free and slave, small and great."

(19)Then I saw the Roman Emperor and the kings of the Earth and their armies gathered together to make war against the Christ and his followers. (20)But the Emperor was defeated, and with him the Antichrist who had performed the miraculous signs on his behalf. With these signs he had deceived those who had received the certificate of compliance and worshipped his image. The two of them were thrown alive into hell. (21)The rest of them were condemned by the perfect judgment of the Christ, and all the faithful rejoiced for their defeat.

The 1000 years of Christ and the saints

The Kingdom of Yahweh on Earth <thousand years>. (20:1-6)

Satan's doom. (20:7-10)

The dead are judged. (20:11-15)

(20:1)And I saw an angel coming down out of Heaven, having the key of the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. (2)He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him till the last days [for 1000 years]. (3)He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the last days [the 1000 years were ended]. After that, he must be set free for a short time.

(4)I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been martyred because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the Word of Yahweh, and those who had not worshipped Rome or her Emperor and had not received the certificate of compliance. They came to life and reigned with Christ till the last days [for 1000 years]. (5)(The rest of the dead did not come to life until their punishment [the 1000 years were] was ended.) This is the first resurrection. (6)Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of Yahweh and of Christ and will reign with him till the last days [for 1000 years].

(7)When the last days are near [the 1000 years are over], Satan will be released from his prison (8)and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the Earth -Gog and Magog- to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore. (9)They marched across the breadth of the Earth and surrounded the camp of Yahweh's people, the City He cherishes. But fire came down from Heaven and devoured them. (10)And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into hell, where the Emperor and the Antichrist had been thrown. They will be punished day and night for very, very long.

(11)Then I saw a great white Throne and Him who was seated on it. Earth and sky passed away, and they were no more. (12)And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the Throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. (13)The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and Death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done.

(14) Then Death and Hades were thrown into hell. Hell is the second death. (15) If anyone's name was not found written in the Book of Life, he was thrown into hell.

This chapter constitutes the only foundation document for the doctrine called "Millennialism;" the only passage in the New Testament in which it appears. As it can be clearly seen by reading the Gospels, this doctrine does not correspond at all to Jesus' teaching. Actually, Jesus never spoke of a "1000 years" Christian Earthly Kingdom free of Satan's influence. On the contrary, he always affirmed that Satan will be heavily influential on Earth, till the "end of the age."

Note. For a proper understanding of the "Millennialism," see: "The Revelation of John – disclosed. Comment to vv. 20:1-15."

The Kingdom of Heaven

The New Jerusalem. (21:1-27)

(21:1) Then I saw a new sky and a new Earth, for the first sky and the first Earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. (2) I saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of Heaven from Yahweh, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. (3) And I heard a loud voice from the Throne saying, "Now the dwelling of Yahweh is with men, and He will live with them. They will be His people, and Yahweh Himself will be with them and be their God. (4) He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

(5) He who was seated on the Throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then He said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

(6) He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the Water of Life. (7) He who gets through will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be My son. (8) But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars -their place will be in hell. This is the second death."

(9) One of the angels who had the bowls full of the last plagues came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the New Jerusalem, the City of the Christ." (10) And he carried me away lifted up by the Spirit of Yahweh to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of Heaven from Yahweh. (11) It shone with the Glory of Yahweh, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. (12) It had a great, high wall with twelve gates and with twelve angels at the gates. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. (13) There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west. (14) The wall of the City had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the Twelve Apostles of the Christ.

(15) The angel who talked with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the City, its gates and its walls. (16) The City was laid out like a square, as long as it was wide. He measured the City with the rod and found it to be 12,000 stadia in length, and as wide and high as it is long. (17) He measured its wall and it was 144 cubits high, by man's measurement, which the angel was using. (18) The wall was made of jasper, and the City of pure gold, as pure as glass. (19) The foundations of the City walls were decorated with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald, (20) the fifth sardonyx, the sixth carnelian, the

seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst. (21)The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl. The great street of the City was of pure gold, like transparent glass.

(22)I did not see a Temple in the City, because [Yahweh] the Lord Almighty and the Christ are its Temple. (23)The City does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the Glory of Yahweh gives it light, and the Christ is its Lamp. (24)The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the Earth will bring their splendor into it. (25)On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. (26)The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. (27)Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Christ's Book of Life.

The River of Life. (22:1-6)

(22:1)Then the angel showed me the River of the Water of Life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the Throne of Yahweh and of the Christ (2)down the middle of the great street of the City. On each side of the river stood the Tree of Life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. (3)No longer will there be any curse. The Throne of Yahweh and of the Christ will be in the City, and His servants will serve Him. (4)They will see His face, and His Name will be on their foreheads. (5)There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Yahweh the Lord will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.

(6)The angel said to me, "These words are trustworthy and true. [Yahweh] the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent His angel to show His servants the things that must soon take place."

Jesus is coming. (22:7-15)

(22:7)"Behold, I am coming soon! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book."

(8)I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I had heard and seen them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who had been showing them to me. (9)But he said to me, "Do not do it! I am a fellow servant as you and as your brothers the prophets and as all who keep the words of this book. Worship Yahweh!"

(10)Then he told me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, because the time is near. (11)Let him who does wrong continue to do wrong; let him who is vile continue to be vile; let him who does right continue to do right; and let him who is holy continue to be holy."

(12)"Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done. (13)I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.

(14)Blessed are those who are faithful, that they may have the right to the Tree of Life and may go through the gates into the City. (15)Outside are the wicked, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who likes and practice falsehood."

It is a human instinct to worship all “superior” beings. In the early Church there was a tendency to worship angels, who were seen not only as Yahweh's messengers but also as intermediaries between men and Yahweh, forgetting that with the coming of Jesus Christ no other intermediary between Yahweh and men is necessary -no priest or pastor, no angel, no recognized “saint,” not even Jesus' mother- and that only Yahweh and Jesus Christ must be worshipped.

Epilogue. (22:16-21)

(16) "I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you all this testimony for the Churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star."

(17) The Spirit of Yahweh and the Christian Church say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the Water of Life.

(18) I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, Yahweh will add to him the plagues described in this book. (19) And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, Yahweh will take away from him his share in the Tree of Life and in the Holy City, which are described in this book.

(20) He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

(21) The grace of the Lord Jesus be with Yahweh's people. Amen.

Conclusive remarks

At the conclusion of this study we have to keep in mind few points:

- The New Testament Books give an over-all idea of Jesus Christ's teaching and healing activity and an explanation for his physical sacrifice.
- Even Jesus' words, as reported by these Books, are not actually his own but, at the best, what his closer followers remembered of his preaching and healing activity. Many times, their own interpretation of Jesus' teaching.
- As we can see by his parables, Jesus' preaching was very linear and simple. These characteristics are at their maximum in the first 3 Gospels (Mark, Matthews and Luke) and already giving way to important interpretation and re-elaboration in the fourth Gospel (John). And then less and less linked to Jesus' simplicity (Acts of the Apostles; Letters of Peter, James, John and Jude; Paul's Letters) to end with Revelation, which actually doesn't have anything to do with Jesus, his teaching and his moral.
- Furthermore, the actual meaning of what is written is too often concealed by considerations derived from Old Testament ideas, as it could not have been easy -actually impossible- for the writers of the New Testament Books, to detach themselves immediately and completely from the ideas they grew up with.

Summary of teachings and deductions**- Yahweh is the only God, the only Creator of everything and everybody****Logos**

The basic belief of Christianity: The only one God is Yahweh, there is no other god, not even as part of a "trinity,"

It is of fundamental importance not to confuse Yahweh -the Father, the Only Eternal God Creator Almighty- with Jesus Christ -the Son, who has both the divine nature of his Father and the human nature of his mother, and who is not God, not even as a part of a supposed Trinity.

To note that the term "Logos," found at the beginning of John's Gospel and usually translated "Word," can't be rendered by one word only. The beginning of Genesis (Old Testament) makes it clear that "Logos" is Yahweh Himself (the Jews used this term as a periphrasis for His Name, which could not be pronounced), His Spirit in action, creating. In effect John's "Logos" is Genesis' "Spirit of Yahweh" (Genesis 1:1-24).

- Jesus Christ, son of Yahweh, is a man (not a god, not a part of a trinity)

Jesus Christ is Yahweh's son, a man, His only son with the human race through a human woman, not a "god," not even a part of a "trinity."

Jesus, a man, was born and began to exist in a certain place and at a certain point of time, something that doesn't apply to a "god," not even to a part of a "trinity."

Even if son of Yahweh, Jesus was fully a man and exactly for this reason his body and mind had to develop following the rules imposed by the human nature. He did not have all knowledge and wisdom from birth, and he had to mature like any other man. And later, as a grown man, after becoming aware of his special relation with Yahweh, at the moment of his temptations, he had to choose what to do and which way; in essence, which kind of Messiah to be.

Jesus always declared that, even if being son of Yahweh, he was essentially and totally a man, physical with body and mind and spiritual with soul, and that all his powers came only from Yahweh, from his total obedience to, and his spiritual communion with, his father Yahweh.

Jesus' teaching was not of human origin, and the things he said and did came straight from Yahweh; not from Jesus, but throughout him.

Jesus, too, being a man, had to demonstrate his faith; he, too, had to accept what he could not fully understand. In the Gethsemane, Jesus had his supreme struggle to submit to the will of Yahweh. A further demonstration that Jesus was a man, not a "god," not a part of a "trinity."

After having being scourged, beaten and crucified, Jesus died and then was buried. It was absolutely necessary for Jesus to die, as all human beings have to go through death. If Jesus was truly and completely man, then he had to experience it.

Jesus' resurrection was an act of the will of Yahweh. In effect Jesus, a dead man, could not have risen himself.

- Jesus, Yahweh's Messiah of Salvation, Savior of all men

There is only One God, Yahweh, Creator of everything and everybody. Jesus Christ, His Messiah, is subordinate to Him, ruling on His behalf as Lord, Judge and Savior of all men with the task to improve the human physical and spiritual condition on Earth, and to administer justice to the living and the dead thus making everybody suitable to be in spiritual communion with Yahweh and everybody else.

Jesus Christ's duty was and is to bring salvation, that is, eternal life in the Kingdom of Yahweh, to all men, without any exception; that is, to all men of all races, countries and religions of the past, present and future.

Judgment is not the purpose of Jesus' coming, but judgment is the other side of salvation. Jesus did not come to condemn; he came to save. It was not the wrath of Yahweh which sent Jesus to men; it was His affection. Yet the coming of Jesus inevitably involves a judgment because by his attitude to Jesus a man shows what he is and therefore judges himself. If he finds in Jesus a person to be fond of, even if he never succeeds in making his life what he knows he ought to make it, he is safe. If on the other hand he sees in Jesus nothing to admire, it means that he is impervious to Yahweh; and he has therefore judged himself.

Yahweh -the only one who can perfectly judge- has delegated the task of judgment to Jesus Christ, who judges: during terrestrial life; at the moment of physical death; when offering his Gospel to those subject to -formative and redemptive- punishment in hell; at the Universal Judgment. All those who didn't hear of Jesus Christ and of his Gospel of salvation during their earthly life will be judged, at the moment of their physical death, following the moral standards of their society (clearly, the vast majority of them will have to undergo a formative and redemptive period in hell) and later -in hell- will be offered to accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

Jesus Christ's death on the Cross brought forgiveness of sins and spiritual salvation to all men.

Note: It is clear that all Scriptures (Old and New Testament) speak of and refer to the human race only, not of and to all other intelligent and spiritual races that, surely, exist around the universe. This means that the saving action of Jesus Christ, the human son of Yahweh and a woman, was and is for the human race only.

- Jesus, only intermediary and intercessor

Between men and Yahweh there is no other intermediary or intercessor -no priest or pastor, no angel, no recognized "saint," not even Jesus' mother. Jesus Christ sacrificed himself and died on the Cross -once for ever and for all- for the spiritual salvation of all men of every time, country and religion.

Jesus is at the center of the Christian faith for he alone can reveal Yahweh to men. And all men have to know that, through Jesus Christ's action of salvation, they all will be saved.

- Jesus' brother and sisters

After Jesus' birth, fulfilled her "physical" mission, Joseph and Mary had four sons, -Jesus' half-brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas- and some daughters -Jesus' half-sisters, whose names are not known- as reported in Mark 6:3; Matthew 13:55-56; John 2:12; 7:3,5; Acts 1:14; 1Corinthians 9:5; Galatians 1:19.

- Spiritual communion Yahweh-men (grace and spiritual salvation)

To note that, at the time of the Old Testament, the spiritual communion between Yahweh and men was completely due to His initiative and reserved to few chosen people only. On the contrary, Jesus' saving action -following Yahweh's will till his crucifixion- has opened once for ever to all people of any religion, race and country, of the past, the present and the future, the possibility of entering in spiritual communion with him and Yahweh, that is, to be accepted in His Kingdom.

Yahweh's grace -spiritual salvation- is given to each man -even to the worst sinner who recognizes himself as such- who wants to accept it. And Jesus only, being the only intermediary with Yahweh, can offer this possibility. This is the message his true disciples have to spread all over the world.

The Jewish religious leaders could not accept that Yahweh's salvation was for the Gentiles too. And the same was and is still valid for many Christian Denominations: they can't and don't want to accept that salvation is for all men, Christian or not.

At the end, all people of every time, race and religion will be "saved," that is, accepted in Yahweh's Kingdom, without any exception. Only their "position" in the Kingdom -that is, the level of spiritual communion they will receive from and give to others- will be different. There will be the "great" -those who had tried to live a "Christian" life- and the "least" -those who will enter the Kingdom after a bad life and a long, redemptive, period in hell, that is, only after recognizing Jesus Christ and his saving action.

- Original sin

Mary, without original sin

Here it is necessary to contrast two wide-spread beliefs:

1) That all human beings are marked by the stain of the so called "original sin."

Now, by eating the forbidden fruit, Adam and Eve "sinned" for the first time in their lives and in the history of mankind. By not obeying they introduced sin in the human race ("in the world"); by being banished, and not allowed any more to eat from the tree of life, they introduced physical death (in the human race). This was the "Original Sin" -the sin committed at the beginning of mankind for which only Adam and Eve were responsible and bore the punishment. All other human beings, who are their descendants, did not and do not have any moral involvement nor responsibility, even if they are suffering the consequences of it, having to live -and die- outside the Garden of Eden.

2) That Yahweh had preserved Mary from the stain of the original sin.

If true, it would mean that Mary had no freedom of choice, that she was predestined -obliged- to carry Yahweh's son, without the need of personally being worthy of it. But, as seen above, no new-born human being partakes in Adam and Eve's sin. Proof of this is that "The Kingdom of Yahweh belongs to the little children" [The little children and Jesus (Mark 10:13-16 Matthew 19:13-15 Luke 18:15-17)]. And the Kingdom cannot

belong to sinners of any kind, not even to infants (supposed to be sinners because of the stain of the original sin). This passage gives a very important confirmation: If the Kingdom is open to little children, when a baby of any religion dies he goes straight into Heaven, without being barred from it by something as “the Original Sin” which, anyway, doesn't exist.

Mary, chosen virgin, Mediatrix of all graces, intercessor, Regina Coeli et Mundi

To write that Mary was a virgin points, quite simply, to the fact that Jesus, her son to be, will have no human father. Mary was found worthy of carrying Yahweh's human son and as such, was chosen. No choice was given her: to be chosen by Yahweh means to accept, act and live as He wants. In this special, unique case, Mary not only was in spiritual communion with Yahweh; she received in herself His creative, life-giving, Spirit to generate His human son.

It is from Mary's request at the Wedding at Cana [John 2:1-11] that began the development of the wrong doctrine of “Mary, Mediatrix of All Graces.” The belief that Mary participates in the mediatory work of Jesus Christ in a unique way. That her holiness and her unique relationship to Jesus Christ, the only Redeemer, would make her a powerful intercessor in Heaven for the needs of humanity. But Jesus himself has declared a number of times to be the Way to the Father, the only intermediary between men and Yahweh; that all prayers have to be addressed to Yahweh, not even to himself, and much more not to the angels or to his mother Mary or to the officially recognized “saints.”

At the Crucifixion, the passage of Jesus committing his mother to John and John to her is understood by some Churches -as the Roman Catholic- as the committing to her of the whole humanity, giving then to Mary the position of “Mediatrix of all Graces.” But Jesus himself has declared a number of times to be the Way to the Father, the only intermediary between men and Yahweh.

Revelation 12:1 depicts “a Woman luminous as the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of stars on her head.” Undoubtedly, the woman is the Mother of Jesus Christ, Yahweh's Messiah, and this is the -only- picture which justifies the titles of “Regina Coeli” and “Regina Mundi” given by the Roman Catholic Church to Mary, the Mother of Jesus Christ.

- Prayers, how to pray

Even Jesus, as a man, knew that he could not accomplish his mission without the help of Yahweh. That if he was to spend his life for others he had to pray and ask for spiritual aid and reinforcement. That if he had to be sure of his choices he had to ask for his Father's help in private prayer, that is, being in deep spiritual communion with Him.

Jesus himself has taught his disciples how to pray and how not to pray [Gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus' teaching on prayer (Our Father) Matthew 6:5-15 Luke 11:1-4]:

- 1) Jesus is very clear. Prayers have to be addressed to Yahweh, not even to himself and much more not to the angels or to his mother Mary or to the recognized “saints.”
- 2) Jesus condemns two habits. First, to pray to be seen by men, making of it a show of devotion. Second, to pray using repetitive fixed formulas, which don't require mental concentration and so carry very little spiritual meaning.

The Christians can go directly to Yahweh in their prayers, making their requests in Jesus' name. Through Jesus, and through Jesus alone, men can find access to Yahweh, as Jesus alone opens the way to Him. Between men and Yahweh there is no other inter-

mediary or intercessor -no priest or pastor, no angel, no recognized “saint,” not even Jesus' mother.

It is important to remember that praying to Yahweh is always a way to enter in spiritual communion with Him.

Another, more intense exhortation is to pray and ask for real necessities only (prayers that, anyway, will be answered as requested if that fits with Yahweh's decisions).

Unfortunately, in any established Church prayers tend to be formalized, in kind and timing, with the liturgy supplying specific prayers to be recited at specific times or occasions. Furthermore, there is a tendency to link prayers with certain places, as Churches, Sanctuaries and so on, as if the prayers were more efficacious if offered there. And so often orthodox, fully observant people are absolutely confident to be right and tend to rate low every person who does not pray as them. But no man who is proud can properly pray, and no man who despises his fellow-men can really pray.

Furthermore, when more people meet to pray and worship together, there is an overall spiritual communion with Jesus and Yahweh stronger than the sum of the individual ones. And that gives more power to their prayers (which, anyway, will be answered if that fits Yahweh's decision).

- Miracles, healing and faith

It was because of his deep spiritual communion with Yahweh, his father, that Jesus, a man on Earth, had the power to heal.

Jesus always prayed to the Father, he always clearly declared that the power which flowed through him was not his; that it was Yahweh's. That he followed always and only the will of Yahweh; and that all his miracles were due to the power of Yahweh Who had sent him.

To obtain Jesus' help in something extraordinary as healing from an incurable illness is absolutely necessary to have faith, that is, to believe that the miracle asked for can actually happen. Nothing more is requested.

Many times Jesus healed people brought to him (and who clearly hadn't had the chance of listening to his preaching in the synagogue) because their faith in Jesus' capability of healing them was enough to be healed, even if they understood little or nothing of his Messiahship.

The essential for a “miracle” is faith. Even if simple people come to Jesus with a very inadequate idea of who and what he is, even if they approach him in a superstitious way (in “holy” places, through saints, relics, and so on) still he helps them seeing the sincerity of their faith. Clearly, this doesn't extend to learned people, who don't have any excuse to be superstitious and condemns all Church people and all Churches who believe to or spread “religious” superstitions of any kind, such as considering “sacred” the images, statues, etc. of Christian “saints,” Jesus, his mother and Yahweh Himself!

The disciples who had received the “gift of healing” could use it only after praying to Jesus and Yahweh. And when they took for granted the power given to them and had come to believe that it was inherent in them, and as a consequence they did not pray enough, they did lose their spiritual connection -communion- with Jesus and Yahweh and were not able to heal any more. The healing was and is not by the healer own power, but by the power coming from his faith in, and spiritual communion with, Jesus and Yahweh. This is why there are so few miraculous healings; for the vast majority of people is too difficult, almost impossible, to have such a strong faith.

- Prophecy

Prophecy did consist mainly in proclaiming Yahweh's words; only seldom in predicting future events. The prophets, because of their spiritual communion with Yahweh (due to Yahweh's decision and initiative), were able to express and proclaim Yahweh's will, that otherwise they could not have formulated on their own.

- Papal infallibility (Roman Catholic dogma)

In "Paul opposes Peter" (Gal 2:11-21) Paul rebukes Peter for his hypocrisy by behaving and acting not following Jesus' -that is, Yahweh's- will. Now, if even the apostle Peter (who is considered the first Pope of the Christian Church) was so much in the wrong, how can the Popes pretend to be infallible? How can they pretend to possess a divine assistance that enables them to teach divinely revealed doctrines on matters of faith and morals?

"Higher than the pope as the expression of the binding law of the ecclesiastical authority, still stands the individual conscience, to which first of all we must obey, in case of necessity even against the injunction of the ecclesiastical authority."

From: Das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil. Dokumente und Kommentare.
(II Vatican Council. Documents and comments)
Author: Joseph Ratzinger (future Pope Benedict XVI)

- Explanation, teaching of Scripture

To be fond of one another is the shortest form, the essence, of Jesus Christ's teaching.

The core of this ethic is in the phrase "*do to others what you would have them do to you*," which expresses the very essence of Christian conduct, that consist not in refraining from bad things, but in actively doing good things. And, the nearest is a man to this way of conduct, the nearest he is to Yahweh.

Any kindness shown, any help given to another person will be rewarded in the next life. And Jesus request was and is for very simple things and help, which can be given without any difficulty.

The real teaching, as in the case of Jesus', comes straight from Yahweh to the men He chooses and sends for some reason (reasons many times they are not aware of and don't understand at all).

Scriptures are to be taken for their moral and spiritual meaning, without any need to study and analyze every single word.

"Jesus Christ is Lord" and "Yahweh raised him from the dead" represent the earliest Christian profession of faith, the first Creed. Furthermore, this is a further declaration that Jesus was a man, not a "god," not a part of a "trinity," for he was resurrected and anointed as Savior of everybody by Yahweh, not by his own initiative.

New Testament teaching is not confined to personal salvation but includes much instruction about practical living and how to improve the well-being of the community.

Generally, discussions about not important points of Scripture are to be avoided. Furthermore, the Christians don't have to sit discussing theological questions when the simple tasks of Christian life are left unattended. A discussions which does not end in Christian action is a wastage of time and only generates divisions based on unessential matters.

All Christians as well -not only the missionaries- are “appointed and sent,” that is, have to give testimony to and spread Jesus' Good News, without forgetting that taking care of the physical needs is, many times, the priority. And always having clear that, even if refused, the seed of Christianity is planted. Unfortunately here, again, it clearly appears that the vast majority of Christians -inclusive of so many priests and nuns- does not.

A teacher, that is, a priest or a pastor, can have a great influence with his ideas, explanations and personality. And for willing to be a teacher and, as such, being learned, his responsibility is great and he will be held more accountable for his teaching.

“False teachers” were and are all those priests and pastors who, instead of teaching the true Gospel of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ, “invent” useless doctrines, rules and myths (for example about the lives of the “saints”), teach and explain the Gospel in wrong ways, so actually bringing incomprehensions and divisions into the Christian Church. Furthermore they, the very persons who should bring men close to Yahweh, actually obscure their understanding with faulty interpretations and erroneous systems of theology, giving “official” interpretations of Scriptures, tuned to keep the power of knowledge in their hierarchical organizations, excluding everybody else. Their main interest is to make a profit from their teaching, not seeing it as a moral and spiritual mission. From the beginning of the Christian Church there always were (and unfortunately there always are) too many priests and pastors (non to speak of the higher hierarchical positions) looking for the social status coming with their position (prestige, authority, power and money).

And, what a difference, between what Peter and other apostles wrote in their letters only few years after Jesus' preaching (practically sermons of admonition and scolding) and Jesus' way of teaching, as seen in the Gospels! Their letters are mainly “negative” sermons, empty of Jesus' affection and understanding and full of complains and scoldings. And, -unfortunately- most of Church sermons are always quite similar.

Christian faith has to be only in the “Word of Jesus Christ,” that is, in Jesus' teaching, as it is reported in the four Gospels, not in any other book or comment or whatever else!

An expedient, a must, to facilitate the spreading and comprehension of Scriptures is their translation in local languages, without imposing the use of a “sacred” language (first, Greek and later, for the Roman Catholic Church, Latin).

- Christian Church, Christianity

The existence of the Christian Church -of Christianity- is rooted in Jesus Christ's words: **“Go into all the world, preach the Good News to all Creation, and make disciples of all nations...”** (The Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Great Commission. Mk 16:15; Mt 28:18-20).

Whoever believes in Jesus Christ as Yahweh's Messiah and spiritual Savior of the human race is truly a Christian -in effect, all Christian denominations fall into this definition.

The Church is the togetherness, the unity, and the communion of all who believe in Yahweh and in Jesus Christ: the “Believers.” Presently, the Church is divided between Earth and the Kingdom of Yahweh. On Earth, it is composed of living people, and so it is very far from perfect. In the Kingdom of Yahweh, it is composed of the souls of men waiting for their resurrection. In the future, at the “end of time,” and after the conversion and the consequent resurrection of even the last man, the Church will be composed of all men who were ever born -all of them believers.

The Earthly Church, which has to continue what Jesus Christ has began, is open to everybody, and is universal; “catholic,” as it is expressed by the Greek word “katholikos” that means, precisely, universal. This concept is perfectly expressed by the Greek word for Church: “Ekklesia,” an assembly of people having a strong common interest; in our case the Community of those who have accepted the invitation and the command of Yahweh, given by Jesus Christ, to come to Him.

The calling to be full-time disciples of some of Jesus' followers marks the beginning of the Christian Community, the Christian Church.

Unfortunately, as time was passing and the Church expanding, many different ecclesiastical structures developed from the original group of Jesus Christ's followers. This situation constitutes the biggest of the many defects of the earthly Church which, because of its being earthly, does not have any possibility to be good and perfect. Anyway, imperfect as it is, the Church is composed of ALL Believers; of ALL people who have faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord of ALL men.

It does not matter, as well, the particular hierarchical organization, the denomination, and the physical place or building used for worship: the Church is composed by every one of its local congregations, by every group of people gathered together to listen to a message from Yahweh, to read the Scripture, and to pray.

It is the community of all Christians (all of them in spiritual communion with Jesus Christ and Yahweh) which constitute the Temple of Yahweh, the Christian Church, not the more or less “sacred” buildings or places where the community could gather for common prayer.

Many times Jesus told his disciples to be careful of not identifying the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth -the Christian Church- with terrestrial goods and with political influence. And we can see how much both his exhortations have been followed!

Even the disciples were ambitious and many times showed how far they were from understanding what the Kingdom of Heaven really is. And it seems that most high prelates of all Churches are still at this point.

In effect, Jesus did not abolish ambition. Rather, he defined it in a totally different way. For the ambition to rule (to have earthly power and greatness) he substituted the ambition to serve (to do things for others). For the ambition to be served (to have things done for themselves) he substituted the ambition to serve, to do things for others.

And, many times, Jesus has pointed to the different standards of greatness in the kingdoms of the world and in Yahweh's Kingdom on Earth, where the standard of life has to be that of service, where greatness has to consist, not in reducing other men to one's service, but in putting oneself to their service, in this way overturning the value structure of the world, and has warned against three things. 1)Desire of prominence. Office in the Church is a responsibility, not a privilege. 2)Desire for deference. A basic fact of Christianity is that it ought to make a man wish to obliterate self rather than to exalt it. 3)Attempt to make a commerce of religion. Religion does not have to be used for self-gain and self-advancement. And the higher is the place of a man in the life of the community, the more severe is the demand of true justice; the more hypocrisy a man will show, the greater will be his condemnation.

Even if, on Earth, is always necessary to put someone in charge of something -in this case of the proper teaching and the running of the Christian Community (the Local Church)- unfortunately many of these men tend to feel important and in a position of power, and so often give rise to heavier and heavier organizations.

High self-esteem is contrary to Jesus Christ's teaching about being humble and serving the others. How different always was and is the behavior of so many priests and pastors, not to speak of high prelates!

Peter had been the first to understand that Jesus was the Son of Yahweh, so he was the first "stone", the first "brick," that is, the first member of the Christian Church which, in this sense, is built on him [*Peter... on this rock I will build my Church*], the first member, not the head of the Church. And each Christian, in any place and in any time, is another stone, another brick, added to the Christian Church.

And Peter was assigned the responsibility of spreading Jesus' Good News, not the top position in the Church [*I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven*], a typical Jewish phrase, carrying the meaning of duty and responsibility, not of power. Nothing to do with his -presumed- position of first Pope at Rome.

Peter, the recognized chief of the apostles, did not consider himself more important or in a higher position than the other apostles and elders. And, although he had full apostolic authority, did not "lord it over" the elders he was writing to, but exemplified the virtues he recommended. And how different was and is the actual behavior of most of the elders of every Christian Denomination!

- Religion, rituals, rules, titles, traditions, places, etc.

In the Old Testament the "Commands of Yahweh" or the "Law" originally were the Ten Commandments and the first five books, the Pentateuch. And, even if they contain a number of social and religious regulations and instructions, in the matter of moral questions they set down a series of great moral principles which a man must properly take, interpret and apply to the individual situations in life. The problem was that the Teachers of the Law, the Scribes, did reduce those great principles of the Law to literally thousands of rules which to them were the essence of religion. To serve Yahweh, to be religious, it was absolutely necessary to observe all of them. This gives rise to "hypocrisy," when a man believes to be a good, "clean," man if he carries out the correct acts and practices, no matter what his heart and his thoughts are. The Jews pursued the letter of the Law developing religious traditions and trying to obtain salvation by "works," that is, by acts, ceremonies, set prayers, rules "do" and "do not," religious organizations, buildings and objects of cult, etc. (exactly as the Christians have done, and still do, in all their Denominations).

Jesus has declared that he had come not to cancel the Law, but to fulfill it, to bring out its real meaning; that is, the one great principle of reverence and respect. Reverence for Yahweh, respect for everybody else. A reverence and respect that did not, and does not, consist in obeying a multitude of regulations. Not in sacrifice, but in mercy, not in legalism, but in affection.

Jesus coming has put an end to the materialistic way of worshipping Yahweh with animal sacrifices and priestly rituals and put in their place a direct approach to Yahweh which doesn't need a ritual of sacrifice or a temple. The whole Earth, actually His whole Creation -the Universe- is Yahweh's temple, where He is always present. In other terms, the place and the ritual of worship are totally irrelevant, actually totally unnecessary. Religion does not consist in rules and rituals. People are far more important than rituals. The best way to worship Yahweh is to help men in their spiritual and material needs.

Jesus did not follow the social-religious ceremonial acts and practices. To omit them was -and so it is for their equivalent in Christian times- considered to sin!

The teachers of the law were considered the only authorized successors of Moses, exactly as, in Christian times, priest and pastors of all denominations consider themselves the only authorized successors of Peter and the apostles. And all of them used and still use their position to impose on men plenty of absurd ceremonial rules and ceremonies, making of religion a depressing affair of burdens and prohibitions; a religion of ostentation (imposing churches and ceremonies, compulsory use of objects “necessary” for the proper cult, inclusive of their “uniforms,” the so called “sacred paraments”).

The Twelve Apostles and all people, men and women, following Jesus during his preaching, were ordinary working men; none of them was noble or rich and none of them did become rich or powerful during the rest of their life. Furthermore, they always kept dressing as ordinary people, without wearing any kind of religious “uniform.”

Jesus saw that the Jewish people were left without guidance, that the Priests and the Teachers of the Law, the pillars of the orthodox religion of his days, had nothing to offer them; neither guidance, nor comfort, nor strength to give. On the contrary, they were harassing men with subtle arguments about the Law, which could not give any help or comfort. And, how similar is the situation, even today, in many liturgical Churches and Denominations!

A religion expressed in rituals, liturgies and ceremonies is not religion at all. Real worship does not consist in rich and elaborate rituals, but in the practical service of mankind (“look after orphans and widows”) and in the honesty of personal life (“keep oneself from being polluted by the world”).

There is only One God, Maker of everything and everybody, and any kind of temple service, with the use of “sacred” objects and set rituals, is totally useless. The only essential -and necessary point- is to have faith in Him.

Jesus Christ will not judge Christians by their observance to legalistic requirements but by their observance to his fundamental teaching to be fond of one another, as all those “Do and Do not” rules, so much characteristic of the human laws developed by all religious hierarchies, were canceled once for ever by his action of salvation.

In the eyes of Yahweh all men are exactly equals (brothers), so no one has the right to consider himself to be a master (Rabbi). Furthermore, all Christians should always remember that they have only one Father -Yahweh- and only one Teacher and Master -Jesus Christ. And we can see how much these words are respected by all levels of Church-men and -women. He who gives himself to the service of the Gospel can't ask to be called Father, Monsignor, Excellency, Eminence, Holy Father, Pontiff, Vicar of Peter, Vicar of Christ, and so many other titles, even in their feminine form. To note that the form of address “Holy Father” is found only once in the whole New Testament, referred to Yahweh only and, so, doesn't have to be used by anybody else. Yet Roman Catholic Popes dare using it, beginning with Urban VI (1378 - 1389 AD). Repeatedly Jesus had told his disciples that, if they looked for greatness, they would find it not by being first, but by being last; not by being masters, but by being servants of all.

And how many times ecclesiastical “positions” have been bought and sold for the money, power and prestige they would bring to the sellers and the buyers!

In “Peter at Cornelius' house [Ac 10:23b-48]” we see Cornelius kneeling in front of Peter. Now, Cornelius was only intending to honor him, but Peter did not want to allow any possibility for a misunderstanding: no created being has to be worshipped. And this means that the habit of kneeling in front of high ranking prelates, kissing their ring and other similar acts are absolutely not justified. Not to speak of the kneeling and praying in front of the tomb of some officially recognized saint or high prelate!

In “Jesus sends out the Twelve” [Mark 6:6b-13 Matthew 10:1,5-42 Luke 9:1-6;12:1-9,11-12] we see that they “anointed many sick people with oil”. In the ancient Mediterranean world olive oil was widely used as a medicine, and was regarded as a panacea for all cures. Practically they were using the pharmacopoeia of their time for treating men, and not performing a “religious act.” In effect, Jesus and his apostles did never “bless” or “consecrate” water, oil or any other substance. Jesus did and does call and send, without any ceremony. To note that only “laying on of hands” is cited in the New Testament as an “official act” and that no “holy water” and no “holy chrism” are ever taken into account.

- Sanctuaries, places of pilgrimage as “market areas”

In Jerusalem, the merchants and the money changers were using -with the approval of the religious authorities- the Temple (its Court of the Pagans) as a market area (which, in theory, was forbidden) depriving the Temple of its sanctity. And, furthermore, they were charging too much, taking financial advantage of the people. In effect, the Temple authorities were treating the pilgrims not as worshippers, but as subjects to be exploited for getting the maximum possible profit. And we can say that even today this still is the situation around every Christian Sanctuary and Place of Pilgrimage.

- Baptism

The ceremony of Jesus' baptism was officiated by a prophet of Yahweh, John the Baptist, and marks the beginning of Jesus' mission. The descent on Jesus of Yahweh's Spirit (symbolic of actively entering in spiritual communion with him) and His words, represent Jesus' official anointing for his ministry.

Two other times the Gospels record the declarations of a voice coming from Heaven and addressing Jesus: on the Mount of Transfiguration (The Transfiguration. Mark 9:2-13; Matthew 17:1-13; Luke 9:28-36) and in the Temple during Jesus' final week (Jesus predicts his death. John 12:20-36). Here Yahweh Himself proclaims Jesus as His own Son and speaks personally and directly to him. This was the first “Christian Baptism” and Jesus was the first human being to enter in permanent spiritual communion with Yahweh as a consequence of understanding and accepting Him and His will. Jesus' baptism was the bridge between a purely ceremonial baptism (immersion in or pouring of water) and the present Christian Baptism which, even if maintaining the ceremony, has a deep spiritual meaning by putting a person in spiritual communion with Yahweh. (Clearly, this better applies to adult baptism, as in the case of Jesus, who at the time was thirty years old, that is, the baptism of people who fully understand and accept the ceremony and its moral and spiritual meaning. In effect, present-day children baptism is followed, years later, by a similar ceremony, Confirmation, when they are supposed to be sufficiently grown-up).

The importance of the baptism ceremony -in its simplest form, that is, immersion in a river, when feasible, and pouring of clear, plain water- is clearly stated by the fact that Jesus and his more closed disciples were baptizing from the beginning of his preaching activity. Yet, almost from the beginning, unction and laying on of hands were -uselessly- part of the baptism ceremony. It is a characteristic of every institution -in this case the Church- to forget the initial simplicity and make every ceremony more and more complicated.

Jesus had come with a message for all men and then his message has to be taken to all men by his disciples -by the Christian Church. This means that the Church -every one Christian- has to be a messenger and spread as much as possible the “Good News” of the Kingdom of Yahweh open to all men, that is, of the real possibility to be in spiritual communion with Jesus and Yahweh. And, when a man accepts Jesus, it is appropriate -even if not strictly necessary- to have a ceremony -the baptism- to officially introduce that man to the Christian community. The baptism -whose ceremony can be performed in various ways, with or without immersion in or pouring of water- is actually “by the Spirit of Yahweh” as it indicates the spiritual communion between that man and Yahweh. This shows what baptism truly is: a ceremony of introduction of a new believer in the Christian Community, symbolizing that, as the water cleanses the man's body, so his soul is cleansed by Jesus Christ's grace.

In “Paul in Ephesus” [Acts 19:1-12] we read, “they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.” How simple the ceremony of baptism was at that time! In effect, nothing more in terms of formula, acts or objects is really needed.

The water of baptism (at the time by immersion) represents salvation for those who believe in Jesus Christ. Anyway, it is clear that the believers are not saved by any ritual, but by the power of Jesus Christ's saving action (confirmed by his resurrection -an act of Yahweh.) Baptism can't bring about forgiveness, as forgiveness is given because and if those undergoing the ceremony of baptism have already repented of their previous sins.

- Born again (Confirmation)

Jesus' baptism was the first “Christian Baptism” and Jesus was the first human being to enter in permanent spiritual communion with Yahweh as a consequence of understanding and accepting Him and His will. Clearly, this applies to adult baptism, as in the case of Jesus, who at the time was thirty years old, that is, to the baptism of people who fully understand and accept the ceremony and its moral and spiritual meaning. In effect, present-day children baptism is followed, years later, by a similar ceremony, Confirmation, when they are supposed to be sufficiently grown-up.

To be “born again” happens not only at the Baptism of an adult, or at the Confirmation of someone who had been baptized as an infant (born of water), but every time an adult decides to live in a “Christian” way (born of the Spirit).

A repented sinner is spiritually reborn, “born again” in the sight of Yahweh.

All men are “born anew” (or “again”) the moment they believe to the Gospel and become Christian.

In “The Transfiguration” [Mark 9:2-13 Matthew 17:1-13 Luke 9:28-36] we find what can be considered the institution of the ceremony of Confirmation or of being Born Again. Two other times the Gospels record the declarations of a voice coming from Heaven and addressing Jesus: at Jesus' baptism (The Baptism of Jesus. Mark 1:9-11; Matthew 3:13-17; Luke 3:21-22) and in the Temple during Jesus' final week (Jesus predicts his death. John 12:20-36). Here, for the second time, Yahweh Himself proclaims Jesus as His own Son and Messiah. In practical terms, Yahweh said to Jesus, “My Son, you are acting properly, go on.” On the mountain of the Transfiguration Jesus was assured that he had chosen the right way and saw not only the inevitability, but the essential rightness of the Cross. It was Jesus' “Confirmation,” his full acceptance of Yahweh's will.

- Confession, forgiveness, authority to forgive or not

In "Peter's confession of Christ" [Mark 8:27-30 Matthew 16:13-20 Luke 9:18-21] Jesus tells Peter that "whatever you bind on Earth will be bound in Heaven, and whatever you loose on Earth will be loosed in Heaven." A typical Jewish phrase, commonly used for the teachings of the great Rabbis and carrying the meaning of declaring something "allowed" or "forbidden." Jesus was actually saying to Peter that he will have to be the guide and the support of the infant Church, not giving him the power to admit or to exclude from Heaven, absolving or not men from their sins.

On Earth, nobody is without sin, and nobody can perfectly judge another human being, having in his hands only "appearances," not deep knowledge. Perfect justice has to take into exact account all the circumstances of every person's life -country and epoch, social reality, family, education, hereditary and acquired diseases, physical and psychical dysfunctions, etc. Only Yahweh and, because of His decision, Jesus Christ, are in condition to judge properly, knowing really everything of a man and to administer this perfect justice. And this is valid even for the Churches having a sacramental or ceremonial "confession" of sin. In effect, priest and pastors can listen and give advice, but cannot "absolve" or not. Their real duty is to tell to people asking for moral help that, if they truly repent, Yahweh forgives them; if not, no.

The true meaning of the passage about forgiving or not has to be carefully understood. Peter and the Apostles had to bring Jesus' message to men. So, if they knew that a man was really penitent, they could with absolute certainty proclaim to him the forgiveness of Jesus. But equally, if they knew that there was no penitence in his heart, they had to tell him that until his heart changed there was no Jesus' forgiveness for him. This passage does not mean that the power to forgive sins was ever entrusted to any man; it means that the power to proclaim the forgiveness was so entrusted; along with the power-duty to warn that forgiveness is not open to the impenitent.

In effect, usually it is easier to confess sins to Yahweh than to men; so to confess them to another person represents a better proof of true repentance. Yet, this doesn't justify the compulsory confession of sins to a priest, nor the compulsory "secret" in the Roman Catholic confession.

Forgiveness will be offered, by Jesus only, both in this life and after death and, in both cases, can be accepted or refused. Jesus is the only intermediary between men and Yahweh as there is no other intermediary or intercessor -no priest or pastor, no angel, no recognized saint, not even Jesus' mother. And Yahweh always forgives, every time the request of forgiveness is accompanied by true repentance. And so must do the Christians: there must be no limit to their forgiveness, even because they must forgive men to be forgiven by Yahweh (to remember also that to forgive does not mean to forget; will is a spiritual matter, memory a physical one).

The same advice is found in the Lord's Prayer [Jesus' teaching on prayer (Our Father) Matthew 6:5-15 Luke 11:1-4]: forgive men to be forgiven by Yahweh. An advice accompanied by an invitation, actually a command, to be generous, with the certainty, but not the purpose, to receive the due reward in the future life.

Jesus has clearly said that if we forgive others, Yahweh will forgive us; but if we refuse to forgive others, Yahweh will refuse to forgive us. Human forgiveness and divine forgiveness are inextricably inter-combined, and cannot be separated. If a man has not put things right with his fellow men, he cannot put things right with Yahweh.

Many times Jesus, the "Son of Man," has declared that his mission was and is to save those in need, that is, the "sinners" who are "lost" to Satan.

After Jesus Christ's physical death, his spirit -his soul- went to the "Land of the Dead" to preach to the souls of all men who lived and died from the beginning of the human race and who never had the opportunity of hearing him, announcing the Gospel of salvation and declaring the remission of sins, which was received by those who believed in him, in the same way he did on Earth.

It is always Jesus' way, for bringing men to himself and to Yahweh, to give them chance after chance both in this life and in the afterlife. So, at the end, a man has always the possibility of rising to Jesus and Yahweh.

The case of the crucified criminal who, in his suffering and with his own death approaching, understood the wrong of his life and repented, and the fact that, immediately after he had asked for forgiveness, Jesus did grant it to him, tells above all that, from Jesus' point of view, it is never too late to turn to him, in this life or in the next one.

Yahweh, the Creator of everything and everybody, has all the right to receive in His Kingdom every man who truly repents, even at the very last moment of his life.

- Resurrection

Jesus' resurrection was an act of the will of Yahweh. In effect Jesus, a dead man, could not have risen himself. The climax of the Gospels is the Resurrection, without which Jesus' death, though noble, would only have been tragic. But the Resurrection, due to the will of Yahweh, confirmed him to be His Son.

One thing is certain, if Jesus had not risen from the dead, we would never have heard of him. Clearly, the women had come to pay the last tribute to a dead body. Clearly, the attitude of the disciples was that everything had finished in tragedy. By far the best proof of the Resurrection is the existence of Christianity. Nothing else could have changed a group of sad and despairing men and women into the people radiant with joy and flaming with courage we find later. In effect, the Resurrection is the central fact of the whole Christian faith.

Jesus' death and resurrection would have effects far beyond the Jewish nation, extending to all of Yahweh's people -that is, to all people of all races and religions- who ever lived, live and will live on Earth. And its final result will be to have all of them, after their admission to Heaven, living in complete spiritual communion with Jesus and Yahweh.

Jesus' second coming at the end of the world will be followed by the Universal Resurrection, and then all men will live for ever in Yahweh's Kingdom, not only with their soul, but with their resurrected body. The resurrected body will not be a non-material body but a physical one, similar to the present yet radically different in that it will be fit to live in eternal universal communion with Yahweh.

The resurrected Jesus' hands, feet and side bore the mark of the most serious wounds. This is an indication that a man's resurrected body will carry in clear evidence, for eternity, those special particularities which could have characterized the most important part of a person's life.

- Taking of Bread and Wine or Breaking of Bread and Sharing of the Cup (ceremony) or Holy Communion or The Lord Supper

On the night of the last supper all together -shortly after the Triumphal Entry in Jerusalem- Jesus took two parts of the traditional Jewish ceremony -the breaking of the bread and the sharing of the cup of wine- and gave them a new symbolic meaning. The

Christians have to meet together to break and eat the bread and drink of the cup remembering and proclaiming the deliverance of believers from the bondage of sin obtained by Jesus once for ever and for all. Important to note that the repetition of the ceremony is not the repetition of Jesus' sacrifice on the Cross -as many Churches came to believe- but -as asked by Jesus- a remembrance of it and a reminder of the "New Covenant" the new relationship between Yahweh and all men, a relationship based solely on affection.

The Lord Jesus Christ's Supper was and is a commemorative communal meal, of deep spiritual significance, recalling Jesus Christ's death for the spiritual salvation of all men, and should be held periodically, even if Jesus Christ did not leave any explicit instruction as to how often. It is a memorial, a symbol of fellowship with the crucified Jesus Christ, not a literal drinking of his blood and eating of his flesh, done at the end of the communal meal.

To the ancient people, accustomed to animal sacrifices, these ideas presented no difficulty at all. They would not read phrases like "eating Jesus' body and drinking his blood" with crude and shocked realism. They would think about the experience of an union closer than any earthly union, of a kind of "communion;" a spiritual union between the worshipper and a god, here Jesus. In few words, all this means that Jesus is the essential for life, that to refuse his invitation is to miss true life both in this world and in the world to come, that, at the end of time, all people will be in spiritual communion with Jesus and, through him, with Yahweh and with everybody else.

- End of time, end of the world (forecast of), second coming of Jesus Christ

At the time, the first Christians and even the apostles believed imminent Jesus Christ's second coming and the end of the world. And, in spite of Jesus' declarations (Mk 13:32; Mt 24:36), even presently many Christians continue to make forecast of those events.

But no one knows the time of the end of the world and of Jesus' the second coming; not the angels, not even Jesus himself when living on Earth knew it, but only Yahweh. Another clear demonstration that Jesus was a man, not a "god," not a part of a trinity.

The New Testament writers viewed the whole period beginning with Jesus Christ's birth as "the last days" and believed that Jesus' second coming and the end of the world were imminent.

Only Yahweh knows the future, so it is totally wrong to make any forecast about the end of the world and Jesus' second coming.

Nobody will be able to predict Jesus Christ's return on Earth at the "end of time," nor will have the time to announce it. Many people will come out with false prophecies and false predictions; but nobody must believe and follow them. Any speculation is totally vain.

Just as Jesus Christ's first coming occurred at the precise time Yahweh wanted, so will be with his second coming, and nobody knows when. It will happen at the end of time, in full view of everybody, all around the world. The important point is that nobody can know that time, and nobody has to speculate about it.

After Jesus' second coming and the end of the world, there will be the Universal Resurrection, and then all men will live for ever in Yahweh's Kingdom, not only with their soul, but with their resurrected body. Then, after the end of the human race and after the conversion to Christianity of the last man, Hell -the place where Yahweh is not and Satan reigns- will be an empty space and, for that, the reason itself of its existence will end. At that point even Lucifer, convinced of his mistake, will repent and enter for ever -accompanied by all his angels- the Kingdom of Yahweh, that is, Heaven.

- **Millennialism**

In "The 1000 years of Christ and the saints," [The Revelation 20:1-10] we find the only foundation document for the doctrine called "Millennialism;" the only passage in the New Testament in which it appears. As it can be clearly seen by reading the Gospels, this doctrine does not correspond at all to Jesus' teaching. Actually, Jesus never spoke of a "1000 years" Christian Earthly Kingdom free of Satan's influence. On the contrary, he always affirmed that Satan will be heavily influential on Earth, till the "end of the age."

Actually, Jesus has warned his men of any time that till the end of time and of the world they might well find the state and the consolidated religious organization allied against them; that both State and Church would persecute them. And the persecutions will even come, too often, from other "Christian" people: it is a matter of fact that so many religious orthodox people have often persecuted others -Christians and not- in the strong conviction that this was right, that they were working for Yahweh, and not against Him. In effect, no established Church likes and accepts to be upset, and quite often the man with a message from Yahweh had -and still has- to undergo the hatred and the enmity of a fossilized orthodoxy.

To remember that the Revelation is the announcement of a foretelling of the near future, the proof that it is wrong to use it as a kind of mysterious timetable of what is going to happen thousands of years later (too many people did use and are still using it to draw celestial time tables of what is to come). The things it deals with are to happen in the immediate future and, so, the Revelation has to be interpreted only against the background of its own time.

- **Leaving Christianity and coming back**

All disciples' flight in the Gethsemane when Jesus was arrested; Peter's triple denial and Jesus' silent look at Peter in the High Priest courtyard; Jesus' later triple reinstatement of Peter and full forgiveness by the Sea of Galilee give an important lesson: People who fall away from or repudiate Christianity and then repent and come back have to be accepted again in the Christian community.

In the High Priest courtyard Jesus, passing by, did not speak to Peter in anger but looked silently at him in sorrow. No accusation, no condemnation for human weakness; only sorrow.

Peter's reply at his reinstatement shows that Jesus perfectly knew his true sentiment. But it was necessary to ask the question and have the answer in front of all disciples, to reinstate Peter publicly and officially. This episode is the better example of what to do with people who fall away from or repudiate Christianity and then repent and ask to come back: they, after showing their sincerity, have to be fully accepted again in the Christian community -something that was and is seldom done!

- **Legalism/Grace**

In the Old Testament we find a number of social and religious regulations, yet very few moral rules; what we do find are great, broad principles which a man must himself take and interpret under Yahweh's guidance, and apply to the individual situations in life. The problem was that the Teachers of the Law, the Scribes, did reduce the great principles of the Law to literally thousands of rules which to them were the essence of religion, giving rise to Legalism. Jesus said he had come not to cancel the Law, but to

fulfill it, to bring out the real meaning of the Law; that is, the one great principle of reverence, respect and tolerance. Reverence for Yahweh, respect and tolerance for everybody else. A reverence that did not, and does not, consist in obeying a multitude of rules. Not in sacrifice, but in mercy, not in legalism, but in affection and grace. A tolerance and respect that must be based not on indifference but on understanding and compassion.

The coming of Jesus Christ marks the passage from Legalism (Moses' Law) to Yahweh's Grace.

To note that in every moment of the Jewish and Christian religions' history, too much relevance was and is still given to sexual conduct, much more than to social problems and injustice.

- Gifts (talents)

Every member of the Christian community has been given some spiritual or physical gift to be able and carry on his assigned service or work. And all those gifts come from Yahweh, who determines which gift or gifts each believer should have and use for the build up of the Christian community and not for selfish advantage. Important to remember that not everyone has the same gift, nobody has all the gifts and nobody should expect a particular gift. Anyway, the existence of the gift -which comes from Yahweh- has to be acknowledged and the gift used.

Yahweh gives different men different gifts. One man can received five talents, another two, and another one. It is not the number of talents which matters; what matters is how they are used. Yahweh never demands a man to use abilities he has not got; but He does demand that a man should use to the full the abilities he does possess. Men are not equal in talent; but they can be equal in effort.

A tricky gift is that of an ecstatic -not of a foreign- language. Sometimes a highly regarded gift, supposed to be due to the direct influence of Yahweh's Spirit. And it happens even today that someone would fall into ecstasy pouring out a torrent of unintelligible sounds which only a person having the gift of interpretation can understand; and with plenty of people blindly believing to the interpretation!

- Human soul

The soul -the spiritual part of a man- is not pre-existent and is not created by Yahweh at the moment of the conception of a new human being, is generated by his parents souls at the moment of his conception, as his body -his physical part- is generated by their bodies.

Interesting to know that the Christian Church's seventeenth Ecumenical Council of Basel/Ferrara/Florence, held in AD 1431 to 1439, maintains (with the majority of two votes!!) that women, too, have a soul.

- Sin – suffering

The Jews -and so many Christians- connected and still connect suffering and sin. They assume that wherever there is suffering, there must be sin. Another belief is the pre-existence of the soul. The belief that all souls exist somewhere in Heaven, waiting to enter into a body, that these souls have the possibility to sin, and that a man's affliction, especially if it is from birth, comes from some sin his soul has committed before he was born. An alternative belief is that a man's affliction is due to the sins of his parents -idea

still quite wide-spread, even among Christians. In effect, clearly, children simply inherit -suffer or enjoy- the physical and moral consequences of whatever their parents do. And Jesus many times strongly contradicted both beliefs. Furthermore, as we know very well, it is often the greatest saints who have to suffer most, to carry the heavier cross.

- Marriage and celibacy of priests

Peter, as well as many other disciples -as Philip (Ac 21:8-9)- and even other apostles, was married. And so it has been for more than 1000 years of Church history. Even Paul asserted his right -the right of each one of Yahweh's workers- to be married, if he wished to.

And, for those having higher responsibilities in the Church, Paul considered essential to be married and to have children (further than being strong and mature Christians, not to risk to become too proud of their importance). Yet, going through the history of the Christian Church, what a difference with the position of authority, power and privilege of all bishops and high prelates!

It was the Synod of Rome, called by Pope Gregory VII in AD 1075 that imposed clerical celibacy. Married priests were excommunicated. As a result, the priests of the Roman Church become a class apart, cut off from the most sacred and elevating experience of family life.

There are those who voluntarily renounce marriage, parenthood, and human physical love to dedicate themselves to some particular mission, a condition that has to be strictly voluntary, and doesn't have to be made compulsory to all the people who want to follow a religious vocation.

Index of The Gospel of Jesus Christ – a unified Gospel

Introduction - Jesus is conceived	
Introduction	Page 16
The Son of Yahweh	16
The birth of John the Baptist's foretold	17
The birth of Jesus foretold	18
Mary visits Elizabeth	18
Mary's song	19
The birth of John the Baptist	19
Zechariah's song	19
Jesus is born	
The birth of Jesus Christ	20
The shepherds and the angels	21
Jesus presented in the Temple	21
The visit of the Magi	22
The escape to Egypt	23
The return to Nazareth	23
The boy Jesus at the Temple	23
John the Baptist prepares the way and denies being the Christ	24
Jesus is baptized	
The baptism of Jesus	26
The genealogy of Jesus	26
The temptations of Jesus	27
Jesus the Lamb of Yahweh	28
Jesus' first disciples	29
First trip to Galilee	
Jesus calls Philip & Nathanael	29
Jesus changes water to wine	30
Jesus clears the Temple	30
Jesus teaches Nicodemus	31
John the Baptist's testimony about Jesus	32
Second trip to Galilee (through Samaria)	
Jesus talks with a Samaritan woman	33
The disciples rejoin Jesus	34
Many of the Samaritans believe	34
Jesus begins to preach	35
Jesus heals the official's son	35
Jesus rejected at Nazareth	35
The calling of the first disciples	36
Jesus drives out an evil spirit	37
Jesus heals many	37
First preaching trip through Galilee	
Jesus prays in a solitary place and heals the sick	38
A man with leprosy	38
The faith of the centurion	39
Jesus raises a widow's son	40
Jesus heals a paralytic	40

The calling of Matthew-Levi	Page 41
Jesus questioned about fasting	41
Lord of the Sabbath	41
A man with a shriveled hand	42
Crowds follow Jesus, Yahweh's Chosen Servant	43
The appointing of the Twelve Apostles	43
Jesus and Beelzebub	44
A tree and its fruit	45
The sign of Jonah	45
An evil spirit leaving and coming back	45
Jesus' mother and brothers	46
The beatitudes. Blessings and woes	46
The salt of the Earth	47
The light of the world	47
The fulfillment of the Law	47
Do not murder	48
Causing to sin. Adultery. Sin, faith, duty	48
The parable of the lost sheep	49
The parable of the lost coin	50
The parable of the lost son	50
A brother who sins against you	51
The parable of unmerciful servant	51
The parable of the workers in the vineyard	52
Divorce	53
Oaths	54
An eye for an eye. Kindness for enemies	54
Giving to the needy	55
Jesus' teaching on prayer (Our Father)	55
Fasting	56
Treasures in Heaven	56
The lamp of the body	57
No one can serve two masters	57
Do not worry	57
Judging others	58
Ask, seek, knock	58
The narrow and wide gates	59
The wise and foolish builders	59
Jesus anointed by a sinful woman	60
Second preaching trip through Galilee	
Jesus travels again through Galilee	61
The parable of the sower	61
The parable of the growing seed	62
The parable of the weeds. Parable's explanation	63
The parable of the mustard seed and the yeast	63
The parable of the hidden treasure and the pearl	64
The parable of the net	64
The cost of following Jesus	65
Jesus calms the storm	65

Healing of a demon-possessed man	Page 65
A dead girl and a sick woman	67
Jesus heals the blind and mute	68
Third preaching trip through Galilee	
A prophet without honor	68
The workers are few	69
Jesus sends out the Twelve. Warnings and encouragements	69
Jesus and John the Baptist	72
Not peace but division	73
Woe on unrepentant cities	73
Rest for the weary	73
John the Baptist beheaded	74
Jesus feeds the five thousand	75
Jesus walks on the water	76
Jesus the bread of life	77
Many disciples desert Jesus	78
The cost of being a disciple	79
Clean and unclean	80
The faith of the Canaanite woman	81
The healing of a deaf and mute man	81
Jesus feeds the four thousand	82
The demand for a sign. Interpreting the times	82
Repent or perish	83
The yeast of the Pharisees, Sadducees and Herod	83
The healing of a blind man at Bethsaida	84
The healing at the pool	84
Life through the Son	85
Testimonies about Jesus	86
Peter's confession of Christ	87
Jesus predicts his death	88
The Transfiguration	88
The healing of a boy with an evil spirit	89
Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?	91
Whoever is not against us is for us	91
The Temple tax	92
Jesus goes to the Feast of Tabernacles	92
Is Jesus the Christ?	92
Unbelief of the Jewish leaders	93
The adulterous woman	94
The validity of Jesus' testimony	94
The children of Abraham	95
The children of the devil	96
The claims of Jesus about himself	96
Jesus heals a man born blind	96
The Pharisees investigate the healing	97
Spiritual blindness	98
A crippled woman healed on the Sabbath	98

Jesus at a Pharisee's house	Page 99
The parable of the great banquet	100
Jesus sends out the seventy-two	100
The parable of the good Samaritan	101
At the home of Martha and Mary	101
The shepherd and his flock	102
The unbelief of the Jews	103
The death of Lazarus	103
Jesus comforts the sisters	104
Jesus raises Lazarus from death	105
The plot to kill Jesus	105
Last trip toward Jerusalem	
Samaritan opposition	106
Ten healed of leprosy	106
The little children and Jesus	107
The rich young man	107
Jesus again predicts his death	108
The request of James and John	109
The blind beggar Bartimaeus receives his sight	110
Zacchaeus the tax collector	110
The parable of the ten minas	111
The sheep and the goats	112
The coming of the Kingdom of Yahweh	112
Seven woes. Jesus' sorrow for Jerusalem	113
The parable of the shrewd manager	116
The rich man and Lazarus	116
The parable of the persistent widow	117
The parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector	117
Jesus at Mary and Martha's home	118
The Last Week	
The triumphal entry	118
Jesus predicts his death	120
The Jews continue in their unbelief	121
The fig tree withers	121
Jesus clears the Temple	122
The withered fig tree	122
The parable of the fig tree	123
The authority of Jesus questioned	123
The parable of the two sons	123
The parable of the tenants	124
The parable of the wedding banquet	125
Paying taxes to Caesar	125
The resurrection and marriage	126
The greatest commandment	127
Whose son is the Christ?	127
The widow's offering	128

Signs of the end of the age	Page 128
<i>The doom of Jerusalem</i>	129
<i>The terror of the siege</i>	129
<i>The day of the Lord</i>	129
<i>The persecution to come</i>	130
<i>Threats to the faith</i>	130
<i>The coming of the king</i>	131
<i>Be on the watch</i>	131
The parable of the rich fool	131
Watchfulness	132
The day and hour unknown	132
The parable of the ten virgins	133
The parable of the talents	134
Jesus anointed at Bethany	135
The plot against Jesus. Judas agrees to betray Jesus	135
The Lord's Last Supper. Jesus washes his disciples' feet	136
Jesus predicts Peter's denial	138
Jesus comforts his disciples	139
Jesus the way to the Father	139
Jesus promises the Spirit of Yahweh	140
The vine and the branches	140
The world hates the disciples	141
The work of the Spirit of Yahweh	142
The disciples' grief turns to joy	142
Jesus prays for himself	143
Jesus prays for his disciples	143
Jesus prays for all believers	144
Jesus prays in the Gethsemane, on the Mount of Olives	145
Jesus arrested	146
Jesus before the Sanhedrin. Jesus taken to Annas and questioned	147
Peter disowns Jesus. Peter's first, second and third denial	148
Judas hangs himself	149
Jesus before Pilate and Herod, sentenced to be crucified	149
The Crucifixion	152
The death of Jesus	154
The burial of Jesus	155
The guard at the tomb	156
The Resurrection and after	
The Resurrection. The empty tomb. Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene	156
The guard's report	158
On the road to Emmaus	158
Jesus appears to his disciples	159
Jesus appears to Thomas	160
Jesus appears again to his disciples	160
Jesus reinstates Peter	161
The great commission	162
The commission confirmed	162
The Ascension	163

Index of The Acts of the Apostles Peter and Paul

Jesus taken up into Heaven	Page. 164
Matthias chosen to replace Judas	164
The Spirit of Yahweh at Pentecost	165
Peter addresses the crowd	165
The fellowship of the believers	167
Peter heals the crippled beggar	167
Peter speaks to the onlookers	168
Peter and John before the Sanhedrin	168
The believers' prayer	169
The believers share their possessions	170
Ananias and Sapphira	170
The apostles heal many	170
The apostles persecuted	171
The choosing of the Seven	172
Stephen seized	172
Stephen's speech to the Sanhedrin	172
The stoning of Stephen	174
The Church persecuted and scattered	175
Philip in Samaria	175
Simon the sorcerer	175
Philip and the Ethiopian	176
Saul's conversion	176
Saul in Damascus and Jerusalem	177
Aeneas and Dorcas	178
Cornelius calls for Peter	178
Peter's vision	178
Peter at Cornelius' house	179
Peter explains his actions	180
The Church in Antioch	181
Peter's miraculous escape from prison	181
Herod Agrippa I's death	182
Barnabas and Saul sent off	182
On Cyprus	183
In Pisidian Antioch	183
In Iconium	185
In Lystra and Derbe	185
The return to Antioch in Syria	186
The Council at Jerusalem	186
The Council's letter to Gentile believers	187
Disagreement between Paul and Barnabas	187
Timothy joins Paul and Silas	188
Paul's vision of the man of Macedonia	188
Lydia's conversion in Philippi	188
Paul and Silas in prison	188

In Thessalonica	Page 189
In Berea	190
In Athens	190
In Corinth	191
The return to Antioch in Syria	192
Apollos	192
Paul in Ephesus	192
The sons of Sceva	193
The riot in Ephesus	193
Through Macedonia and Greece	194
Paul's last night at Troas	194
From Troas to Miletus	194
Paul's farewell to the Ephesian elders	195
On to Jerusalem	195
Paul's arrival at Jerusalem	196
Paul arrested	197
Paul speaks to the crowd	197
Paul the Roman citizen	198
Before the Sanhedrin	198
The plot to kill Paul	199
Paul transferred to Caesarea	199
The trial before Felix	200
The trial before Festus	201
Festus consults king Agrippa II	201
Paul before Agrippa II	202
Paul sails for Rome	203
The storm	204
The shipwreck	204
Ashore on Malta	205
Arrival at Rome	205
Paul preaches at Rome under guard	206

Index of The Letters of Peter, James, John and Jude

1 Peter	
Introduction	Page 207
Praise to Yahweh for a living hope	207
Be holy	207
Living stone and chosen people	208
Submission to rulers and masters	209
Wives and husbands	209
Suffering for doing good	210
Living for Yahweh	210
Suffering for being a Christian	211
To elders and young men	211
Final greetings	212

2 Peter	
Introduction	Page 212
Make your calling and election sure	212
Prophecy of Scripture	213
False teachers and their condemnation	213
The Day of the Lord Yahweh	214
James	
Introduction	215
Trials and temptations	215
Listening and doing	216
Favoritism is forbidden	216
Faith and deeds	217
Taming the tongue	217
Two kinds of wisdom	218
Submit yourselves to Yahweh	218
Boasting about tomorrow	218
Warning to rich oppressors	219
Patience in suffering	219
The prayer of faith	219
1 John	
The Word of life	220
Walking in the light	220
Do not get to like the world	221
Warning against the antichrists	221
The children of Yahweh	222
Be fond of one another	223
Test the spirits	223
Yahweh's fondness and ours	224
Faith in the Son of Yahweh	224
Concluding remarks	225
2 John	
Introduction	225
Walk in truth and fondness	225
Greetings	226
3 John	
Letter to Gaius	226
Greetings	227
Jude	
Introduction	227
The sin and doom of godless men	227
A call to persevere	228
Praise to Yahweh	228

Index of Paul's thought – from Paul's merged letters

Introduction:	
To the Thessalonians	Page 229
To the Galatians	229
To the Corinthians	229
To the Romans	229
To the Ephesians	229
To the Colossians	229
To Philemon	230
To the Philippians	230
To Timothy	230
To Titus	230
Introduction of himself:	
Paul called by Yahweh	230
Paul accepted by the apostles	231
Paul opposes Peter	231
The Lord Yahweh's grace to Paul	232
Thanksgiving and prayer:	
To the Thessalonians	232
To the Corinthians	233
To the Romans	233
To the Ephesians	234
To the Colossians	234
To Philemon	235
To the Philippians	235
To Timothy	235
Praise to Yahweh:	
To the Corinthians: [Yahweh] the God of all comfort	235
To the Romans	236
To the Ephesians: Spiritual blessings in Jesus Christ	236
Paul's thought:	
Yahweh's punishment of the wicked	236
Yahweh's righteous judgment	237
The Jews and the law	238
Yahweh's faithfulness	238
No one is righteous	239
Righteousness through faith	239
Abraham justified by faith	239
Peace and joy	240
Death through Adam, life through Jesus Christ	241
Dead to sin, alive in Jesus Christ	241
Slaves to righteousness	242
An illustration from marriage	242
Struggling with sin	243
Life by means of Yahweh's Spirit	243
Future glory	244
More than winners	244

Yahweh's sovereign choice	Page 245
Israel's unbelief	246
The remnant of Israel	247
Ingrafted branches	248
All Israel will be saved	248
The Son superior to angels	248
Warning to pay attention	250
Jesus Christ made like his brothers	250
Jesus Christ greater than Moses	250
Warning against unbelief	251
A Sabbath-Rest for the people of Yahweh	251
Jesus Christ the great high priest	252
The certainty of Yahweh's promise	252
Melchizedek the priest	252
Jesus Christ like Melchizedek	253
The high priest of a new covenant	254
Worship in the earthly tabernacle	254
The blood of Jesus Christ	255
Jesus Christ's sacrifice once for all	256
A call to persevere	256
By faith	257
Yahweh disciplines His sons	259
The resurrection of Jesus Christ	259
The resurrection of the dead	260
The resurrection body	260
The glory of the new covenant	261
Treasures in jars of clay	262
Our heavenly dwelling	262
The ministry of reconciliation	263
Do not be yoked with unbelievers	263
Made alive in Jesus Christ	264
One in Jesus Christ	264
Paul the preacher to the Gentiles	264
A prayer for the believers	265
Unity in the Body of Jesus Christ	265
Spiritual gifts	266
One body, many parts	266
Affection	267
Gifts of prophecy and tongues	267
Orderly worship	268
Living as children of light	269
Warning against refusing Yahweh	270
The coming of the Lord Jesus Christ	271
The rebellion before Jesus Christ's coming	272
Jesus Christ the wisdom and power of Yahweh	272
Wisdom from the Spirit of Yahweh	273
The supremacy of Jesus Christ	273
Freedom from human regulations...	274

Rules for holy living	Page 275
Imitating Jesus Christ's humility	276
Living to please Yahweh	276
Warnings from Israel's history	276
Idol feasts and the Lord Jesus Christ's Supper	277
The armor of Yahweh	277
Different talents by grace	278
Exhortation to affection	278
You must be fond, for the day is near	279
Exhortations	279
Request for prayer	279
Forgiveness for the sinner	280
The weak and the strong	280
Food sacrificed to idols	281
The believer's freedom	282
The rights of an apostle	282
Instructions on worship	284
Propriety in worship	285
Overseers and deacons	285
What must be taught to various groups	286
Doing what is good	287
Advice about widows and elders	288
Rules for Christian households:	
Wives and husbands	289
Children and parents	289
Slaves and masters	290
Submission to the authorities	290
Marriage	291
Expel the immoral brother	292
Sexual immorality	293
Lawsuits among believers	294
Particular addresses	
To the Thessalonians:	
Paul's ministry in Thessalonica	294
Paul's longing to see the Thessalonians	295
Timothy's encouraging report	295
Stand firm	295
Final instructions	296
Warning against idleness	296
To the Galatians:	
No other Gospel	296
Faith or observance of the law	296
The law and the promise	297
Sons of Yahweh	297
Paul's concern for the Galatians	298
Hagar and Sarah	298
Freedom in Jesus Christ	299
Life by the Spirit of Yahweh	299

Doing good to all	Page 299
Not circumcision but a new creation	300
To the Corinthians:	
Divisions in the Church	300
On divisions in the Church	300
Apostles of Jesus Christ	301
The Lord Jesus Christ's Supper	302
The collection for Yahweh's people	303
Personal requests	303
Paul's change of plans	304
Ministers of the new covenant	304
Paul's hardship	305
Paul's joy	305
Paul's defense of his ministry	306
Paul and the false apostles	306
Paul boasts about his sufferings	307
Paul's vision and his thorn	308
Paul's concern for the Corinthians	308
Generosity encouraged	309
Titus sent to Corinth	309
Sowing generously	310
Final warnings	310
To the Romans:	
Paul's longing to visit Rome	310
Paul the minister to the Gentiles	311
Paul's plan to visit Rome	311
To the Ephesians:	
Final instructions	312
To the Colossians:	
Paul's labor for the Church	312
Further instructions	312
To Philemon	
Paul's plea for Onesimus	313
To the Philippians:	
Paul's chains advance the Gospel	313
Shining as stars	314
Timothy and Epaphroditus	314
No confidence in the flesh	315
Pressing on toward the goal	315
Exhortations	315
Thanks for their gifts	316
To Timothy	
Warning against false teachers of the law	316
Instructions to Timothy	317
Greed for money	317
Paul's charge to Timothy	318
Further instructions to Timothy	318
A workman approved by Yahweh	319

Godlessness in the last days	Page 320
Paul's charge to Timothy	320
Personal remarks	321
To Titus:	
Titus' task on Crete	321
Final remarks	322
To the Hebrews:	
Warning against falling away	322
Final exhortations	323
Benediction and final greetings:	
To the Thessalonians	323
To the Galatians	323
To the Corinthians	323
To the Romans	323
To the Ephesians	324
To the Colossians	324
To Philemon	324
To the Philippians	325
To Timothy	325
To Titus	325
To the Hebrews	325

Index of The Revelation of John - disclosed

Prologue	Page 326
The letters to the Churches in Asia	
Greetings and praise to Yahweh <doxology>	326
One like a Son of Man	326
To the Church in Ephesus	327
To the Church in Smyrna	327
To the Church in Pergamum	328
To the Church in Thyatira	328
To the Church in Sardis	328
To the Church in Philadelphia	329
To the Church in Laodicea	329
The prophetic visions	
The Throne in Heaven	329
The scroll and the Christ <Lamb>	330
The seals	331
The great number <144,000> sealed	331
The great multitude in white robes	331
The last <seventh> seal and the golden censer	332
The trumpets	332
The angel and the little scroll	334
The <two> witnesses	334
The last <seventh> trumpet	334
Christ's Mother <the Woman> and Satan <the dragon>	335

The emblem of Rome < <i>beast</i> > out of the sea	Page 336
The emblem of the Antichrist < <i>beast</i> > out of the land	336
The Christ < <i>Lamb</i> > and the great number < <i>144,000</i> >	337
The three angels	337
The harvest of the Earth	337
The < <i>seven</i> > angels with the last < <i>seven</i> > plagues	338
The < <i>seven</i> > bowls of Yahweh's justice < <i>wrath</i> >	338
The punishment of Rome <<i>Babylon</i>>	
The image of Rome < <i>woman</i> > on the emblem of the Antichrist < <i>beast</i> >	339
The fall of Rome < <i>Babylon</i> >	340
Hallelujah!	341
The rider on the white horse [the fall of Rome]	341
The 1000 years reign of Christ and the Saints	
The Kingdom of Yahweh on Earth < <i>thousand years</i> >	342
Satan's doom	342
The dead are judged	342
The Kingdom of Heaven	
The New Jerusalem	343
The River of Life	344
Jesus is coming	344
Epilogue	345

Index of main topics

(Numerical references indicate the relevant pages)

- **Authority to forgive or not:** see Confession
- **Baptism:** 26, 29, 32, 33, 46, 73, 162, 164, 167, 176, 180, 192, 211, 220, 242, 286, 356
- **Born again (Confirmation):** 26, 32, 46, 51, 89, 208, 357
- **Breaking of Bread and sharing of the Cup:** see Taking of Bread and Wine
- **Celibacy of priests:** see Marriage
- **Christian Church, Christianity (Kingdom of Heaven, Kingdom of Yahweh):** 37, 38, 51, 61, 64, 65, 79, 84, 87, 88, 101, 115, 125, 144, 145, 158, 161, 162, 167, 181, 186, 187, 209, 216, 266, 276, 352
- **Confession, forgiveness, authority to forgive or not:** 44, 51, 52, 53, 56, 58, 60, 88, 94, 123, 139, 142, 148, 153, 163, 166/167, 167, 185, 211, 212, 220, 280, 358
- **Confirmation:** see Born again
- **End of time, end of the world (forecast of), second coming of Jesus Christ:** 113, 126/127, 130, 133, 164, 166, 211, 219, 222, 223, 228, 255, 271/272, 274, 317, 318, 360
- **Explanation, teaching of Scripture:** 16, 87, 116, 172, 188, 215, 226/227, 247, 288, 317, 351
- **Faith:** see Miracles
- **Forgiveness:** see Confession
- **Gifts (talents):** 134, 268, 278, 362
- **Healing:** see Miracles
- **Holy Communion:** see Taking of Bread and Wine
- **Human soul:** 97, 209, 362
- **Jesus, son of Yahweh, a man (not a god, not part of a trinity):** 16, 22, 24, 30, 34, 37, 38, 41, 51, 65, 74, 77, 86, 87, 93, 96, 108, 121, 133, 140, 145, 152, 154, 155, 158, 167, 168, 180, 185, 191, 207, 208, 212, 215, 220, 228, 230, 233, 234, 247, 249, 284, 346
- **Jesus' brother and sisters:** 21, 31, 46, 69, 92, 165, 215, 227, 228, 231, 284, 348
- **Jesus, only intermediary and intercessor:** 30, 34, 64, 66, 74, 86, 102, 105/106, 108, 139/140, 143, 154, 169, 180, 185, 221, 284, 341, 347
- **Jesus, Yahweh's Messiah of Salvation (Savior of all men):** 25, 28, 29, 34, 36, 43, 45, 51, 78, 83, 89, 104, 108, 109, 111, 117, 120, 128, 141, 142, 155, 167, 187, 228, 230, 236, 249, 274, 288, 332, 347
- **Leaving Christianity and coming back:** 139, 148, 162, 361
- **Legalism/grace:** 17, 48, 361
- **Logos:** 17, 346
- **Lord's Supper:** see Taking of Bread and Wine
- **Mary chosen virgin, without original sin, Mediatrix of all graces, intercessor, Regina Coeli et Mundi:** 18, 30, 56, 74, 154, 336, 348, 349
- **Marriage and celibacy of priests:** 38, 54, 196, 283/284, 363
- **Messiah of salvation:** see Jesus, Yahweh's Messiah
- **Millennialism:** 343, 361
- **Miracles, healing and faith:** 35, 38, 39, 68, 69, 82, 84, 85, 90, 91, 99, 104, 105, 106, 110, 168, 171, 185, 193, 205, 350
- **Original sin:** 18, 107, 241, 348
- **Papal infallibility (Roman Catholic dogma):** 232, 351
- **Religious places:** see Religion

- **Prayers, how to pray:** 43, 51, 55, 56, 58, 59, 77, 91, 118, 143, 145, 205, 349
- **Prophecy:** 20, 351
- **Religion, religious rituals, rules, titles, traditions, places, etc:** 21, 27, 34, 42, 43, 48, 55, 56, 68, 69, 71, 76, 81, 83, 84, 85, 92, 97, 99, 101, 115, 116, 127, 138, 144, 155, 176, 180, 187, 191, 194, 212, 216, 220, 232, 247, 275, 282, 289, 323, 354
- **Religious rituals:** see Religion
- **Religious rules:** see Religion
- **Religious titles:** see Religion
- **Religious traditions:** see Religion
- **Resurrection:** 158, 255, 260, 261, 266, 272, 286, 289, 290, 291, 292, 336, 359
- **Sanctuaries, places of pilgrimage as “market areas”:** 31, 122, 356
- **Savior of all men:** see Jesus, Yahweh's Messiah
- **Second coming of Jesus Christ:** see End of time
- **Sin – suffering:** 97, 362
- **Spiritual communion Yahweh-men (grace and spiritual salvation):** 16, 17, 19, 22, 25, 26, 29, 32, 34, 35, 41, 46, 48, 51, 56, 59, 64, 78, 91, 93, 100, 102, 103, 106, 112, 113, 121, 139, 140, 141, 142, 144, 145, 162, 164, 165, 166, 180, 203, 206, 242, 245, 260, 261, 272, 298, 301, 317, 348
- **Spiritual grace:** see Spiritual communion
- **Spiritual salvation:** see Spiritual communion
- **Suffering:** see Sin
- **Taking of Bread and Wine, Breaking of Bread and Sharing of the Cup (ceremony of), Holy Communion, the Lord's Supper:** 78, 138, 167, 193, 253, 255, 256, 277, 303, 359
- **Talents:** see Gifts
- **Teaching of Scripture:** see Explanation of Scripture
- **Trinity:** see Jesus, a man
- **Yahweh, only God, Creator of everything and everybody:** 16, 53, 179, 191, 207, 211, 212, 215, 220, 228, 230, 249, 284, 346

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