

## **PART 4: Jesus, and the Early Church**

### **Chapter 4.01 About Jesus**

The story of early Christianity is at least four stories:

(1) What Jesus really said and did, what really happened in his life, and what he thought about his mission here. We cannot know the majority of this story now, including some that is most important. This part of the book gives as much as I have been able to figure out from reading the latest scholarship.

(2) How the prophet Jesus became the god “Christ”. Whether or not Jesus was really God, we need to know how the idea got across to Christians, how various Christians and non-Christians understood it, and how it developed. We need to know how the idea of Jesus-as-the-god-Christ came to overshadow his message, and how his message was preserved along with the idea of his divinity.

(3) The early Church modified the history of Jesus, the message of Jesus, and relations among followers of Jesus, all to suit its needs. For example, it went from egalitarian and not-very-sexist to stratified and patriarchal. The changes might or might not have been in line with what Jesus wanted. The third story is what happened, in particular (a) how the Church guided the change of Jesus into the god Christ, (b) how early Christians lived ordinary life after they realized that a great world change was not imminent, and (c) how the early Church shaped the New Testament.

(4) What happened between Christians and Jews, in particular why they came to be opponents, how Christians came to denigrate Jews, and how attitudes about Jews shaped the writing of the New Testament.

Each of these tasks requires several books. I focus on the first task while making a few comments on the other topics that are relevant to the first topic.

The real story of Jesus differs from the New Testament. The differences are not huge but they are enough to matter. I repeat that debunking traditional faith is not my intent. My intent is to offer a reasonable version of Jesus’ history to modern people who accept their debt to his moral teachings. I tell the story by selecting from the New Testament and from related literature of early Christianity.

#### **The New Testament.**

The New Testament was written in Greek, not English, Hebrew, Latin, German, or French. The King James (Authorized) Version is not the original version of the Bible. Some parts of the New Testament were derived from lists of the sayings and acts of Jesus; some lists were originally in Aramaic (a language similar to Syrian and related to Hebrew). Jesus spoke mostly Aramaic.

The New Testament is not literally “gospel truth” nor was it originally intended to be literal truth. Jesus died around 30-36 CE (AD). Paul’s letters were probably written in the decade of 50-60 CE. The gospels

were not written until after 65 CE, and none of the writers had known Jesus personally. Other parts of the New Testament were written as late as 120 CE. The gospels and the letters were written at a time when groups of followers were arguing among themselves, and when followers of Jesus were arguing with Jews. Because Jesus spoke Aramaic, none of his words in the New Testament are original to him (unless he actually said some few phrases in Greek). It is not clear how close his words in the New Testament are to what he really said. Jesus did not say all that comes out of his mouth in the gospels. Of what he really did say, it is not clear if the New Testament Greek reflects the original Aramaic well. He said important things that are left out. The gospel writers edited almost everything they used even if the sources originally were Jesus' words. His words were cut short, and other words added. His words were taken out of context. His words were put in new contexts. Jesus is credited with acts that he did not do. Acts that he did do were not reported or not reported accurately. Events were retold to reinforce whatever point the writer wished to make. The order of events was changed to serve the writer so that real events did not happen in the order given in the gospels. The gospels disagree on the order of events and on what happened within events. The writers have Jesus claim things about himself that he never claimed. Rather than reflecting conflicts that Jesus had with Pharisees, Scribes, and other Jews, most episodes of conflict in the gospels have more to do with disputes among followers of Jesus, and disputes between Jews and followers of Jesus. There is not a single clear unambiguous basic text for the New Testament but instead many variant texts that agree in most places but not all places. Many passages are hard to understand in the original Greek and hard to translate with one clear meaning, so that several variant meanings are possible in translations. That is why there can be many English versions. Any reading of the New Testament, in Greek or in translation, is also an interpretation. We have to be careful when citing the New Testament as evidence.

Modern scholars have to assess each phrase. Did Jesus say those words? If he did, what was the original context? If he said approximately those words, can we guess at the real words, real meaning, and real context? If he did not say those words, is the idea still in line with his style, probable intent, mostly-was, or all-about? If he did not say those words, why did the writer put them in his mouth? The same warnings are true about his acts. What point was the writer making about Christianity and Christians?

Some of the words and acts in the New Testament that are not from Jesus still express his intent and/or express good religious insight. I almost cried when I learned that Luke rather than Jesus might have originated the parables of the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son; but they are still great examples of what Jesus is all about and still among the best statements of religion ever written. I believe Jesus said something like them. Even if he did not, they express great truths that belong now to Christianity and to the world.

This use of Jesus by New Testament writers was not lying by the standards at the time. It was accepted then to put words in the mouth of a great person, to use his-her words out of context, and to invent contexts and incidents, so as to make a point that the writer considered important. For at least the first hundred years after the gospels were written, at least some readers would have taken them in that light rather than as literal truth. Ancient practice is like using an idealized Curt Kobain to explain the 1990s. Think of "biopics" such as "A Beautiful Mind", "The Doors", or "Ray". We should not judge New Testament writers by our standards but rather take them in their context and work with that.

For a few hundred years after Jesus, influential writings about him included more than is now in the New Testament. The early Church did not distinguish between what we now call the New Testament versus other important writings about Jesus. The early Church did not take any of the writings as literally as do modern standard churches. It did take the writings more literally than I do. Gradually the early Church took the writings about Jesus as almost literal, probably to thwart people who used the writings to launch strange speculation. The Church became committed to treating words as literal that were not meant literally. The Church tried to find the proper balance between allegory and literality but for safety it erred on the side of being literal. The New Testament was assembled out of a mass of existing writings in that climate. The Church selected some writing to serve as the basis for the new religion. It declared those writings, and only those writings, to be the product of the Holy Spirit. We should use our judgment in how literally to take the New Testament and how to interpret it.

Scholars argue a lot over these topics. The suggested readings at the end of this book give you a range of books, many of which assess particular passages so that you can decide for yourself. A few books give lists of what Jesus said, might have said, and did not say, the contexts, his acts, and his possible intent.

I do not argue as a biblical scholar. I do not assess evidence. That is another kind of book. I use passages that I think are from Jesus, reflect his style or intent, or show an important truth even if they came after Jesus. I avoid misleading passages.

Even though the New Testament is not literal truth and was not intended to be literal truth in the modern sense, it might still be true enough and still be the Word of God. It might be what God wanted us to know. It might be the words that God wanted us to have about Jesus. It might be what the Holy Spirit guided into creation. If you want to think of the New Testament as the Word of God in this sense, then you need to understand the history of the New Testament and you need to explain the meaning, consistency, and inconsistency of all passages in the New Testament.

### **John the Baptist.**

John was a prophet who reached his peak at the time Jesus was just starting out, around 25-32 CE (AD). The movement around John was much larger than the movement around Jesus while Jesus was still alive. Herod Antipas, the son of Herod the Great, killed John in about 29-32 CE, a year or more before Jesus died. John's followers continued on after his death. John still has many tens of thousands of followers in the Near East, known as Mandeans.

John was the teacher and predecessor of Jesus. We cannot understand Jesus unless we first understand John. Jesus stayed with John probably for at least several months, perhaps a year, probably not much more. Jesus started his own mission right after he left John. Probably outsiders originally saw Jesus' movement as a breakaway from John's movement. Some modern writers think Jesus and John might have argued but I see little evidence. Jesus' followers might have argued with John's followers over who was the true herald of the Kingdom of God and about the correct behavior of the herald and his followers.

John was sure the Kingdom of God was about to arise, and wished as many Jews as possible to be part

of the new Israel. I do not know exactly what he thought about the Kingdom of God. John probably did not have any well-structured plan for the Kingdom of God. He likely did not think of it in political terms as an alternative to the Jewish aristocracy and the Romans.

John called on Jews to repent their sins, probably both to bring in the Kingdom of God and to allow Jews to participate in the Kingdom when it arrived. To show their repentance and freedom from sin, John ritually washed repentant Jews, sometimes in the Jordan River. Ritual bathing was part of Jewish tradition but had never been used on a large scale as John used it, never to wash away sins with as little preparation as John did, and not to bring in the Kingdom of God. Until John, people thought they needed priests and particular rituals to be absolved of sin and to become ritually pure again. John allowed people to feel clean and pure without need of priests or elaborate rituals. John gave all the people direct access to holiness and to God.

John taught people to be honest and forthright. Officials should only carry out their duties and should not use their office for gain. Tax officials should only collect the right amount of taxes. Soldiers should not bully. If everyone behaved properly, the world would be changed into the Kingdom of God.

John sustained the Law but John did not promote mainstream ideas about Jewish ethnicity and Jewish privilege. The New Testament reports that some Jews challenged John once, saying that Jews did not need John to achieve holiness, purity, or the Kingdom of God because they were Jews, children of God, heirs of the covenant, and guaranteed God's privilege. John retorted that God could make Jews (children of Abraham) even out of the stones if he wished. John did not expect God to make new heirs out of stones. Rather he meant that Jewish identity alone was not enough, and the normal channels to holiness and purity were not enough. People needed to repent in their hearts and to act as God wished. Any Jew who repented and who acted as God wished would be holy enough and pure enough to enter the Kingdom. That person would be a true child of Abraham, true Jew, and true child of God. Thus John stressed intent over ritual action.

People got the mistaken idea they would enter the Kingdom of God if they were baptized but would be denied entry if they were not. I doubt John taught this idea or Jesus taught this idea either. I do not know if Jesus baptized people after he left John but Jesus' followers did baptize much as John had done. Christians later took up the idea that baptism meant entry while not being baptized meant denial but changed the idea to mean that proper baptism meant salvation while not being baptized meant damnation. I believe any mechanical-magical reliance on baptism, and the Christian interpretation of baptism, are both mistakes. I find it hard to understand the mistakes when John and Jesus were so clear about the role of intent and so clear that God would not rely on external ceremonies.

John was austere. He fasted often, ate simple food, and wore simple clothes made from coarse local material, rather like Gandhi or like an Indian "ryshi". He called people away from everyday life, at least for a while. In contrast, Jesus did not think that austerity alone was enough or even necessary. Jesus ate reasonably well; drank wine; laughed; consorted with rich people, prostitutes, and other sinners; and went to parties. Jesus wanted to find holiness and ritual purity in the middle of everyday life. If people could not find holiness in everyday life, then there was little hope for the Kingdom. I do not know if this difference with John caused Jesus to leave John. I do not know if Jesus became discouraged with John's idea of the Kingdom because John had had his chance in his way and his way had not worked, so Jesus

wanted to try another way.

Jesus was like Siddhartha the Buddha when Siddhartha denied the need for strict asceticism and instead took the Middle Path. In seeking to find holiness in the middle of everyday life, Jesus is like a Taoist adept or some Mahayana Buddhists. I do not stress any of this similarity here.

John probably did not think he would be the one to usher in the Kingdom of God or to control the Kingdom. John did not think of himself as the prophesied messiah. He did not see himself as a political messiah. John likely expected someone to come after him who would usher in the Kingdom and would administer the Kingdom as an agent of God. It is not clear if he thought his actions prepared the way for the coming person(s) or how his actions might prepare the way other than by the repentance of the Jews. It is not clear if John thought of the coming person as a messiah, as the Davidic messiah, or in terms of any messianic ideas. It is not clear what role the "Son of Man" might have played in John's ideas but I have seen no evidence the "Son of Man" played any role. John's followers might have thought John was the coming person or the messiah. During the time that Jesus was with John, Jesus might have gotten the idea that he, Jesus, was the coming person but I see no clear evidence. Jesus' understanding of the situation might have been part of any argument between John's followers and Jesus' followers even after both of them were dead.

The Jewish aristocracy killed John from fear of his popularity. They did not kill John because John offered the people direct access to God and so bypassed the clergy, putting the clergy out of work; the clergy never thought John's movement would erode the devotion of the people to the Temple and them. John was not a threat to organized religion. John was a possible threat to the normal socio-political calm necessary for power relations. John was a peaceful man who had no interest in hurting the Jewish or Roman governments. But John was not under control. So although John was peaceful, his popularity might have led to public disturbance, might have led Rome to suppress the disturbance and his movement, and so might have led Rome indirectly to hurt the Jewish aristocracy. If Rome acted against John, the people would blame the Jewish aristocracy for not defending John. If John's movement caused a disturbance, Rome would blame the aristocracy for allowing John to flourish; then Rome would kill John and punish the aristocracy, and the people would still blame the aristocracy anyway. The aristocracy figured it was better to kill John before he became a problem. Probably the same thing happened to Jesus.

### **The Story of Jesus.**

Jesus was born between 8 BCE and 3 BCE in the last days of King Herod the First.

Jesus died between 30 CE and 38 CE in Jerusalem. He was crucified.

Jesus was born in Galilee. Jesus was not born in Bethlehem. Joseph and Mary did not go to Bethlehem to take part in a census. Herod did not send soldiers to kill the children of the village in the hope of killing the future king. Joseph, Mary, and Jesus did not flee to Egypt and return. Mary was not related to Elizabeth, the fictive mother of John the Baptist. Jesus and John the Baptist probably were not related.

Jesus was the first child of Mary. Mary and Joseph were not married when Jesus was born. Joseph likely was not the father of Jesus. We do not know the human father of Jesus. If Jesus' biological father was God, we face other problems that I talked about in previous chapters. God was not Jesus' biological father. Thus it makes no sense to talk of Mary as a virgin except as a virgin when she first had sex with the human father of Jesus. All the birth legends in the New Testament were made up based on motifs of semi-divine heroes; we find the same motifs in stories about Moses, the Buddha, and Lao Tze.

Jesus had four brothers and some sisters. The siblings were real "blood" younger siblings of Jesus through his mother Mary, and were not cousins of Jesus. So Mary did not remain chaste after Jesus was born. If Joseph was Jesus' father and the father of Mary's other children, then the siblings were full siblings to Jesus; otherwise they were half siblings through Mary.

Jesus spent his childhood and early adult years in Nazareth, a small town in Galilee. Jesus spoke Aramaic as his first language. Jesus might have known some Hebrew to read the scriptures and might have known a little Greek to carry out business. I think he could read Hebrew well but the question is not clear.

Galilee lies well north of Jerusalem, around what would now be the "Golan (Galilean) Heights" of Syria and Lebanon. Galilee was generally prosperous and had a diverse economy. Like Samaria, Galilee was once part of the Northern Kingdom of Israel as opposed to the Southern Kingdom of Judea with its capital at Jerusalem. Galilee had been separated from Judea for at least 500 years. Judeans looked down on Galileans and Samaritans as not fully Israelite, as rude bumpkins, and as not fully understanding the religion of God. Galileans looked down on Judeans as snobs, rather like northern Californians and Oregonians think of southern Californians. Galilee did not have many Pharisees and did not show much interest in that approach to Judaism. After the time of Jesus, when the Romans ended the Kingdom of Judea and eliminated Samaria and Galilee as Hebrew districts, some Galileans took on a Syrian or Lebanese identity; but most of them probably joined the movement that led to what is now dominant rabbinic Pharisaic Judaism, what most Americans think of as Judaism.

In Greek, Jesus' occupation was "tekton", which means "craftsperson" (from the same root as English "technician"). Jesus might have been skilled, semi-skilled, or unskilled. All carpenters are tektons, but not all tektons are carpenters, so Jesus might have been a carpenter. His family probably did not have much land. They might have been poor or prosperous; we do not know.

Jesus did not marry and did not have children. A son then should, especially a first-born son, so his non-marriage might have made Jesus seem odd, and probably annoyed his family. We do not know if Jesus had sex outside of marriage but probably not. I see no evidence that Jesus was homosexual, heterosexual, bisexual, asexual, or anything else. If "stereotypical heterosexual but chaste outside of marriage" is the default then we should probably assume that.

Jesus was in his late twenties or early thirties when he left his family to follow John the Baptist. Jesus was subordinate to John. It is not clear how long Jesus stayed with John but likely about a year. John baptized Jesus.

Jesus and John agreed on most points but disagreed on some points, for which see above on John. Jesus set out on his own mission.

I gave the content of Jesus' message in earlier chapters. I will illustrate some points of the content in later chapters with selections from the New Testament.

Preaching the Kingdom of God, and bringing about the Kingdom of God, was the chief goal of Jesus' mission. At first, his movement was a movement entirely within Judaism, aimed at Jews. It was something like the revival movements we see among Christians, as for example in the early 1800s in the United States.

Jesus said the Kingdom of God was both already here and also coming. He announced the Kingdom in two ways, as an external Kingdom to be ruled by God and as a kind of community made up of people who "get it" and act according to the message. He felt the two implied each other.

When the Kingdom of God came fully, all the world, all the persons, and all the nations, would change in accord with Israelite expectations. But the world and everything in it would not end entirely. Jesus was an eschatological prophet of the end of the normal world and the coming of the Kingdom of God in this world instead, but he was a limited eschatological prophet. Jesus did not proclaim any secret knowledge, despite some New Testaments passages to that effect; he proclaimed the Kingdom openly and fully; so he was not an apocalyptic prophet. He thought that everybody should be able to see, understand, and participate in the Kingdom if they only wished to do so.

Jesus thought he was the person appointed by God to bring in the Kingdom of God. He might have thought he was also appointed by God to administer the Kingdom for at least a while until God solidified the new arrangements of the Kingdom, maybe something like an acting general manager or acting CEO. He might have expected to cooperate with the Temple priests, as something like a prophet-consultant.

Jesus differed in two ways from other people who tried to bring in the Kingdom of God. First, Jesus was not only a harbinger or a doorman, he was the instrument by which the Kingdom would come and he had a large role to play in it. Second, his idea of the Kingdom was not primarily military or political. He did think there would be political and military changes in that Israel would return to its former glory and would have an even bigger world role than ever before. But probably he did not think it was up to people to bring military or political changes. God would do that. People would go along. What people were to do in the meantime, and the nature of the Kingdom, are both topics for later chapters.

The traditional kings of Israel came from the House of David. It is not clear if Jesus expected a Davidic King shortly, eventually, or at all. He did not think he was the next king of Israel in the sense of a Davidic king or any other kind of king. It is not clear what he thought of relations between the Kingdom of God, his role, the messiah, and the next Davidic king. He might have thought of himself as a non-military or non-Davidic messiah in the sense of an active prophet. There were many such in the Tanakh who were not kings. He might have labeled himself as a (non-Davidic) "messiah" either directly in words or indirectly by using symbols from the Tanakh such as riding into Jerusalem on a donkey.

Jesus definitely called himself the “Son of Man” but he did not mean anything more than “me”.

The Kingdom of God was not an alternative political kingdom to that of the Jews or Romans. Jesus was not a secret militant freedom fighter. Jesus was probably non-violent, perhaps nearly a pacifist.

In standard Judaism at the time of Jesus, there was only one God, God had no rivals, and no human being could participate in divinity at all. To think of a human as divine was blasphemous. Whatever Jesus thought of his status as a human being or as God is not evident, even from the New Testament, but very likely he went along with Jewish thinking. I doubt Jesus thought of himself as God or god-like at all. He would have considered such ideas blasphemous. During Jesus’ life, there was no idea of the Trinity and of the second person of the Trinity. If somebody had asked him, “Are you the second person of the Trinity?” he would not have known what the person was talking about. If Jesus thought of himself as a son of God, it was in the same sense that all Israelites (Galileans, Samaritans, and Judeans) were Children of God, or as any person adopted by God was a Child of God, such as Abraham. He did not think of himself as the only begotten Son of God. He did not even think of himself as a son of (a) god in the way that the Greeks understood heroes such Heracles (Hercules) or Achilles to be sons of divinities; even that little was blasphemous to a Jew.

Jesus limited his activity to Israel, mostly Galilee. He went to Jerusalem several times, primarily to participate in religious festivals, and not primarily to preach or to carry out his mission. He did not seek non-Hebrews (non-Jews) and at first he did not welcome them. As time went by, and some non-Jews showed interest, he probably tolerated them. It is not clear that he treated them equally with Jews but I hope he did.

Jesus taught in rural areas and small settlements of Galilee but not in cities. Part of the mission was healing. At that time a person could not be fully healed without also being forgiven of any accumulated sins, so Jesus served as the conduit by which God forgave accumulated sins. To forgive sins in this way, as a conduit of God, for the purpose of healing, was not wrong or blasphemous. Other Jews did it. Jesus’ healings were considered miracles caused through God’s intervention using Jesus, and were not the cause of controversies.

Jesus believed in demons and Satan, as did most Jews then. It is not clear if Jesus thought that all evil originated with Satan, but he did think Satan and demons caused a large share of evil, and he used Satan and demons to represent all evil. Jesus intended to defeat evil. He thought he had already defeated evil to a large extent through his own realizations and his own actions, and he thought that all evil would be defeated during his mission. The biggest evil was social injustice. To defeat evil meant to end social injustice. To end social injustice meant that evil had been defeated. If social injustice persisted, then evil had not been defeated.

Jesus exorcised demons. Exorcism was probably not central to the mission in the same way that teaching good behavior was or healing was. But defeating evil was central to Jesus’ mission, and exorcising demons was part of defeating evil. If Jesus and his followers could not exorcise demons then they could not defeat evil. Some people thought Jesus healed and exorcised demons because he used black magic or had some direct connection to demons. He did not.

Jesus called followers. It is not clear how many he called or how many followed him at any one time. Jesus had some constant followers that followed him around most of the time, and likely relied on the mission for support. Jesus had some people that followed him around sometimes but probably did not follow him everywhere he went, and did not rely on Jesus' mission for support. Jesus had some people that supported him and his followers whenever he was in their vicinity, and who might have given them support to travel on as well. His mission had a support network.

Jesus extended ideas of personal integrity and equal respect to women. Jesus treated women as full human beings. Jesus listened to them. Jesus acknowledged that they had the authority to make decisions and to confer respect. He acknowledged when they showed respect to him, as when a woman poured oil on him in a symbolic anointing of him as an important person. To anoint a person means to label that person a "messiah" but not necessarily a Davidic king messiah.

Women were prominent among the supporters and followers. Some individual women were widely known as important in the movement. They were administrators, leaders, and teachers. Their particular identities are largely lost now. Mary Magdalene ("from Magdala") was one. Public action by women was unusual, especially among Hebrews but even among non-Hebrews. For women to openly follow Jesus, go around with him, go out publicly, and teach publicly, even with proper men as companions, even if they kept all proprieties, was a serious scandal. The fact that women did so openly shows their commitment to Jesus and their importance in the movement. Some women were called "apostles" and had status equivalent to the highest ranking male followers such as Peter and Paul. The facts that their identities are lost, they are not called apostles now, and women's activities were downgraded in scope and importance after Jesus died, do not show that women did not have status originally but show a change from what Jesus originally did and taught. These facts show that the position of women changed back to what it had been before Jesus, and that the record was edited to conform. Jesus was not a feminist in the modern sense but respected all persons regardless of sex (gender) or status.

Any of the followers or supporters might be called "disciples" or might not. At the time, the word meant "follower" or "serious student" of a person.

Probably within a short time of starting his mission, Jesus began to attract large groups of people to hear him speak, to benefit from his healings, and to watch him heal. This aspect of the mission bothered the authorities, as it had with John.

Jesus liked to socialize. Especially he liked to eat with people and to go to social events such as weddings.

Jesus ate with just about anybody, including disreputable people such as tax collectors, prostitutes, rich people, poor people, and soldiers. Eating with people showed that you accepted them into your society, so Jesus accepted into his society people that strict Jews then would not accept and he accepted people that many upright Christians now would not accept. Eating together probably both symbolized the Kingdom and was an instance of the Kingdom. By accepting all kinds of people with him, Jesus accepted them into the Kingdom of God.

Jesus supported the Jewish Law, and condemned deliberate breaches of the Law; but he was not much

concerned with fine points. He probably did not get into disputes about following the Law or interpreting it as we see in the New Testament; he probably did not care enough about those technical matters to dispute them. He stressed the intent and spirit of the Law over the letter. In this, he was similar to other Jewish religious leaders of his time, including some Pharisees.

Jesus probably was little concerned with purity. He did acknowledge some of the strong major pure or impure conditions, such as when a person died; but otherwise probably did not worry much. Except for major purity situations, he did not worry about whether the purity conditions of people would prohibit them from contact. He did not try to keep himself ritually pure all the time. In this, he was like most regular Jewish people, even most educated or rich regular Jewish people, and like a Galilean peasant. He differed from strict Pharisees, who were concerned with purity and did try to keep pure at all times; but he did not differ so much as to cause serious dispute.

In eating with all people, not worrying about purity, exorcising demons, healing, and acting as an instrument for God to forgive sins, Jesus did bypass the regular priestly system including the Temple. Jesus offered the people direct access to God and to a feeling of power not mediated by the regular power brokerage system of "who you know and do favors for". I am not sure what the Pharisees offered Jews in the time of Jesus, so I am not sure if he also bypassed the Pharisees, but I doubt it. Jesus was like John. Like John, offering direct access would have made Jesus popular and contributed to the external show of his movement, just as it does with charismatic preachers today. Also as with John, somebody offering direct but temporary access to God did not worry the priests and Temple authorities very much and was not the basis for conflict.

In the gospels, Jesus speaks of twelve apostles. Jesus had an inner circle, which might have consisted of about twelve men. If there were exactly twelve, then they represented the twelve tribes of Israel - that is how the later Church portrayed them. The rosters of the twelve apostles vary a bit in the New Testament but on the whole the lists are pretty consistent, and the followers of Jesus likely knew these special individuals well. There might really have been twelve, at least sometimes. The New Testament calls them "the twelve" for short.

Jesus had a special mission for the twelve. He sent them to Israel to give his message and to get people to act accordingly so as to begin the Kingdom of God. Sending them in that way was both a symbol of the reunification and restoration of Israel, and the first concrete step in the reunification and restoration. He did not send them to non-Jews. Although they had some success, on the whole they did poorly. Jesus was disappointed at the failure. The mission lasted at least a few weeks, probably a few months. It likely did not last several years. The twelve probably did not go forth alone but went in pairs or in small groups. It is not clear if one apostle was paired with another apostle or if each apostle had his own companion or companions.

No women were among the twelve. It is not clear if some women went on the special mission of the apostles.

Jesus ate many meals with his close followers, including the twelve but not limited to the twelve. As with some Jewish meals and some pagan meals, Jesus' meals with his close followers probably had some ritualistic aspects such as breaking and blessing bread and blessing wine.

Jesus went to Jerusalem with some of his followers several times, maybe as many as five times. Jesus' ministry lasted at least one year and maybe as many as four years. The Gospel of John indicates about three years.

At some time, Jesus had an altercation at the main temple in Jerusalem. He severely interfered with the vendors on one of the major porches. It is not clear if this altercation happened several years before he died, one year before, or a few days before. Mark, Matthew, and Luke report it as a few days before he died. John reports it as at least one year before he died.

Pharisees tended to live around Jerusalem, so Galilee had very few Pharisees. Jesus probably did not encounter many scribes and Pharisees, so he probably did not argue often with them. The stories of arguments with scribes and Pharisees reflect conflicts that the early Church had rather than conflicts that Jesus had. Pharisees might have looked down on him and dismissed his religious importance but more likely they just did not pay much attention to him.

Sometime in the decade 30-39 CE, Jesus went to Jerusalem for Passover for the last time. Maybe around that last visit, Jesus caused the general disturbance at the temple.

Jesus had a final meal with the disciples. It is not clear that this meal was distinctive or was in any way different than other meals with his close followers. The words about his body and blood might have been from this meal or from any meals before this time but were reported as having been stressed at this particular meal.

Jewish authorities arrested and questioned him. It is not clear if the Jewish or Roman authorities instigated the arrest but probably the Jewish authorities did. The Jewish authorities would not have spent much time on Jesus, especially because they were busy with Passover. It is not likely that the high priest would have spent any time with Jesus because of his duties elsewhere at the time but he might have spent some time with Jesus.

The Romans were aware of Jesus' group and unhappy about it. With the consent of Jewish authorities, the Romans executed Jesus by crucifixion, outside Jerusalem. Both Roman and Jewish authorities wished to eliminate Jesus to prevent any possible public disorder. It was like swatting a fly to stop the buzz, even before any biting. The Jewish authorities did not have the power to execute anybody; only the Romans could execute anybody. The decision to kill Jesus was a mutual decision by the powerful people of two ethnic groups and two religions. It is not clear if Romans or Jews made the decision first; probably they made it together in a joint effort to preserve beneficial public order.

The Romans officially executed Jesus as a political prisoner, specifically as a pretender to the throne of Israel. It is not clear why the Romans thought Jesus was a political threat or pretender to the throne of Israel other than that Jesus led a public movement and that some followers likely hailed him as messiah. The charge against Jesus might have been founded on a distortion of his idea of his role in the Kingdom of God, and might have been merely a pretext.

Jesus was not killed because of his ethnicity, religion, or religious innovations, because he preached the

Kingdom of God, called for repentance, healed, offered interpretations of the Law, broke the Law in minor ways, forgave sins, ignored purity, allowed people direct access to God, bypassed the official priesthood, claimed to be God, opposed the Pharisees, opposed the Sadducees, partied with disreputable people, or was a secret freedom fighter. If Jesus had only preached the Kingdom of God without also heading an obvious public movement, likely he would have been hailed as a saintly ineffectual minor prophet. He was killed to prevent any public disturbance, almost regardless of what he taught, even though his movement was obviously non-violent and often socially useful.

The apostles, disciples, and other followers fled when Jesus was arrested. They did not witness his trial and so did not know what really happened. Some women followers probably stayed in Jerusalem and might have seen his crucifixion and burial, perhaps because the authorities did not consider women dangerous. The authorities did not pursue the followers that fled. After Jesus died, the authorities no longer considered the movement or anybody in it as much of a threat.

Jesus' body probably was not recovered after he was crucified, especially since his followers fled. Jesus' body probably was not put in a tomb, and therefore it was not resurrected out of a tomb. We do not know what happened to his body.

### **Right After Jesus.**

The stories by the women witnesses became the major source of stories of his death. After he died, some followers saw Jesus. The people who saw Jesus incorporated the stories of the women witnesses into what they said they saw, and elaborated the stories to include his burial, tomb, empty tomb, and resurrection. It is not clear exactly what they saw; they did not always see a physical body or a physical body with normal traits. Some followers really did see something; and many of their reports were sincere. People that claimed to see him gained little except attention or status from a minor stigmatized group, and they might have put themselves at risk from authorities. Still, I found no strong evidence that Jesus really did rise from the dead. Some stories are contradictory, and several stories can be explained as allegories that were not originally intended as literal reports but were later taken as literal reports. If you wish to think of Jesus as resurrected in some spiritual way but not in the obvious physical way, and wish to use the stories as proof, you can do so.

The idea of the tomb, the variant stories of the empty tomb, what happened while Jesus was dead, variant details of the men at the empty tomb, and some appearance stories, are all later ideas of the early Church told to bolster dogmatic points or factional claims. As a result of some people seeing Jesus, and of other people believing the people who said they saw Jesus, some of his followers came to believe Jesus would return to restore Israel, found the Kingdom, and begin a general resurrection. His resurrection was the first in the general resurrection.

Not all of Jesus' followers believed in his resurrection. I think, at first, that most followers did not believe in the resurrection but I do not have much evidence. The followers that did not believe in his resurrection eventually died out, and the followers that did believe came to dominate.

Many followers continued the movement on the basis of what they had learned and what they had done while with Jesus. Both followers that did not believe in his resurrection and followers that did

believe continued his movement until the ones that did not believe in his resurrection dwindled away.

All followers believed in both the message of Jesus and the coming Kingdom of God. Members of the movement awaited the restoration of Israel, reunification of Israel, rise to dominance of Israel, and the Kingdom of God. They used baptism and the Last Supper as an initiation ritual. Many followers also awaited Jesus' imminent return and the resurrection of the dead. Many of these beliefs are in line with strict orthodoxy but differ from what most Christians believe now.

Some followers did not believe that Jesus was a son of God or a god in any way. Some followers, probably a majority, believed Jesus was divine in some way. The followers that believed in his resurrection also tended to believe he was divine. The two ideas go together. After stories of his resurrection became current, it was hard to believe in one without believing in the other.

People that believed in his divinity also stressed the magical efficacy of his birth, death, and resurrection. They believe that somehow the mere facts of his birth, death, and resurrection changed the world and continue to change the world. Somehow they bring about the Kingdom of God. This subgroup came to dominate the Jesus movement, so that the people who did not believe in some divinity for Jesus disappeared. Jesus the prophet had become a god Christ.

Within the subgroup of followers that believed in Jesus' divinity, a sub-subgroup believed he was divine in a lesser way rather than in a high way like God the Father. Within the subgroup of followers that believed in Jesus' divinity, another sub-subgroup believed he was divine in a high way, either very much like God the Father or exactly like God the Father. Eventually the sub-subgroup that believed in high divinity for Jesus dominated the Jesus movement. Jesus the prophet had become the God Christ. The movement had become the Church.

At first, followers of Jesus were largely Jewish and they aimed their work only at Jews; but gradually more non-Jews joined, and eventually non-Jews dominated. Non-Jews came to dominate the part of the movement that believed in a high divinity for Jesus and in the magical power of his birth, death, and resurrection. That does not necessarily mean those ideas were weird to all Jews, imposed on Jews, or non-Jewish. It does not mean those ideas are wrong. Divinity for a human is blasphemous in standard Judaism now; and was blasphemous among priests or well-educated Jews in the time of Jesus; but it might have been more tolerated among common Jews then. Some Jews could have believed in his divinity and the magical efficacy of his birth, death, and resurrection. The picture is not clear. Non-Jews did strengthen the ideas of divinity and magic.

"Non-Jews" means not just Greeks but also Syrians, Babylonians, Iranians, Romans, and other ethnic groups. The followers of Jesus that stressed his divinity as the God Christ were first called "Christians" in Antioch in Syria, where they formed a big group. The Christians at Antioch exerted much influence over all the early Church.

Groups of Jesus' followers argued among themselves about all the issues, probably in particular his divinity and the degree of his divinity. Groups of his followers were mostly still Jews, and hoped to recruit Jews. As a result, groups of Jesus' followers argued with Jews about these issues too. Even after non-Jews dominated the movement, they still argued about these issues. The New Testament was

written while all these people were still arguing, mostly around 70-90 CE. The controversies in the gospels have less to do with conflicts that Jesus had with Pharisees, Sadducees, scribes, and other Jews than with conflicts that followers of Jesus later had with them. The New Testament reported about Jesus but did so in ways to support the point of view of the writers.

Some non-Christian Jews harassed followers of Jesus. It is not clear if non-Christian Jews harassed all followers of Jesus or harassed only followers of Jesus who stressed his divinity. Jews tolerated fairly well some followers of Jesus in Jerusalem who did not believe in the divinity of Jesus, the party around James the Just, the brother of Jesus. It is not clear in what ways Jews harassed Christians that believed in the divinity of Jesus or how severely. Probably harassment was quite mild until after the Romans destroyed the Temple and most of Jerusalem from 70 CE onwards. After then, Jews needed to be strong in their ethnic identity, and the split between Jews and Christians became intense and irrevocable. Later, Romans also persecuted some Christians. The Roman persecution also was usually mild except for some isolated atrocities.

When Christians later gained the upper hand, Christians persecuted Jews, more severely than Jews had persecuted Christians. When Christians persecuted Jews, many Christians did so.

After Jesus died, his followers feared the Romans and sought peace with the Empire. After non-Jews dominated the movement, and after the movement split from most Jews, followers stopped thinking of the Kingdom in terms of Israel. Followers of Jesus stopped seeing the Kingdom in terms of any political state and started seeing it in terms of peaceful non-Jewish communities. After Jesus did not return for several decades, and nobody else was resurrected, followers stopped thinking in terms of a resurrection and began thinking of alternatives. Church dogma to this day still focuses on a resurrection but most common Christians came to think of the Kingdom as going to heaven to be with Jesus after they die. The Church replaced Israel as the institution of the Kingdom. Membership in the Church replaced Jewish identity as a criterion for membership in the Kingdom. Carrying out the ideas of the Church, and especially the message of Jesus, became what people do as Christians just as Jews had the Law. Good standing with the Church replaced a good relation with the Jewish God.

Within a hundred years after Jesus died, the Church was less egalitarian and more hierarchical, with regular offices. Men dominated the offices, and women were relegated to traditional roles in the home, to minor roles, or to subgroups for women with limited power. Christians interpreted the ideas of Jesus so as to validate the Church and their normal lives in the Roman Empire. People used the identity of Jesus as the god Christ to validate the changes and their normal lives.

Some Christians still felt the call of Jesus' message, often urgently, but they usually acted on it within the framework of the Church, the Empire, and Tradition. Jesus also had acted within the framework of Jewish Church, Jewish tradition, and the Roman Empire. You have to decide for yourself if you think there is a difference.

### **My Take: The Message Again.**

I think Jesus' original message, that focused on a Jewish Kingdom of God, was changed slightly into the better message that I described in the first part of the book: a relation with God as Jews had in the

Tanakh, the Christmas Spirit, the Golden Rule, love your neighbor, include everyone, forgive, value your soul-spirit-self, value the soul-self-spirit of everybody, love nature, and try hard to build a better world. We put all this in the context of realistic human nature and practical self-government. I cannot be sure Jesus would approve but I think so. The early Church can take much credit for this beneficial shift in Jesus' message.

**Reminder: Paraphrases.**

Most of the Biblical citations in this part of the book are from the New Testament. The citations are not direct quotes from a widely-accepted version of the Bible but are paraphrases that I made up mostly from the King James (Authorized) Version, which is public domain. I did this to avoid problems with copyright. I encourage you to check against your favorite translation; somebody who believes in the inerrant literal word of God has to check. Each paraphrase begins and ends with an asterisk (\*). Double quotation marks (“”) indicate speech within a paraphrase, usually Jesus speaking. Single quotation marks (‘’) indicate a quote within a speech, often Jesus speaking the words of a character in a parable. My comments and additions are in square brackets []. I apologize for typographical errors.

## Chapter 4.02 Illustrating Points about Jesus

This chapter and the next two chapters use selections, mostly from Mark, Matthew, and Luke, to illustrate points about Jesus' message and life. I illustrate as many points as I can from his message but I do not cover all: some points are self-evident; and some are implied by other points. I note what I do not explicitly cover. To decide if my treatment is fair or not, you have to read the New Testament for yourself.

The goal in using passages from the New Testament is to show that the modern American view of Jesus is compatible with most of the New Testament. This view is as valid as the conservative orthodox Christian view and the atheist view. You do not have to worry that the modern American view of Jesus is not supported.

### **Proof Texts.**

Beforehand, I need to explain why I seem to use a technique that I dislike. A "proof text" is a short passage from the Bible that somebody cites supposedly to prove a point, such as that God hates homosexuals or that we must give all our possessions to the poor now. Usually the text is given incomplete and out of context, sometimes the text is based on mistranslation, and so often it does not support the point. People who use proof texts call themselves Biblical literalists so, to them, every text should be equally a proof text. In fact, they do not treat every passage as equally true and binding. They select and interpret passages to suit their agenda while they overlook passages that go against it. People use proof texts as a weapon to defeat opponents rather than out of respect for God's word. Proof texts get in the way of good understanding rather than show good understanding. Real scholars avoid them. Real scholars cite texts fully enough to show the intent of the text and they explain alternatives even if alternatives do not accord with their argument. I seem to use proof texts but I hope not. I use texts as short illustrations of points and I invite you to go to the whole context to see what I have left out and to decide for yourself.

### **Jesus' Style.**

In many of the passages that can be attributed firmly to Jesus, we see a distinctive style. Jesus was clever, blunt, funny, did not suffer fools, and did not give people much "wobble room" to get out of doing good. For example, when asked how often we should forgive, he said in effect, "Always. No limit." Jesus wanted to shake people out of their normal mindsets and wanted them to see clearly the simple truth at the heart of a matter, so he used verbal and mental tactics. He was like a Zen master. Jesus did not speak like that all the time. He could be patient, kind, and even sweet. Sometimes he just talked ordinarily. He used images from everyday life, especially the lives of farmers, workers, and householders. Jesus was not an ideologue. He did qualify situations. He was not a black-and-white fundamentalist. Most passages that show Jesus' distinctive style are from him; some passages might still be from him that do not show his style but are in line with his intent and do not contradict his style; many passages that do not show his style are from the writers; and passages that do not show his style and do not follow his intent likely are not from Jesus. The lines are not easy to draw.

## **The Message.**

Here again is Jesus' message. Some points are so simple they need no explanation and little support from scriptures. In the explanatory sections below, I do not cite passages for each point, and I combine some points. Some points do not come out in any single passage of their own but emerge from a combination of many passages, so it is not possible to cite all the necessary passages. It is not hard to read the Gospels with these points in mind, and that is the best way to verify them.

- (1) The Golden Rule: actively do for other people as you would have them do for you.
- (2) The Kingdom of God. See below and later in the book.
- (3) God loves us each in particular as individuals. God loves you.
- (4) We should love other people like God loves us, as much as we can.
- (5) Trust God, other people, and ourselves. Usually we can do what we need to do if we let go of fear and if we trust. Usually we get what we need to get if we let go of fear and if we trust.
- (6) Mercy. Show forgiveness with few requirements.
- (7) The importance of intentions and purity of heart.
- (8) Include as many people as possible. Include sinners and other marginalized people.
- (9) Act on the basis of our ability, to the full extent of our ability. Try hard. You cannot do more than that. God expects more from people with greater ability, wealth, and power.
- (10) There is no magic ritual, formula, set of rules, or set of laws to establish and maintain a relation with God. We must respect laws but we have to trust God more.
- (11) Non-violence, with few exceptions.
- (12) Allow other people to hurt us rather than that we should hurt them, even to defend ourselves, our family, what is right, or any property. We should trust God to advance the cause of right if we cannot do it ourselves other than through violence.
- (13) Be willing to sacrifice a little bit so that the common good benefits even more. If you sacrifice a little bit in this way now, you are likely to receive even more in return later as a result of society and life becoming better. But even if you do not, be willing to give up a little for the common good.
- (14) God is bigger than any ideology, program, law, or ideology. God is bigger than evil. God is bigger even than Jesus.

(15) God invites you to join the world and to enjoy it if you can. Enjoy it in your own way but do not hurt other people. Understanding that there is a God and that he cares about you can be a great joy. Even when we are in distress such as when sick or in prison, we can sometimes take comfort from knowing that God cares about us and we can feel joy in the world. If you cannot join and enjoy because your own distress is too much, God still understands and still cares.

(16) Individual people are precious. Your integrity as an individual person is the most precious part about you, more precious to you than all the world. Following the above points helps maintain your integrity. Failing in any of the above points can undermine your integrity. You can call your individual integrity your "soul"; but Jesus probably did not think of individual integrity, and even of the soul, in the same ways that the modern Christian term "soul" conveys.

(17) If you understand all this, especially if you understand God's love and you trust God, then sometimes you can cut through all the silliness, personal problems, ill will, clinging, setbacks, and handicaps to a sudden insight.

### **The Golden Rule and Loving Your Neighbor.**

Although everybody knows the Golden Rule, it is well to cite the passages. In Matthew, it is part of the Sermon on the Mount; in Luke, it is in the parallel Sermon on the Plain. The famous words from the King James Version are: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you".

Matthew 7:12. \* "Act toward other people as you would like them to act toward you; that is the root of the Law and the prophets." \*

Luke 6:31. \* "Act toward other people as you would like them to act toward you." \*

Luke does not say this phrase summarizes the Law and the prophets.

Mark 12:28 – 12:34. \* At a break in the discussion, a lawyer who apparently approved of Jesus' answers asked him, "Which commandment is most important?" Jesus answered, "The First is: 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God [Yahweh] is the only Lord [God]; love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.' The second commandment is: 'Love your neighbor as if he were you.' There is no other commandment greater than these two." The lawyer said, "Well said, Master. You are right. God is one and there is no other god. To love God with all your heart, mind, and strength, and to love other people as if they were you - that is far more than any burned offerings, sacrifices, [rituals, or dogmas]." When Jesus saw that the lawyer spoke sincerely and understood too, Jesus said to him, "You are at the door of God's Kingdom." \*

The saying that begins 'Hear, O Israel...' is called the "Shema" ("Hear") and is perhaps the most common and basic prayer of Judaism. To cite the beginning words is to imply the entire prayer. The message of this passage accords well with rabbinic (Pharisaic) teaching at the time of Jesus. The words of the lawyer refer to Isaiah, and are designed to show the astuteness of Christian understanding. At the same time, the words do not "put down" any other groups.

Matthew 22:34 – 22:40. \* The Pharisees heard that Jesus had defeated the Sadducees in discussion, so they conspired to get him. A Pharisee went to Jesus to ask: “Master, what is the greatest commandment of the Law?” Jesus said, “‘Love God with all your heart, soul, and mind’ is the greatest commandment. The second greatest has a similar root: ‘Love your neighbor as if he were you.’ Everything in the Law and from the prophets comes from these two commandments alone.” \*

Matthew makes this situation a controversy with the Pharisees rather than a simple productive discussion with a lawyer. Matthew uses Jesus to justify the Christian stance against a contrived stance of the Pharisees. The words of Jesus likely are from Jesus but Jesus probably never had such a dispute with a Pharisee. He did not say the words in that context. The Pharisees did not conspire to get Jesus. Matthew puts Jesus’ words in a context to make them mean more than the original in a way that supported Matthew’s position and the position of the early Church.

Matthew 25:31 – 25:46. \* When the Son of Man comes in glory with the angels around him as an army, he will sit in state on his throne, with all the people of the world, from all the peoples of the world, gathered at his feet. He will divide individual people into two groups, on the left and right, much as a shepherd sorts sheep on the right with goats on the left. King Jesus will say to the people on the right, “You have the blessing of God my Father. Come, enter, and possess the Kingdom of God. It has been ready for you since [before] the world was made.” Jesus continued:

*“When I was hungry, you fed me. When I was thirsty, you gave me water. When I was a stranger lonely and afraid, you took me into your home. When I had no clothes, you gave me shoes and a coat. When I was sick, you nursed me. When I was in jail, you visited me.” Then the decent people [on the right] will ask, “Master, when did we see you hungry and feed you, when thirsty and gave you water, when a stranger that we took in, when shivering so that we clothed you, when ill so that we nursed you, and when in jail that we visited you?”*

And Jesus the King will respond:

*“Understand my words: Anything you did for any of my humble brothers and sisters on this Earth, you did as much for me.”*

Then Jesus will say to the people on his left hand, “You are cursed. Get out of my sight. Go to the eternal Hell that is waiting for you, the Devil, and his angels.”

*“When I was hungry, you gave me nothing to eat. When I was thirsty, you gave me nothing to drink. When I shivered, you gave me nothing to wear. When I was ill, you gave me no care, [medicine, or insurance]. When I was in jail, you increased my time. [You found rationalizations to deny me, overlook me, and hurt me.]”*

The indecent on the left will retort: “Lord, when did we see you hungry, thirsty, unclothed, shivering, a stranger, ill, or in prison, and did not help you?”

*Jesus will declare, “Hear me. Whenever you ignored or denied any other person, no matter how small, you ignored and denied me personally.”*

And the indecent will go to Hell's punishment eternally. But the decent people will have eternal life. \*

This passage shows Matthew's editing, how hard it is to separate what Jesus said from what Matthew had Jesus say, yet how important to think about the problem. The portion in italics (and/or in red) likely belonged to the original event, and it reflects the words of Jesus although the words are not an exact quote. Jesus likely did say that helping any other people, especially the most humble, is like helping him, God, a prophet or teacher, or yourself. This passage also shows that Jesus did not pay much attention to personal situation or social station and that he intended to include many people.

Matthew added the other words to make a situation, put spin on Jesus' words, and make points that Matthew cared about but that Jesus did not obviously care about. The words attributed to Jesus but that are not in italics are not in the style of Jesus but are in the style of a scholarly religious commentator. Matthew makes Jesus a king, and has Jesus publicly accept his status as a king. Matthew condemns to hell people who were not kind enough (Pharisees), and sends to heaven kind people (Christians). It is not likely that Jesus believed in heaven and hell in this manner. Jesus would not send people to hell for this kind of non-action, and Jesus would not have condemned Jews while saving non-Jews. Rather, Jesus wanted all people to see what doing unto others, and loving others as yourself, meant. Jesus would accept truly decent people into the Kingdom of God and would shut the door on the indecent. Jesus wanted people to do good primarily because it was good and because it was what the citizens of the Kingdom of God do; not for rewards such as heaven or hell. Jesus did not speak of "coming in his glory". Common listeners of Jesus would not have known what that image meant but literate readers of Matthew would know if they shared Matthew's ideas about the Book of Daniel, ideas that came only after Jesus (Daniel was before Jesus but Matthew's ideas about Daniel came after Jesus). Matthew created the situation and gave words to Jesus to validate the new Christian position on Jesus as Lord, God, king, and judge; show that Pharisees and Jews were selfish; bolster Matthew's arguments against opponents; and change the Kingdom of God into heaven and hell.

**Kingdom of God.** I illustrate this topic in the next chapter.

**God Loves Us Each Individually.** See below under "Trust God" and "Individual Integrity", and see the Gospel of John in Chapter 04.07 on illustrating the Gospels.

**Trust God.**

Mark 4:21 – 4:23. \* Jesus said to them, "Do you turn on the light switch but unscrew the bulbs? Surely you turn on the light switch to see. Nothing is now hidden that will not be understood. Nothing is now covered up that will not be revealed. If you have ears [and a brain], then use them!" \* Matthew 6:19 – 6:21. \* "Don't go crazy stuffing your bank account and adding rooms to your tacky mansion. Thieves steal your identity, your counter tops turn radioactive, and you have to buy a hybrid to replace your gas-guzzling SUV. Instead, store up treasures in heaven [God's mind] where there are no thieves, no decay, and things always work. Wherever your focus is, there also will be your heart [and soul]." \*

Luke 12:33 – 12:34. \* "Don't fear. The many ordinary people among you who follow God should not fear. Your Father has decided to give you the Kingdom. Sell what you have and give to charity. You will

find ATMs without limits and accounts that never empty in heaven, where thieves have no access and nothing wears out. Wherever your focus is, there also will be your heart [and soul].” \*

Matthew 7:7 – 7:11. \* “Ask, and God will give; seek, and you will find; knock, and the door will open. Everyone who asks, gets; everyone who seeks, finds; and to everyone who knocks, the door will open. Would any parent among you give your child a stone if the child asks for bread, or give a snake when the child asks for a fish? If you, bad as you are, know how to give your children good things, how much more will your heavenly Father give good things to the people that ask him!” \*

The parallel in Luke is 11:9 – 11:13.

Matthew 6:25 – 6:33. \* “Stop worrying about food, clothes, [houses, and IRAs]. Life is more than food, clothes, [wealth, and security]. Look at the robins and wrens; they do not write resumes or make monthly contributions yet God your Father feeds them. You are worth more than birds! Can any man by worrying make himself into an athlete or any woman by worrying make herself into a model? Then why worry about clothes? Look at the wildflowers. They do not work, they do not shop outlet malls, and yet the Queen of England in her full regalia never dressed so well. [The wildflowers decorate the otherwise plain hay of the fields]. If that is how God clothes the hay, which is here today and gone tomorrow, will God not clothe you even better? You have so little faith. Do not whine: ‘What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear? [Where will we live? What about old age?] These are for the crude heathen non-believers to chase, not for you. God your Father knows that you need them. Focus on God’s Kingdom and his justice first, and then everything else that you really need will come to you as well. Don’t worry about tomorrow; tomorrow will take care of itself. Each day has its own troubles enough.” \*

The parallel text is Luke 12:22 – 12:34.

If you are a Biblical literalist, and have not yet given up all you own, then these passages should cause an immediate and total change in your life. Of course, the problem with faith alone is that it is not enough. It does not lead to food and clothes. It is not enough on which to raise a family. It cannot serve as the basis for good government. If we are not fed and clothed, then it is hard to do positive good things. There is no solution to this problem for average people. We can hope that God provides enough even if he does not make us rich and secure.

### **Mercy and Forgiveness.**

Many passages here also show the importance of intentions.

“Casting the First Stone.” The following famous passage is disputed. Some early texts of the New Testament do not have it at all. Some have it at John 7:53 – 8:11. Some place it after John 7:36, John 7:52, or Luke 21:38. In the New English Bible it is on page 193 of the New Testament.

\* The crowd went away, and Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. At dawn, he was in the Temple again, and a crowd gathered around him. He was sitting teaching the people when lawyers and Pharisees dragged in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand in the middle of the crowd. They said to Jesus, “Master, we caught this woman right in the act of adultery. The Law from Moses said to stone her. What do you say?” The legalists and Pharisees wanted him to contradict the Law so that they

could frame him. [If he said to release her, he would contradict the Law. If he said to stone her, he would seem harsh in the eyes of the people.] Jesus bent over and wrote in the dirt with his finger. They kept badgering him. Suddenly he sat up straight and said, "Whoever among you has no fault [has never committed a sin] should throw the first stone." Then he bent over again to write on the ground. With his words in their ears, one at a time they slipped away, beginning with the eldest. In a few minutes, Jesus and the woman were alone there. Jesus looked up again and said to her, "Where have they gone? Has nobody condemned you?" She replied, "Nobody, Master". Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you. You may go. But you must not sin again." \*

Again, Jesus probably said and did something like this but probably not as a response to a test by "lawyers and Pharisees" but because people dragged a woman in front of him. I can imagine a good-hearted Pharisee coming to the same conclusion that Jesus did, although probably not in this dramatic way. Some commentators cite this passage as evidence that Jesus could read and write.

Matthew 7:1 – 7:5. \* "Do not judge other people and they will not judge you. As you judge other people, so will they judge you. Whatever standards you apply to other people, they [and God] will apply those standards to you. You always notice the tiny flake in your neighbor's eye [his-her small difference of opinion with you] but never see the log [of bias] floating in your own. How can you say to your neighbor, 'Hey, I can clean that dirty eye of yours' when all the time your own log makes you blind? First haul the log out of your own eye, and then you will be able to see clearly enough to dab the flake out of your neighbor's." \*

Luke 6:28 – 6:31. \* "Love your enemies. Be good even to people that hate you. Bless people that curse. Pray for people that show spite, [bitterness, and vengeance]. When a man hits you on one side of the face, turn your head to let him hit you on the other side as well. When a man begs for your coat or sues you for your coat, let him have your shirt as well. Give to everybody who begs or asks. When somebody takes your tools, money, car, clothes, MP4 player, smart phone, tablet, or laptop, do not ask for it back. Treat other people as you want them to treat you." \*

Matthew 18:21 – 18:22. \* Then Peter asked Jesus, "Lord, how often do I have to forgive somebody if he keeps doing the same bad thing? Do I have to forgive him seven times?" Jesus said, "Not just seven times. I say you have to forgive them seventy times seven [that is, always]". \*

"Seventy times seven" did not mean exactly 490 times but meant "a gazillion" or "so many as to be without limit" or "every time, always, without exception, no matter how many times". Jesus meant to shake Peter out of any kind of simple rule so that Peter had to use his judgment and his heart.

Luke 17:3 – 17:4. \* "If your brother-or-sister wrongs you, then tell him-her. If he-she repents, then forgive. Even if he-she does the same bad thing seven times in one day but comes back to you seven times saying, 'I am [really] sorry', you still have to forgive him-her." \*

The qualification that we forgive only if our brother repents probably comes from Luke rather than from Jesus and probably shows a problem in the early Church with applying the absolute teaching of Jesus to daily life. There is still no solution.

Matthew 18:23 – 18:25. \* "Think of the Kingdom of God this way: Once a king decided to settle with his

servants. The first man that the king saw had run up debts of billions. He could not repay, so the master ordered him sold along with his wife, children, and all that he had. The men fell on his face begging: 'Be patient with me and I will pay the debt.' Pity moved the master to release the man and forgive the debt. No sooner was the man out the door than he ran into a fellow civil servant who owed him only a few dollars. The first man grabbed the second man by the throat and said, 'Pay all you can right now'. The second man fell at the first man's feet begging for mercy saying, 'Be patient with me and I will pay the debt'. But the first man refused and had the second man jailed until the second man [his family] could pay the debt. The other civil servants were shocked when they saw, [and feared for themselves too], so they told the master the story. The master sent for the first man. The master said, 'You scoundrel! I forgave your whole debt when you begged me. You were honor bound to show your fellows the same pity that I showed you.' The master condemned the man to torture until the man could pay the whole debt. That is how God my father will treat you unless you forgive your brothers and sisters from your heart." \*

God extends to all of us great mercy. We are bound by honor to extend to other people mercy just as God extends mercy to us even if we can never extend as much mercy to others as God extends to us. If we do show mercy to others, we are in the Kingdom of God. If we do not, we are in Hell. In Jesus' time, a king could torture a man for bad debts. It is not clear Jesus really said God would torture us. In traditional high Christian theology, the worst torture consists of separation from God.

Luke 13:6 – 13:9. \* Jesus told this parable: "One day a man came looking for figs on one of his fig trees but found none. So he told the gardener, 'Hey. For the last three years, I have come looking for figs on this tree but found none. Cut it down. Why should it go on taking up space and robbing the soil?' But the gardener said, 'Please leave it for one more year. I will trench around it, drain it, and manure it. If it bears, then well and good. If not, I will cut it down.'" \* Again Luke allows qualifications on mercy and he tries to establish some reasonable guidelines in practical life. He also shows that we need to invest in our relations with other people to expect anything from them, we all need a little patience sometimes, and people can really change.

The next story contrasts with the story above and it puzzles scholars. Why would Jesus be so unreasonable and spiteful? I do not know. Matthew removed the reference to fig season to make Jesus seem justified. Matthew probably added the part about the tree withering to make Jesus seem magically powerful. In Matthew, the story sounds like a simple lesson about unproductive people. For one-and-the-same-event, Mark and Matthew do not report the same literal words for Jesus, so the New Testament cannot always be the literal words of Jesus. The gist is the same, and sometimes that is all we can hope for.

Mark 11:12 – 11:14. \* Next day, after leaving Bethany, Jesus was hungry. He saw a fig tree in leaf in the distance, so he went looking for fruit. When he got there, he saw no figs because it was not fig season. He cursed the fig tree, saying, "May nobody ever eat any fruit from you again". His disciples heard all this. \*

Matthew 21:18 – 21:20. \* Next morning on his way to the city, Jesus felt hungry. He saw a fig tree on the side of the road so he went up to it but he found nothing. He said to the tree, "You will never bear any fruit again" and the tree withered immediately. The disciples were amazed at what happened. \*

## **Intentions, Purity of Heart, Consistency, and Not Deceiving Yourself.**

See the story above about not casting the first stone. See passages about not judging so that you are not judged. See personal integrity below; you cannot have personal integrity if you deceive yourself.

Mark 7:1 – Mark 7:8, Mark 7:14 – Mark 7:23. \* A group of Pharisees and lawyers from Jerusalem met Jesus. They noticed that some of Jesus' disciples were eating food with "dirty" hands – that is without washing their hands first. Jews in general, and Pharisees in particular, never eat without first washing their hands, following an old tradition. When they go to the public square with the market, they never eat without first washing their hands. They follow traditional rules too on many other points such as washing cups, pitchers, and copper bowls. So the Pharisees and lawyers asked Jesus, "Why do your disciples flaunt old tradition but instead eat with dirty hands?" Jesus answered, "Isaiah was right when he said about you hypocrites, 'This people pay me lip service but in their hearts they ignore me. Thus their worship is in vain. They teach as God's doctrine the commandments of men.'" Jesus resumed, "You neglect God's commands so as to keep your own merely human traditions"...

Another time, Jesus called the people to say, "Listen. Nothing that goes into a man from outside can make him dirty. No, it is what comes out of a man that makes a man dirty."...

When Jesus had left the people to go outdoors, his disciples asked him about what he had just said. He replied, "Are you as stupid as the rest? Can't you see that what goes out of a man does not make him dirty because it does not go into his heart but goes through his stomach, out his butt, and into the gutter?" In so saying, Jesus in effect declared all foods clean. "Yet from inside a man, from his heart, come evil thoughts, acts of lust, stealing, murder, adultery, merciless greed, malice, cheating, envy, slander, arrogance, and stupidity. These evil things come from inside a man. They make him dirty." \*

"Dirty" did not mean "contaminated with germs and soil" but ritually impure. Washing did clean as we think of cleaning now in terms of removing germs and chemicals but more importantly it cleaned in another spiritual sense.

Jesus' did stress what is inside. Most of the rest Mark made up. Jesus did not care much about ritual purity but about purity of heart.

Bands of Pharisees and lawyers did not wander up from Jerusalem into Galilee-of-the-rebel-boondocks, and, if they did, they had more important business than to test Jesus. Mark was writing to non-Jews. Thus Mark also had to explain the rules of ritual purity and of washing. Mark stretches this incident to cover the food laws, and by further extension, all the Law. Mark uses an incident that is really about intention to exempt non-Jewish Christians from Jewish Law. Mark thus accentuated the difference between (non-Jewish) Christians and Jews. Jesus did not declare all foods clean, and he did not do it by emphasizing the importance of right intentions. Simply having a good heart does not automatically release people from food rules and does not release people from the Law in general. The parallel passage in Matthew is 15:1 – 15:20.

The gospels tend to develop the idea of intent in terms of system-versus-intuition: you can either be on

the side of a bad external system of Jewish Law or of good internal Christian intuition; you cannot have both; if you follow intuition then you must be right while if you follow the Law you must be wrong. That simple opposition does not hold up. A person can both follow the Law and have good motives. A lot of people follow their intuition into bad paths. The Law does not usually advise people to do the wrong thing. Sometimes people do use the Law for bad reasons, and Jesus condemned such misuse of the Law; but that is another topic and should not be mixed up with the idea that intent is good and automatically does away with all bad Law.

Matthew 5:27 – 5:30. \* “You have been taught that our ancestors were told, ‘Do not commit adultery’. But I declare this: If a man looks at a woman with lust in his eye, he has already wronged her in his heart. If he is married, he has also already committed adultery in his heart. If your right eye leads you to think badly or act badly, then rip it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose a part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into the trash pit. If your right hand is the instrument for you acting badly, then cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to throw into the trash pit.” \*

Matthew 5:16 – 5:24. \* “In the same way, when you fast, do not look disheveled and depressed like the hypocrites. They make their faces look like zombies so that other people will know that they are fasting. They have their reward already. When you fast, wash your face and hair, and comb your hair, so people can’t tell you are fasting, but only God your Father, who lives in your secret heart, can tell. Your Father, based on what he sees from his secret vantage point, will reward you.

Do not think about worldly goods by adding to your bank account and your toys. Thieves steal your identity and toys wear out. Store up treasure in God’s mind where there are no thieves and nothing ever wears out. Where your treasure is, there your heart and soul will be too.

The eye [understanding] is the light of your body. If your eyes are fine, you will have light for your whole body. If your eyes are bad, your whole body will be dark. If the only light you have is darkness, then you are in a double darkness.

No servant can serve two masters. He will hate one while loving the other, or he will think the world of the first while despising the second. You cannot serve both God and money [power] too. [You must choose.]” \*

Probably Matthew put this argument in terms of where you get your reward, and in terms of a treasure, but the gist goes along with Jesus’ emphasis on intent. The eye and heart are metaphors for intent. “Part of the body” does not mean only literal parts of the body such as the eye but means bad thoughts as well. If your desire for power, sex, fame, tobacco, alcohol, wealth, etc. causes you to lose the way, it is better to give those up entirely than to lose your whole soul. The parallel is Luke 16:13.

Matthew 7:21 – 7:23. \* “Not everybody who calls me ‘Lord, Lord’ will get into the Kingdom of God. Instead only the people that do the will of my Father God in heaven will get into his Kingdom. When that day comes, many will say to me ‘Lord, Lord, didn’t you see us prophecy in your name, cast out devils in your name, and do many miracles in your name?’ Then I will say to their faces, ‘You were not mine. Get your selves and your conniving wicked ways out of my sight.’” \*

Matthew 21:28 – 21:32. \* Jesus said to the assembled people, “What about this: A man had two sons. He said to the first son, ‘My son, go work in the vineyard today.’ The boy said, ‘I will, sir’, but never did. The father said the same to the second. The second son said, ‘I refuse’, but then he changed his mind and did go work. Which of these two sons did as the father wanted?” “The second”, said the people. Then Jesus said, “I say this: even tax-men and whores will get into the Kingdom of God before you do. When John came to show you the right way to live, you did not believe him, but tax-men and whores did. Even when you had seen how tax-men and whores changed their lives, you did not change your minds and believe John.” \*

These passages have been guides throughout my life. It is better to do as Jesus taught than to worship God and Jesus without doing as he taught. The second passage is one of my favorite stories because I am like both sons. Parents want a son who agrees to work and then actually does it, but we all know that son is not always what we get, and then we have to think about how best to deal with the real son we do get.

**Inclusiveness.** See directly above about tax-gatherers and whores listening to John the Baptist and doing the will of God.

Luke 14:12 – 14:24. \* Once at a dinner party, Jesus said to his host [so that everybody could hear], “When you give a party, do not invite [only] friends, family, rich neighbors, [your boss, or influential people]. They will return your invitation, and then you will be fully repaid. When you give a party, ask people who are poor, crippled, lame, blind, [and losers]. In that way, you will become happy. They cannot repay you [so you cannot look for any reward in the normal terms of this world]. You will be repaid [by God] when good men arise on resurrection day.”

One of the guests heard this and said to Jesus, “The guests who sit at the feast in the Kingdom of God will be truly happy”. Jesus continued with another story. “A man was giving a big dinner party and sent out many invitations. To remind the invitees, at dinner time he sent a servant to their homes to say, ‘Please come, everything is ready’. The invitees all excused themselves. One said, ‘I just bought some land, and I have to go inspect it, so I’m sorry’. Another said, ‘I bought five yoke of oxen [a brand new hybrid car], and I really want to try them out, so I’m sorry’. The next said, ‘I just got married. You can see I have something more important. I’m sorry.’ When the servant returned, he reported all the excuses. The master got angry. He told the servant, ‘Go out right now into the dirty alleys of our town to bring the poor, crippled, lame, blind, [and losers].’ The servant went and returned quickly. ‘Sir, I have called all as you ordered, and still we have more room at the table’. The master added, ‘Then go out to the highways and the county roads. [When you meet a traveler, farmer, or person of foreign land,] make them come in because I need my house to be full. Alas. None of the people I originally had invited will taste my banquet.’” \*

Unfortunately, some readers of Luke would have understood “those who were invited” to mean “the Jews”, and the “foreigners” to mean non-Jewish Christians, so that Jews had refused Jesus and were excluded while non-Jews were invited instead. Fortunately, the meaning is wider than that, and we can rest on the better broader meaning. It is about including anybody, Jew or non-Jew. The parallel is Matthew 22:10 – 22:10. Matthew differs dramatically in that the master does not only ignore the guests

that ignore him, the master sends soldiers out to kill the bad guests! Matthew had a grudge.

Luke 15:1 – 15:4. \* Another time, the tax-men and other thieves were jammed around Jesus listening to him when the Pharisees and lawyers began whining, “This man opens his arm to sinners and actually eats with them”. \*

Matthew 9:10 – 9:13. \* One day when Jesus was eating at somebody's house, many tax-men and other yahoos were seated with him and his disciples. The Pharisees said to his disciples, “Why does your master eat with tax-men and sinners?” Jesus heard and said, “Healthy people don't need a doctor. Sick people do. Go and learn what this text means, ‘I require mercy, not sacrifice.’ I did not come to invite spotless people but sinners.” \*

Matthew 11:18 – 11:19. \* “John [the Baptist] came, with fasting, neither over eating nor drinking liquor, and they say, ‘He is possessed [by a demon]’. The Son of Man [me, Jesus] comes eating and drinking [normally], and they say, ‘Look at him. He is a glutton, a boozier, and a friend of tax-men and sinners’. In the end, God's wisdom is proven right by its outcome.” \* Below, a centurion is a Roman soldier, head of 100 soldiers. He is not Jewish (Israelite) and so should not have faith and should be excluded. Ideally, a Roman should never need help from a Jew.

Matthew 8:5 – 8:10. \* When Jesus entered the town of Capernaum, a centurion came to him to ask for help. He said, “Sir, my son is at home in bed paralyzed and in agony”. Jesus said, “I will go cure him”. But the centurion replied, “Sir, who am I to have a man like you in my house? You need only speak and he will be cured. I know because I have been trained to follow commands and I have soldiers under me who follow my commands. To one soldier, I say ‘go’ and he goes. To another soldier, I say ‘come’ and he comes. To a servant, I say ‘do this’ and he does it.” Jesus listened with amazement. Jesus said to the crowd, “I tell you this, nowhere, not even in Israel, have I found faith like this.” \*

The Church likely did not create the next story just as a way to ratify appealing to non-Jews because the story shows Jesus in a harsh light, as the Church would not want him to be seen: he calls non-Israelites “dogs” and he means it. Even so, the story shows that Jesus could learn from sinners and non-Jews, and could “open up”. “The children” means Israelites. The parallel text from Matthew is 15:21 – 15:28.

Mark 7: 24 – 7:30. \* Then he went to the area around Tyre [in Lebanon]. He found a house and would have liked to stay for a while in peace but this was impossible. Right away a woman heard about him, came to him, and fell at his feet because her young daughter was possessed by a dirty spirit. She was a Gentile, a Phoenician [Lebanese] of Syria by her birth. She begged him to drive the spirit out of her daughter. Jesus at first said, “Let the children eat their fill first. It is unfair to take food from the children and throw it to the dogs.” She replied, “Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the scraps from the children.” He said back, “For saying that, go home happy. The dirty spirit has gone out of your daughter.” Indeed, when she returned home, she found the child calm in bed because the dirty spirit had left her. \*

The people that we include we call “neighbors”. So we need to know who our neighbors are. The next story of the Good Samaritan is well known. The amount of money cited is considerable, probably the equivalent of several month's wages. Recall that a Levite is a member of the Jewish priestly clan. Luke specifically cites them as a way to look down on Jews and on various strata of Jewish society. Jews

looked down on Samaritans and usually had nothing to do with them, so this story is another reversal in which despised outsiders (Christians) are better than Jews. Some scholars think Luke originated this story. I hope the original came from Jesus even if Luke edited the original. Even if it all came from Luke, it is worth repeating here anyway because it is certainly in the spirit of following Jesus.

Luke 10:29 – 10:37. \* A man who had overlooked his duty wanted to excuse himself so he said to Jesus, “Well then, who is my neighbor?” Jesus answered, “A man was on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho when robbers attacked him, stripped him, beat him, and left him half dead. A priest was going along the road. When the priest saw the man, he went past him on the other side of the road. A Levite did the same. But a Samaritan traveler saw the man and had pity. He cleaned the man’s wounds in oil and wine, and bandaged them as best he could. The Samaritan put the man on his own horse, took the man to an inn, gave the inn-keeper two silver pieces, and told the inn-keeper, ‘Look after the man until he recovers. If you spend more than this, I will pay you on my next trip by here.’ Which of these three men was the neighbor of the victim?” The man who had been making excuses to Jesus answered, “The one who showed kindness”. Jesus said, “Go and do the same thing”. \*

### **Work Hard to Get Results.**

The passages also support trusting God.

Mark 8:34 – 8:38. \* Jesus called his disciples and the people. He said, “Anybody who wishes to follow me must leave behind his ego. He must take up his cross and come along with me. Whoever cares for himself and his security will lose his self. But if a man lets himself be lost for me and my message, that man will be safe. What does a man gain by winning the entire world at the cost of his true self? What price can he pay to buy back his true self? If anybody is ashamed of me, my message, and my followers in this world (where people deny God and act wickedly), the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when the Son of Man takes his rightful place with God and the angels.” \*

Most of this passage is from Mark rather than Jesus but I think there is a core message that needs stressing: the value of the soul is greater than the value of the whole world. This was the meaning of the James Bond movie, “The World is Not Enough”. If you believe in Jesus’ message, then be willing to say so. If you deny it, then you undermine your self-integrity. You have to be willing to let go at least somewhat to get something that is more important than security.

In Jesus’ time, there was no Gospel yet; ‘take up a cross’ was not a common saying, and nobody would have known what Jesus was talking about if he did mention a cross before his death; all this must have been added later. Jesus did not talk of coming into the glory of his Father and the holy angels because nobody would have understood that either while he was alive, so it must have been added later too. The parallel in Luke is 9:23 – 9:27.

The parallel passage in Matthew 16:24 – 16:27 adds 16:25: “but if a man will let himself be lost for my sake, then he will find his true self.”

Matthew 25:14 – 25:30. \* “Once a rich man traveled overseas and did not know when he would return, so he gave portions of his capital to his servants according to the ability of the servant: to one, five bags

of gold; to another, two bags; to another, one bag; and so on. The man who had five bags right away invested them in business and made a profit of five bags on top of the original five. The man with two did the same. But the man with only one bag buried it in his backyard. Years later, the master returned, and quickly settled accounts. The man who got five bags said, 'Master, see, you left me five bags and I made five more on top of that'. The master said, 'Well done. You are a good and trustworthy worker. Because you did so well with this modest task, I will put you in charge of a big project. Be happy along with me.' The man with two bags said, 'Master you left two bags with me, and I made two more.' The master told him the same, and gave him another project in accord with his talent. Then the one-bag man said, 'Master, I know you are strict and hard. You reap where you have not sown, and you gather where you have not scattered [you find goodness even where people do not expect and where you have not obviously laid the ground work]. I am afraid. So I buried your one bag in my backyard. Here it is back, exactly what you gave me in trust.' The master fumed, 'You are lazy, not careful. You know that I reap where I have not sown so at least you should have put my money in a bank where I could have earned some interest. Take the bag of gold from him and give it to the man with five bags. To any man who already has wealth, I will give even more until he has enough and beyond. From the man who has little, I will take it all. Throw the useless servant into the dark alley where the poor wail and grind their teeth.'" \* The parallel is Luke 19:12 – 19:24.

Matthew 7:21 – 7:23. \* "Not everybody who calls me 'Lord, Lord' will get into the Kingdom of God. Instead only the people that do the will of my Father God in heaven will get into his Kingdom. When that day comes, many will say to me 'Lord, Lord, didn't you see us prophecy in your name, cast out devils in your name, and do many miracles in your name?' Then I will say to their faces, 'You were not mine. Get your selves and your conniving wicked ways out of my sight.'" \*

It is not enough to do nothing or to be safe. We have to actively work to make the world a better place. We have to work to the best of our ability. We have to yield results to the best of our ability. We have to use our energy to best account so that it yields the best result. We cannot only seek our own satisfaction. That is part of the Golden Rule too.

We have to be careful with this passage. God does not demand results; he demands that we really try. Only evil people demand results "or else", such as movie villains that are out to take over the world, cruel business people, and the Russians in old Cold War dramas. God is not like that.

**No Magic Formula.** This message is implicit in what has gone before.

**Non-Violence.** See loving your neighbor as yourself in the section above on mercy.

Matthew 5:5. \* "People of a gentle spirit are already blessed. In the end, they will take control of the earth." \*

Matthew 5:7. \* "People who show mercy are already blessed because other people will show mercy to them."

Matthew 5:9. 5:11. \* "People who know how to spread peace are already blessed. God adopts them as his sons. People who suffer persecution for a good cause are already blessed because they already live

in the Kingdom of God. You are already blessed when you suffer insults, persecution, and disaster for my sake. Accept it. Be glad about it. You have a rich reward in the Kingdom of God. Remember that they ignorant treated the prophets in the same way before you.” \* Some parallels can be found in Luke 6:12 – 6:22.

Jesus also said that he came not to bring peace but a sword, and that he would cause dissension even among close kin. These two sayings about swords and dissension seem to contradict his stress of non-violence. I do not think they do but an argument over the issue is out of place here. Jesus was realistic about what would happen; it was not something he hoped for or approved of.

### **Willing to Die Rather than to Do Bad.**

I do not cite specific texts. The message comes from Jesus’ crucifixion and from the texts on non-violence. The stories in the gospels are not fully accurate, but assume they are approximately true. If so, then Jesus knew he was in for trouble. Rather than run away, or resist, he accepted that he had to face the situation, and that he might even die. Sometimes it is better to allow harm to come to yourself than to do harm to others. For Jesus, the stakes were higher than himself. If Jesus was human, he could not have known that his mission, and the Kingdom of God, would go ahead anyway after he died. He had to take the chance that his mission and the Kingdom of God might die with him. Jesus did not only risk himself rather than not do harm, he risked what must have been the most important things in the world. Jesus trusted God to advance the cause of right even though Jesus might not be there to see it through and even though Jesus did not fight for right. Maybe it is better to risk not only yourself but also what you love rather than to do wrong by harming other people, resisting, or running away.

This issue is important for modern people who will do harm to make sure their own ethnic group, religious group, or nation, survives. It is easy to argue against crazies such as suicide bombers and the IRA. It is not right to do that kind of evil even to make sure your group survives. The real question comes when standard Christians have to fight to preserve their group. If Jesus was willing to die, then how can Christians fight against Nazis, Communists, or terrorists? If Jesus was willing to die, then why should anybody fight for his-her family? Why should the French fight the Germans to preserve France, Americans fight terrorists to preserve America, and Roman Catholics fight to preserve the Church against Protestants? Why should the Politically Correct oppose the Religious Right or vice versa? We should trust God to preserve good and preserve our family, or to cause goodness and our kin to rise again if they fall. We should trust God rather than do harm. Yet, along with standard Christians, I believe it is right to fight to preserve some things. It is very hard for a normal human being to trust God to preserve family and group, or to bring them back again. I have a hard time justifying my thoughts in light of what Jesus did and must have believed.

**Personal Integrity.** See also “Trust God” and “Work Hard” from above.

Mark 8:34 – 8:38. \* Jesus called his disciples and the people. He said, “Anybody who wishes to follow me must leave behind his ego. He must take up his cross and come along with me. Whoever cares for himself and his security will lose his self. But if a man lets himself be lost for me and for my message, that man will be safe. What does a man gain by winning the entire world at the cost of his true self?

What price can he pay to buy back his true self? If anybody is ashamed of me, my message, and my followers in this world (where people deny God and act wickedly), the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when the Son of Man takes his rightful place with God and the angels.” \*

Matthew 16:24 – 16:28. \* Jesus said to his disciples, “If anybody wishes to follow me, he must let go of his self. He has to pick up his own cross and walk with me. Whoever cares more about his own safety is already lost. If a man will let himself be lost to the normal world for my sake, then he will find his true self. What does a man really have if he owns the whole world at the cost of his true self? Out of the whole world, what could he give to buy back his true self? Someday the Son of Man [I] will come in the glory of his Father, with a retinue of angels, and then he will give to each man the reward for what that man has done. I say this: some of you standing here will not die before you have seen the Son of Man bring his Kingdom.” \*

Matthew 4:1 and Matthew 4:8 – 4:11. \* The Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness so that Satan could tempt Jesus...For a final temptation, Satan took Jesus to a high mountain from which they could see all the kingdoms of the world in their glory. Satan said, “I will give you all these if you will only fall down and honor me [according to the power that I truly have.]” But Jesus said, “Get lost, Satan, you enemy! Scripture says, ‘You will worship the Lord God and only him.’” \*

Matthew 6:1 – 6:7. \* “Be sure not to parade your religion. If you do that, then God will not recognize you in heaven [because you have received enough reward here on earth already]. When you help somebody or give to charity, do not make a big deal about it like the politicians, celebrities, and televangelists do on TV, and the hypocrites do in the churches, so people will admire them. They already have their reward. Instead, when you do something good, don’t even let your left hand know what your right hand is doing. Keep your good deed secret. Your Father who knows everything, even secrets, will reward you. When you pray, do not be a hypocrite. Do not stick out your hands in the middle of the office, in the break room, or on the street corner, so that other people admire your piety. People like that already have all the reward they are going to get. When you pray, go into your room all by yourself, shut the door, and talk to your Father who is in every secret physical place and secret personal place. He sees you and will reward you. When you pray, you can be short and to the point. You don’t need to use a lot of words like people who chant and babble and who imagine that the more they say the more likely they are to be heard.” \*

Matthew 13:44 – 13:46. \* “The Kingdom of God is like a buried treasure in a field. One day, a man accidentally finds it. With joy in his heart, he sold everything he had so he could buy that field to get the unforeseen treasure. Here is another way to think about the Kingdom of God. A pearl merchant was always on the lookout for good ones. One day he found the best pearl he had ever seen. So he sold everything he had, including all his other pearls, so he could buy that one perfect pearl.” \*

The original ideas are in Mark. Matthew repeats the ideas but adds a bit about the role of the young Church. The part in Matthew 16:24 – 16:28 that begins “For the Son of Man” is Matthew’s addition to promote allegiance to the cause. The passages about being tempted by Satan show the emerging theology and cosmology of the early Church. Still, Satan can stand for any seduction of integrity and so the passages are true even if there is no literal devil and Jesus really was not tempted in the wilderness; that is the point of the James Bond movie. The passages about Jesus coming back soon caused enormous problems in the early Church, and still cause problems today. Matthew mars some of the

passages with snide comments about Jews, and seems to show some ignorance. Matthew takes Jews as (false) examples of what to do wrong, and so started a trend that continues to this day. Praying in public and giving alms in public was also seen as an act of asserting Jewish identity and of defiance toward Rome, although, of course, people did use it as self-advertisement. It was not always bad, it depended on who did it and why. It would be like reciting rap (hip-hop) on a street corner now.

The Christian idea of the self did not emerge in a vacuum; there were many Hebrew precedents in, for example, Abraham's dialogues with God, Moses' dialogues with God, the Book of Job, and the Book of Ezekiel where the foundation for modern individualist justice was laid. An idea of the self similar to the Christian idea of the self is also in other religions, as for example in the Upanishads (Hinduism), non-reductionist Buddhism, and the upbeat Taoism of Chuang Tzu. Still, the Christian idea supported individualistic justice and ideas of the individual that are not as well-developed in other religions and cultures.

Jesus' idea of the preciousness and integrity of individual people does not necessarily mean the standard dogma that is taught in standard Christianity. God made us and God can do with ourselves as he sees fit. As far as I can tell, Jesus just did not think in the terms of standard Christianity where people have an immortal soul, people face eternal damnation or salvation as the only options, and their primary (rather selfish) concern is to save their soul. God decides all that when you die. Standard Christianity substitutes salvation of the eternal isolated soul in place of Jesus' teaching about being a citizen in the Kingdom of God. Heaven usurps the Kingdom of God. The metaphysical immortal isolated soul usurps the integral self. Jesus did not teach any of this standard dogma. He would have seen it as a distortion of his teaching, a distortion that diverts people away from the true message of participation in the Kingdom of God. Jesus did not think of the integral self in the same way that Christian theologians developed the idea of the soul or as modern people think of the soul. Immortality of the soul was not important for him, and he does not raise it. I do not know if Jesus thought the soul is immortal. Eternal salvation in heaven likewise was not an issue. I doubt Jesus thought heaven could take the place of being a member of the Kingdom of God. Jesus thought people could suffer greatly due to separation from God and the Kingdom, and degradation of the integral self; but he did not think of that in the same way modern people think of being damned in hell. Rather than worry about your immortal soul, heaven, or hell, think instead about being a useful citizen of the Kingdom of God, which includes your integral self, and the rest will take care of itself.

**Sacrifice for the Common Good.** This point is derived from everything above.

**Sudden Insight.** This point is derived from everything above.

## Chapter 4.03 Illustrating Additional Topics about Jesus

This chapter continues to use selections from the gospels to illustrate particular topics about Jesus and Christianity. These points are not in the list of items in his message. The last sections illustrate the Kingdom of God and show that Jesus felt the Kingdom was coming soon.

### Jesus and God.

By the early 100s, the Church had solidified the ideas that Jesus was God and he was roughly equal with God the Father. The Church had good reasons for aggressively holding this position. It wanted to stave off other mistaken ideas that led believers far astray. For its time, the Church likely did the best thing. Yet in going down the road of “Jesus is high God”, the Church went against some passages in the gospels and the Church contradicted Jesus himself. I do not argue with any church. I only show that alternative views of Jesus are reasonable. Our era no longer requires this dogma. To accept that Jesus is not God does not undermine the message of Jesus. To insist on his status as God while overlooking his message undermines both his message and his status as God.

Mark 10: 17 – 10:18. \* As Jesus was about to begin a journey, a man ran up, kneeled, and asked, “Good master, what do I have to do to get eternal life?” Jesus retorted, “Why do you call me good? No person is [fully] good. Only God is [fully] good.” \*

The parallels are Luke 18:18 – 18:20 and Matthew 19:16 – 19:18. Luke follows Mark fairly closely but Matthew alters Mark to avoid the implication that Jesus is not equal to God. Already by 70 CE, doctrine had developed to the point this topic was sensitive. Matthew writes: \* Jesus said, “What about good? Why do you ask me about good? One [person] alone is good.” \*

Mark 13:29 – 13:32. \* “In the same way, when you see all these things happen, you will know that the change is near, at your doorstep. Listen: this generation will live to see it all. Heaven and earth might crumble but my words will endure. But about the exact day, nobody knows that, not even the high angels in heaven, not even the Son [Jesus] but only the Father.” \*

The parallel is Matthew 24:34 – 24:36.

Mark felt he could get away with calling Jesus “Son” but not with making Jesus equal to the Father in all respects. Jesus likely insisted he was subordinate to the Father, and to make Jesus equal to the Father was too much against Jesus’ intentions even forty years after he died.

The Gospel of John is not a reliable source for what Jesus actually said but it is a good source for Church ideas about Jesus and God. Chapters eight and nine are especially rich. John wanted to elevate Jesus as high as he could without making Jesus fully equal to God the Father. John’s statements that subordinate Jesus to God the Father would now be heretical if taken at face value, so the churches now have other interpretations. John is not consistent. His struggle was great. The end result is often beautiful. Take him as you will.

John 5:19 – 5:30. \* To this accusation Jesus replied, “The truest truth I can tell is this: the Son cannot do anything by himself alone. He does only what he sees the Father has done. The Father does first, and then the Son does it. The Father loves the Son and shows the Son all that the Father has done and does now. The Father will show greater in the future, so as to fill you with awe. As the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so [as the acting agent of the Father who has taken over for the Father here], the Son gives life to men as he [the Son] decides. The Father no longer judges anybody but has given full authority to the Son to judge. It is the will of the Father that everybody now should honor the Son as they already honor the Father. To deny honor to the Son is to deny honor to the Father who sent the Son. In deepest truth, anybody who listens to what I say and trusts the Father who sent me already has his hands on eternal life. He will not come up for further judgment. He has already overcome death to gain life. In truest truth, I say that a time is coming, in fact is already here, when the dead will hear the voice of God’s Son and will come back to life. As the Father was the source of all life, so now the Son is the source of all life. He has this from the Father as a gift. As the Son of Man, the Son also has the right to judge souls. Do not boggle at this because the time is coming when the dead in their graves will hear his [the Son’s] voice and arise. The dead who have done right will rise to life while the dead who have done wrong will hear their doom in their ears. I cannot act by myself. I judge as God the Father bids me. My pronouncement is just because my goal is not from my own will but only acts out the will of God who sent me.” \*

This passage also shows that early Church followers believed in a general resurrection not only of Jews and of the just but of everybody.

John 8:19. \* They asked, “Where is your father?” Jesus retorted, “You do not know me and you do not know my real Father either. If you really knew me you would know who my real Father was too.” \*

John 8:28 – 8:29. \* Jesus said to them, “When you have lifted up [crucified] the Son of Man, then you will know I am what I am. I do nothing on my own. God the Father taught me everything that I say. He who sent me is here with me now, and has never left me by myself...” \*

“I am what I am” refers to one meaning of “Yahweh”, that is “I am that I am”, or, in Greek philosophical terms, “I am the ground of being”. It is John’s way of identifying Jesus with God for learned people.

John 8:58. \* A disputant asked, “How can you personally have seen Abraham [he died long before you were born].” Jesus replied, “In full truth I tell you, before Abraham was born, already I was [and still am].” \*

John 9:37 – 9:38. \* If I do not act as God my Father would act, then you [should] not believe me. Even if you do not believe my words, then accept the evidence of what I do, so you can see the Father acting through me, know that he is in me, and I am in him.” \* John 12:44 – 12:50. \* So Jesus explained loudly [like a man urging a child in danger from him-herself], “When you believe me, you believe in God who sent me rather than in me. When you see me, you see God who sent me. I have come into this world as a light so that anybody who has faith in me [heeds me] does not have to live in darkness. But if anybody ignores me, I personally do not have to judge him. I have not come to judge the world but to save the world. The message in my words sets up a standard that judges automatically at the end of days. I do

not speak out of my own authority but God the Father who sent me gave me the words to speak. I know that in his words is eternal life. What God the Father said to me, that is what I say to you.” \*

John 14:6 – 14:12. \* Jesus replied, “I am the way, I am the truth, and I am life. No person comes to the Father except through me. If you knew me, you would know my Father as well. In fact, from now on, you do know him because you have seen him.” Philip said to Jesus, “Lord, show us the Father and we won’t ask you for anything more again.” Jesus said, “Philip, have I been among you all this time and you still don’t know me? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. Then how can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’ Don’t you believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? I am not on-my-own the source of what I say to you. The Father who lives in me does his own work in having me speak. Believe me when I say that the Father is in me and I am in the Father. If you do not believe my words, then believe my actions. In deepest truth, I tell you, whoever has faith in me will do as I have done. He will do even more than I have done because soon I will return to the Father [die in this world]. In fact, whatever you ask for in my name I will do for you, so that the Father will be honored through the Son. If you ask anything [sincerely] in my name, I will do it [for you].” \*

### **Jesus and Non-Israelites.**

“Israelites” usually meant Judeans although sometimes it included Samaritans and Galileans. See the previous chapter with the passage on the woman from Syria-and-Phoenicia where Jesus calls non-Jews “dogs”. See “Kingdom of God” below.

Matthew 7:6. \* Don’t feed dogs what is holy. Do not spread your pearls [on the ground] for the pigs [to admire]. The pigs will only trample on your pearls, and then turn and tear you to pieces.” \*

Modern people sometimes do not know what to make of this passage because we are not sure what the pearls are and who the dogs and pigs represent. To Jesus and to other Israelites, pearls were words of the Law while dogs and pigs were non-Israelites. Jesus was saying, “Don’t extend God’s grace to non-Israelites because they are too base to appreciate it. They will only ruin God’s grace and then hurt you.” Jesus meant the Kingdom of God first for Israelites. Non-Israelites were to have only a subordinate role. I disagree with Jesus. Jesus seems not to have understood the Book of Jonah with God extending his grace to the Assyrians. I am glad the Church kept this passage in Matthew, and that the Church forgot the restriction to Jews and the prejudice against non-Jews. I am glad the Church interpreted this passage to mean that God’s wisdom should not be given to fools of any ethnic group and I am glad the Church extended the invitation to all people. I hope Jesus would agree with the change. But we have to see what the passage meant originally and we have to accept that we might disagree with Jesus. Unfortunately, some early Christians interpreted pigs and dogs to mean Jews because Jews rejected Jesus. That is just as bad. I am sorry prejudice against non-Jews by Jews changed into a prejudice against Jews by Christians.

Matthew 10:5 – 10:8. \* Jesus sent out the twelve [apostles] with these instructions: “Do not take the road into gentile [non-Jewish] lands, and do not go into any Samaritan town. Go only to the lost sheep of Israel. As you go, say clearly, ‘The Kingdom of God is already here for you.’ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cure lepers, and cast out demons. You received [a great treasure] without having to pay for it so you have to give without charging anybody.” \*

## **Jesus, Satan, and Demons.**

Jesus believed in Satan and demons. He believed that Satan was responsible for much of the evil in the world. He believed that demons are able to possess a person, even against the person's will. I do not know if Jesus believed in the "heavenly rebellion" version of Satan and demons as in "Paradise Lost" by Milton. I believe none of this about Satan and demons, so I disagree with Jesus. People cause most of the evil in the world. Most cases of possession can be explained psychologically or socially. Jesus probably did go alone to the wilderness and did think he struggled with Satan and evil; but the story of Jesus being tempted by Satan before his mission is entirely made up by gospel writers so I do not cite it or comment on it here.

Mark 1:32 – 1:34. \* Just after sunset, they brought to Jesus all the people who were sick or possessed by devils. It seemed as if the whole town was gathered at the door. He healed many people who suffered from a variety of diseases, and he drove out many devils. He would not let the devils speak at all because they knew who he was [and he was not ready yet for other people to know]. \*

Mark 3:13 – 3:16. \* Jesus went into the hilly country where he called the men that he wanted. Those men he called joined him. [Of the men he called], he named twelve as his particular companions. He sent them out to proclaim his message and to drive out devils. \*

Mark 5:1 –5:20. \* They crossed the lake into Gerasa. As Jesus stepped ashore, a man rushed at him from the tombs where the man had been living. A dirty spirit possessed the man. Nobody could control him anymore. Often he had been beaten and chained but he shook off the beatings and broke the chains. Nobody was strong enough to defeat him. Day and night without break, the man would wail among the tombs and in the hills and would cut himself with sharp rocks.

When the man saw Jesus, even at a distance, he ran and fell before Jesus. Jesus [immediately saw that a demon possessed the man], and began to say "Out dirty spirit, get out of this man". The demon, through the man, screamed "What are you going to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Highest God? In God's name, please do not torture me." Jesus asked, "What is your name?" The demon said, "My name is Legion because there are many of us". In fact, there was not one spirit but many. The demons begged that Jesus would not send them out of Gerasa.

There just happened to be a herd of about two thousand pigs eating on the hillside. The demons begged Jesus, "Please send us to the pigs and let us go into them". Jesus gave permission. The dirty spirits went out of the man and went into the pigs. The entire herd rushed over the edge of the cliff, fell into the lake, and drowned.

The swine herds took off running. They told the people of the town and the surrounding countryside. All the people came to the site to see what had happened. They saw Jesus and saw the former lunatic of many devils sitting calmly, clothed, and sane. The people who had actually seen the events related the story. The local people were afraid. They asked Jesus to leave Gerasa.

As Jesus was leaving, the man who had been possessed begged to go with Jesus. Jesus refused and

said to him, "Go home to your own people and tell them what God in his mercy did for you". The man went off and told the people of the Ten Towns all that Jesus had done for him. The people were amazed.  
\*

The gospels writers have the demons know that Jesus is the divine Son of God even though Jesus' disciples do not. This motif is part of a larger theme of only gradually revealing the secret identity of Jesus. It comes from the Church rather than Jesus. I return to it in later chapters.

This episode looks down on Romans, and likely on non-Jews in general. There was no personal name "Legion". The term referred to a particular grouping of Roman soldiers and so meant "Romans" in general. Jews did not raise pigs. Jews looked down on pigs. Pigs were a symbol of foreigners. To send the demons into the pigs only confirmed the identity of all foreigners as "dirty foreign devils". That the pigs rushed into the sea to die is the death that Jews wished for the Roman army in particular and sometimes to all foreigners. Jesus probably did not intend such racial overtones, or at least did not intend them so harshly, so likely Mark took a real incident and added on to it to suit his own desires.

Luke 10:17 – 10:19. \* The seventy-two came back overjoyed. They declared [to Jesus] how, "In your name, Master, even the devils submit to us". Jesus said, "I watched as Satan fell, like lightning, out of the sky. Now you know that I have given you the power to crush snakes, scorpions, and all agents of the enemy, and know that nothing will ever harm you". \*

Jesus sent either twelve or seventy-two disciples on a mission to bring in the Kingdom of God immediately, which included defeating Satan and his agents. "Seventy-two" is half of twelve times twelve, and it can mean "a sufficiently large group". Both twelve and seventy-two refer to the idealized twelve tribes of Israel. To see Satan fall out of the sky means that Jesus saw the end of Satan's reign over this world. Luke declares that Jesus' mission had succeeded in one of its main goals, to conquer evil.

### **Wealth.**

Evil has not been conquered as long as social injustice remains. Jesus did not like the rich and powerful. Jesus did like the poor. He seems to have thought the poor were morally better than the rich. His attitude does not make full sense because Jesus got support from some rich people and he "hung out" with rich sinners such as tax men. You have to decide if Jesus was hypocritical. The early Church sought support from the rich so it could not afford to condemn the rich and it modified Jesus' condemnation of the rich. Standard Christians today usually seek prosperity and they consider prosperity a sign of God's favor, so they are in the same bind. I do not see how they can rationalize away Jesus' dislike of the rich. If they disagree with Jesus, they need to say so.

The vast majority of people cannot be happy if they are not reasonably secure and have a reasonable amount of wealth on which to raise a small family. The normal pursuit of wealth within limits is a good thing. Even supervised capitalism is a good thing because it allows for many people to have moderate amounts of wealth. I do not know how to fit in these facts with Jesus' teachings. Rationalizations of all capitalism as in line with the New Testament are wrong. Maybe we should not take wealth an idol and we should share when we have enough.

Luke 6:20. \* “You poor people are already blessed because the Kingdom of God is yours now”. \*

In the King James (Authorized) Version, the text is clearer: “Blessed are the poor”.

Keep the above text from Luke in mind for comparison with Matthew 5:3.

Luke 6:21. \* “You hungry people are already blessed because your hunger will be filled and you will be satisfied”. \*

Luke 6:24 6:26. \* “Too bad for you rich. You had your period of happiness. Too bad for you with full bellies. You will go hungry. Too bad for you who laugh smugly now. You will cry-and-cry and feel sorry for yourselves”.

Mark 10:17 – 10:31. \* As Jesus was about to begin a journey, a man ran up, kneeled, and asked, “Good master, what do I have to do to get eternal life?” Jesus retorted, “Why do you call me good? No person is [fully] good. Only God is [fully] good. You know the commandments: ‘Do not murder, do not have wrongful sex, do not steal, do not lie, do not cheat or steal, and honor your father and mother.’” The man replied, “But master, I have kept all these rules since I was a child.” Jesus looked directly at him for a while. Jesus’ heart understood the quest in this man. So Jesus said, “You only have one more step to take. Go, sell all you own, give the money to the poor, and thus you will have riches in heaven, and you can follow me.” When he heard Jesus’ words, the man’s face fell to the ground and he stumbled away with a heavy heart because he was rich.

Jesus looked at his disciples and said, “It is really hard for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God.” The disciples were disturbed that Jesus would say this but Jesus pushed further, “My young followers, it really is hard {for people who trust in wealth} to enter the Kingdom of God. It is easier for a camel to walk through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God.” The disciples were fully discouraged, and grumbled among themselves, “Then who can be saved?” Jesus looked at them and said, “For men it is impossible but not for God because for God everything is possible.” \*

The man runs up to Jesus to ask about a spiritual journey just as Jesus is starting on a leg of his own journey. Mark added the last comment about everything being possible with God. Jesus did not say it. It is a way to keep rich people in the Church. The passage in curly brackets is omitted by some texts. In my paraphrase, the sentence does not follow unless the omitted passage is included, so I included it.

Mark 12:38 – 12:44. \* A big eager crowd surrounded Jesus. He taught them, “Watch out for lawyers, [doctors, and professors]. They love to walk around in long robes, get respectful nods from people on the street, have the front seats in synagogues [churches and temples], and have the place of honor at banquets. They gobble up the little house of a widow while they say long prayers to look good [they live on public salaries while they give speeches about development and about how other people have to work hard]. God will give them the harshest sentence.”

Once Jesus was standing next to the temple treasury box watching as people dropped their donations [and temple taxes] into the box. Rich people gave obviously large amounts. Eventually a poor widow

slipped in two tiny coins which together would not buy a soda. Jesus gathered the disciples right then and there to say, "Listen up. This poor widow gave more than anybody. The other people gave out of what was left over when they felt they had enough. But she hasn't even enough to live on and she gave all that anyhow." \*

This story choked me up as a boy, and still gets me now. It is a powerful statement of the importance of intent and commitment. Jesus did not originate this story. It was told all over the ancient world by various religions. In the version I heard, the village church had a giant bell that could not be rung by human hands. When a donation large enough was given, an angel would ring the bell. Rich people and great kings came from afar to try to ring the bell but with no success. Then one day, without thinking of ringing the bell, a widow dropped in the little penny she had been trying for years to save, and the bell rang for days. I have heard that bell ring but not from anything I ever gave. In the movie "The Magnificent Seven", peasants that want to save their village from bandits give the leader of some hired guns as much money and jewelry as the whole village could scrape together. The leader of the hired guns is moved. He says he has been paid a lot before by rich men but has never before been paid everything.

Luke 12:33 – 12:34. \* "Don't be afraid, my little band of followers. Your Father [God] decided to give you the Kingdom [and to use you as the instruments of setting up the Kingdom]. Sell what you own and give to charity. By doing that, you will buy wallets that never go empty. You will have never-ending bank accounts, where no identity thief ever gains access and no inflation ever devalues. Where your treasure is, there also will be your heart." \*

Luke 12:15 – 12:21. \* Then he told the crowd, "Look out! Fight greed of every kind. Even when a man is rich enough, his wealth does not give him life." Then Jesus told this parable: "Once a man started a chain of low-cost retail stores that did really well. As his business grew, he thought, 'Demand for these goods is heavy. My current facilities are not enough. I have to build larger warehouses. I can use them as receiving facilities for cheap goods from overseas, cut my holding time, and make more profit. Then I can say to myself, Hey good man! You have plenty of goods stored up for many years' business. You can live well on what is in your own warehouses. Take life easy: eat, drink, and be merry.' But God said to the man, 'You fool. You die tonight. You made the money. So who will get it now?' That is how it goes for the fool who amasses wealth alone but remains poor in God's sight." \*

## **Divorce.**

This section fits in with discussions of "Family Values" below. Jesus seems to clearly deny any possibility of divorce. I do not think he did so, but, if he did, I disagree with him. In Jesus' day, in practice, only men could initiate divorce. Men used the threat of divorce to control their wives and children. Men often divorced and abandoned a wife when she became middle aged. So divorce was a legal weapon for men. Men had to give their wives a formal note of divorce. The note supposedly helped women because it allowed them to have sex or remarry without being accused of sexual sin (adultery) – a very serious crime. In fact, the note was only another part of male weaponry. Waiving a note of divorce in front of your wife could be a kind of cruel joke. Apparently women did not want equal rights for divorce as much as they wanted to stop men from using divorce as a weapon. To stop that, women wanted to end the easy legal basis for divorce. But divorce did have a basis in the traditional Mosaic Law; and sometimes women needed to divorce a bad husband.

Mark 10:2 – 10:12. \* To get him, some disputants asked: “Does the Law allow a man to divorce his wife?” Jesus asked, “What did Moses [the Law] command?” They replied, “Moses allowed a man to divorce his wife if he gave her a written formal note to that effect.” Jesus educated them: “Moses set up this rule for you because your souls were narrow and closed then. Instead, look at it this way. In the beginning, God made all big creatures male and female. Because male-female gender is basic to us, [at the right time,] a man leaves his parents to seek a wife and to become one with her [and a woman does the same with a man]. The two separate bodies become one person. Do not use temporary legal convention to rip apart what God fuses together.” When Jesus and the disciples were apart, the disciples asked Jesus about divorce. Jesus said, “Any man who divorces his wife and then marries another woman commits sexual sin against both women. Any woman who does the same to her husband commits the same sin. [Or, any woman who is divorced by her husband and then marries another man commits sexual sin against both men.]” \*

Luke 5:18. \* “Any man who divorces his wife and then marries another woman commits sexual sin. Any man who marries a divorced woman commits sexual sin.” \*

Matthew 5:31 – 5:32. \* Jesus spoke, “[In the past], [the Law] told people, ‘A man who divorces his wife has to give her the correct legal note.’ But I say instead, if a man divorces his wife for any cause other than adultery, then [if she has sex with another man even if she marries the other man] the original husband has forced his wife into sexual sin. Any man who marries a divorced woman commits sexual sin.” \*

See also Matthew 19:3 – 19:12. Matthew 19:11 – 19:12. \* The disciples said to Jesus, “Well, if that is what it means to get married, then it is better never to get married.” To this, Jesus replied, “Not everybody can accept this strictness of relationship but only the people that God wants to get married. Some people are incapable of marriage because of their natural temperaments. Some men cannot get married because they were castrated. Some people renounce marriage for the sake of the Kingdom of God. Let only people accept marriage who can really deal with all it means.” \*

Jesus is clear in Mark and Luke. Matthew has Jesus allow an “out”: if a woman has sex with a man other than her husband, the man may divorce the woman. He does not say that a woman may divorce her husband if he has sex with another woman. Matthew likely allowed an out because of pressure from Church members living in the real world. Previously the early Church, including Paul, had provided this out.

We can say that Jesus’ ideals of marriage and divorce actually protect women - like Mohammad allowing a man to have only four wives instead of twenty. Jesus’ rule rights the balance by making men live by the same impossible standards as women. This is true, but it is also an evasion. It allows marriage only for some small minority of ideal humans.

Jesus romanticized marriage. His attitude might be typical of someone thirty years old and still celibate (see “The 40 Year Old Virgin”). It is a good ideal, but it is not realistic and it is not for everybody. We need rules that treat men and women equally but that do not trap them in unrealistic ideals and stereotypes. Modern ideas about divorce and marriage are working their way toward that difficult goal.

The alternative to forbidding divorce is not inevitable promiscuous sex. It is responsible behavior based on real human nature.

When Jesus' style tended toward absolutes, it was usually to open minds and correct an error. I think Jesus did not really demand "no divorce ever" but said that to wake up people and to correct an imbalance in which men dominated. I am not sure what Jesus would have said if he had lived and had to face real couples with problems. I cannot make a case from gospel materials, so you have to decide.

### **Family Values.**

Before citing passages, I explain why this issue annoys me. "Family values" is not really about families but about political power. People that promote stereotyped "family values" really promote an idealized version of the family into an idol. They worship the idol rather than worship God. They use worship of the idol to avoid correctly worshipping God and following Jesus' message. They use worship of the idol as a way to get the state on their side and to attack their enemies, including the poor. It is their Golden Calf. The liberal other side does the same in its way when it promotes the poor and non-Europeans just to gain allies, and when it promotes non-stereotypical families without knowing why those families might be adaptive in their situations or why those families might be bad. All this is blasphemous and hurtful. We need realism and kindness. We need standards of good family behavior regardless of the composition of your family, such as do not have children as a teen, do not have too many children, and personally take good care of all the children that you do have.

We need to believe in higher values than the family sometimes. Thinking of Jesus and Christianity as primarily about family values, and thinking of Jesus as god of the hearth (family), blocks the need for higher values and greater achievements. Even if we have to risk sometimes making mistakes about the family, to worship it inevitably limits us in the way that all idolatry limits us.

Jesus was single and very likely celibate. He was not a family man. He seemed to like children and family life but that does not mean he considered them the only way to be human or the best way to be human. Jesus was waiting for the Kingdom of God. While waiting, apparently he thought celibacy was the best way to live, and many of his followers thought so too. Many early Christians were celibate. Early Christians had to be talked into having families. Jesus did not think people would have the same kind of sex life and families after the Kingdom as they did before. Jesus likely thought people would have real physical bodies of some kind but not as they were then. The new bodies would be transformed and more ethereal. It is not clear if the new bodies would have sex, have children, and live in families. It is not clear what Jesus would have advised people about family life if he knew the Kingdom was to be delayed for a long time. It is even less clear what Jesus would have advised people if he knew that the Kingdom as he wished it might never come. Almost certainly, he would not have raised the family to an object of worship. Definitely, he would not have raised the family to an object of worship to use as a political tool.

Luke 14:25 – 14:26. \* Once he told a great crowd: "If anybody wants to follow me but does not hate his father, mother, children, brothers, sisters, and even his own life, he cannot follow me." \*

Matthew 10:37 – 10:39. \* "Nobody deserves me if he cares more about his father or mother than about me. Nobody deserves me if he cares more about son or daughter. Nobody deserves me if he does not

take up his own cross [overcome his greatest desires and greatest fears] and walk in my footsteps. By keeping his life, a man loses it. By losing his life for me, a man will gain it.” \*

Again, Luke is probably closer to the original while Matthew softened the words to make them more acceptable. The reference to “take up his cross” would have been nonsense in Jesus’ time. It only makes sense as a comment Matthew added later to give power to his version.

Mark 3:31 – 3:35. \* [Once while Jesus was in a big house], his mother and brothers arrived but could not get in because of the big crowd around the house, so they sent a message to Jesus inside through the crowd. A man said to Jesus, “Your mother and brothers are outside asking for you.” Jesus retorted, “Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?” Glancing at the people around him, he continued, “Here are my mother and brothers. Whoever does as God asks is my brother, sister, and mother.” \*

The parallel passages are Matthew 12:46 – 12:50 and Luke 8:19 – 8:21.

Luke 12:51 – 12:53. \* “Do you suppose that my mission on earth will bring only peace here? Not at all. My coming will bring division. From now on, a family of five will be divided three against two or two against three, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, and mother against son’s wife and son’s wife against her husband’s mother.” \*

Matthew 10:34 – 10:36. \* “Do not think that my mission here will bring only peace. My mission brings not only peace but also the sword. My coming will set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a son’s wife against her husband’s mother, and a man will find bitter enemies even in his living room.” \*

### **Kingdom of God 1.**

Jesus understood the “Kingdom of God” as below. Most of the ideas are taken from Isaiah. Most Jews at the time shared about half the ideas, up to the point indicated.

-Israel would be free of political control by any other state or nationality. Israel would not necessarily dominated other nations but no other nation could dominate Israel, and God would aid Israel in case of conflict.

-God would run Israel. Likely God would run Israel through the Temple priests with the cooperation of the aristocrats.

-Other nations would look up to Israel for moral, religious, and political guidance. Other nations would acknowledge God as the one god, and acknowledge the special relation of God with Israel. Other nations would not feel lessened by being under the dominion of God and the leadership of Israel but would be glad.

-War would end, at least as concerns Israel but probably everywhere.

-Social injustice would end. Some wealth and power differences would continue but no person would be injured by them. Everyone would have a chance. Nobody would fall into hardship through the

conniving of another.

-Most disease and poverty would end.

-The Devil would be defeated. The main sign of the defeat would be the end of social injustice. If social injustice persists, the Devil is not yet defeated.

Not all Jews would have agreed with the following points.

-It is not clear if Jesus expected a resurrection of prominent Jews or the past such as Moses, David, and Elijah, and/or a general resurrection of all Jews, or no resurrection. He did not make a point of it.

-It is not clear if Jesus expected himself to be resurrected in case he should die before the Kingdom came fully, but probably he did.

-People would not die any more.

-People would be transformed to be more spiritual than they are now but not to lose their physical bodies entirely.

-It is not clear if he expected people to continue to feel sexual desire, get married, and have children. I think not.

-People, especially Jews, would change their thinking and behavior to accord with the new way of life of the Kingdom. They would change in accord with Jesus' message. This is the most important point about the Kingdom.

-Jesus expected to be the major instrument by which God would start the Kingdom, and he expected to play a major role. He did not expect to be King but he probably expected to be the major prophet speaking to the Temple priests.

-Anybody who followed Jesus and acted as if the Kingdom were here would already be in the Kingdom and would be like Jesus as an instrument that brought in the Kingdom. Followers would change their behavior to be like they were already in the Kingdom. It is not clear if their bodies would change before the full coming of the Kingdom. Followers both already lived in the Kingdom and brought it in for other people. This is the second most important point.

-All Jews would participate simply by being Jews. It is not possible that any Jew would see the changes and not wish to participate fully as a good Jew.

-The Kingdom was primarily for Jews. All of Jesus' original followers were Jews. Non-Jews could participate as much as they accepted God and the leadership of Israel. They did not have to convert to Judaism, but, if they did not, some benefits were not available, such as close communication with God through Temple priests. I am not sure what all benefits were available or not available to non-Jews. Non-Jews could fully belong by converting to Judaism.

-If any non-Jew did not fully accept the changes, he-she would be excluded. It is not clear what exclusion meant but probably it meant social ostracism, isolation from God as had happened to King David, and then death without possibility of resurrection.

-There was no Hell in the Christian sense.

Jesus was wrong about some of these points, for which see below. The Church changed many of these points, for which see the next three chapters.

## **Kingdom of God 2.**

For Matthew, "Kingdom of Heaven" is the same as "Kingdom of God" because "heaven" is a euphemism for "God". See the end of this chapter for a few more words on the Kingdom of God.

Jesus saw the Kingdom of God two ways. First, the Kingdom was the restoration and rise of Israel. The various groups of Hebrews (Israelites) reunite. Israel becomes free. At least some Hebrews are resurrected. All people recognize Yahweh as the one true God, turn to Israel for guidance, live according to the Law as interpreted by Jesus, live according to the Golden Rule, and love their neighbors. All people are neighbors. Second, the Kingdom exists already in people's hearts, ideals, and current behavior. When people see the ideal and began to act on it, already they are in the Kingdom of God even if the rest of the world is a mess.

To me, the Kingdom also happens in two ways. First, internally, when people understand that the world could be a better place and people actively work to make it better, they are already in the Kingdom. People act according to the message of Jesus. The real world does not have to become a perfect world to reach the Kingdom of God. Whenever a person understands the idea and begins to work toward the idea then that person already has entered the Kingdom of God. Second, externally, as the real world approaches the ideal, it becomes the Kingdom of God. For Jesus' ideal in which Israel leads the world, I substitute the ideals of a better world and good nations. In our times, I think of good nations as pluralistic democracies. When pluralistic democracies work as they should, with decent people, real freedom, and reasonable prosperity, they are as close to the Kingdom of God as we get on this earth. When most people live according to the message of Jesus, then we are in the Kingdom of God whether or not Israel has been restored and even if a lot of dead people are still not resurrected.

I do not believe in any second coming or massive change in the world as in standard Christianity. I disagree with Jesus. Any change in the world will be through science, politics, prosperity, and change in the environment. I hope that change is for the good but it need not be.

People probably will never achieve the ideal as it exists in human minds, and likely should not. The ideal is different in God's mind. If we approach human ideals we also hope that we approach God's ideals at the same time.

Jesus often talked of the Kingdom of God in terms of being invited to a feast. This might be a third way of thinking about the Kingdom. This way of understanding the Kingdom of God has some problems. It is

best to defer talking about it until Part Six of the book. In the meantime, this way of thinking about the Kingdom of God can be taken as a variation on the other two ways.

To begin, a passage on the external Kingdom:

Mark 13:28 – 13:32. \* “Learn from the fig tree. When its soft new shoots are breaking into leaves, you know that summer is near. In the same way, when you see all that I have talked about happening, know that the change is near, even at the door. Listen to me. The present generation will live to see everything. Heaven and earth will crumble but my words will never fade.”

“But about the exact hour, nobody knows for sure, not even the high angels in heaven, not even the Son [me], but only the Father.” \*

Parallels are Matthew 24:34 – 24:36 and Luke 21:32 – 21:33.

Now we see the internal side:

Luke 17:20 – 17:21. \* The Pharisees asked Jesus, “When will the Kingdom of God arrive?” Jesus said, “You cannot tell by looking at external things when the Kingdom of God has come. You cannot say, ‘Oh, look at that! It is here now!’ In fact, the Kingdom of God is already here among you [in your hearts and relations].” \* Luke contrived the setting of the Pharisees but the gist about the Kingdom is still true. The two passages contradict each other if they refer to the Kingdom of God in the same way. Only if we see the Kingdom as both inside and outside are they compatible.

You can get a sense of the interior view from the movie “Casablanca”. A friend of mine once was annoyed after seeing the movie because people gave Rick (Bogart) so much credit for “seeing the light” and going off to fight oppression while people overlooked the French freedom fighter who had been doing that already for years. My friend missed the point. Once a person gets the idea then he-she is fine. We do not think a lot about people that already understand. We rejoice when a new person gets the idea. Getting the idea and starting to work is as much the Kingdom as any end point. This conclusion is implied in the stress on intent and in the (contrived but useful) contrast between the rigid, external Jewish Law (system) versus Christian intuition.

Luke 15:1 – 15:10. \* Once tax-men and other criminals were pushing in to hear Jesus when the lawyers and Pharisees saw the criminals and so started slandering him. They said, “This guy welcomes sinners and actually eats with them.”

Jesus answered them with a parable. “If a person owns a hundred sheep and loses one of them, he will leave the ninety-nine behind in the [safe] open pasture while he searches for the one lost sheep until he finds it. When he does find it, he is happy. He puts it on his shoulders, and goes around to all his friends and neighbors, showing it off, saying, ‘I found my lost sheep’. [On my authority], I tell you there will be greater joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who do not need to repent.

Likewise, if a woman has ten golden earrings [as the basis for her personal wealth and independence] but

loses one of them, she will turn on the light, carefully sweep the rug and under the furniture, and look in every nook and cranny until she finds it. When she finds it, she will call up her friends and neighbors to say, 'Come have some wine with me. I found my lost earring.' [On my authority], I tell you God and the angels feel such joy over one sinner who repents." \*

The parable of the Prodigal Son follows in Luke immediately.

See the "Widow's Gift" above. When the widow throws in her two coins, she is already in the Kingdom of Heaven, and so are any people who understand her and are moved to do likewise, even if they not as well. When a few people act correctly, they can stimulate a change in their society. This is the chief way in which the Kingdom grows.

Mark 4:30 – Mark 4:32. \* "How can I describe the Kingdom of God? It is like the tiny mustard seed. [In the beginning] when it is first planted, it is the smallest of all seeds. But after it sprouts, it shoots up and grows taller than any other garden bush. It has branches so big that even the birds can settle happily in its shade." \* Luke 13:18 – 13:19 repeats the parable of the mustard seed, then goes on with Luke 13:20 –

13:21. \* "What can I compare the Kingdom of God to? It is like the spoonful of yeast that a woman mixed into the half-a-hundred weight of flour until all the flour was leavened [rose]." \*

Half-a-hundred weight is a lot of flour. Yet a little yeast takes care of it all. In modern terms, this is the idea of a "cell" of dedicated people, focus groups, consciousness-raising, radicalizing, networking, good PR, and "staying on message".

Notice that Jesus tells two versions, one for men and one for women, each story based on what would be clear simple personal experience. Neither version is any better than the other and neither showed either gender in a better light. This duplication was not to keep men and women in their own separate worlds but to bring both men and women into his one world on an equal basis. In his time, this equality and inclusion of women was not unheard-of but was rare. The previous chapter used the parable of the wedding banquet to describe inclusiveness but it can be repeated here to describe the Kingdom of Heaven.

Luke 14:12 – 14:24. \* Once at a dinner party, Jesus said to his host [so that everybody could hear], "When you give a party, do not invite [only] friends, family, rich neighbors, [your boss, or influential people]. They will return your invitation, and then you will be fully repaid. When you give a party, ask people who are poor, crippled, lame, blind, [or losers]. In that way, you will become happy. They cannot repay you [so you cannot look for any reward in the normal terms of this world]. You will be repaid when good men arise on resurrection day [by God]."

One of the guests heard this and said to Jesus, "The guests who sit at the feast in the Kingdom of God will be truly happy". Jesus continued with another story. "A man was giving a big dinner party and sent out many invitations. To remind the invitees, at dinner time he sent a servant to their homes to say, 'Please come, everything is ready'. The invitees all excused themselves. One said, 'I just bought some land, and I have to go inspect it, so I'm sorry'. Another said, 'I bought five yoke of oxen [a brand new hybrid car], and I really want to try them out, so I'm sorry'. The next said, 'I just got married. You can see

I have something more important. I'm sorry.' When the servant returned, he reported all the excuses. The master got angry. He told the servant, 'Go out right now into the dirty alleys of our town to bring the poor, crippled, lame, blind, [and losers].' The servant went and returned quickly. 'Sir, I have called all as you ordered, and still we have more room at the table'. The master added, 'Then go out to the highways and the county roads. [When you meet a traveler, farmer, or person of foreign land,] make them come in because I need my house to be full. Alas. None of the people I originally had invited will taste my banquet.'" \*

The previous chapter used the parable of the unmerciful servant but it also can be used here to describe the Kingdom of Heaven.

Matthew 18:23 – 18:25. \* "Think of the Kingdom of God this way: Once a king decided to settle with his servants. The first man the king saw had run up debts of billions. He could not repay, so the master ordered him sold along with his wife, children, and all that he had. The men fell on his face begging: 'Be patient with me and I will pay the debt.' Pity moved the master to release the man and forgive the debt. No sooner was the man out the door than he ran into a fellow civil servant who owed him only a few dollars. The first man grabbed the second man by the throat and said, 'Pay all you can right now'. The second man fell at the first man's feet begging for mercy saying, 'Be patient with me and I will pay the debt'. But the first man refused and had the second man jailed until the second man [his family] could pay the debt. The other civil servants were shocked when they saw, [and feared for themselves too], so they told the master the story. The master sent for the first man. The master said, 'You scoundrel! I forgave your whole debt when you begged me. You were honor bound to show your fellows the same pity that I showed you.' The master condemned the man to torture until the man could pay the whole debt. That is how God my father will treat you unless you forgive your brothers and sisters from your heart." \*

The story of the Kingdom below is my favorite because it reinforces lessons from the movie "Casablanca" and from optimistic American culture.

Matthew 20:1 – 20:16. \* "The Kingdom of Heaven is like this. A landowner went out early in the morning to hire labor for his vineyard. After agreeing on the standard daily wage, he sent the men off to work. About nine in the morning, he saw some more un-hired workers, so he said, 'Go out in my trucks to work with the others in my vineyard and I will pay you a fair wage'. That was their best deal, so they went. At noon, he did the same thing, and then again at three in the afternoon. One hour before quitting time at sunset, he found another group of men who had not worked all day. He asked them why they were still standing around at the end of the day, and they said because nobody [was interested in them and] would hire them. So he did the same for them that he had done with workers earlier. [They were happy to go to get in wages whatever they could, even for an hour's work.] At dusk, at quitting time, the landowner had his foreman call in everybody to get paid, starting with the last and ending with the first. The landowner paid everybody the same no matter how long they had worked. The ones hired in the early morning expected a bonus but didn't get it. They were not happy, saying 'Hey! You pay the Johnny-come-lately workers as much as you paid us, and we have been sweating out here in the hot sun all day long! [How about a bonus to recognize our hard work and to show how much you value us?]' The owner turned to the leaders and said, 'My old friends, I am not unfair. We had a bargain didn't we? And I lived up to it, didn't I? If I choose to pay the others the same as you, that does not mean I pay you any less. I can do

with my money what I want. You should not get angry because I am big-hearted.' In the same way, in the Kingdom of God, [among the Christians and Jews], the last will be first and the first will be last." \*

To get some bad reminders out of the way first: Some original readers of this passage saw the first workers as the non-Christian Jews while the later workers are Christians. Other original readers saw the first workers as the pioneer followers of Jesus, Galileans and Jews, who built the Church and did the hard work while the later workers are the second or third generation Christians, many non-Jews, who took over an established movement and re-shaped it to what they wished. Jews had an agreement with God, the Covenant, and God had lived up to his end. If God wishes now to let non-Jews into the Covenant and to treat them as well as Jews, out of kindness, how has God cheated the Jews? Christians have a right to full benefits while non-believing Jews do not. Likewise, the early Christians had the example of Jesus and the martyrs.

They knew how hard the job would be and what they could expect. They have no complaints if later Christians get the same reward without all the danger and fighting.

Hopefully now we see: The vineyard is the Kingdom of God. To work in the vineyard means to work for the Kingdom and to be in the Kingdom. There is only one wage for working in the Kingdom, which is the highest wage that can be paid. Whenever in a person's life he-she gets Jesus' message and decides to work for the Kingdom, that is when the person is entitled to the full pay, and that is when the person receives the full wage. Whenever in your life you understand the Kingdom of God, then that is when you enter the Kingdom fully. Whenever in your life you understand an idea from math, science, politics, religion, or environmentalism, then that is when you get the idea, get it fully, and cannot get it any better. Whenever in your life you get the Tao, the reality of human existence, the participation of all beings in all other beings, or Enlightenment, you get it, and you cannot get it any better. It does not matter if people before you got it too. People that already understand have no reason to feel jealous of people that just understood. Among people that have been in it for a while, enthusiasm might have faded and the work might seem hard. Among people that have just come in, enthusiasm is high and the work seems like play. But really the work and the reward are just the same and it is what they expected all along. Make yourself useful and do not worry about the reward or about what other people get.

### **Eschatological Jesus; Big Change is Coming Soon.**

Jesus did think there would be a big external change of the world and the change would come soon. As time passed and the big external change did not come, Christians substituted an internal change and membership in the Church for the external change, forgot about the external change, and forgot how quickly it was supposed to come, except when they used it as a threat. The passage about the fig tree continues as below in Mark 13:30. The "abomination of desolation" likely refers to a statue of himself that the Roman Emperor Caligula tried to put in the temple at Jerusalem and which helped start another severe conflict. Jesus could not have used that event as a reference because it happened after Jesus died. I have seen churches in the South put an American flag up above the altar, so I know how some Jews must have felt when Caligula did this.

Mark 13:30 – 13:31. \* "I say: the present generation will live to see all of this. Heaven and earth will crumble away but my words will last forever." \*

Mark 13:14 – 13:19. \* “When you see the ‘abomination of desolation’ seizing a place to which it has no right (you the reader should understand), then Judeans must flee to the hills right away. If a man is sitting on his deck, he should not go back into the house to get anything. If a man is in the yard, he must not return for his coat. Alas for pregnant women in those days and for women with nursing children. Pray [to God] that the big event does not come in winter. Those days will see anguish that has not been felt since the beginning of the created world and will not be felt again.” \*

Luke 12:35 – 12:40. Jesus speaks to his disciples: \* “Be ready for action, with boots on and the light shining. Be like firemen waiting for the bell to ring. Happy are the pilots and crew when their commander returns to see them ready for action. The commander will lend his own hand, prepare their rations, and suit them up even if it is in the middle of the night or just before dawn. Remember, if the house owner had known when the burglar was coming he would not have gone out and would not have let the burglar break in. Keep always ready because the Son of Man will come when you least expect him.” \*

Luke 12:49 – 12:53. \* “I have come to set the earth on fire and how I wish I could set the match to it now! Do you think I came to bring universal peace? Not at all. I came to divide people. From now on, in one family of five, three will oppose two and two will oppose three. Fathers will oppose sons and sons oppose fathers. A mother will oppose her daughter-in-law and a wife will oppose her son’s mother.” \*

Luke 20:34 – 20:38. \* Jesus said, “The [ordinary] men and women of this world go ahead and marry. But the people whom God has judged worthy of a place in the other world and to be resurrected from the dead do not marry. They are not subject to death any longer [so why should they marry and how could they marry]. They are like angels, they are like children of God [Elohim from the Tanakh] because they will be resurrected [and so have eternal life of a different kind]. The truth of resurrection comes out in the story of Moses and the burning bush. Moses calls God, ‘the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob’. Those people were alive. God is not God of the dead but of the living.” \*

Jesus probably did not quote scripture like that. Luke probably added the quotation to emphasize the point. Jesus likely did make the point about people being resurrected and about not having regular physical bodies.

### **Kingdom of God 3: Useful Images.**

This section is not formal theology. It does not try to interpret Jesus or God. It only offers images that might make more intuitive sense of the Kingdom of God for modern people. These images do not come from Jesus but from modern imagination.

#### *Groundhog Day.*

In the movie “Groundhog Day”, Bill Murray eventually realizes it is better to be useful and to do good than to keep up a bitchy attitude and annoy people. It takes him a long time to learn how to do good but eventually he really makes people feel better. He saves himself in the process. He quits hating himself. He becomes a loved and useful member of the community. Realizing this is getting into the Kingdom of God. Just the realization and a sincere effort are enough. You are automatically fully in when you see

this. You have to try hard once you get it, but you don't have to be superman. Just getting it makes the trying not so onerous. In one case, Murray tried to save an old drunk derelict but could not. That does not matter. It matters that he tried and that he felt the death of another human in his heart.

"Groundhog Day" focuses on the personal level, and a lot of it is maudlin. Many of us could not be content with only doing good deeds like fixing a flat tire. Some of us want to work on a more systemic level such as curing poverty or saving nature. That is fine too. If you feel the need to work on a system level, but you do not yet know how to work on that level, you should try to find out how. If you feel the need, and you see how, then you should do it. If you do not feel it or see how to do it, do not worry. The point is to see and feel the importance of being useful.

### *Contentious Angels.*

Imagine a group of angels still in heaven, bragging about how successful they could be in any created world. They brag that they could be like Bill Murray no matter what world they were put in. No matter what the world was like, they would discover morality, act in the best way, and act only in the best way. They might be selfish for a little while but they would soon come to their senses, learn how to do good in that particular world, overcome their selfishness, and then do only good. God calls them on their brag. He makes a world for them. But God is smarter than they are. He wants to teach them that they really can fail so they know how hard success is and so they really understand their fellows who succeed and fail. What kind of a world would God put them into? In that world, what would life be like for the angels who did succeed in coming to their senses? Our world is like the training world that angels would need to get the chip knocked off. The Kingdom of God is like the society of angels that come to their senses. I return to this image later in the book.

### *Video Games.*

People tend to project their world into metaphysics and theology. I do not remember who said that, if horses had gods, they would look like horses. "Gulliver's Travels" uses this idea. This subsection does too. That does not mean it is bad. Since the rise of computer simulations, many people have said this world is like a simulation and God is like a programmer. I am not always sure of their point but often enough it seems to be that God and morality do not matter so much after all. The world is not really real. Someday our character will end, and that is that. I can see the point but I disagree. While you are in the game, the game is real. No matter what video game we were in, morality would still be similar. The point is to do well in the game you are in. The point is to play the game as well as you can by the best morality that you know in that game. Just because the world is a game does not mean it is less real. As far as you are concerned, it is as real as real gets. Unless you are God, there is no reality other than the subordinate reality of particular games. If we could discover a greater reality for sure, and we knew what morality was supposed to prevail there, then we could import that morality here. Gnosticism and the "Matrix" movies try to do that. Until then, though, this world is reality even if it is only a video game and we are only characters in the game. While we are here, our task is to play the game by the best morality we know how. Just because it is a game does not mean we can stop playing the game or play by a different morality. Even in the matrix, unless we were Neo, our task would be to act like Bill Murray or Trinity. If in the end our character just ends, then we will not have lost anything by playing it that way.

## Chapter 4.04 The Early Church 1: Overall

This chapter and the next four, five in all, describe the early Church and the change in the image of Jesus. I do not illustrate with passages from the New Testament because that would take too long; some passages are cited in Chapter 04.07. Earlier chapters summarized what happened after Jesus died. These chapters fill in some details. These chapters are not a history of the early Church. The main goal is to allow you to read more books about the early Church, and to be able to deal with the point of view of the authors.

It is easy to say that the story of the Church is the familiar tale of a great person taken over by an institution. The story is that; but it is also bigger, more interesting, and more important. Please keep an open mind and pay attention to the bigger story.

### **Agrarian Hero.**

For reasons that I do not fully understand, the people in early large agricultural states, such as Babylon, Egypt, India, and China, over 2500 years ago, liked to have a divine or semi-divine hero. Usually the hero is a young man, but sometimes the hero is a young woman, as with Kwan Yim (Jaaw Mae Kuan Im) in China and Japan. The hero rescues the people from everyday life and makes everyday life more meaningful. The hero allows the people access to a better life either in another spiritual place, like heaven or the “Western Lands”, or allows them access to a better life in a future birth. The hero listens to their troubles, and often intervenes in this life to make it better. The hero absolves them of their sins. The hero saves them. The hero performs miracles, often from the time he was a child. The hero mediates between the highest God and the people. Usually the hero is more graceful, kind, and ethereal than the average person or average deity. The hero is a perfect person. Although the hero is noble, the hero relates to the common people more than to other aristocrats. The hero gives the common people their own version of the abundant good life that had been confined to aristocrats. Often the hero has a family and a band of followers who help. Often the hero dies and is reborn, or appears in this life as the result of many previous deaths and rebirths. Usually the hero is killed by enemies of the people and the true spiritual life. The dying and being reborn reflect the seasons and symbolizes eternal good life, as a seed has to die so as to be reborn a young healthy beautiful sprouted plant. The proper attitude toward the hero is faith, devotion, and worship. The proper attitude brings the proper rewards. In Egypt, the family was Isis, Osiris, Horus, and Set. In India, it was mostly Vishnu, his human incarnations, and the figures around him. In Buddhist countries, the hero has been various Bodhisattvas.

Jesus clearly falls into this pattern. Some among the early followers of Jesus gave him some of the attributes of an agrarian religious hero, and later followers eventually added the entire set. Modern states are the heirs of early agricultural states. People in modern states like to believe in a semi-divine hero as much as our ancestors did. Most Christians today know Jesus’ stereotyped attributes more because they adopt this mythic pattern than because they understand theology – just like followers of other religious leaders. Likely, today, people still convert to Christianity as much because they are attracted by these attributes as from any deep understanding.

All religions use these attributes, especially miracles, to argue that they validate their particular hero and their particular religion. If all religious leaders had these mythic attributes then they cannot be used to validate any one leader or religion. Christians call this pattern “mere myth” when it applies to non-Christian religious figures yet say it is literally true when it applies to Jesus.

C.S. Lewis said that Jesus was the only true case of these attributes, and other religious leaders had these attributes through a kind of metaphysical imitation of Jesus, even if they came before Jesus. Atheists debunk this myth as a way to discredit bad thinking and to force people to their views. Whether Jesus really had these attributes is not a question I can answer definitely. I think he did not. I think nobody really had these mythic attributes, but I don't care much. Whether the myth is literally true in any particular case is not very important. Seeing the main message of the religious leader is important.

If these attributes certainly got in the way of the message of great religious figures, then it would be necessary to debunk the myth harshly – Zen does some of that. But I have found that is not the case with most believers. Some people can respond only with devotion and cannot respond much to a deep message anyway, so trying to debunk the myth is useless. Some zealots insist on the attributes for their hero and no others; it is best to leave them alone. We can only hope that devotees and zealots do little harm. Most traditional believers cannot let go of the myth but are receptive to the main message as long as you do not attack the attributes of their hero. That is mostly what I do in this book. Some open-minded believers are curious about the myth, how it has shaped ideas about their leader, and about other religious heroes. Sometimes they can see beyond the myth to the messages. Then it is worth explaining the situation and comparing religious heroes without forcing any conclusions.

This chapter and the next two chapters explain how Jesus got some of the attributes, in particular the ones that are most in contention today such as his divinity. The point, as always, is not to discredit but rather to clarify. I aim to calm people down so they can see the reasons on the other side, and do the right thing. The right thing is the message of Jesus.

### **Kind Words about the Early Church.**

Besides becoming a large institution with the appropriate divine hero leader, the early Christian Church also served as the vehicle that carried Jesus' message, preserved it for us, and made sure that it could be offered to all people. Throughout Christianity, many followers have found Jesus in his message rather than in formal institutions. They could find his message only because the formal institutions carried it. The early Church was run by what we now call radical middle compromisers. The Church leaders took into account reasonable interpretations of Jesus and then sought the middle ground of likely truth, as some people today take into account the reasonable world religions and seek the middle path of truth in them. Within about forty years after Jesus died, most Christians tended to see him as God and to overlook that he was a man. The early Church insisted on seeing Jesus not just as God but also as fully human. This stance would have been the liberal humanist viewpoint of its time. The early Church lost converts and patronage because of this stance but the early Church stuck to it. Modern liberals owe their ability to see Jesus as a man to the stubbornness of the early Church. If you can work through a bit of early Church history (not only in this book) you might better feel Jesus' message even if you do not like what standard Christianity did to him. You have to know what Christianity did to appreciate the Jesus behind the institutions. I repeat this point often because I want to be sure it gets through.

## **Method and Ideology.**

This section prepares you to read other books. The earliest Church was not one thing; it was a mixture of groups, individuals, ideas, and practices. If each group had a distinct signature, a distinct idea or practice or place, then it would be easy to trace the history Jesus' image in the earliest Church. That is not the case. The earliest Church was more like a stew than a neat box of classified chocolates. So, modern scholars developed methods to tell the meat from the potatoes.

Conservatives see the package of the standard orthodox Nicene Church already clearly defined in the earliest groups of Christians. They assume groups that showed later standard dogma got their dogma directly from Jesus while he was alive and that they dominated the early Church from the beginning. They assume that the standard package comes as a whole directly from Jesus via those groups. They dismiss other groups as heretical.

In contrast, liberals see the earliest Church as not dominated by any dogma about divinity but as a diverse movement of people all following the Golden Rule and all working to change society according to modern liberal ideals. Within that early mass movement, a deviant group arose later that stressed ideas such as the divinity of Jesus and deviant practices such as the Lord's Supper and paranormal spiritual gifts. That odd group did not represent Jesus' intent or the true spirit of his all-about but it did come to dominate the movement and the Church. The message of Jesus persisted despite the arising of standard dogma rather than because of it.

I agree with the liberals but the situation is complicated. Ideological battles complicate the story of the Church.

(1) The first battle has been mentioned: Standard Christians feel their package must be taken as a whole or not at all. Any criticism of any part is seen as an assault on the whole. If we deny the right of the Church to interpret the bread and wine, then we deny all Church authority, deny Jesus was God, was resurrected, died, had a message, or even lived. If we say Jesus was only a prophet but not God, then we deny it all. In the same way, if we say Jesus had an important message, then we accept the whole package including the divinity of Jesus, the magic of the birth, death, and resurrection, the democracy of Bishops for the Orthodox Church, the Pope for Roman Catholics, and the rebellion against the Papacy for Protestants. I think we can accept what points we think are true without attacking the whole package of any church and without accepting the whole package either.

(2) The second ideological battle runs as a theme in the background of recent books on Jesus and the Church: The earlier in the literature we can find some idea or practice, the truer it is to Christianity, the more likely that many followers believed it, and the more likely it came from Jesus himself. If a writer wishes to validate an idea about Christianity, he-she looks for a scrap of evidence that it appeared as early as possible, regardless of other considerations. Unfortunately, this assumption is not true. It would be true only if we had direct access to all of what Jesus said without any filtering by any enthusiasts later. Think of Presidents Kennedy and Reagan, or of dead rock musicians. What devotees thought in the first decade after famous people died is less accurate than the truth that got sorted out later. Many exuberant fans did not even understand stars well but substituted their own ideas of the star's cosmic meaning. The

loudest fans are not always the best representatives of the charismatic dead. We have to take evidence as we find it.

(3) The early followers of Jesus were a mixture of people with various ideas, just like early rock-and-roll. We find Fats Domino alongside Jerry Lee Lewis. We find high divinity along with lowly carpenter. An idea or a practice might be in the early literature but might not represent what early followers of Jesus thought in general and what Jesus thought. The song "Strawberry Fields" is a "psychedelic" song but it does not represent the whole 1960s. The song "Smells like Teen Spirit" by Nirvana might or might not represent 1990s punk revival or Kurt Cobain. Particular ideas come from particular groups of early Christians but those ideas do not necessarily represent what was going on and do not necessarily represent Jesus - even if those ideas later prevailed - but they might. We have to think about what groups were present among early followers of Jesus, and how they imposed their "spin" on what followed.

(4) "The victors write the history". What we see as the practices and ideas of the Church is what survived because the group that prevailed carried them on. They won, so what they thought and did became standard. The winners did not always represent Jesus or the general followers of Jesus. They did not necessarily win because they were like Jesus. In my experience, subgroups that prevail within movements are not at all Jesus-like, and usually are not like the spirit of the original movement. The leaders of the Republican Party now are not like the people that began the Conservative movement and not like Lincoln or Eisenhower. People now think swing music is the core of jazz or bop is the core, but jazz was not those at first. Swing and bop represent jazz to because they prevailed among the public (swing) or hipsters (bop), not because they accurately represent early jazz or because they are better.

(5) The same fuzziness with groups, ideas, practices, and doctrine applies not only right after Jesus but also through the whole history of the Church. Just because the Christians in Antioch around 100 CE were influential does not mean the entire Church followed them and does not mean their ideas and practices are correct - but it might. Just because the church in Rome believed some things in 150 CE and eventually won the war does not mean the entire Church was like that or that those ideas and practices are correct - but it might. Just because grunge jam bands played their way does not mean all punk revival was like that and does not mean original punk was like that or that all punk should be like that.

(6) Not every distinct idea or practice necessarily represents a distinct group. Not every group had its own distinct ideas and practices. Ideas and practices span groups. Punk, heavy metal, and folk rock actually share a lot in common. We have to be careful if we say that a certain practice represents a certain group, a certain group represents Jesus, a certain group represents all of Jesus' followers, a certain group came to impose its will on all followers, or a certain group that used to represent Jesus and his authentic followers died out. Trying to write a history of the early Church is like trying to write a history of jazz without any evidence except a lot of "cuts" on old records from which all the labels have been removed.

In sum, consider four cases made of two options. We can like or dislike an idea, and the idea can be present or absent in the early literature. (A) Just because we like an idea, and it is present in early writings, does not mean Jesus endorsed it or the majority of early followers endorsed it. (B) Just because we like an idea, and it is not present in early writings, does not mean it used to be present, and it did

represent Jesus and his early followers, but some subgroup squelched it later. (C) Just because we do not like some idea, and it is present in early writings, does not mean either that it does represent Jesus and his followers or that some later group imposed it. (D) Just because we do not like some idea, and it is not present in early writings, does not mean it was never there. It might never have been there, or might have been there and got deleted. If an idea or practice is present in early writing, we have to deal with that and any possible links to groups. If an idea or practice is not present, we have to deal with that and any possible links to groups. This is why people want a simple, clear, consistent text such as the idealized New Testament, and a simple roster of clear-cut groups with typical ideas and practices.

### **Diaspora Jews and Gentile God Fearers.**

“Diaspora” means “cast about” as with seeds; “spora” means “seeds”. Applied to Jews, the term means the Jews who moved away from Israel. There were three large Diaspora. The first Diaspora took place over centuries and might have involved the most people. It was just the continual movement of Jews into the Greek and Roman empires, mostly to cities. By the time of Jesus, many Jews lived in cities all over the Roman Empire, and many had adopted some Roman ways. The second Diaspora came after 70 CE when Rome sacked Jerusalem. The third occurred after 130 CE when the Romans overran Israel and forced many Jews out. From then on, most Jews lived away from Israel. Some Diaspora Jews tolerated the ways of non-Jews around them while some were critical. Some did not keep the old Jewish ways while some became even stricter. Some traditions could not be kept while away from Israel, such as animal sacrifice by priests at the Temple. All Jews contributed to the rise of Rabbinical Judaism. Some of them contributed to Christianity.

Almost as soon as Israel was incorporated within the Greek empire after about 300 BCE, some non-Jews discovered Jewish religion, respected it, and tried to follow it. The idea of a single good God goes along with the best ideas of Greek thought. Some non-Jews identified Yahweh with one of their old major gods, such as Zeus, while others left native their religion to practice Judaism as best they could. They followed a less strict version of the Law that is based on rules from Noah rather than Moses. Not many non-Jews fully converted to Judaism and Mosaic Law because to do so required male circumcision. Some converted their children. Non-convert followers of Judaism were called “God Fearers”. How well Jews accepted God Fearers depended on the situation.

When Christians sought converts, they went after Diaspora Jews and God Fearers. Scholars use Diaspora Jews and God Fearers to explain how following Jesus changed into worshipping Christ. Scholars argue that both these groups were already used to the idea of a divine son of (a) god. Both groups played more of a role than Jews in Judea but it is really not clear how much of a role either played.

### **Defining Crises.**

Eleven crises helped define the Jesus movement, and helped build the early Church. As a result of these crises, groups of Jesus’ followers began to use ideas not in standard Judaism as we see now. The next section describes some of the ideas. The crises are in rough time order but not exact time order. Because now we focus on the Church instead of Jesus, I switch from “Kingdom” to “kingdom”.

(1) *Jesus' Death.* Jesus probably did not predict his death although he likely sensed he could get into serious trouble as leader of a movement. If he did anticipate his death, he did not forewarn followers enough so they expected it. The predictions of his death in the gospels were all added later to rationalize his death, the ignorance of his followers, and the impact of his death. Jesus' death was a great shock to his followers, both the fact of his death and the method. Crucifixion was deliberate humiliation. Until Jesus' death, followers would never have believed the messiah could die before he restored Israel or the messiah could be crucified. They could not understand how God could allow Jesus to die, or, if God arranged for Jesus to die, what purpose Jesus' death by crucifixion could serve. It seemed evil had beaten Jesus and God. Jesus' death was a greater shock and greater inversion of good-to-evil to his followers than the change of Annikin Skywalker into Darth Vader was to Obiwan Kenobi. Jesus' followers had to account for the role of Jews and Romans in the life and death of Jesus. They explained Jesus' death by saying it was really part of God's larger plan, a plan that had been secret until Jesus' death revealed it. Followers had to explain how Jews could be the chosen people of God in the long run and yet aid evil in the short run.

(2) *Jesus' Resurrection.* The resurrection was both a solution to the problem of Jesus' death and the cause of another problem in itself. It does not matter if Jesus really rose from the dead or not. It matters that some people believed they saw him after death, some people convinced themselves they saw him after death, and other people believed them. Followers had to decide if they believed in his resurrection. Followers that did not believe separated from those that did. Eventually followers that did believe dominated. Followers that believed then had to make sense of his resurrection within the constraints given by the problems below.

(3) *The Delay.* At first, followers who believed in Jesus' resurrection expected other dead people to rise soon and expected the Kingdom to come right away, certainly within a few years. Jesus did not necessarily say the Kingdom would come within a few years but he did make the coming seem soon, and his followers expected it soon. Followers expected that leaders, such as Peter, Thomas, John, Paul, and Jesus' brother James, would not die until the general resurrection had come. As time went by, other people besides Jesus did not rise from the dead, the Kingdom did not come, and the leaders died. Then Christians had to revise ideas about Israel, Judaism, the Kingdom, Jesus, time, history, faith, salvation, and what it meant to follow Jesus. As a result, followers' ideas about the Kingdom differed from Jesus' ideas.

(4) *Not Offending the Romans; the Kingdom.* Because Jewish and Roman authorities killed Jesus as a pretender to the throne of Israel, followers of Jesus made clear they did not want any standard political-military kingdom. Yet they still had to go along with the kingdom language that Jesus had used. So they had to explain how Jesus' followers had a kingdom with a head-and-ruler but the kingdom was not political or military, not populated by resurrected people, and not bounded by any state. The kingdom came to mean many things and still does: community, church, heaven on earth, heaven not on earth, the planet, family values, an internal attitude regardless of the external world, self-control, and the striving for a better world regardless of whether it is achieved.

(5) *Jesus as Human and God.* Some followers did not think of Jesus as any kind of god, and did not want other people to see him that way. Mainstream strict Jews would have resisted seeing Jesus as god way but I suspect some non-Jews also resisted. Some followers thought of Jesus as a minor god, more likely

the son of a god, like Herakles (Hercules) or Achilles. Mainstream Jews would not have thought this way but some non-strict Jews might have. Most people who thought this way were non-Jews. Some followers thought of Jesus as a strong high god, likely in line with Gnosticism and some form of emanation. Most of these followers likely were non-Jews. Some followers thought he was a mix of human and god, high god or otherwise. Some followers thought he was purely god and only used human likeness as a disguise to get the job done while here on Earth. It is not clear what difference these ideas about Jesus would have made in practices and in community relations. Likely some followers with strong ideas about Jesus as not god could not get along with other followers who insisted that Jesus was pure high god, and so the two groups formed separate communities. The early Church eventually had to settle on one consistent version. Ideas of resurrection and of Jesus as some kind of god go together and likely reinforced each other to the exclusion of other options.

*(6) Reinterpreting Rites and Making Rites.* Christians took over baptism from John. They did not want to be seen as merely an extension of John's movement, so they had to interpret baptism in their own way. They made baptism a secret initiation rite. They also started the ritual of the Last Supper, for which they had two versions. The first version was a communal meal for all followers, and did not stress conversion of the wine and bread into body and blood. The second version was a secret initiation rite too, along with baptism, and did stress conversion. Rituals like this help groups to keep solidarity, especially in the face of opposition.

*(7) Salvation.* Because Jesus died before the Kingdom came, Jesus did not offer membership in the traditional Jewish Kingdom of God. Yet following Jesus had to offer something. It offered salvation and insisted Jesus was the instrument of salvation. Salvation is the final entering into the non-political kingdom. There are many ideas of salvation and of how Jesus saves, and I do not go into them here. None make much sense to me. Ideas of salvation, resurrection, and have to conform to each other, and do tend to reinforce each other. It is easier to say a god saves than that a man saves.

*(8) Growing Importance of Non-Jews.* Jesus had aimed his mission at Jews, although he probably did allow minor non-Jewish participation. The important early followers were all Jews, and they aimed their mission at Jews too. Some of the issues listed above prevented Jews in general from going along. Some Jews-in-general did not believe in resurrection at all. Of Jews-in-general that did believe in some kind of resurrection, many did not think that Jesus was resurrected and did not think his life and death were the prelude to a general resurrection. The idea of Jesus' resurrection soon led Christians to give Jesus semi-divine or divine status. Consent to Jesus' resurrection meant also accepting his divine status. That, most Jews could not do. Membership shifted to non-Jews, including non-Jews that were not God Fearers and might know little about Judaism.

*(9) Split From the Jews.* It would have been possible for Christians to have a movement that did not include Jews, even one based on a Jew, without Christians and Jews being hostile, just as Buddhists split from Hindus but Buddhists and Hindus are not hostile to each other. Yet Jews and Christians did split and become hostile. Why this happened is less important than what resulted. Both groups hurt each other. They demonized each other. Which group got hurt the most depended on which groups was in power. When Christians finally gained the long-term upper hand, they hurt Jews over centuries. The greatest tragedy is that Jews and Christians could not recognize Jesus as a prophet and mutually benefit from his message. The second greatest tragedy is that Christian ideas formed in false opposition to the Jews,

such as denigration of Jewish Law, distorted Christian thinking for centuries.

*(10) Eligibility, Citizenship, and Benefits.* People understood citizenship and its benefits in the Empire of Rome, the state of Israel, or the Jewish Kingdom of God but people did not automatically understand citizenship and benefits in the Christian kingdom of God. Membership among Jesus' followers also meant citizenship in the Christian kingdom of God. People needed to know what that meant. As long as recruiting was aimed primarily at Jews, and before the rift with Jews, citizenship in the kingdom of God, and the benefits, were not issues. Any Jew was eligible for citizenship and would receive full benefits, whatever those might be. Non-Jews were not eligible unless they accepted God and the pre-eminence of Jews. After resurrection and divinity became key issues, and it was clear the kingdom was not coming soon, then eligibility, citizenship, and benefits became problems. Who was eligible and who not? If a person was eligible, what more did he-she have to do to achieve full citizenship? Were non-Jews eligible without doing anything further such as getting circumcised and without following the Law? Was God Fearer status enough or was more required? Did they have to follow the full Law or only some of it? Before, citizens got the benefit of resurrection and the eternal good life implied by resurrection. Now it was not clear what benefits they could expect. The most common benefit cited was salvation, but salvation has its problems; and other benefits were cited too, such as eternal life, heaven, and abundant life. The various benefits had to be sorted out. Eligibility, membership, and benefits depended on what kind of kingdom followers could expect. That, in turn, depended on who Jesus was, and what his death and resurrection meant.

*(11) Multiple Communities: Multiple Interpretations of Jesus and Everything.* Various groups of Jesus' followers separated into communities with distinct points of view. Although there was blending, the distinctions were hard enough so they could not be reconciled and so they caused trouble. The next chapters list and discuss the communities. The communities developed their versions of Jesus' life, his status as god or man, and of various rituals such as Baptism and the Eucharist. They used their doctrines and rites as initiation ceremonies, as ways to keep the group coherent, keep others out, and compete with other groups. The controversies in the New Testament are as much between these groups of Jesus' followers as they are between Jesus' followers and Jews. Eventually, one group had to emerge as dominant. That is the group that gave us orthodox Christianity and the Church up to about 1100 CE (AD).

### **The Church as Solution.**

A kingdom needs some order, and real people need a visible organization on this material earth even if the theoretical kingdom is spiritual and even if the eventual reward is in heaven. Whatever organization gives order, controls access, certifies members, excludes non-members, controls relations between members, and gives ideas, becomes the de facto kingdom. By becoming the kingdom on this Earth, the Church settled the early crises.

Jesus explained how followers were not just waiting for the Kingdom of God but actually lived it while they waited. That is the basis for the communities of followers. Early Christians really lived in communities that were distinct from neighbors and often better. The Church used the-community-of-followers-as-the-kingdom as a way to become the kingdom when it was able to decide who was in a genuine Christian community. At the same time, the Church did urge people to live in the appropriate lifestyle that Jesus

established as typical of the Kingdom of God. That was how the Church perpetuated Jesus' message.

The Church became the New Israel so the "old Israel" was no longer relevant, and questions about the kingdom that revolved about the old Israel were no longer relevant. Because Christian communities were the kingdom, and the Church controlled Christian communities, the new kingdom had, in fact, already arrived; it began with the Church, the New Israel. The Church took the place of Jesus' idea of the Kingdom, as a practical matter for now, a theoretical entity, and long-term institution. The Church defined salvation, and what people had to believe and do to get saved. Membership in the Church was equivalent to salvation, and salvation could not happen apart from the Church. The Church declared that Jesus was God, and was resurrected. The Church asserted that Jesus' life, death, and resurrection did save and did establish the kingdom (the Church). The Church explained why the idealized promised kingdom did not come right away, what the problems were with Jews, and why Christians had split from Jews. The Church explained relations between salvation, heaven, resurrection, kingdom, eternal life, and abundant life.

The Church sought validation retroactively in the sayings and acts of Jesus, in the controversies reported in the New Testament, and in bits of passages from the Tanakh. The Tanakh became the "Old Testament". Church writings, and writings that supported the Church, became the New Testament. The fact that the early Church did all this does not necessarily make it right or wrong, and does not necessarily mean Jesus is God or is not. Just because a formal institution acts like an institution does not necessarily mean it is wrong. The statuses of Jesus and the Church have to be decided on other grounds; see below.

### **Other Movements.**

Other movements besides Christianity have done much the same things as did the early Church, including religious movements such as Buddhism and political movements such as the Religious Right in America and Marxism in Russia and China. That does not make those movements right or wrong either, and it does not make Christianity necessarily suspect just because it is like other movements. No movement is right or wrong because it is a movement. As with the early Church, the correctness of all movements has to be decided according to the substance of their ideas rather than their similar form as human movements.

### **Political Synopsis.**

We need some dates for reference. Followers of Jesus tried to recruit primarily from among Jews during the first 40 years or so after Jesus died, until about 70 CE. They had some success but not much. The New Testament materials from before about 80 CE show arguments of Jesus' followers with Jews about Jesus, particularly the status of Jesus as divine.

After the Romans overran Israel and destroyed the Temple in 70 CE, there was no basis for the traditional Israelite religion centered on the Temple. Samaritans and Galileans became totally irrelevant and eventually assimilated to non-Jews. "Israelite" came to mean only "Judean" or "Jew". There were no Israelites other than Jews. Other Israelites either became Jews or became non-Israelites and non-Jews. Jews needed a focus for identity and religion other than the Temple and the priests, which they found in

Pharisees. From then on, Pharisees were the leaders of Jewish communities, identity, ethnicity, politics, religion, and culture. Pharisees became the basis for later rabbinical Judaism centered on the synagogue.

After 70 CE, Pharisees and Christians became increasingly hostile toward each other. Non-Jews increasingly took over from Jews in the Christian movement. By 100 CE, the movement had few Jews. What had begun as a pro-Israel movement in Galilee-Israel was transformed into a movement among non-Jews with strong tones of hostility to Jews.

The Jews revolted against Rome periodically. After 132 CE, the Emperor Hadrian decided to end the problem. The Romans overran Jerusalem, destroyed it, rebuilt it as a Roman city, renamed it, and forbade Jews to enter it. They forced many remaining Jews out of Israel. From then on, more Jews lived out of Israel than in Israel. Romans took over the territory of Israel, ending Israel as the Jewish homeland until 1948-1950 CE.

The Christian Church grew regularly if not rapidly. By the time of Constantine in the early 300s CE, the Church was a major institution but it was still not the dominant religion; traditional religions such as "Paganism" and Isis worship still dominated most areas. Constantine granted full tolerance to Christianity. Because he was himself a Christian, his decree of tolerance in effect made Christianity the official religion. Through consistent growth among urban people in general, more than because it was the official religion, Christianity became the dominant religion after about 500 CE. By then, the Church long since had the bishops, presbyters, deacons, priests, and formal hierarchical structure that Americans think of as "Roman Catholic", "Eastern Orthodox", or "high church". A series of creeds and statements of dogma after 320 CE, including the Nicene Creed, formalized Church ideas of Jesus as God and human.

### **Literary Synopsis.**

Within a few years after Jesus, people wrote his sayings and doings into lists. None of the lists survive in their original form except as fragments. Jesus' first language was Aramaic (close to Syrian and like Hebrew). Followers composed hymns but scholars have not reconstructed any hymn books; hymns are known from quotations of them in the New Testament. As far as I know, all the sayings that scholars know of are in Greek, so are not as Jesus spoke them. Although in Greek, it is easy to see that some sayings originally were in Aramaic and then translated into Greek. Scholars argue which were from Jesus and which were added later.

Within about three years after Jesus died, probably no later than 40 CE (AD), Saul-soon-to-become-Paul had an intense experience about Jesus, and began his activity in the movement. Paul wrote the earliest material that later became part of the New Testament, his letters to other churches, called "epistles". Paul wrote from about 45 CE to about 60 CE. Paul quoted some even earlier hymns that he did not write. Paul had secretaries who edited his letters. His letters were later edited again as they went among churches. Later people wrote letters in Paul's name so as to use his authority, much as writers attributed words to Jesus to use his authority. About half the letters attributed to Paul were really by Paul. The letters of Paul are among the best evidence for the beliefs of the earliest Christians.

Mark wrote the first gospel, probably after 65 CE but probably before 75 CE. He might have known of

the first destruction of Jerusalem after 70 CE, or might only have suspected great trouble; but he does not make a point of it. He used at least one book of sayings for a source. Mark might have been an associate of Peter, and might have used Peter as an oral (not written) direct source.

Matthew and Luke wrote the second and third gospels independently, around 75-85 CE, after the Romans sacked Jerusalem. They knew of the sacking of Jerusalem and used that in their polemics against Jews. They likely did not know of each other's work. Both knew of Mark and based their work on his gospel. Both also used at least one source book of Jesus' sayings and doings, very likely the same source book, now called "Q". They augmented Mark and Q, and rearranged the events of Jesus' life, both to serve the needs of their particular Christian communities and to get across their points of view. Scholars have been able to recover much of Q from their gospels. Both likely also used a separate source book(s) that he had but they other did not have. Their own particular sources have not survived other than in their gospels. Thus both Luke and Matthew had at least three sources for their work: Mark, Q, and their own independent sources. Luke wrote Acts of the Apostles as part of his gospel. Originally the two books were one book but, for convenience, were split into two and re-edited. The gospels of Mark, Mathew, and Luke are called "synoptic" because they follow the same plan ("are together to the eye").

John wrote the fourth gospel sometime between 90 and 110 CE. The writer was not the disciple John as claimed in the gospel. We do not know the relation between John the disciple and John the writer of the gospel. John the writer might have known the disciple John and/or might have borrowed his name and identity. Although the writer of John likely knew of Mark's gospel, John's gospel is not based on Mark; and the writer of John probably did not know of Matthew or Luke. John's gospel does not follow the same plan as the synoptic gospels. It is not clear if he had independent source books of the sayings of Jesus but probably he did. His account of Jesus differs in sequence and emphasis from the synoptic gospels. For example, the ministry of Jesus lasts for three years rather than one year, the disturbance at the Temple occurs at the beginning of the ministry rather than at the end, and the last supper is not a Passover meal. His view of Jesus is different than Mark, Matthew, and Luke, more philosophical. Somebody other than the main writer of John added the last chapter, Chapter 21.

A person who called himself John wrote the book of Revelations (apocalypse) sometime after 100 CE. It is not clear if this is the same John that wrote the gospel of that name or if it was somebody who wanted to use that name for its fame.

People other than Paul wrote additional epistles around the time of the gospels or after.

Much of the New Testament shows evidence of arguments among Christians, between Christians and Jews, and between Christians and non-Jews. The writers edited the sayings of Jesus and the story of his life to promote their point of view. Mark disputes bitterly with Jews but thinks of reconciliation if they will come over to his view. Matthew and Luke have largely given up on Jews and write mostly for non-Jews, perhaps for God Fearers. Matthew is very angry at Jews, and condemns them. Luke overlooks Jews to aim at non-Jews. John largely overlooks Jews to dispute with at least two groups of Christians: one which saw Jesus as not very divine and one which saw Jesus highly divine and hardly human.

None of the gospel writers, and few of the epistle writers, knew Jesus in person. Mostly the gospel writers relied on the books of sayings and doings of Jesus.

Within a short time after Jesus' death, followers differed in how they understood his life, death, and meaning. Some followers formed distinct communities in which ideas about Jesus were similar within the community but different from other groups. Scholars can reconstruct some of these groups from their writings.

Within decades after Jesus' death, the Church had bishops, elders (presbyters), and deacons. Within a few more decades, it had priests. It developed higher and lower offices along with formalized offices. It is very difficult to recover the organization of any original church before it began to look much like the organized Church. The best view is contained in the Didache (see below).

Besides the now-standard material in the New Testament, other people wrote about Jesus. For instance, there are at least twenty distinct gospels or large fragments of gospels, and fragments of many more. The early Church revered some additional material and the Church almost accepted some of the additional material into the New Testament, such as "Teachings of the Twelve Apostles" ("Didache") and "Shepherd of Hermas". Some additional material is found in the "Apocrypha" that often accompanies versions of the Bible. The New Testament is only a small selection of material from the time. The selection indicates the point of view of the Church, but, on the whole given the alternatives, I think it was a very good selection.

Some other additional material gave a different view of Jesus than the view held by the early Church, such as the Gnostic-Emanation view of Jesus or the view of Jesus as Wisdom-Emanation (Sophia). The early Church eventually condemned most of the other additional material as heretical. Some of the battles over these ideas were really spectacular as far as battles over ideas go, and contributed to the later orthodox view as in the Nicene Creed. Most of the heretical material originated after about 150 CE, well after the material that the Church later accepted as the canonical New Testament; so non-canonical material probably does not represent ideas about Jesus that were current during the time of Jesus. The non-standard material probably does not represent ideas of very early followers of Jesus. It might represent ideas of fairly early followers that were not written down until later, perhaps especially Wisdom interpretations of Jesus. More likely it represents non-Jewish later religious ideas that used the story of Jesus as a focus to be more concrete in their own speculations. Whether or not the ideas of the early Church about Jesus more accurately represent Jesus than such well-developed alternatives as Gnosticism is another issue that cannot be taken up here. In the 1970s to 1990s, the non-standard material received much popular attention because scholars thought it might represent views of Jesus that were more accurate or more compelling than what later became the standard Church view of Jesus. The story of what got into the New Testament as the standard Church view, what did not get in but is revered, and what was rejected as heretical, is too much to tell in this book. Textbook histories of the Church are full of it.

No one single book containing the works that we now call the New Testament appeared until after 400 CE. The works of the New Testament were not bundled as a unit until after 400 CE. Until then, even great scholars used bundles that did not contain all the later canonical books. Their bundles also contained some non-canonical books. The Council of Carthage in 394 produced a list of books that later served as the basis for the Latin Vulgate. At the same time, the similar Eastern Orthodox Church list did not contain Revelations but did contain 1 Clement, Barnabas, and the Shepherd of Hermas. The idea

that the Bible is a self-ratifying unchanging inerrant document on which alone the Church was founded was not current until long after the early Church was firmly established and long after the Church had ratified the Bible. Widespread practices of the Church, and general ideas about Jesus and Christianity fostered in the Church, predated the New Testament. I wish Relations had not been included in the New Testament but the Didache, and perhaps the Shepherd of Hermas, had been included.

The Christian community “routinized” as followers adapted ideas and practices of Jesus to the needs of regular life and politics. People began to believe and to do what made them feel good about their particular families and their particular ways of earning a living. They sought justification for their particular way of life in Jesus and the Church. They standardized ideas of Jesus as a divine or semi-divine hero, and as the patron of various activities that were important to their lives. The Christian community developed formal theology to back up early ideas of Jesus as divine and the development of Jesus as a divine hero. Early offices such as bishop, deacon, presbyter, priest, and monk were elaborated and then standardized. The Church became the organized, centralized, and hierarchical Church that we see today in various denominations. Ever since, it has been closely linked to official power, and has been used to validate and keep government and common order too.

### **Before and After.**

The remaining sections are optional but fun. The phrase “before Christianity” means “before these ideas were developed by some followers of Jesus” while the phrase “after Christianity” means “after that”. The phrases do not imply that Jesus held the ideas. I think he did not. The changes began among some followers a few years after Jesus died but did not take hold until at least twenty years after. The ideas are related and support each other, so it is hard to present them in any order. These changes are typical of the divine hero of early agricultural states. Similar changes occurred when Mahayana Buddhism supplanted Theravada Buddhism.

Before Christianity, Jesus’ message was aimed primarily at Jews and at Gentiles who had adopted a nearly-Jewish way of life. The message had to do with a real this-world Kingdom of God oriented around Israel, with the proper way to live under that Kingdom, and with the proper way to live so as to bring in that Kingdom. After Christianity, the message extended to include everybody. The Kingdom of God was the community of people who understood Jesus and his message. Eventually, though, the Kingdom of God came to be pretty much the same as the Church, and membership was extended only to people who could accept the doctrine and authority of the Church. Still, the ideas of universality and the right behavior for the Kingdom were not lost, and continued to drive the Church, its members, and other followers of Jesus.

Before Christianity, the idea of a messiah was not that important, it did not always mean a particular descendant of David coming to save Israel, and it was not the same as the “Son of Man” in Daniel. After Christianity, it did mean all that, and it meant Jesus; Jesus was all those things. Changing the meaning of “the messiah”, and then making Jesus into the new kind of messiah, was a way to make Jesus special, and to combine his human and divine identities. Many Jews did not accept Jesus because they did not think of a messiah in the way that Jesus’ followers developed the idea.

Before Christianity, Jews had souls but they did not worry about them too much. Life was about what

happens here. Few people were so good or so bad that they expected anything special after death. People did not worry about an entirely spiritual soul that is separable from a body. People did not worry about eternity. People did not worry about eternal reward or punishment. Jesus very likely did have an idea of the soul as a kind of pure person that was very much more valuable than any treasure on this earth, and that could be lost through confusion; he believed in personal integrity; but he probably did not have the idea of a soul that was later developed in Christian theology.

Before Christianity, Jews had few ideas of heaven and hell, and their ideas were not consistent. In Judaism at the time of Jesus, I am not sure what happened to normally (merely) good people or to really good (saintly) people. If you were a bad person, you were discarded after death, symbolized by the smoking garbage pit that was often found outside towns ("Gehenna"). You were not tormented. Ideas of Hell developed after contact with other people, especially Iranians, and were not much developed until about two hundred years before Jesus. After Christianity, you went to heaven or to hell as we know them now.

Before Christianity, sin was a problem for Jews but it was solvable. Jews had recourse through the Law to become clean. After Christianity, sin was much deeper and more corrupting. It was part of human nature. It was degradation of the soul. It could not be cleansed through the Law. It needed something deeper and stronger. This idea of sin was more like the idea of deep confusion and corruption that is a problem for Greek and Hindu philosophers or for Gnostic mystics.

Before Christianity, Jews recognized that all people carried within them tendencies to do both good and to do bad. People can spontaneously do both good and bad. Jews did not expect that either tendency had to dominate. Jews expected that the tendency to do bad could be controlled and the tendency to do good could dominate for nearly all people. The Law, society, friendship, and a relation with God were all forces that could bring the tendency for good to the fore and control the bad tendency. Jews recognized the original sin of Adam and Eve but did not think that it left an eradicable taint on the human soul, it only explained burdens such as having to work for a living and the pain of childbirth. After Christianity, evil was the basic character of people. Christians changed the tendency to do bad into the tendency to do evil. There was no innate tendency to do good. Not even training or the Law could eradicate our evil nature. Only God's grace could control our evil nature while we lived and eradicate the taint of evil after we died. Paul opened the door for this idea through using the original sin of Adam and Eve to explain why Christianity was needed but not accepted, and Augustine developed the idea into what we know now. They blended the idea of original sin with the idea of soul degradation. Now Christians carry an odd and extreme form of guilt. It leads to such odd and bad ideas as that people can never do any good on their own but that all good, even down to feeding the cat, comes only from God. All human action not guided by the grace of God must result in evil. All people are condemned to hell unless saved by the grace of God.

Before Christianity, individual people were not saved and salvation did not mean what it does now. Israel as a nation was already saved through its ongoing relation with God, and would be saved even more when it was restored. Salvation meant the restoration of Israel to its rightful place. After Christianity, individual people were saved, not nations, but, oddly enough, it was not clear what salvation is. The confusion actually makes salvation a more powerful ideology, especially for use by churches. For a few centuries after Jesus, salvation was Resurrection into the Kingdom. Then Salvation was going to heaven after death to be with Jesus forever, much as it is now for many Christians. Then Salvation was about the

right attitude (sometimes faith, sometimes trust in a church, sometimes love, sometimes something else). You could not go to Heaven to be with Jesus if you did not have the right attitude even if the right attitude alone was not enough without God's grace. You had to be justified to be saved. As an attitude, as taught by theologians, salvation is like the idea of enlightenment for Greek philosophers or Persian mystics. It is salvation from deep confusion and degradation of the soul caused by original sin and subsequent sin. To people who could not get this obscure idea, the only path was to do what a church told them to do, and hope to get into heaven with Jesus that way. Although salvation now is for individuals, salvation cannot happen outside a church. Some church always defines what salvation means and who gets it. Only a church can help you approach justification to be saved. Individuals are both independent of institutions (formerly, being Jewish) and yet still deeply dependent on institutions (a church). All these ideas of salvation go far beyond Jesus' (Jewish) idea of the integrity of the self, and seriously distort his idea. I believe the Christian idea of salvation is a fundamental error, Jesus would not understand it, and it has seriously hurt many people.

Before Christianity, Jews had people that were adept, strong, smart, cunning, beautiful, heroic, or nearly sinless under the Law; but Jews did not have the ideal of a spiritually perfect person. That would have been a bit blasphemous because only God was perfect. Even great prophets such as Moses, and great leaders such as David, were not perfect and were not expected to be perfect. Jews did not try to be perfect like God even if they did try to be as sinless as possible and even if they worked toward a kind of perfection under the Law. After Christianity, people carried the burden of perfection. Jesus became a flawless, sinless, perfect man potentially adept at everything. Jesus was more like the philosophical ideal man, like a Buddhist Arahant or Bodhisattva, or the Platonic King, than like a Jewish leader. If you could not be perfect like Jesus then you were not worthy of Jesus and of his salvation. This is part of the taint of original sin. Christians felt a kind of guilt that Jews had not. Progress through the Christian life was idealized as a continual cleansing and perfecting of the soul - but toward a goal that no mere human could ever reach. Christians had forgiveness, but that was not the same as cleansing through the Law, and it did not make up for being imperfect. Christians blamed Jews for trying to reach purity (righteousness) under the Law. Yet, ironically, Christians substituted unreachable spiritual perfection for reachable purity under the Law. Having to work toward an unreachable goal creates mental problems that plague Christianity and are the source of much Western literature. I do know of legendary Jewish guilt, and of the idea that no Jew can ever be good enough for his-her parents. I do not know how Jewish guilt relates to Christian perfection, imperfection, inadequacy, and guilt; but I do not think that it explains Christian ideas.

Before Christianity, the idea that a single person by himself could save Israel was just not available. A single person might act as the instrument of God, but that single person would need an army of Israelites for help, and God would do the actual saving, even in battle. Not even Moses, Joshua, or David saved Israel single-handed. Even before Jesus, peasants around the world often developed the idea of a savior, a "white knight" who rides into the village to clean up the mess and to restore justice and the good life. After Christianity, followers combined in Jesus the idea of the peasant savior with the idea of the messiah. The messiah saved not villages or nations but individuals. He saved them not from corrupt lords or corrupt bosses but from sin and degradation of the soul. Communities of the saved could then form saved communities.

Before Christianity, the idea that an instrument of God saved the whole world rather than the nation of

Israel would have seemed bizarre because the idea of salvation could only apply to Israel. If the world wanted to go along, it could be saved too in a derivative way. If non-Jewish individuals wanted to go along, that was up to them. If neither wanted to go along, that was not the problem of Israel. After Christianity, Israel was no longer at center stage. The whole world was the arena, and salvation had a different meaning. Israel was saved when the whole world was saved.

After Christianity became established, it was not clear what it meant to save the world, especially because salvation applied primarily to the souls of individuals. In Christianity, Jesus inherited the role of a national hero as Jewish messiah, and that role then expanded into the role of global hero, especially after Christianity included non-Jews and Jesus became God. At the same time, Christians wanted to appear non-political to Rome, so salvation, what Jesus did, had to be limited to individuals. It is not easy to put together the two ideas of saving individuals and saving the world. If you want to save individuals, you can save the world, and saving the world means saving everybody in it, then why not first just save the world with everybody in it, and be done with it? That plan goes against free will. If saving the world means giving each individual the chance to be saved one-at-a-time, then we can keep free will and it is possible to put together the two ideas, like Buddha does in Theravada Buddhism. But Christianity wants "saving the world" to be more than plinking down individuals one-at-a-time – probably due to the original "glow" of Jesus being an international hero divinity, rather like a Bodhisattva from Mahayana Buddhism. If saving the world means changing the world into the Kingdom after enough people are individually saved, then it is possible to put together the two ideas (I think along these lines); but a lot of people have already become Christians and the world does not seem to be better enough to say Jesus saved it, and the world does not seem likely to get better enough soon enough. If saving the world means setting up for the final battle of good and evil, then I don't know what to say. Like the idea of individual salvation, the idea of saving the world is confused, the confusion serves institutions while hurting people, and the idea is not what Jesus had in mind. People are better off not thinking of salvation but instead thinking of being useful.

Before Christianity, the idea of a devil had already developed but not all Jews had fully accepted the idea or used it to explain all evil. Stuff happened. In the Tanakh, Satan was usually a plot device to move along considerations of the human condition and of God's role. Jews did not need to find an explanation for all the bad in the world. After Christianity, the world was not just bad sometimes but infected with evil, the evil had to be explained, and the devil was the source of all evil. The savior had to defeat the devil in order to save individuals, nations, or the world.

Before Christianity, Jews had trust in God, had ways to express trust in God, and had acts to express the relation to God. After Christianity, Christians had faith in the person of Jesus. That faith alone was supposed to be enough. That faith had many chores to perform. In theory, in dire straits, faith alone has to be enough. In practice, faith alone is not enough, so practice has to conflict with theory; but that sequel belongs to the history of Christianity rather to contrasts with Judaism.

Before Christianity, Jews worshipped God and had a relation with God. The relation was based on mutual respect, as when Abraham bargained with God for the lives of the good people in Sodom and Gomorrah. After Christianity, Christians worshipped Jesus, were devoted to him, and sometimes had a relation with him. The character of any relation changed. After Christianity, the relation was more like the devotion an employee has to a charismatic CEO, a faithful henchman has to his-her gang leader, a fan

has to a rock star or movie star, or the devotion some confused lovesick person has to somebody who loves the devotee as a friend but “not that way”. It is like the devotion toward a god that Hindus feel in “bhakti” worship or like the devotion some Buddhists feel toward a favorite Bodhisattva.

Before Christianity, instruments of God did not necessarily have to die to serve God or to achieve their goals. In fact, most of the major figures of the Tanakh lived to old age and had a fairly successful family life, including Moses. The story of Abraham not sacrificing Isaac teaches that death for God is not usually required. Living for God is better. After Christianity, the instrument of God achieves his success through dying. The martyr becomes the model for the instrument of God, a problem that plagues us to this day. Followers have to explain how the martyr’s death succeeds in carrying out the mission from God.

Before Christianity, the idea that a death in itself was effective would have seemed a bit weird. Jews understood the idea of willingness to die for a cause or a people. There was no shortage of heroes among Jews; Samson is a good example because he made it into the movies. Death as a self-sacrifice would not by itself be effective, especially since God ended human sacrifice after he had Abraham release Isaac. There were no ideas available as to how a death alone could be effective. Even the idea that the death of the messiah could somehow automatically save the world did not make sense unless it was the first step in a general resurrection – and that interpretation had to be dumped when a general resurrection did not happen. After Christianity, Jesus’ death and resurrection somehow themselves saved the world. Christians had to explain how Jesus’ death and resurrection saved the world. Christian theologians have never solved this puzzle and still do not agree. This problem is why C.S. Lewis uses “magic” for the saving ability of Aslan’s death in the Narnia books.

Christians had to explain how Jesus’ death and resurrection defeated evil and defeated the devil, especially since evil continued on after Jesus’ death and resurrection, and people in general were not resurrected. In part, Christians said people would have eternal life in another world, but that explanation did not always make sense and did not always satisfy people. It might be that some people have an eternal good life in some other world but why did Jesus have to die and be resurrected for that to happen? Theologians still have not settled this issue either. This problem is one reason why the idea of an Armageddon caught on after Jesus; the devil is still not fully defeated, and must be fully defeated at the end in a real battle. Even in the Narnia books, even after Aslan is resurrected, saving Narnia and defeating the Ice Queen requires a real battle with real weapons and real blood.

Before Christianity, Israel and the Kingdom were external. They were about birth, the annual rituals, the Law, accepting the authority of the priests or rabbis, and sometimes about conversion. After Christianity, Israel and the kingdom were largely internal. They were about beliefs and attitudes. External situations or acts could signal allegiance or rebellion but they were only signals. What really mattered was what went on in your soul. As we will see, running an internal kingdom in this world is quite difficult, and so the ideal internal kingdom was soon externalized.

Christians had to reconcile the idea of salvation as an inner thing with the idea of Jesus defeating the devil and evil. Really, the question here is free will. If salvation is internal, then what difference does defeating the devil make? If defeating the devil makes a difference, then how can salvation be internal?

To explain his death and resurrection, some followers of Jesus reinterpreted his life in terms of his death

and resurrection. His death is what his life was really all-about. His death and resurrection became more important than his life and teachings. Those followers subsumed his life and teachings into his death. His life prepared for his death and resurrection, made his death and resurrection more effective, and gathered a core group of people to carry on. God staged all this as a roundabout way to defeat evil and to instigate good. Some other followers likely did not interpret his life in terms of death and salvation, and tried to stick to his moral message as most important, but those other followers did not leave lasting texts and a lasting church.

The ideas that Jesus' death and resurrection somehow automatically save, and that his life and message were really a preparation for his death and resurrection, are more convincing if believers think of Jesus as divine. Thinking that way allowed believers to connect Jesus to other strains of thought such as emanation, Wisdom, Gnosticism, dying-and-rising gods, one-with-God mysticism, and types of Platonism. The problem of Jesus' death stimulated ideas of Jesus as messiah, suffering servant, sacrifice for atonement of sins, dying-and-rising god, Son of God, second Adam, remover of original sin, and non-political King of Jews and of the world. Early Christian writers combed the Tanakh for validation for this point of view. Eventually the group of followers that thought along these lines came to dominate Jesus' followers.

Before Christianity, the idea of a dying-and-rising god was known to Jews but not very popular. It did not fit in with ideas about Yahweh. The Egyptians had a version in the myth of Isis and Osiris, and the Greeks had a version in Dionysius, whom the Romans called "Bacchus". The dying-and-rising god represents the annual cycle. A symbol of the dying-and-rising god is the seed, which must die and be planted in the ground like a corpse, before it can come to life again and rise again. Death automatically causes salvation and getting better. Unless some person is willing to die for the sake of others, like a seed, the world cannot come to life again, renewed and better. Later philosophers used the idea of dying-and-rising-again-even-better as a metaphor for the spiritual journey. Many charming versions occur in the books of Joseph Campbell. C.S. Lewis uses this idea in Christianity when he says that people have to give up bad habits, vices, and short-term kicks to progress spiritually. Bad habits have to die for good habits to be born. After Christianity, followers of Jesus had a dying-and-rising god whose death automatically saved, brought eternal life, and brought abundant life. They still had to come up with explanations for how it worked but at least they could fall back on the basic myth that it did work even if we do not understand how.

Before Christianity, the idea that an instrument of God would remain celibate throughout his-her whole life, and could be pure only by remaining celibate throughout life, would have contradicted the basic idea of living life here as life is here. Jews sometimes did remain celibate temporarily to be ritually pure temporarily, which was sometimes needed to carry out a duty like burying a relative or to carry out a special mission such as battle. But ritual purity was not expected to last beyond temporary need. Even a person whose life was dedicated to God, such as Moses or Joshua, was not expected to stay ritually pure in that sense, and to stay celibate. A person might choose to be celibate for personal reasons but that was a personal choice and not a condition of being an instrument of God throughout a lifetime. After Christianity, celibacy became the ideal, and the celibate martyr for God became the model.

Before Christianity, the reward of being a faithful Jew was being a faithful Jew, feeling confident in the favor of God, and having a reliable relation with God. The punishment for not being a faithful Jew was

cutting the relation, as happened to David in his old age. Sometimes the reward was a rich and happy life now. Sometimes the punishment was making a person sick, poor, and alone. After Christianity, the reward was an “abundant life” but “abundant life” could not mean the same relation with God as Jews had, and did not mean being rich and normally happy. Christians knew that many fellow Christians were poor and so could not hold up the expectation of wealth as a normal part of the Christian life, as some mega-churches do now. The new abundant life had to be filled with something else that was good-in-itself and made life worthwhile. That something else is not so easy to specify but eventually Christians settled on a multi-tier approach.

Theologians settled on the idea of a close relation with God. Normal people began to understand the reward as being in heaven with Jesus. Some Christians began to expect the reward here as a good family life, early “family values”. Some Christians did expect wealth and comfort, as in mega-churches now. Some Christians expect the abundant life to mean the ability to do supernatural things here on earth, such as prophecy, heal, exorcise, and speak in tongues – like getting their dose of “the Force”. See below. Even now, Christians disagree on what abundant life means.

This paragraph specifies some of the changes that happen when the Church becomes the Kingdom of God. Before Christianity, the Kingdom of God was centered on Israel. Israel was the Kingdom of God and other nations were vassal states. After Christianity, no actual state or nation was the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God was made up of believers in Jesus’ divinity. Israel was no longer Israel. “Israel” was now the people that believed. The people of God were no longer the Jews. They were the people that believed in Jesus. Membership no longer depended on birth or conversion. Membership depended on belief and practice, and in the willingness to go along with what previous members taught. Anybody could become a member as long as they believed properly, acted properly, and accepted the authority of previous members.

Before Christianity, Jews had special people with special spiritual gifts, including healing and prophecy, but these gifts were not expected for Jews in general and were not part of the idea of a good life. People that claimed the gifts were restricted to a community of prophets, and sometimes had to undergo tests to prove the gifts were genuine. People that had the gifts were better than other people in some sense but they were also under a heavy burden because of the gifts. They were not generally better. They did not necessarily expect greater wealth, power, or approval. Some prophets lived miserable lives. Some lesser prophets did benefit from these gifts, and some people did try to claim these gifts as a way to improve their fortunes. But it was not something that the people in general sought or needed. After Christianity, the average Christian did expect access to spiritual gifts. The average Christian seemed to think that having spiritual gifts proved he-she was a real Christian, and that being a real Christian entitled some Christians to “Jedi powers”. The average Christian got the idea that gifts were part of the abundant life. Spiritual gifts made people better than others. People sought gifts so that they could feel better than other people and so that they could feel saved. These ideas still prevail among some Christians now. The early Church fought hard both to allow the possibility for the gifts but not to make gifts part of expectation for the abundant life and to limit expression of gifts so that order was maintained in the community. Paul’s letters have some funny passages on this problem.

All these changes amount to a great reinvention of a religion. Jesus became the focus of a devotional religion of dualism, fallen evil, salvation, justification, redemption, revival, worship, and gifts. If the new

religion had not arisen by scuttling Judaism, it would be a magnificent artistic achievement.

### **Might Be True.**

Long before Jesus, long before Judaism was standardized around worship at the Temple, Judaism was not one thing but a mixture of ideas, practices, opinions, and subgroups. Hebrews shared many similar ideas with related neighbors, such as the flood and the god El, and they borrowed some ideas such as the dragon ("Tiamat") as the reigning monster of the deep and the symbol of chaos. El was not originally alone but had a wife and son, and probably he chaired a community of gods ("Elohim"). Yahweh originally was a storm and warrior god who was more powerful than other gods, not the only God. Only gradually did El and Yahweh merge. Only over time did the merged God Yahweh-El become the only God rather than the most powerful among gods. During most of their history, Hebrews were not strict monotheists as Jews are now. Original Hebrew religion changed into Judaism over time; I could do a "before and after" with Judaism as I did above with Christianity. I do not think Jews would argue that this invalidates Judaism. I agree. We take Judaism as it is now, as a final religion, and consider its truth in that form. Buddhism arose from, and vastly changed, Hinduism; yet I do not think Buddhists would argue that invalidates Hinduism or Buddhism. Because Christianity changed some elements of Judaism, Christian ideas were similar to ideas of some non-Jews, and Christians made a church, does not mean Christianity is wrong. Christianity argues that Jesus had ideas about himself as God that would have been quite odd for a Jew, but even that does not necessarily mean Christianity is wrong. Even more strongly: just because Christianity might have changed the status of Jesus to something he would not have understood himself while alive, into God, does not mean Christianity is wrong. You have to take ideas and practices as you find them, and judge for yourself.

### **New Israel.**

Suppose a powerful group of people that are not of British stock decide that they will become the New Britain. They decide that nobody can be British by birth any more. All "old" British immediately lose their citizenship, so, if you were born old British, you in particular cannot become New British. You have to call yourself something else now. The New British are the people that love what they think is important about Britain. They select what they think is peculiarly British such as Arthur, Celtic folklore, and a strong sense of fair play. Only the New British can carry out those practices and ideas with purity and success. Any other group might have a pale imitation of those ideas and practices but their version cannot be true, full, lasting, and satisfying. Another group might have a sense of fair play, but not like the New British. Not even the Old British can live up to the way of life that they created. The New British pick a new regent. Almost anybody except an old Britain can become a citizen of New Britain if he-she memorizes what is important about the identity of the New British, does what a New British person is supposed to do, and swears allegiance to the new king or queen. Most New British live in America but they do not have to. They can live anywhere as long as they join New Britain. New Britain is an ideal country rather than a real country limited to a real place. Still, to make sure old British do not form a counter movement to New Britain, the Old British must leave the British Isles to settle anywhere else, maybe in old British colonies such as India, where, hopefully, they will be absorbed into local culture and disappear as a race. New people move to live in the British Isles, some of whom are New British but most of whom are just people of any non-British stock looking for an available place to live easy. The British Isles get filled with people

from Jamaica, Haiti, Norway, Lebanon, Thailand, and Crete. Now imagine that Russians do this to France; that Palestinians do this to Lebanon; or that Muslims, Asians, and Africans do this to America. That is about what Romans and Christians did to Israel.

This is a dismal story. The bad effects go beyond the Christian Church usurping the identity of old Israel. Using this logic, a series of countries in the West claimed to be the New Israel, and claimed the right to conquer and to oppress their neighbors. Using this logic, Europeans claimed the right to conquer and civilize the world. Americans fall back on this logic when they exert power. In effect, Muslims claim to be the New Israel when they claim to have superseded Jews and Christians, claim to fight Satan all over the world, and wish to impose their idea of proper life all over the world.

To avoid seeing this story as only dismal, I rationalize and romanticize. This romanticizing is not a way to re-assert New Israel under a different gloss but it is a way to salvage some good out of the situation. Allow that the Jews really are the people of God if not the only people of God. It makes sense to say that a person is a person of God not because his-her parents were people of God but only because he-she is worthy through his-her own actions. That is a core message in the Book of Ezekiel. Even Jews say that a person who does not act like a Jew is not a true Jew, as American Blacks say that a person who does not "act Black" is not really Black, and Americans say a person that does not act American is not American. A true follower of Jesus, a true Christian, is not somebody who got sprinkled with water once but who acts on the message of Jesus. It is wrong to call even true followers of Jesus the "New Israel"; it is an insult to Jews. We should stop doing that, and should stop thinking with that ideology. But we should not give up the idea that Christians, followers of Jesus, or anybody who acts on ideas from the prophets, is a real person of God regardless of nominal religion. People that call themselves the people of God have to act like true people of God, and have to never use the labels "New Israel" or "People of God" as an excuse to do harm.

## Chapter 4.05 The Early Church 2: Groups and Directions

This chapter goes into some details of the story of the early Church and the shift from Jesus the prophet to the God Christ. Followers of Jesus were not originally called “Christians” but were called followers of the “way” of Jesus. They were “wayists” like Taoists or like followers of the Way in the sci-fi TV shows “Andromeda” and “Star Trek”. Non-Christians first called them “Christians” in Antioch in Syria when non-Christians heard them using the term “Christ”, probably in the 50s CE. Let us call all the people that followed Jesus the “movement”.

### **Early and Continuing Deification; Jesus as Divine Hero.**

Within a few years after Jesus died, some followers already began to speak of him as semi-divine and as like a Mediterranean hero such as Herakles (Hercules) or the Twins Kastor (Castor) and Polydeukes (Pollux). Jesus did miracles, was wise, fought terrible villains, died young to save us, had one divine parent, and was divine himself. His power, heroism, divinity, the size of his sacrifice, and efficacy of his sacrifice, all grew with the telling. His real humanity faded and he became primarily a divine hero, most important son of the highest God. Unlike other Mediterranean heroes, Jesus’ Father had no rival gods, and Jesus had no rival gods, although Jesus did have rivals of nearly divine ability such as Satan (Lucifer) the Devil.

Within two hundred years, Jesus became more than a Classical semi-divine hero; he became like a Hindu avatar or like the Mahayana Buddhist Bodhisattva for his era of the world. These figures might have begun as human but they became fully God, they created the world, sustain the world, guide the world, save the world, lead all sentient beings to salvation, sacrifice themselves to do this, dualistically fight against evil, and monastically rise above evil and duality. Jesus’ early character as superhero and his early semi-deification paved the way for his later change into full Godhead Bodhisattva.

The problem is how much of Jesus’ character as superhero and deity might really be part of his original personality and his real identity, and how much has been added later. Liberals think almost all the divine attributes were added later while conservatives see almost all the divine attributes as factual. The problem is worsened according to what subgroup of Jesus’ early followers might have done the embellishing, and what we get when we strip away the gloss. At least some of Jesus’ Jewish followers began to see Jesus as more-than-human right after his death although they likely did not see him as fully God equal to God the Father. When non-Jews took over, they continued the development of Jesus as more-than-human.

(A) Orthodox standard Christians take the early Jewish ideas about Jesus as evidence that Jesus really was more-than-human, and take later non-Jewish embellishment as further evidence. Orthodox standard Christians tend to see these ideas as not coming from mere humans but as coming through divine inspiration from God the Holy Ghost.

(B) Assume that early Jewish followers of Jesus already had ideas of him as semi-divine or divine. Assume that later non-Jewish ideas are unjustified elaborations. It still seems reasonable to give the

early Jewish ideas of Jesus as more-than-human a lot of weight. Just because non-Jews later might have fantastically turned Jesus into divine superhero does not mean he was only human. He might really have been divine. Even if we remove later non-Jewish embellishments, we have to be careful not to remove a true divine core that lies underneath, for which the early Jewish ideas might be evidence.

(C) On the other hand, even if a residue of Jewish ideas remains after we remove later non-Jewish embellishment of Jesus as divine superhero, that remainder does not necessarily mean the early Jewish ideas of him as semi-divine are correct. Likely the early Jews who thought of Jesus as somewhat divine were a non-typical minority. Early Jewish ideas of Jesus as semi-divine might be wrong, and later non-Jewish elaboration might be wrong too, so Jesus might really be only human. This is the liberal position. I am close to this position.

(D) Suppose we accept that later non-Jewish embellishment of Jesus as divine is distinct from earlier Jewish ideas of Jesus as divine. This understanding does not mean that early Jewish ideas are right or wrong or that later non-Jewish ideas are right or wrong. The early Jewish followers might have gotten it half-right, and then the later non-Jewish followers built on the basic early Jewish insight to get it all right. Both groups were right about Jesus' divinity, each in their own ways. The two sets of ideas complement each other to make a correct fully rounded picture of Jesus including his full divinity. Of course, the later non-Jewish ideas about Jesus' divinity had to avoid going too far such as by seeing Jesus as only-divine-and-not-human-at-all; but they did manage this feat. This is roughly the position among standard Christian scholars and might have been the position of the early Church.

(E) The early Jewish followers, or the later non-Jewish followers, might both be right or wrong; but that does not matter. Jesus loves us whether we think he was God or not; God loves us whether we think Jesus was God or not. What matters is not Jesus' status as any kind of god but his message. This is my position. I think all ideas of Jesus as divine are very likely wrong, Jewish or non-Jewish, and are due more to human mythic imagination than to revelation or facts. Even if Jesus is divine, we do not understand his divinity well enough to make a big deal out of it. We do understand his message well enough to act on it. I trust Jesus and God to be kind on this matter.

**“Lord”.**

Within a few years after Jesus died, even before Paul began to write his letters about 45-50 CE, at least one large group of Jesus' followers already began to see Jesus as more-than-human, and began to institute practices accordingly. We can look at some practices of the early Church to see the transformation.

Even before Jesus died, likely some followers already called him “lord”. For Jesus, the term “lord” probably started out meaning (1) “respected human”. It soon moved through (2) “mixed divine and human” to (3) “A god” to (4) “THE God, the same as the one and only God Yahweh-EI”. The shift in meanings was allowed because of overlap between the Greek term “kyrios” and the Hebrew term “adonai”, both of which are translated as “lord” but do not mean fully the same thing.

The Hebrew term can apply to both people and God but not at the same time. When it applies to people, it can only mean “aristocratic superior lord” and cannot mean “God”. It is often used as a euphemism for

God. It cannot apply to any mixed being because Jews do not allow mixed beings. When it is used as a euphemism for God, Hebrews always keep in mind that it is only a euphemism and that using the same term for people and God does not mix people and God. The Greek term can have all four meanings, and Greek thought does allow mixed beings. The New Testament is in Greek. Where the Hebrew term "adonai" occurs, it is translated by the Greek term "kyrios". What is not permitted in Hebrew happened in Greek. Jesus started out as a respected human but ended up as co-equal to the one and only God Yahweh. The same thing probably happened in the spoken languages before the New Testament was written, at least among followers who spoke mixtures of Greek and Hebrew.

Even though fuzziness of language helped the shift in meaning for the term "lord" (adonai) as applied to Jesus, the shift likely did not depend primarily on fuzziness of language. The shift indicated something going on in how people thought. Unfortunately, this long after the original events, it is hard to be clear about what people thought and how they expressed it. People can subdue linguistic fuzziness when they want; and they accept changes allowed by fuzziness only when they want the changes independently of the fuzziness. "Dude" did not originally mean all of what it does now, and "dude" did not have to shift in meaning if people did not want it. People can use the fuzziness of "dude" to mean either a man or woman – I find "dude" applied to a girl funny - or can clarify with the term "dudette" if needed. Likely some early Jewish followers did call Jesus "adonai" and meant some kind of divine lord. Fuzziness between Greek and Hebrew helped allow a shift in meaning that some speakers already intended. Fuzziness in language did not alone cause the shift. Why some Jewish followers did mean "divine" when they used "adonai" is not clear. Other Jewish followers who did not think of Jesus as divine did not necessarily go along with them; this group used "adonai" to mean only "respected human". The way of speaking of the group who thought of Jesus as divine did win out finally: "Lord (Adonai) Jesus" now means much more than "Lord Byron" or even "Lord Buddha".

### **Messiah.**

Followers of Jesus probably speculated on him as a messiah or as the Davidic messiah even while he was still alive but I see no evidence that he embraced that role or that term. He certainly did not make a point of it. Probably within a few months after he died, people did call him the messiah, meaning the Davidic messiah, meaning a unique human-divine person with a unique relation to God. Although an idea of a messiah was available in Jewish culture of the time it was not this idea. I think early followers of Jesus who stressed this kind of messiah did not use the idea as it was found in Jewish culture then but instead shaped what was available into the new idea that we see in the New Testament. I cannot prove my interpretation. Giving evidence would take us too far out of the way. The New Testament idea of Jesus as this new messiah went along with the idea of him as Lord. It is possible that non-Jews would have reshaped Jewish ideas in this way but it is more likely that early Jewish followers of Jesus began the reshaping of available Jewish ideas.

### **Eucharist; the Last Supper; the Lord's Supper.**

"Eucharist" means "good gift" or "good grace". "The Last Supper" refers to the supper that Jesus had with his disciples just before he was arrested. "The Lord's Supper" refers to the sacramental practice that developed out of the Last Supper. "Eucharist" was the original Greek name for the sacrament. See below for passages about the body and blood. See Chapter 06.02 for further comments on the Lord's

Supper.

The "Lord's Supper" played a role in early Church organization. The Lord's Supper symbolized Jesus' divinity, and the relation of believers to Jesus as God. Jews consider consuming blood a sin. Jews identify blood with the life force. The life force of any being belongs to God, so the blood belongs to God, and so humans may not drink liquid blood or eat congealed blood. In the Temple in Jerusalem, the blood from animal sacrifices was poured out to God. Jews do not sacrifice people. Jews accused their neighbors of human sacrifice, with some reason; they looked down on their neighbors for it; and they used the contrast to support ethnic distinctions. Recall from the Tanakh that God told Abraham to sacrifice Isaac but later relented. Perhaps the major point of the story is not that God ordered the sacrifice of human Isaac but that he relented and then stopped the sacrifice. In relenting, God abolished human sacrifice. To Jews, eating Jesus' body and drinking his blood, even as bread and wine, was doubly blasphemous as both human sacrifice and drinking of forbidden blood. Yet the practice was in fact set in among some early Jewish and non-Jewish followers of Jesus, they interpreted it as participating in the divinity of Jesus, and they interpreted it as necessary if they were to be resurrected and have eternal life. This view was revolting to Jews that were not in the movement, to many Jews that were in the movement, and to many non-Jews as well who thought that Christians were drinking real blood rather than symbolic blood. Among non-Jews, there is precedence for drinking the blood of a god, usually in symbolic form such as wine. Still, I do not see how Jews could come to this practice, not even if they considered Jesus God, and especially if they considered Jesus God.

I think Jesus wished people to eat bread and drink wine in memory of him and in celebration of the Kingdom of God. I do not think Jesus interpreted eating bread and drinking wine as eating of his body and drinking his blood.

The standard interpretation of the Eucharist in the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches is: the bread is the literal body of Jesus, the wine is his literal blood, and we have to literally chew and gulp if we want eternal life. We really eat a real body and we really drink real blood. We cannot get eternal life if we do not chew and gulp. If we believe, and do not commit heinous sins, then the act of chewing and drinking almost guarantees eternal life. It is Christian magic. It seems like black magic. The Roman Catholic and the Orthodox Churches use passages from the New Testament to support their interpretation. I disagree with their position but I do not strongly disagree with their interpretations of the relevant passages. Instead, I reject the passages.

Not all early followers of Jesus interpreted the practice as standard Christianity does now. Something like the standard Roman Catholic and Orthodox interpretation only won out after several decades. The victory was part of one group taking control of the Church. That group edited his words after Jesus died so as to support their position. I do not believe the passages accurately reflect the words or intent of Jesus. Passages in the New Testament that describe the activity of ritual eating and drinking accurately report some of Jesus' words as support for the position of the winning faction; but the passages also attribute ideas of the winning faction to Jesus as a way for that one group of early followers to justify itself. The act of eating bread and drinking wine, and the now-standard literal interpretation as chewing and swallowing, became part of a secret magic ritual for advanced followers that brought them to innermost membership in one faction of the early Church. The Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches are the heirs of the winning faction and its practices, as is standard Orthodox Christianity.

Some other people of the time who wished to follow Jesus could not accept this magical meaning of the practice. Some followers of Jesus left the early Church when they reached the stage where they learned of this idea and of the secret ritual. I do not know of clear alternative non-standard interpretations of eating and drinking from the early Church. I think alternatives were suppressed by the winning faction. There is not much point in guessing. I do not want to seek validation for my point of view by projecting it backwards. The winning faction distorted Jesus' words so as to create a magical ceremony that would separate them from other kinds of believers and would thus make their faction a strong in-group. They succeeded.

Some Protestants disagree with the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches, and give interpretations of the passages to support their own ideas. In effect, Protestants say the practice is not a literal eating of meat and blood but uses meat and blood as a metaphor. It is not always clear what the meat and blood symbolize. I agree with Protestants somewhat in their ideas about the practice but not with their use of the passages. They are reverse-editing passages to support their position while I simply discard the bad passages.

### **Lord's Supper (Eucharist) Passages.**

In Mark, the passage is simple, and suggests Jesus had symbolism in mind, although Mark does not explain the symbolism. The words are not entirely from Jesus but are Mark's reworking to bolster the magic of Jesus' death. "The covenant" means the new Christian covenant to replace the old Jewish covenant. Jesus very likely would not have used "covenant" in that way. The new Christian covenant is instituted when Jesus dies, so the passage refers to his sacrifice. As far as I can tell, the passage does not intend literal body or blood. This passage also shows that Jesus expected the big change to happen quickly. Eating bread and drinking wine meant more than it does now, especially eating the first piece or "breaking bread" (literally tearing a piece off a loaf). Breaking bread and drinking the first wine was a minor ritual that said "now this meal is underway, now this meal is will successfully complete, and with it so our lives with our family and friends". When Southeast Asians open the rice pot and spoon out the first rice of the evening meal, the feeling is much the same.

Mark 14:22 – 14:25. \* During supper he broke bread, said the blessing, and gave some bread to the assembled disciples. He added these words, "As you take this bread, you also take my body." He took the first cup of wine, offered thanks to God, and then gave some wine to the disciples. They all drank from the cup. As they did, he said, "As you drink, you also drink my blood, the blood of the covenant. It is spilled for the sake of many people. I tell you I will not drink the fruit of the vine again until the day when I drink it in the Kingdom of God." \*

About thirty years later, John offers a more elaborate scenario. Jesus is describing himself to some Jews and to his disciples. In doing so, Jesus creates a rift within his disciples. The scene does not take place at the dinner just before Jesus died but long before. It is a turning point in the movement. At first in this scene, John suggests that Jesus means not his actual body but his words, his ideas, and his message; probably as was originally intended in Mark. Then John changes to mean Jesus' actual body. In Greek, the word for "eat" is more like "chew" and the word for body ("sarx") is literally "flesh", so the shift is clearer in Greek. John purposely mixes up symbolism with literality, so eventually we have to take the

symbolic as literal. At first we think that, “the bread which I give is my own flesh” refers to the fact that Jesus will sacrifice himself to save others but then we see it means Jesus literally gives his own flesh for eating. As usual, John embeds all this in a philosophical discourse in which he makes Jesus divine even if not yet quite fully equal to God the Father. The actual dispute among followers that John reports came decades after Jesus died, not at an altercation with the Jews while Jesus lived. John took the terms of a later dispute and rewrote it to get sanction from Jesus for John’s group. Jesus is the first speaker.

John 6:46 – 6:66. \* “No, nobody has seen the Father directly except the one who came from God the Father, and only him. In deepest truth I tell you, [you do not have to see directly, you only have to believe because] believers already have eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the desert but they died anyway. When I talk about the bread of life, I mean the bread that comes directly from God. If a man eats that bread, he will never die. I am that living bread from God. If anyone eats this bread, he will live forever. In addition, the bread from me, which I give, is my own flesh. I give my flesh for the life of the world.”

This explanation led the Jews to argue. “How can a man give us his own flesh to eat?” When Jesus was teaching in a synagogue in Capernaum, he explained further. “I also give you my blood to drink. In deepest truth I tell you, unless you eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Son of Man [me], you will have no real life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood will live eternally and I will resurrect him on the last day. My flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives always in me and I live always in him. As the living God [of life] sent me, and as I live because of the Father, so whoever eats my flesh will live through me. My flesh is the living bread from God. It is not like the bread that your ancestors ate and yet died eventually anyway. Whoever eats this bread [of my flesh] will live forever.”

When they heard this further explanation, many of the disciples objected. “This is more than we can stomach. We won’t listen to this stupid talk”. Jesus knew some of his disciples were disgruntled, and so continued. “Does this [modest knowledge of the divine] amaze you? What if the Son of Man levitates back to the place where he came from? The spirit alone gives life. The flesh alone cannot do it. My words have both spirit and life. Yet still [despite the blessing of hearing my words] some of you have no faith. That is why I told you before that nobody can join me unless the Father has given that to him as a gift.” Jesus knew the whole time who would find faith, [who would drop out of the movement], and who would even betray him. From then on, many disciples left the movement and no longer followed him. \*

I doubt Jesus said any of this in these words. The phrase “more than we can stomach” is John’s little joke. The phrases “whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood will live eternally” and “you can have no real life in you” remind me of vampire movies such as “Bram Stoker’s Dracula”. John has Jesus institute the practice while Jesus still had much work to do yet the other gospels have Jesus institute the practice at the Last Supper before Jesus’ death. John emphasizes the divisive character of the idea of the literal body and blood while the other gospels emphasize its holiness, probably as symbolic body and blood. It cannot be both times and both ways. The different times show their different concerns and show how gospels writers felt free to retell a story to suit their needs. I think John was more correct than the other gospels about the timing. I think Jesus used bread and wine symbolism long before the Last Supper to mean the meat and blood of his message, and I doubt his poetry caused this much controversy. The gospel writers other than John impose the idea of literal body and blood into the Last Supper, and make a big deal of it there, to gain extra ratification for a new tradition that arose after Jesus died. Some

groups within the movement had accepted the new tradition while other groups had not. John's group had already accepted the idea of literal body and blood to such an extent that John did not have to re-write the timeline to gain extra support for the idea among his group. Although Jesus did not speak these words, John has Jesus as the speaker because John emphasized the importance of "the Word", John needed Jesus' words to explain a rift within the movement, and John needed Jesus to back up John's group in the rift. John needed to reinterpret Jesus' words and he needed to institute the practice of the Eucharist before the time of the Last Supper. In the end, the Church rejected John's timing while it did accept the timing found in other gospels and John's dramatic use of Jesus' speech. I do not know what the Church makes of John's timing.

### **Resurrection Stories.**

Ideas of Jesus' resurrection likely began right after he died. Resurrection itself need not make Jesus divine because many Jews expected a general resurrection. As the first person in the general resurrection, Jesus would be special but not necessarily divine. As the resurrection of other people did not come, followers had to explain why Jesus was resurrected but other people were not. That delay makes sense if Jesus was not just anybody but was a special divine person who prepared the way for a later resurrection. Probably various ideas and terms (lord, messiah, body and blood) of Jesus' divinity and stories of Jesus' resurrection came shortly after he died, arose roughly at the same time, and fueled each other. Probably visions of him resurrected occurred for several years after he died but not for decades.

"Them" below refers to disciples. A disciple is not necessarily an apostle. There were many disciples but only a few apostles. The time is three days after the crucifixion. Then there were only eleven apostles because Judas left the group after betraying Jesus. "Simon" refers to Peter.

Luke 24:13 – 24:35. \* On the third day itself, two men who had been interested in Jesus were walking on the road to Emmaus a few miles outside of Jerusalem. Jesus himself started walking alongside the men but something prevented them from recognizing who it was. Jesus-in-disguise asked, "What are you talking about with such intensity?" Both looked really down. One man, Cleopas, said, "You must be the only man in Jerusalem not to know what happened the last few days." Jesus-in-disguise said, "About what?" The men said, "About Jesus from Nazareth. He was a powerful prophet both in what he said and in what he did. We were hoping he was our Liberator. But instead our head priests and rulers contrived a death sentence for him and then crucified him. Curiously, though, this is the third day since he died, and some women in our group told a story that shocked everybody. They went early in the morning to his tomb but didn't find his body. They said they saw some angels who told them Jesus was alive. So some of our group went to the tomb and found it disturbed as the women said but they did not see his body."

Jesus-in-disguise said, "You are really not bright. You refuse to believe all the prophets said. They told you that the Messiah had to suffer like this before he could return in full glory." Then Jesus-in-disguise began with Moses and explained to them all the texts from the Tanakh that referred to him as the Messiah. By that time they were at Emmaus, and Jesus-in-disguise started to go his own way. The two implored him to stay with them. "Stay here [for the night] with us because it is almost day's end." So Jesus-in-disguise went in with them. He sat down at evening table, took bread, said blessing, broke bread, and offered it to them. As he did that, suddenly the eyes of the two men were really open and they

recognized him. As soon as they recognized him, he disappeared in front of them. Both exclaimed, "Whoa! That is why our hearts burned as we walked along the road and he explained scripture to us." Instantly they jumped up and ran all the way back to Jerusalem where they found the Eleven and the rest of Jesus' group, and they told their story. The group also said that Jesus still lived. They told their own story of how Jesus had appeared to Simon, and told how they too had recognized Jesus when he broke bread." \*

Originally this story did not include the elaborations such as the theological explanations, the jibe at the Jews and authorities, and the reference to the foretelling of Jesus in the Tanakh. In this version of the resurrection, unlike other accounts in the New Testament, only women see Jesus at the tomb, and an angel has to explain to them what it is all about. If Jesus had just arisen, some women had only just seen him that morning, the women did not tell many disciples, and the disciples they did tell did not believe them, then it is very unlikely that the event is already the talk of the town, everybody already believes in the resurrection, and two travelers from Jerusalem already are obsessed with the events and their meaning. Those elaborations became typical of stories about Jesus as the Church went along. Notice how Jesus is changing from a prophet that wanted to restore Israel into a Messiah (Christ) with a bigger agenda. The center of the story is: two men meet another man along the road; they begin to talk about important matters, including Jesus; they share a meal, as Jesus once did with people; as they share a meal and talk about Jesus, they realize they have understood each other and "bonded" as they could not have done otherwise; even though Jesus is dead, it is as if he were still alive with the people that "get" him, and he is still changing their hearts; especially when people share meals as he used to do, it is as if he were still alive and helping them. In this sense, it is true that Jesus is still alive and still with the people that will listen. The message of the story is to trust other people and share with them, especially food. When you do, you will be in the Kingdom of God as if you were still with Jesus when he was alive.

As more people told this story, they changed "it was as if he was really there with us" to "he was really there with us and was really alive". It is like the game "telephone" or like a chain of gossip in which imagined details become real and then take over the story. Jesus' imaginary presence overcame the message. Eventually the metaphysical glamorized version displaced the real version; the magic displaced the message. The message was lost. This happens with seeing Elvis Presley too.

John Shelby Spong argues that many stories of Jesus' resurrection are like this, and that other stories about Jesus might be like this too. People tell stories to explain what it means to understand Jesus and to follow him. They tell stories to explain his life and message. The stories feature Jesus as if he were still alive. Jew has used this kind of story before with other characters in the Tanakh, such as Moses, and would continue to use this kind of storytelling throughout their history. This kind of story was so common among Jews that it has a name, "midrash". Jews understand clearly the difference between "as if" and "really was". Yet during the telling from one Christian to another, the stories featuring Jesus changed so that they became not "as if" but "really was". Fun words spoken to stimulate the imagination became the literal Word of God. Later on, the Church inherited the stories. It had to defend its position and its sacred texts, especially the gospels. To defend itself, it asserted that the stories are literally true, not just "as if". The stories were never meant literally but they were taken literally and defended literally, and that can cause a lot of trouble.

**Superman.**

Probably because of when I was born (1949) and how I misspent my youth, the early deification of Jesus reminds me of the transformation of Superman. His true Kryptonite name, "Kal-el", is a mix of Greek and Hebrew, and, I think, means "good" ("kallos") from Greek and "God" ("El") from Hebrew. When Superman first arrived on the literary stage in the 1930s, he was not who we know now. He "was able to leap tall buildings in a single bound", "faster than a locomotive", and could not be pierced by a needle to receive a vaccination (the movie "Superman Returns" makes a visual joke out of this early comic book problem). He could run fast and jump far but he could not fly, and he was not able to fly faster than the speed of light so as to reverse time. I think he did not have heat vision or x-ray vision although he did develop them quickly. He could not withstand nuclear bombs because there were no nuclear bombs in the 1930s. He was not smarter than all the scientists put together. He was not especially brainy. He fought bank robbers rather than Lex Luthor or other super villains. Kryptonite did not exist. He aged normally. There was no super dog or super girl. There was no city in a bottle. All the extra powers came to him as the writers allowed their imaginations to roam to provide what people wanted. Once he gained a power, he never lost it. Once a power stepped up in scale, such as flying speed, it never reverted. Once his story gained a situation, such as Bizarro World, the situation returned again and again. Originally he did not think of sacrificing himself for the greater good. He wanted a girlfriend. Now Superman can never live a normal life but always has to be available to make our lives better. Superman started out as "super jock", an extension of teen fantasies, and ended up as something qualitatively different. At first, he was more like the Hulk than the Superman we have now. Eventually he became like a Mahayana Bodhisattva. In whatever religion it appears, the god-hero who sacrifices himself to save other people, to give us life at the cost of his own, fills a deep need. To quote the movie Spiderman (not Superman, but it fits): "With great power comes great responsibility" – if you are a good guy. As Jesus was deified, he began to fill the need. To better fill the need, he was deified, purified, and expanded more and more. Eventually the character and the need matched well enough to endure. Similar transformations happen to other heroes even if they do not go as far, even to heroes that expressly do not have any super powers, and, these days, especially to heroes that have a dark side. Batman and Conan clearly became the instruments of light and good for their time and place.

### **Church Organization.**

Within a decade of Jesus' death, his followers divided into two levels. Not all subgroups had both levels, but both levels were in the subgroup that eventually dominated the movement. The first level included regular followers who met together, sang songs, and helped each other. The second, deeper level included initiates who knew secret ideas and had secret practices such as baptism and the Lord's Supper. Eventually the secret practices became open, so the distinction between the two levels blurred, but in the early years it was important.

Regular followers of both levels met together and sang together. The songs were like hymns, and the songs taught about the movement or taught doctrine about the movement such as the lordship of Jesus. Singing was not a Christian innovation; Jews had done it for a long time, as with the Psalms. Christians adapted the Jewish practice. From what I have seen, singing is a great recruiting tool. Already while Jesus was alive he ate regular meals with his followers. Probably the meals were not like the Last Supper or like the Lord's Supper of modern churches. The meals had bread and wine, but that was true of all meals if participants could afford it. Soon after Jesus died, followers began to have regular

meals together, and the meals were remembrances of him. Those meals became ritualized.

Probably as soon as Jesus died, followers ritualized the communal meal. The meals might have included disreputable characters such as tax-collectors, prostitutes, and the poor. People probably pooled resources for the meals. The meal might have been a big source of support for poor followers. I think this is like large church suppers even now in American churches, often held after services or in the evening on Sunday. In addition, some followers modified the general meal to make a second kind of meal that was a secret meal for the in-group. The in-group meal included a re-enactment of the idealized Last Supper in which the in-group followers ate bread-as-body and drank wine-as-blood. They discussed doctrines they did not want other followers and the public to know, such as about Jesus' body and blood. When pagans later criticized Christians as cannibals, they had these secret meals in mind.

Baptism was an important initiation rite into the deep level. At first, not all followers necessarily were baptized although I think most persistent followers were baptized. Baptism indicated a commitment to the movement where people went from being casual followers to being real followers, maybe as it does today. Members of the in-group had to be baptized but just being baptized might not necessarily have made a follower a member of the in-group. I do not know what it took besides baptism to be a member of the in-group. I think Jesus did not baptize his followers but some of Jesus' disciples did baptize the followers they recruited. Baptized followers considered themselves to be in a direct line from the baptizing disciples of Jesus. I think baptized members of the in-group felt they then had a right to baptize others and to continue the line. People got the idea that you had to be baptized to be resurrected, and, later, to go to heaven. What I just described seems to preclude infant baptism but the practice of infant baptism arose in the decades after 70 CE, so I do not take a stand either way.

Churches kept doctrinal disputes internal and tried to keep all other disputes internal as well such as over inheritances or marriages. Christians did not like to go to court. Influential members of a church tried to get the parties to agree privately. If that did not work, a group of church members met with the rivals. Among Western Americans and among many Christians I have known, this attitude persists now. Westerners used to consider court shameful.

Partly to keep the peace, and partly to keep purity of conscience, members went through public confession of sins and faults. After confession, other members decided what to do with the sinner. I do not know how lenient or harsh Christians were. I have seen films of this practice among modern people but I have never seen it in real life. It looks unpleasant. Sociological works on modern cults refer to it as a form of mind control. This practice kept people out of the movement, maybe especially rich and powerful people. Eventually the Church replaced this technique with private confession to a priest or bishop. Later on, Protestant churches dropped it altogether.

These relations and practices imply at least some officers and hierarchy. They do not necessarily imply the full spectrum of offices and hierarchy of elaborate churches such as the Roman Catholic, Orthodox, or Episcopalian.

### **The Game: Jesus Slowly Reveals Secrets to His Idiot Disciples.**

Jesus did not take on the role of messiah, and Jesus did not expect to die and be resurrected. If he had,

he would have made it openly clear, his disciples would have known, and it would have been a big part of the movement even before he died. Yet it was not. Beginning with Mark, the earliest gospel, the writers made up a story to explain why it was not. As in the resurrection story above, the gospel writers have Jesus play an odd unrealistic game with his disciples, who look stupid. The reason nobody knew about Jesus identity as Messiah and the need for his death was not because Jesus did not try to tell people but because his disciples were too stupid to get it. At first, Jesus keeps his identity and the future secret. He lets the secret out bit-by-bit, and he makes the disciples guess at his identity and at his upcoming death and resurrection. Demons know Jesus' secret identity, and what will happen, because Jesus has been around since before time and demons have been around since at least the dawn of time. Jesus commands demons not to reveal his identity, not even to his disciples, but sometimes demons let it slip anyway. People in general, not his disciples, cannot know who Jesus is until his death and resurrection, but must know after. Jesus wants his disciples to know even before but he does not want to tell them directly. He wants them to guess. So Jesus asks questions, performs miracles, and drops hints; but no disciples get it. Finally Peter does get it, but not quickly and not well (see below). It is not clear how well the other disciples get it even when Jesus explains, although they seem to pick up on the idea that Jesus is divine. Not until after Jesus is killed and resurrected do they seem to fully get it, and even then only slowly.

If Jesus did play this game, that might explain why nobody knew in advance who he was and what was going to happen, but using this game to explain general ignorance is a stretch. This game is out of character for Jesus. Jesus would not talk like this or act like this. It is not clear why Jesus would hide his identity or the upcoming events of his death and resurrection from anybody. If he did hide them from his followers in general, it is not clear why he revealed them to the disciples, or why he revealed them through this game rather than directly. If he did reveal the truth to his disciples, it is not clear how they could be so stupid. I do not see how keeping everything a secret from everybody but his disciples would have made his death and resurrection more effective. If Jesus had revealed the future to a general audience, the revelation would have helped the movement. The gospel writers are skillful at dramatizing the game but it is not clear why readers-listeners would go along with it.

Not all the original followers of Jesus' Way had in-groups. One subgroup that did have an in-group invented this game. This game explains the death of Jesus in a way that gives power to in-groups. This game explains why they know of Jesus' divinity but other followers do not. This game might be one reason why the particular subgroups within the Jesus Way that had in-groups, secret baptism, wine-as-blood, and bread-as-body eventually prevailed over followers of the Way that did not. Followers that did not believe in magic, did not believe in this game, and did not have magical in-groups, could not compete, and so died out.

### **Early Church Groups.**

The Jesus movement split into at least three distinct major subgroups. These are not the same subgroups that I mentioned before, that split along the lines of Jesus' divinity; but there is considerable overlap between the two groups of three. As with the other group of three, the lines between these three groups were not sharp.

#### **(1) Jerusalem Church.**

James the Just led the first group. James was “the Just” because he strictly adhered to Jewish Law and apparently he had a noble personality. He lived in Jerusalem. He interacted often with Pharisees and Jewish authorities, and they got along well. James was very likely close kin to Jesus, likely Jesus’ half-brother through Mary. According to standard Church doctrine from about 200 CE onwards, James might have been Jesus’ cousin but could not have been his brother because Mary did not have children after Jesus, and Joseph was not Jesus’ father. In contrast, the early Church right after Jesus did seem to recognize James as Jesus’ half brother. James was the accepted leader of the entire Jesus movement with all subgroups while he lived, held in regard even above Peter and Paul. Meetings of the movement were held in Jerusalem under his auspices. He claimed the right to set doctrine and judge disputes. He would have been like a first Pope or Patriarch if those offices existed then. In 62 CE, a Jewish official, acting on his own, killed James. Other Jews were shocked and they had that Jewish official deposed.

The church in Jerusalem under James is called the “Jerusalem Church” and sometimes “the Nazarenes”. The Nazarenes and the Jerusalem Church might not always have been the same group, so the reader should be careful in attributing facts about the Nazarenes to the Jerusalem Church under James.

James insisted that all followers had to adhere to the Mosaic Law including the dietary laws, and men had to be circumcised. In effect, he required followers of Jesus to be Jewish or to convert to Judaism, and to maintain Jewish identity. James saw the Jesus Way as the new direction of Judaism and not as anything apart from Judaism. James did not allow followers of Jesus to be only God Fearers following a Law less strict than Mosaic Law.

Further beliefs of the group in Jerusalem have to be inferred from a group that might have descended from the group in Jerusalem, “the Ebionites”. After James died in 62 CE and the Romans destroyed the temple in Jerusalem in 70 CE, the Jerusalem Church did not continue long. It might have contributed to another group called “the Ebionites”, which means “the Poor” in Aramaic, and who lived in Syria or Jordan. Their poverty was voluntary. They endured for a few hundred years, and then died out. The later Church that became the standard Church considered the Ebionites heretics, what we know of them is only from reports of the standard Church, and so the information probably is biased, but the information is probably reliable enough. The Ebionites believed that Jesus was a normal human being born naturally of a man and woman; was not divine; observed the Law assiduously; that God made him a prophet, maybe when John baptized him; and that Paul had distorted Jesus’ teaching. The Ebionites did not like the Hellenists (see below) and Paul was a clear Hellenist. Some Ebionites might have believed that Jesus started out as a normal man but was adopted by God and made semi-divine; probably when he was baptized. When the Jerusalem Church and the Ebionites disappeared, this line of thinking about Jesus nearly disappeared as well.

The Jerusalem Church left no particular documents. The Ebionites wrote at least one gospel, but it has survived only in fragments or in quotes from other sources, and cannot be considered in this book. The letter of James in the New Testaments might or might not be by James the Just although it is attributed to him. For current thinking on the status of that letter, go online. Even if the letter was not entirely by James it likely represents his thinking.

## **(2) Hellenists.**

The second group is called "Hellenists". It is better to think of them as moderate Hellenists. Some writers call them "hellenizers" because this group wanted other people to adopt their ideas. To many Jews of Jesus' time, "Hellenists" was originally a derisive term, like "Yankees", a term that stuck and got less derisive over time. "Hellenes" was the Greek term for themselves. A "Hellene" was a Greek or, more often, any person of any ethnicity who had accepted basic Greek ideas even if he-she also observed the customs of the society-culture of birth. To accept the Greek way of life was to "Hellenize". Romans were Hellenized. Many residents of Syria were Hellenized. Paul was a prominent Hellenist. Christian Hellenists directed much of their missionary activity to God Fearers, Diaspora Jews, or even to ordinary residents of the Empire that were neither Jews nor God Fearers. They probably did not try to convert Jews in Judea. Christian Hellenists were called that because of their personal roots in Greek culture and because of who they focused missionary activity on, not necessarily because their beliefs about Jesus came out of Greek culture or reflected Greek beliefs.

(Many ideas that are called "Hellenistic" did not derive from Classical Greek culture or philosophy. True, the ideas are Indo-European as opposed to Semitic but the ideas are more akin to ideas from Iran and India that had spread throughout the Middle East, and had been taken up by some philosophers and religious leaders. These ideas are part of later middle Platonism and Neo-Platonism that in turn became the basis for ideas of the Church. There is no equivalent to the Indian Bodhisattva or Iranian devil in Greek culture.)

In general, the Hellenists stressed the divinity of Jesus and the magical efficacy of the birth, death, and resurrection. At least at first, the majority likely did not think that Jesus was divine in the full sense of God the Father. They thought Jesus was divine but at a subordinate level or in some other way. Only gradually did the faction that believed in the full divinity of Jesus, and that the divinity of Jesus is identical to the divinity of God the Father, win out. Hellenists did not think followers needed to convert to Judaism, be circumcised, or follow the full dietary laws.

Necessary fussiness: Some Jewish followers of Jesus did not believe in his divinity. Some Jewish followers of Jesus who were not Hellenized might have believed in his divinity. Some Jewish followers that were Hellenized did believe in his divinity while some did not. Some Hellenized followers of Jesus, Jew or non-Jew, did not believe in Jesus' divinity while others did. I do not know: what ratio of Jesus' followers were Jews or non-Jews at particular times; what ratio of Jews (followers of Jesus or not) were largely Hellenized; what ratio of non-Hellenized Jewish followers of Jesus believed in his divinity; what ratio of Hellenized Jewish followers of Jesus believed in his divinity; and what ratio of non-Jewish followers of Jesus (mostly Hellenized) believed in his divinity. I do not know the ratio of various beliefs among Jews in Jesus time, such as for example the ratio of Jews that believed in Heaven or did not.

The Jerusalem Church and the Hellenists argued strenuously over what was required of followers of Jesus. James the Just and Paul did not get along. Paul called himself an apostle yet James did not accept Paul as an Apostle. James did not accept claims that non-Jewish followers of Jesus did not have to follow Jewish Law. James and Paul argued openly over dietary rules and over the requirements on non-Jews. For the most part, the Church as a whole accepted the right of James to decide, at least until the Jerusalem Church was destroyed after the fall of Jerusalem.

The Hellenists were not uniform in belief and they formed subgroups that argued among each other. They ranged from modest Hellenists such as Luke, to fervent but orthodox Hellenists such as Paul, to orthodox but metaphysical Hellenists such as the author of the gospel of John, to extreme believers in the divinity of Jesus such as the Gnostics. If you do not know much about Paul, see the chapter on him later in this part of the book. Some Hellenists felt that Christians were completely free of the Jewish Law and should deliberately not follow it so as to make a point of not being under it; Paul argued against them, saying that Christians should follow the Law when they could even though they knew they did not have to. When I grew up, Greek parents even in the United States did not circumcise their sons so as to make a point of contrast with Jews. Even now, Americans eat pork on religious holidays such as Christmas so as to continue to emphasize differences with Jews – some Americans do not know that is why they eat pork then. Some Hellenists followed the lesser law of the God Fearers and would not eat food that had ever been offered to any other gods, even the household gods. Some respected the Jewish Law almost fully.

The letters of Paul (45 – 60 CE), the gospel of Luke, the Acts written by Luke (both after 70 CE), and the gospel of John (around 100 CE), are classics of Hellenistic Christianity. From them we can see the variation in Hellenistic ideas. Other documents show forms of Hellenism that more strongly stress the role of Jesus as philosopher or as spirit, such as the gospel of Thomas, but they were not accepted in the New Testament. Hellenist documents that were taken into the New Testament tend to show elements of compromise (see below) and so the Hellenistic elements do not always stand out. Even though John argues strongly for the divinity of Jesus (see later chapters), passages from John can be seen as arguments against even more metaphysical, spiritualized, and non-corporal explanations of Jesus by more extreme Hellenistic groups with whom John's group competed.

### **(2B) Radical Hellenists or “Heretics”.**

Aside from the moderate Hellenists was an assortment of other groups that were more radical, especially radically non-Jewish in that they stressed the divinity of Jesus without much consideration for his humanity, for example some Gnostics. I do not consider these groups much here because there are too many, they are too diverse, and the early Church gradually purged their ideas. They contributed some ideas to Christianity but the ideas were filtered through more moderate Hellenists, and this book cannot consider that topic. Today we know some as early “heretics”. The next chapter briefly describes two, Marcion and Mani. The chief rivals of these radical Hellenists were probably other moderate Hellenists. The moderate Hellenists argued with these groups and tried to contain them. In the Gospel of John, John argues with at least one group that saw Jesus as only divine and as not human at all. That is why John stresses the incarnation of the Word. Radical Hellenists were important for keeping the moderate Hellenists moderate, for clarifying why the Church needed to compromise for unity, and for clarifying by contrast the lines along which the Church needed to come together.

### **(3) Compromisers.**

The third group was a de facto compromise group, originally led by Peter. Peter was active in Jerusalem, Galilee, and neighboring areas, maybe especially Syria. Peter represented the apostles and apostolic authority, at least after the fall of the Jerusalem Church after 70 CE. One incident shows the character of Peter and the compromisers, even though the incident is reported by Luke, a sympathizer of Paul. Paul

and the Hellenists allowed non-Jewish Christians to eat what they wished. James insisted that all Christians “eat kosher”, especially no pork and no food that had been offered to any idol, even a household god. While James the Just was still alive, before 62 CE, Peter dreamed that God showed him a big sheet on which were many animals, and told him that he could eat of any animal without being unclean. Peter and many members of the Church interpreted the dream to mean that the dietary laws no longer applied to non-Jewish (at least) Christians. Due to this dream, Christians adopted a compromise in which Jewish Christians continued to follow the full Mosaic Law while non-Jewish Christians could follow the less strict version of the Law (from Noah) typical of the God Fearers. Non-Jewish Christians still could not eat food that had been offered to an idol but they could eat pork if it had not been offered to any idol. Really the Jerusalem Church and the Hellenists agreed to leave each other alone, with Peter brokering the deal.

The first gospel, of Mark, around 60-70 CE, is an example of a compromise text, especially if Mark was the secretary of Peter. It is a somewhat angry book, written as an argument against fellow Jews, but still with the hope of coming to an accord with Jews and bringing them into the fold. Mark was probably a Hellenized Jew but might have been a learned God Fearer Christian. Mark is angry because he seems to believe that Jews would come to Jesus if only they would relax and open up. Mark accepts some divinity for Jesus but does not stress his divinity. In its original version, Mark did not even report the resurrection or appearances of the risen Jesus. That might not have been important in the Jesus mythology at the time, or many followers still did not accept the resurrection. The gospel of Matthew, from shortly after 70 CE, does accept the magic of the birth, death, and resurrection even though Matthew is steeped in Judaism. Matthew was deeply familiar with the Torah. He used proof texts, fairly and unfairly, to argue strongly against Jews. He might also have been arguing with the strict group of James the Just. Matthew might have been a learned Diaspora Hellenized Jew. Matthew seems to have given up on bringing in any more Jews to the movement, and now wants primarily to justify his wing of the Jesus movement, and to bring in any God Fearers that might be open to his arguments. He seems to refer to the burning of Jerusalem and seems to say that it was the fault of the Jews for not accepting Jesus. That might be the first serious instance of blaming the Jews.

**Blending.** When the Romans sacked Jerusalem and destroyed the temple in 70 CE, Christians outside the Jerusalem Church took that as a judgment by God against Jews for not accepting Jesus. I do not know if Christians outside the Jerusalem Church also took those events as a judgment against the Jerusalem Church for not accepting the ideas of the Hellenizers and Compromisers. What happened between Hellenizers and Compromisers after 70 CE is not clear. It seems the Hellenists absorbed the Compromisers so that a moderate Hellenist position eventually dominated, approximately the position of Paul, augmented by the high Christology of John (almost full divinity of Jesus). “Apostolic authority” is the special authority of the closest followers of Jesus who knew Jesus personally, originally “The Twelve” and probably including James and his group. They were all Jews; none were Hellenists. The Hellenists wanted both to keep their position of not being Jews and not being subject to Jewish Law while also taking the apostolic authority of the Jewish Christians.

They accomplished this in three ways. First, Paul insisted he had met Jesus in a vision, and so he really was an apostle and really had apostolic authority even though he had never met Jesus while Jesus was alive. Second, other Hellenists insisted that apostles had baptized them and that the apostles had laid hands on them. These acts gave the second generation, the Hellenizers, the direct authority of the

apostles. It also meant only they could continue the chain of charismatic power; only chosen successors of the Hellenizers could continue the authority of the apostles. Third, they could both be Hellenistic and appear Jewish at the same time by “co-opting” Peter, the chief of the apostles. The gospels start with Peter as an idiot yet have him first to understand that Jesus is God and that Jesus must die and be resurrected to fulfill his mission. Even while the gospels paint Peter as a stooge unable to get the hints of Jesus, they also paint him as the leader of the apostles, brave, true, and astute – a contradiction that can lead to unintended humor. In painting him both ways, they can use a well-known and respected figure as a dominating authority for their own ideas about the divinity of Jesus and the mission of Jesus.

In his association with Paul, Luke was a Hellenist, but his gospel seems more like a compromise attempt to bring together Diaspora Jews, Hellenized Jews, and general members of the Empire. It has anti-Jewish rhetoric but not as much and not as strong as Matthew or John. It does not constantly refer to the Tanakh and it does not subvert traditional Jewish understanding, as did Matthew. It broadens the roots of Jesus to make him appear part of the “family of people” rather than as just a Jew (see next chapter). For example, the Three Kings (Three Wise Men or Three Magi) that come to visit Jesus represent the whole world, not just Jews.

By the time of the gospels of Luke, Matthew, and John, the Church had bishops, had developed the idea of apostolic succession, and developed the idea that apostolic succession might come in distinct lines from particular apostles. The bishops that could clearly link their office to particular apostles, and especially to Peter, carried great weight in discussions of policy and practice. For example, the Bishop of Rome claimed that his office descended directly from Peter and so carried the greatest weight; eventually the Bishop of Rome became the Pope.

Galilee disappeared as a center for the followers of Jesus. The Way of Jesus, and later Christianity, moved almost immediately from the country and from peasants to the cities and to small business people and working people. It altered the message to appeal to these new people, such as by stressing the need to bypass courts.

### **Modern Takes.**

Conservative Christian writers such as Larry Hurtado and N.T. Wright see at the heart of Christianity the early subgroups that stressed the divinity of Jesus (the Christ) and that had a separate in-group. I am not sure, but I think they argue: (a) some of Jesus’ earliest followers thought he was strongly divine; (b) some of the earliest followers were Jewish; (c) so some of the earliest Jewish followers of Jesus saw him as strongly divine; (d) Jews would not think a human being was strongly divine unless he really was strongly divine; (e) and so Jesus really must have been strongly divine. They turn the aversion of traditional Jews for mixing the human and divine into an argument for the strong divinity of Jesus. Their view is not necessarily wrong but it requires clear evidence that some early traditional Jewish followers did think Jesus was strongly divine. Their view supports the idea that the standard Christian package comes as an indivisible whole.

In contrast, liberal Christian writers such as Marcus Borg, John Dominic Crossan, and John Shelby Spong think the original Jesus Way was made up mostly of common people with no hidden programs or in-groups. They see as deviations the subgroups that stressed the divinity of Jesus and that used in-groups

and mystery rites. The divinity of Jesus was not an important idea in the early Way. We do not have to take the standard Christian package as a whole. Elaine Pagels points out the role of Gnostic alternatives to the standard orthodox position in the early Church. Gnostics believed in the divinity of Jesus but not in the standard divinity. The prominence of Gnosticism in the early Church shows that even people who believed in the divinity of Jesus did not all agree on the nature of the divinity and its significance, and thus the standard orthodox Christian position does not have to be the only position. We can believe in a divine Jesus without necessarily taking the entire standard package as a whole; or we can believe in a Jesus that was not divine. Indirectly she supports the idea that the Jesus movement did not at first consist mostly of people that insisted on the divinity of Jesus. I agree with liberal writers in most respects, so here I go into the liberal position a bit.

The problem with the liberal Christian view is how it sees the original Jesus Way. Suppose the original Jesus Way did not have a standard divine Jesus and did not believe in the standard magic of the birth, death, and resurrection. Liberals prefer idealized populism to the kind of Big Change that Jesus preached. The original Jesus Way comes across as the first arrival of 1960s peace-and-love, of modern 1970s-1990s New Age, or of academic intellectual post-modernism. The followers of Jesus come across as intoxicated proto-hippies sharing a whole-grain organic dinner, wine, and their gently used clothing with the good-hearted misunderstood poor. I think the real mass followers were more like the crowds at a modern mega-church or at the traveling show of a televangelist. They wanted to know what Jesus and the disciples could do for them. They were hungry, sick, and needed clothes. They were not in the mood for rationality or too much mush. In the movie "Phenomenon" with John Travolta, the lead character gets mild super powers. At first the public fears him. But when they think he can heal, they jam sick children in his face. They get angry when he cannot cure everybody for free. In theory, liberal thinkers do not overlook what Jesus said about the end-of-the-world-as-we-know-it and the restoration of Israel. In practice, they do. Without change-of-the-world ideas, the Way can appear like a klatch of Socratic philosophers or a group of drunken Taoists. To Jesus, the point was the Big Change, the restoration of Israel and everything that went along with it. To his mass followers, eschatology mattered because it meant they would be healed, fed, healthy, and have an eternal abundant life including food, clothes, spouses, children, and status; they wanted to know how to get that for themselves for sure now.

Liberals still want to see Jesus as secretly divine and therefore consistent in all his aspects. As long as liberals insist on seeing the Jesus Way in their terms, and insist on an absolutely consistent Jesus that reflects the idealized divine Jesus, they will focus on some idealized mostly-was of Jesus while neglecting his all about in the real world. They will not be able to address his all-about properly.

The closest analog to a good version of the Jesus Way that I have seen with my own eyes is the non-militant wing of the Black Panthers in Oakland, California in the late 1960s and early 1970s, before the police destroyed the movement. The Panthers fed, housed, and clothed people, helped people get medical care and jobs, fixed buildings, cared for oldsters, and educated children; all without state help. They did not see an end of the world or a complete transformation but they did see a big real change. They knew any change depended on them. They did not let populism get out of hand. They were not the blood-drinking anti-capitalist revolutionaries of conservative nightmares; the Black angels of contemporary Black revisionist history fantasy pep rallies; the goo-goo dolls of liberal longings; or even the Black knights of their own self-image; but they worked. They did not deify (divinize) their leaders, even when their leaders were killed or imprisoned. I doubt most of their followers understood the rhetoric,

cared, or followed because they did understand. That didn't matter either. The Jesus Way was much less fierce but might have been similar. With less strident tones, the Salvation Army and the Volunteers of America also are similar.

### **Peter.**

Peter was probably about the same age as Jesus. He was a fisherman. His original name was "Simon". Jesus renamed him "Cephas" in Aramaic, which means "rock". During their lifetimes, Jesus called him either "Cephas" or "Simon". In Greek, "rock" is "petros", which in English becomes "Peter". "Rock" in Latin is "lapis". Jesus did not call him "Peter". Peter likely moved to Rome when he was old to live among Diaspora Jews there. He might have been killed there in one of the persecutions. He was a charismatic person, brave, true, astute, and bold when needed. He helped hold the early Church together. It is not clear what relation he had with James except that, while James lived, Peter was under the authority of James. It is a shame the gospels painted him as a stooge in the game of guessing Jesus' secret plan so that the gospels could use him to validate Jesus' divinity.

A famous passage in Matthew shows how both Peter's astuteness and dullness were invented to bolster claims of Jesus' divinity and Church authority. This passage is typical of invented passages where Jesus plays the game of slowly revealing the secrets to his idiot disciples, and typical of added passages that ratify Church authority. Roman Catholics cite this passage as evidence the Bishop of Rome comes directly from Peter, the Roman Catholic Church has authority even over heaven or hell, and so the Roman Catholic Church has very great authority. Protestants deny that this passage validates the authority of the Bishop of Rome; but their denial rests on twisting the meaning of the passage from its face value. I consider the passage as added later and not the words of Jesus. I think it has little to do with the real Peter. So I do not accept Church claims to authority based on this passage, or the claims of any particular church. It is hard to have it both ways: Peter as idiot stooge and Peter as the judge of creation. If Peter (the Church) did not understand then what it takes to achieve what God wants, I wonder if the Church understands now.

Matthew 16:13 – 16:23. \*When the band got to the area around Caesarea Philippi, Jesus asked his followers, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" They responded, "Some people say you are [the Son of Man is] John the Baptist [returned], some say Elijah, some say Jeremiah, and some say one of the prophets." Jesus asked, "What about my followers? Who do you think I am?" Simon Peter said, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God." Jesus declared, "Simon son of Jonah, you are a lucky man. You did not learn this from any ordinary mortal. My Father God told you that. I add this: You are Peter [Cephas the Rock], and upon this rock [Peter, Cephas] I will build my church. The power of death will never defeat my church. I will give you the keys to the Kingdom of God. What you deny [forbid] on earth will be denied in heaven, and what you permit in earth will be permitted in heaven." He then strictly ordered his disciples not to tell anybody he was the Messiah. From that time on, Jesus started to explain to his disciples that he had to go to Jerusalem; suffer much from the elders, chief priests, and lawyers; be put to death; and rise up again on the third day. When Peter first heard what would happen to Jesus, Peter grabbed Jesus' arm and began to plead, "God [the Father], please, no. No, Lord [Jesus], this can never happen to you." Jesus turned directly to Peter and said, "Get out of here, Satan. You are now an obstacle in my way. You think as men think, not as God thinks. [You do not understand what it will take to achieve what God wants.]" \*

## Chapter 4.06 The Early Church 3: Church Growth

This chapter begins with an illustration of heretical alternatives to standard Christianity. After that, it switches to its main topic, the growth of the early Church and the changes that came along with growth.

### Heretics.

Just to show that the early Church was sensible for its time about Jesus' identity, and it more often had to defend Jesus as a man than as a god, here are two foes of the early Church, one in the Church, one a rival religion.

*Marcion of Sinope* (about 85 – 160 CE).

Marcion might be the favorite heretic of every writer on early Church history. He might have lived earlier than the usual given dates. Marcion was probably a bishop, and was a well-known commentator (theologian) of the early Church in his lifetime. He thought the life and teachings of Jesus were not compatible with nearly all of the Old Testament (Tanakh), in particular with the idea of Yahweh. Yahweh was too parochial, crude, and cruel to be the Father of Jesus. Instead, there must have been another original God, whom Jesus called "Father", and whom modern theologians might call "Godhead". The Father created Yahweh, who then usurped some of the authority of the Father to use to arrange life on earth, with the Jews as his instruments. To shape the behavior of the Jews, Yahweh rewarded and punished them. The Father sent Jesus to straighten things out. Jesus was pretty much an avatar of the Father and only used a human body for convenience. Marcion thought Paul was the only apostle to have understood correctly. Marcion rejected all writings about Jesus except ten epistles of Paul and most of the Gospel of Luke. He rewrote the Gospel of Luke to emphasize Jesus' ties to the Father and Jesus' purity. He rejected works that today the Church finds inspired such as the other Gospels. He pretty much condemned Jews. Marcion was a dualist in that he divided the Father, Jesus and saved people on one side versus Yahweh, Jews, and crude humanity on the other. He was also Gnostic in using levels of divinity, seeing Yahweh as a usurper, and thinking the true story was a secret that liberated people from the misrule of Yahweh. Most histories of the Church label him a Gnostic but he was not a fully developed Gnostic.

Marcion was very popular. He was a "rock star", including his own groupies. When other theologians rejected his ideas, he and his followers carried on their own Church. In the official version, he split from the "real" Church. In his version, the church split from his "real" Church. His church was about as popular as the now-official Church for about a hundred years. Even now, many people like the ideas that Jesus is too good for the god of the Old Testament, and that the religion of the Jews based on Yahweh is inferior and vulgar, although they do not say it out loud much.

Before Marcion, Church leaders did not think much about which works should be considered holy and authoritative, that is canonical. Because of him, Church fathers had to decide what books to include and exclude, and why. The reaction to Marcion began the process that eventually led to the New Testament.

*Mani and Manichaeism (210 – 276 CE).*

Mani might have been born in what is now Iraq but he flourished in Persia. Mani was an almost Classic Gnostic. The world is divided into the forces of good and light versus the forces of evil and darkness. They do not sustain each other in some kind of overarching Hegelian Romantic symbiosis but are plainly at war. It is not clear that the forces of good and light will win. Spirit tends to be good and light while anything material tends to be bad and dark, including the human body and all animal urges. The leaders of the forces of darkness are spiritual too, so I am not clear on the full relation between spirit, matter, good, and evil. Later versions of this kind of strong dualism gave the forces of light and the forces of good each their own highest leader. The idea of the leaders of the forces of darkness and evil was one origin of the Christian devil.

Humanity is the main battleground. Just because it is a non-material soul, the human soul is supposed to ally with light, but it can be corrupted to the dark side. Temptations of wealth, power, emotions, and of the body can lead the soul down the wrong path. The body is a danger because it is material and so tends to sink the soul into bad and dark. Sometimes a champion of good and light arises. Although the champion appears to have a human body, really his body is irrelevant. What matters is that his soul is entirely of light and entirely on the side of good. (I do not know if there were ever any women champions.) People need to see the original nature of their souls, to purge their souls of material, dark, and evil, and so return to the light. Champions show the way. Jesus did not figure in all versions of Manichaeism but when he did he was one such champion of good and light.

Manichaeism was very popular in its time. It was a religion unto itself, and also influenced all the major religions, including Christianity. It lasted for about a thousand years, and spread as far as China. Eventually the mainstream Christian Church saw Manichaeism as a serious rival and condemned it. Reaction to developments such as Manichaeism eventually led to the Nicene Creed. Islam tolerated Manichaeism but did not promote it and officially viewed it as un-Islamic although unofficially it seems to have had quite an influence on Islam. Saint Augustine was an official Manichean until he converted to Christianity. Despite orthodoxy, I think Manichean dualism still pervades much of Christianity and Islam. Even though Augustine tried to purge Manichean ideas from his own thinking and writing, I think Manichean ideas were still strong in Augustine and are still strong in Church doctrine that comes from him, especially his views of Paul and views of Paul that follow him such as of Luther and Calvin. Manichean dualism lives on today. Manichean dualism supports ideas such as that all Muslims are terrorists and servants of the devil, or that the United States is the agent of Satan (Great Satan) in our time. You should recognize Manichaeism in many movies such as in the Sci Fi, horror, slasher, and serial killer genres. “Star Wars” and “The Matrix” are almost Manichean texts. You should see Manichaeism in Right and Left Wing slanders of each other, and in policies of the recent Bush administration.

### **Family Values Again.**

Early Christians did have a different sense of the family, and did behave differently toward spouses and children, than many people in other religions. Christian ideas have roots in Jewish values, which contrasted from neighbors, but Christian ideas also differ from Jewish values. Christian attitudes helped the growth of the early Church. Modern so-called Christian family values are related to the family values

of the early Church but are definitely different too. The practices of Jews and their neighbors often had a basis in adaptation to ecology, economy, politics, or society but I do not discuss that here. I do not evaluate in terms of political correctness or anti-political correctness. I do not cite texts for support for each point. General support is in the lists of readings.

#### *Non-Jewish Sexual and Family Behavior.*

I do not distinguish between various Jews and between various non-Jews. I use simplistic dualism. Groups of Jews differed, and some adopted behavior like the non-Jewish behavior listed here.

-Non-Jews might have allowed human sacrifice, including child sacrifice.

-Non-Jews allowed abortion and infanticide. In particular, non-Jews exposed baby girls, or even girl children, so that they would die. In some cases, this practice might have been viewed as child sacrifice for the welfare of the remaining members of the family.

-Non-Jews allowed multiple wives and/or families for the same man.

-Non-Jews allowed fairly easy divorce for the man.

-Non-Jews allowed extramarital affairs by both husband and wife, but primarily by the husband.

-Non-Jews allowed or encouraged homosexual relations between males or between females, including boys, men, girls, and women.

-Non-Jews allowed prostitution, and allowed married men to visit prostitutes without stigma. Prostitution included homosexual prostitution.

-Non-Jews sometimes institutionalized prostitution, sometimes in religious temples, sometimes in guilds protected by the city, sometimes just by tolerating it.

-Non-Jews discouraged celibacy in the family.

-Non-Jews allowed suicide for the good of the family, the city, the country, or for the peace of mind of the individual. They emphasized quality of life as much as quantity of life.

#### *Jewish Sexual and Family Behavior.*

I do not distinguish between various Jews.

-Jews did not allow human sacrifice, including child sacrifice.

-Jews discouraged abortion and infanticide. They would not have seen it as sacrifice for the welfare of remaining members of the family.

-Jews also allowed a man to have multiple wives and families, and to divorce his wife (wives) without too much trouble.

-Jews rarely allowed a wife to divorce a husband, and almost never allowed a wife to have extramarital affairs.

-Jews discouraged homosexual relations and they looked down on male homosexuals (gay men) and/or transvestites.

-Jews allowed prostitution and allowed married men to visit prostitutes.

-Jews did not institutionalize prostitution. Jews were fastidious in separating sexuality from worship and so disliked the idea of temple prostitution.

-Jews wanted family continuity and family increase. They discouraged celibacy either within the family or without the family.

-Jews felt that women wanted sexual activity more than men. If women did not get sexual satisfaction within marriage, they would look for it outside of marriage. If a man did not satisfy his wife, then she might have an extramarital affair.

-Jews held a strong "double standard" on gender matters, at least in public. Women were subordinate to men. Men had to control the women under their jurisdiction. If a man and a woman committed a sexual offense, the woman was usually punished more harshly than the man. For adultery, a man might go free while a woman might be stoned.

-Jews did not oppose the mind to the body, or sexuality to mentality. They did not look down on sexual activity or physical activity. They did contrast obvious bodily functions, including sex and death, to religious grace; but the opposition was usually temporary for the purposes of a ritual duty.

-Jewish ideas about the family have their roots in the idea that life is good and holy, and that it should be respected and increased. Life is precious and should be taken care of.

-Jews did not allow suicide. It is simplistic to say that they emphasized quantity of life over quality of life but they did not want short-term rationalizations to undermine the reverence for life.

#### *Christian Ideas.*

Christians were much like Jews, with the following modifications. For non-Jews to adopt Jewish ideas would have been quite a change and would indicate strong forces at work.

-Christians had the same ideas about abortion, infanticide, suicide, homosexuality, and the value of life.

-Christians did not allow divorce except for adultery by the wife.

-Christians did not allow multiple spouses.

-Christians did not allow prostitution or visiting of prostitutes.

-Christians allowed people to be celibate. Christians allowed people to be celibate even within marriage. At first, many Christians extolled celibacy over married life. Christians thought of celibacy as being like Jesus.

-Christians encourage people to marry so as to have an outlet for sexual desire, rather than to visit prostitutes. This was true for both men and women.

-At first, Christians discouraged marriage and having children, especially when they still thought the end of the world was near. After they realized the end of the world was not near, they allowed people to marry and have children.

-Christians did not stress family life until later.

-Christians at first were much more equal between men and women than Jews. Women were powerful in the early Church. They supported early Church activities financially and by giving use of their houses. Women acted as disciples and apostles even if they were not called that. Women were deacons. Women spoke in church. Women were probably not officially bishops. I do not know if any women carried out the duties of a bishop without the name but I suspect so. Within a few decades after Jesus died, the Church began to push women back into traditional Mediterranean and Jewish roles. Nearly all the written evidence we have, such as the New Testament, comes from after the time when women were already being pushed back, so we have to be careful reading it. The notorious advice by Paul about keeping women in their place should not be read as the attitude of the original Church or of Jesus but as the later attitude of returning to earlier times.

-Christians were nearly pacifists. They did not resist violence and they did not resist authority. They did not engage in righteous rebellion against the oppressors.

-Christians did not allow their sons to join the military until after the time of Constantine in the middle 300s. Some allowed sons who were drafted to fill out their conscripted terms but did not allow them to voluntarily re-enlist. Early Christians avoided the military and looked down on the military (I do not know how they felt about individual soldiers). In sharp contrast, modern "family values" Christians revere the military, praise their children who join, and too often glamorize violence. I see no way to reconcile the two attitudes.

### **Church Growth.**

Christianity was not the most popular religion even after it became the official religion of the Roman Empire under Constantine in the 300s. Other religions held on for hundreds of years afterwards, including Greek and Roman paganism. Christianity became dominant only after the Empire had trouble and people lost faith in traditional religions and the other alternatives to Christianity.

The Christian Church only had to grow a few percent per year to reach the size estimates for the Church at particular times in the history of the early Empire, less than 5% per year would do easily if it were steady. That growth rate is less than the growth rate of some modern churches such as the Mormons (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints), the “Moonies” before about 1990, the mega-churches, and New Age. The Church did not immediately appeal to all the masses and immediately lead to a general “call to Christ”. It grew for many reasons. I do not know if it grew because some people wanted the charismatic gifts of Christians, so I do not discuss that topic.

Whether or not true faith was always the biggest reason for the growth of the early Church, it certainly was a big reason. Christianity appealed to people. Jesus as both God and man, who sacrifices himself for us, meant something to people. The ideal drew people to the Church, and still does.

On a more worldly level, I have personally seen the biggest reasons for the growth of Christian churches, especially in the Third World, and I think the early Church grew for similar reasons.

(1) The need for order fuels growth of any institution that can supply order, especially in a changing world. People in America in the 1970s were lost. They went back to Jesus, or went to New Age, or found Marx, Political Correctness, the free market, or Reagan and the Right, because they needed any kind of real order in their lives. This is sad.

(2) Growth arises from mutual help. Churches in the Third World operate as social security and financial security agencies. They give social opportunities and financial opportunities. They educate children that would otherwise remain ignorant and without a certificate. They give medical care to people that would otherwise die or remain maimed. They allow children to survive. They give food. They allow employers and employees to find each other. They allow people to make business deals with some assurance of honesty. The same benefits apply in many churches in Western countries but the power of the church is more important in the Third World because the Third World does not have the other social controls of the West such as a reliable general police force. Many people that join do not understand the dogma of the church but their children grow up with it and accept doctrine without thinking. Some people do understand the doctrine. People are theologically sophisticated even in the Third World. I heard the Thai call joining a Christian church “selling your soul” (“khai winyan”), and that is true in many cases, but joining a church is not always that cold. A lot of Western people cultivate church membership with more calculation than Thai people, and we do not always look down on calculating Americans. Benjamin Franklin held membership and prominent pews in at least three churches at the same time, and he did not believe in standard dogma. It is possible to be a personal friend and a business associate at the same time and it is possible to be a real church member and to benefit from membership at the same time.

These practical reasons would be important in the countryside but they would be even more important, maybe vital, in towns and cities. In the country, people still know each other, know reputations, can check reputations, and can badger kin in case somebody does not come through. In the countryside, land can be used as a capital base, if you own land. In the city, these safeguards do not exist and people often do not have any capital base. Members of the working class and the small business class need something, which church membership provides. That is why Church membership shifted to the city and why it grew so well in the city.

(3) The Church was not the only mutual aid society. To use mutual aid to explain growth, we need to appreciate how the aid offered by Christians differed from the aid offered by other groups. Listing and evaluating alternatives would require a social science book but maybe one example illustrates mutual aid: funeral societies. People would pay a little bit every month so that their funeral would be covered when they died. In the meantime, members had the right to borrow from the mutual funeral fund to help with their business. This kind of society funded the beginning of jazz in New Orleans. The early Church differed from other mutual aid societies in the variety of its work, and the depth of its commitment. Christians really did give aid to the sick and poor. They really did go to prisons. They really did help bury people. They even helped people that were not Christians, although I think aid tended to get aimed more at Christians as the movement grew. Cities of the Roman Empire were unhealthy. Only somebody who has lived outside Europe or the United States can know what a Third World slum smells like and how hard it can be to find a clean glass of water. People got sick and died. The equivalent of a major flu epidemic happened every year. Infant mortality was over fifty percent. Unlike the non-Christian rich, Christians, even rich Christians, did not flee the cities with the annual plagues and they did not have safe houses outside the city. They did not shun the houses of the sick. They stayed to save lives. They really helped out. They were like "Doctors Without Borders" or like Red Cross volunteers in disaster zones. This was hands-on work, even by rich Christians. Rich Christians opened their houses as schools and hospitals. Modern Christians should take note. Non-Christians saw this devotion and were deeply impressed. Pagan philosophers of high moral caliber were deeply impressed. Even authorities that might otherwise be suspicious of Christians or persecute Christians were impressed. So the Christian movement grew fast enough to eventually dominate the Empire.

(4) Christian family values appealed to peasants, the working class, and the modest middle class of cities. Especially Christian family values appealed to women. A family that was not large and wealthy had trouble making it unless it stayed together. It could not afford to waste resources on prostitutes, side families, or sideline affairs. Men had to use their energy and wealth on primary wives if they wanted to reproduce and carry on the family. Even homosexual affairs would undermine a working class or middle class family on a tight budget. If you had only one son, and he was homosexual, then the family could not so easily carry on. Celibacy could be confined to family members that would not have reproduced anyway because they were too poor to find spouses or to raise children, such as extra girls. These family members could be honored while at the same time they contributed to the other family members that would reproduce. Families that lived by Christian values endured and slowly grew while families in similar situations that did not live by Christian values often dissipated. Non-Christian families saw the success of Christian families and emulated their ideas and practices; sometimes they even converted to Christianity.

The success of Christian family values at that time does not mean the values are from God or are absolutely right. The success of Christian family values at that time does not mean we have to live only by those values and that we cannot find somewhat different successful values now.

Modern "family values" Christians do not live by those values; they have selected, rejected, and interpreted to seek their greatest success under their modern situations. The success of Christian family values then does not mean that stereotyped Christian family values now are from God, or are correct, or even that they are the values most conducive to success for all families. The success of Christian family values then does mean we have to think about the roots of those values and we have to think about our

own values.

### **Divine Jesus as Warrant.**

Would Christians have acted so well in managing resources, helping neighbors, and in their family practices, if they did not believe Jesus was Christ the God but instead believed he was only a prophet? That question is impossible to answer. Probably some Christians needed to believe that Jesus was God to act as well as Christians did. I do not mean to sound cynical. Sometimes we need to bolster our courage with divine backup. Some Christians then might not have believed Jesus was God yet still acted well. Not all Christians then believed in Jesus' full divinity, or that he was divine at all, yet still acted morally, bravely, and to uphold strong family life. Many people today do not believe Jesus is God yet still act according to the high standards set by Jesus and followed by Christians.

### **The Original Church Again.**

To people questing for the original essential pure early Church, or the original essential pure early Jesus Way, the real early followers of Jesus the prophet and Christ the God are not homogenous enough to be a sure guide. The original followers were various groups held together by overlapping ideas, experiences, and codes of conduct but not necessarily by any single set of ideas, experiences, or code – not even belief in the resurrection of Jesus. Whether the early group of followers is one enough for standard Christian doctrine now is unclear. If you want to pick an early subgroup to serve as justification for your practices now, you are free to do so, and I hope you give good reasons; but other people need not follow you.

Nor can the New Testament alone serve as a guide. At the very least, the New Testament requires Church tradition for its validation. When any author of the New Testament speaks of "scripture" it does not mean the New Testament because that did not exist then, the author means the Tanakh, the "Old Testament". Nowhere does the New Testament say it is the one and only source of ideas about holiness and truth, above Church tradition, even apart from Church tradition. The New Testament was never ratified in a single meeting of the early Church. Instead, it was accepted gradually over about the first four hundred years in the hierarchical Church. So Church tradition is as much the basis for the New Testament and its validity as the New Testament is the basis for Church tradition and its validity. Of course, it is not a good idea to try to justify by using tradition any church doctrine that clearly goes against the New Testament. It is also not enough to argue against any church doctrine by saying it does not have a clear warrant in the New Testament. Old traditions deserve respect. History really did make a contribution.

The message of Jesus is clear enough so that we do not have to worry too much about finding authentic scripture and practice in some version of the pure essential early Church. If your present church does not get in the way of doing what Jesus taught, you get along well enough in your church, and you do not have to do anything against its dogma, then do not worry too much.

I offer a warning to people that seek egalitarianism in the early Jesus Way, in the early Christian Church, or in some early subgroup of followers. These ideas arose and matured along with Church offices and stratification: Jesus was God; Jesus is all about salvation, whatever that is; and the magic of his birth,

death, and resurrection. I think you cannot nurture these ideas except in a stratified organization. The hierarchical organization of the Church is an old part of its tradition. Any church larger than a couple dozen people has to have some un-egalitarian organization. Large scale, hierarchy, and ideas about divinity and magic go together. If you want divinity and magic, you almost have to have hierarchy and organization or you will have chaos. The development of Church hierarchical organization is as logical, reasonable, and balanced as development of ideas about the divinity of Jesus and ideas about the Trinity. Ideas of the divinity of Jesus, or his identity as the emissary of Love and Acceptance, go along with hierarchy and institution. I do not endorse elaborate organized hierarchical churches but I think they cannot be dismissed as non-Christian without also questioning all Christian doctrine including the divinity of Jesus, salvation, the magic of his birth, death, and resurrection, and his modern roles such as emissary of Love and Acceptance. If you want a totally egalitarian church, you have to consider if a divine Jesus would want a totally egalitarian church. If a totally egalitarian church implies at least some chaos and dissension, then you have to think if a divine Jesus would want a totally egalitarian church. If you want a divine Jesus and/or the emissary of Love and Acceptance, then you have to think about what kind of hierarchy you want in the church. If you want many followers of Jesus, that is a large church, then you have to think about what kind of hierarchy you need, and what any hierarchy inevitably does to the content of belief.

## Chapter 4.07 Selected Illustrations from the New Testament

This chapter illustrates ideas about the New Testament by using selected passages, mostly from the Gospels and the letters of Paul. This chapter does not try to give a sense of the New Testament as a whole. It does not defend arguments from previous chapters point-by-point. This chapter introduces the gospel of John, and it explains the increasing accommodation of the Church to everyday life.

### Jesus Through the Editing.

Recall that the gospels edited Jesus' words, including using them in settings in which he did not originally say those words. Some of the intent was to argue against the rivals of the early Church, the Pharisees. Some of the intent was to use Jesus to declare the identity that the Gospel writers wished for him, such as Messiah, King, and divine Son of God. The passage from Matthew below appeared in an earlier chapter but is reproduced here as a good illustration. The parts in red and/or italics are words that reflect the genuine intent of Jesus even if they are not his exact words. The other words attributed to him are from Matthew and probably do not reflect his intent or self-image.

Matthew 25:31 – 25:46. \* When the Son of Man comes in glory with the angels around him as an army, he will sit in state on his throne, with all the people of the world, from all the peoples of the world, gathered at his feet. He will divide individual people into two groups, on the left and right, much as a shepherd sorts sheep on the right with goats on the left. King Jesus will say to the people on the right, "You have the blessing of God my Father. Come, enter, and possess the Kingdom of God. It has been ready for you since [before] the world was made." Jesus continued:

*"When I was hungry, you fed me. When I was thirsty, you gave me water. When I was a stranger lonely and afraid, you took me into your home. When I had no clothes, you gave me shoes and a coat. When I was sick, you nursed me. When I was in jail, you visited me." Then the decent people [on the right] will ask, "Master, when did we see you hungry and feed you, when thirsty and gave you water, when a stranger that we took in, when shivering so that we clothed you, when ill so that we nursed you, and when in jail that we visited you?"*

And Jesus the King will respond:

*"Understand my words: Anything you did for any of my humble brothers and sisters on this Earth, you did as much for me."*

Then Jesus will say to the people on his left hand, "You are cursed. Get out of my sight. Go to the eternal Hell that is waiting for you, the Devil, and his angels."

*"When I was hungry, you gave me nothing to eat. When I was thirsty, you gave me nothing to drink. When I shivered, you gave me nothing to wear. When I was ill, you gave me no care, [medicine, or insurance]. When I was in jail, you increased my time. [You found rationalizations to deny me, overlook me, and hurt me.]"*

The indecent on the left will retort: "Lord, when did we see you hungry, thirsty, unclothed, shivering, a stranger, ill, or in prison, and did not help you?"

*Jesus will declare, "Hear me. Whenever you ignored or denied any other person, no matter how small, you ignored and denied me personally."*

And the indecent will go to Hell's punishment eternally. But the decent people will have eternal life. \*

### **Blessings and Woes.**

Matthew and Luke have different versions of the "Beatitudes" (blessings). In Matthew, they are part of the Sermon on the Mount while in Luke they are part of the Sermon on the Plain. Matthew softens Jesus' blunt style, and he changes the focus from simple life situations to complex relations with God. Matthew sounds like a polemical theologian while Luke sounds like Jesus. In addition, Luke has a section of "woes" that Matthew omits. Luke's list of Beatitudes is shorter. Most scholars believe the wording in Luke is older and more accurate, and that the "woes" were part of a set of Jesus' sayings that was compiled before Luke and Matthew wrote in 70-80 CE. Within only 40 years of Jesus' death, already Matthew changed Jesus considerably. Some of what Matthew has Jesus say is good in itself but it is not what Jesus said or intended. This case shows how we have to think not just about what Jesus really said or intended but also of logical extensions of his ideas and of religious ideas from other people that have become part of Christianity. The Beatitudes are not always easy to understand. Even if we think we understand them, we are not sure how they could apply to real life. I do not try to expound them here.

Luke 6:20 – 6:38. \*

"How blessed already are the poor and needy because you will own the Kingdom of God.

How blessed already are hungry people because you [will be fed and] satisfied.

How blessed already are people who cry now because you will laugh [and smile].

How blessed you already are when men hate you, when they use the law to prosecute you and force you out of society, when they insult you, when they ruin your reputation so that your name is like a curse, all because you follow the Son of Man. On the day when you realize your suffering comes from following me, be glad and jump for joy because then you will have a rich reward from God. In the past, the ancestors of the people that persecute you treated the prophets that way [the prophets they now adore].

Too bad for you rich because you have already had your period of happiness.

Too bad for you over-fed gourmands because now you will go hungry.

Too bad for you who smirk now because you will cry and feel sorry for yourselves.

Too bad for you when you have a good reputation and everybody praises you because that is how the ancestors of you flatterers treated the false prophets of the past.

[You misunderstood the Law before] so instead I say to anybody with the wit to hear and

understand:

Love your enemies. Do good even to people who hate you. Bless the people who curse you. Pray for the people who are spiteful and vindictive. If a man smacks you on one cheek, offer him the other cheek too. If a man sues the coat off your back, offer to give him the shirt along with it. Give to anybody who asks you. If somebody takes your car or your cell phone, don't demand it back. Treat other people the way you want them to treat you. If you love only the people that love you, how does that make you a good person and a force for good? Even hateful people do that. If you give to people only when they are well-off enough to give back, how does that make you a good person or a force for good? Even greedy people lend to people who can repay [because the greedy people know they risk nothing]. You have to love even your enemies and do good [to them and all other people]. Give without expecting to be paid back. Doing that, God will reward you well. You will become children of the highest God. God is merciful and kind even to sinners and ungrateful people [so he certainly will be to you]. Be merciful and kind just like your Father. Don't judge other people and they won't judge you. Don't decide other people are worthless, bad, or stupid and they won't see you that way either. Let other people get by [with their needs and foibles] and they will let you get by. Give, and other people will give to you. You will get a big, dense, honest measure of fun, joy, and useful material goods because that is what you give to other people and they will give it back to you." \*

Matthew 5:3 – 5:12. \*

"How blessed already are people who know how much they need God and in what ways they need God because they already live in the Kingdom of God."

How blessed already are the unhappy, depressed, and sorrowful because they will get consolation.

How blessed already are people with a gentle spirit because in the end they will control the world.

How blessed already are people who yearn for justice like a deep hunger and thirst because they will get justice and be satisfied.

How blessed already are people who show mercy because mercy will be shown to them.

How blessed already are people with pure hearts [intentions and outlooks on others] because they will see God [in the workings of the world and in their intuition].

How blessed already are people who know how to make peace and who work to make peace because God will take them as his children.

How blessed already are people who suffer abuse for justice and good because they will get the Kingdom of God [and help run it]." \*

Matthew twisted Jesus too much, and Matthew did it for bad reasons. The Kings James (Authorized Version) translation from Luke is succinct about the poor: "Blessed are the poor". In Luke, Jesus' phrase for the poor ("the poor and needy") becomes in Matthew "those who know how much they need

God". Luke's "poor" became in Matthew "the poor in spirit". Matthew completely subverted Jesus' meaning and intent. Jesus gave the poor hope, and he wanted his followers to help the poor. Jesus meant the real poor, people without enough food, clothes, shelter, land, or capital. "People who know how much they need God (the poor in spirit)" are another group entirely. By looking at them, we lose sight of the real material poor. Without a philosophical guidebook, we are not even sure who the poor in spirit are. Matthew's wording opens the door to a lot of odd interpretations. Matthew's words must have made middle class and wealthy would-be followers of Jesus breathe easier but his alteration of Jesus is wrong.

Luke says the hungry will be satisfied, will be fed. Matthew changes "the hungry" to be people "who yearn for justice like a deep hunger and thirst". He does the same thing with the hungry that he did with the poor. He changed a category of real physical people with real physical needs into a category of metaphysical people with abstract needs. He subverted Jesus so as to serve the needs not of people who hunger and thirst, or even who hunger and thirst to see justice prevail, but of people who want to avoid the issues altogether.

In his woes, Luke condemns the rich clearly. He condemns people that have enough to eat while others go hungry. He condemns people that laugh first, maybe because they tend to be the powerful; so indirectly he condemns the powerful. These words would offend the people that Matthew tried to recruit, so maybe that is why he left them out.

Some of the remaining sections of Luke follow Jesus fairly closely, such as the famous "offer the other cheek". Some of Luke's words drift away from the likely words of Jesus but the intent still follows Jesus. Luke is a clear and beautiful statement of ethics in its own right. Matthew has no parallel to Luke.

### **The Prodigal Son.**

Like Matthew, Luke also put words in Jesus' mouth. Here is a famous story, and the subject of many gospel songs and blues songs. It comes right after the stories of a man who had a hundred sheep but lost one and looked until he found it, and a woman who had ten coins but lost one and looked until she found it. Jesus narrates.

Luke 15:10 – 15:32. \* "I declare to you, the angels of God feel great joy over one sinner who repents. Once a man had two sons. The younger son said, 'Father, give me now my share of your property that I would inherit anyway.' So the father divided his estate between the two sons. In a few days, the younger son liquidated his share of the estate into cash and left home for a city in a faraway land. There he quickly squandered his wealth in booze, gambling, drugs, women, bars, cars, and bad living. After he had spent it all, the economy of the country collapsed, unemployment shot up, and he could not find any job or support. So he went out to the countryside where he found a pig raiser that gave him a job. He did not get paid much and there was no food allowance. Many days he would have been happy to eat the melon rinds and leftover grits out of the pig troughs but nobody gave him even that much. One day all the drugs and foolishness wore off, he came to his senses, and said to himself, 'My father's servants get paid well and they have more than enough to eat, yet here I am sweating blood and almost starving to death. I will go to my father and plead with him, "Father, I have sinned against God and against you. I am not worthy to be your son. Please hire me and treat me as only one of your other paid servants."' So he went back

to his father's house. Even while he was still a way off, his father recognized him, and the father's heart went out to the wayward son. The father ran to greet him, threw his arms around the son, and kissed him. The son said, 'Father, I have sinned against you and God. I am no longer fit to be your son. [Please hire me and treat me as a servant.]' But the father said to his servants, 'Right now go get some new jeans, a shirt, and some shoes for my son out of my own closet. Go kill the fat calf that we had been saving for a special feast and let's have that feast tonight. Until now, this son of mine had been dead to me but he has come back to life. I had lost him but now I have found him.' No sooner said than the servants clothed the son and the celebration began.

Just when the younger son returned, the older son was out working in the fields. As the older son came back to the house, he heard the music and saw the commotion. He asked one of the servants what was going on. The servant said, 'Your brother came home, and your father killed the feast calf to celebrate because your brother returned safe and sound.' The older brother was angry and refused to go join the celebration. The father came out to see what was wrong and pleaded with the son. The son whined in retort, 'You know that I have worked hard like a slave for you for decades. I never once disobeyed you. [I never asked you for anything.] After burning up what you and I had earned on drugs, gambling, and whores, now this delinquent son shows his face again, so what do you do? You kill the feast calf for him.' The father explained, 'My son, you have always been with me and always will be. Everything I have is yours and will be yours. But how could we not help celebrate this happy day? Your brother was like the dead and has come back to life, was lost to us and now is found, [was stupid but now sees].'" \*

Jesus probably did not really tell the story, Luke did. I do not know if Luke adapted a story from Jesus but no other gospel says that Jesus told this story. If Luke did make up this story and put it in Jesus' mouth, it is easy to forgive Luke because the lesson is fully compatible with Jesus' ideas and the story is a great piece of religious education.

Most people think the story ends after the first long paragraph. Originally it might have ended there and had been closer to something Jesus said but I do not know for sure. The last paragraph has a critical message. The original readers of Luke would have understood immediately that the father is God, the older son is the Jews, and the younger son is the Gentile followers of Jesus. A distant country is anywhere but Israel, anywhere foreign, where "they" raise disgusting pigs and "they" get little reward for their honest labor. Original readers of Luke would have thought: "Now that Gentiles have seen their mistake and have come back to God through Jesus, why can't the Jews accept the return of the Gentiles and join in their joy? Why do the Jews sullenly refuse to join the party by not accepting Jesus?" I think it is good that modern readers do not see the story this way anymore. They interpret the characters according to their own experiences. Most people think of some sullen member of their family who was brought back into the family fold through the kindness of other family members; some people think of an alienated workmate; some people think of old-fashioned Christians and new-fashioned Christians. We probably do not see it in terms of Jews and Gentile Christians anymore not out of any progress toward greater enlightenment but because Jews have "dropped off the radar" for so long that we forget to think of them in these terms. That is good enough for now.

### **Fundamental Hymns.**

This section shows early ideas about Jesus as the Christ by using small excerpts, mostly from Paul.

Scholars think these excerpts are hymns that Paul and others quote but nobody knows for sure. Unfortunately, their character as hymns does not come out in translation. These pieces show ideas that predate Paul and the gospels, and thus already were current in the decade or two after Jesus died. They were used for instruction and might have been used in rituals such as baptism. I do not point out all the ideas in each excerpt that might indicate a divine Christ or might show how Christ saved. Sometimes Christ is clearly a Gnostic-emanation figure or a Wisdom figure; I do not point out those cases either. Just because some early followers of Jesus saw him as God or saw him in other exalted ways does not mean it is all true or all false; but it does mean we have to think about how Jews and God Fearers could have thought this, and we have to think about our appropriate response either way. I think the best response either way is to do what Jesus asked.

Paul: Romans 3:25 – 3:26a. \* God crafted Jesus as the master tool to cut away sin, for all who believe, through Jesus' death. God overlooked the sins of the past in the same way that a master woodworker finds a way to use inferior wood, and God needed us to see in Jesus the justness of his skill. \*

Paul: Philippians 2:5 – 2:11. \* Make your behavior towards one another come out of your new life in Christ Jesus.

[Full] Godliness was in Jesus from the beginning  
But Jesus did not cling to equality with God [the Father]  
[From everything], Jesus made himself into nothing  
Taking on the nature of a slave, taking on the appearance of a human,  
Showing himself in human form, he humbled himself  
In full obedience [to his mission and his dual nature] he accepted even death on a cross  
For his obedience, God raised him from the depths to the heights  
And made sure his name would be first of all names  
At his name all knees would bow, in heaven or earth, and in Hell,  
And every mouth acknowledge "Jesus Christ is Lord"  
All to the glory of God the Father. \*

The hymn probably begins with the sentence, "[Full] Godliness was in Jesus..."

Paul: Colossians 1:15 – 1:22.

\* Jesus' form is our image of the invisible God  
He is primary over all created beings In him, heaven and earth were created  
Not only what we can see [with our eyes]  
But also the invisible spiritual beings that rule over the created world  
Everything was created through him and for him  
He was before anything was  
All things continue on through connection to him  
He is head of the body of human life, of the church  
He founded the church  
He was first to return from the dead  
Through him, all of God, by God's own choice

Came to live among us  
Through him God chose to make peace with and reunite all of creation to himself  
He made peace and unity through his blood that was shed upon the cross  
All things in heaven and earth were brought to God through Jesus and his blood alone

In the past, you were separated from God.  
You opposed him in your hearts and minds,  
And so what you did could come to nothing but evil.  
But now because of Christ's death in his body of flesh and blood on the cross,  
You can stand before God as voluntarily choosing God,  
Dedicated men, free of stain, and innocent in his sight. \*

If you know the Nicene Creed, note the similarity of this passage to it. The phrase "Through him God chose to make peace with and reunite all of creation to himself" ("Through him God chose to reconcile the whole world to himself") is justly famous.

The second paragraph likely does not belong to the hymn. It fuels the terribly wrong and hurtful idea that people can do only evil and that all good comes from God and God only. This idea predated Paul and Augustine but they made further use of it.

Paul: Colossians 3:16 – 3:17. \*

Invite the message of Christ to live with you in all its wealth Teach and correct each other along by following greatest Wisdom Sing to God with thankfulness in your hearts Sing psalms and songs that express the Holy Spirit through you Whatever you do, however you speak, however you act Do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus Giving thanks to God the Father through Jesus \*

The following is definitely a hymn because Paul quotes it as such. Paul introduces it.

Paul: 1 Timothy 3:16. \* The mysterious truth of our religion is certainly great and profound:

"The person who came in a body Was proven true and good as a spirit Was seen by angels Was taught to all peoples of the world Led people everywhere in the world to believe in him Let him be glorified in the highest realm of God" \*

Paul: Ephesians 5:13 – 5:14 and Ephesians 5:19.

\* When the light comes, then it shines on everything, bathes everything, and makes everything visible.

"Awake sleeper, Get up from your death And Christ will shine on you" \*

In Paul's name: Hebrews: 1:2 – 1:4.

\*But in this final age God has spoken to us in the Son, the Son to whom God gave the whole world, and through whom he had already created all levels of existence.

"The Son is the emanation of God's power And the die-mark of God's deepest being

[A stamp of evidence both on his own body and through him on all creation]

The Son sustains the world by his word of command power

When the Son had cleaned all sins

The Son took his seat at the right hand of Glory on high

Raised [by God] far above all angels

Because the rank he inherited was greater than that of any angel" \*

(Pseudo) James: James 5:13. \*

"Does trouble follow anyone among us?

Turn to prayer and so turn away from trouble.

Does a joyful heart beat in anyone's breast?

Let the joyful rhythm spread by singing songs of praise. \*

### **The Gospel of John.**

See the section on "Jesus and God" in Chapter 04.02 on "Illustrating Particular Topics About Jesus".

The seed that was planted in the pre-Pauline hymns, and nurtured in Paul and the gospels, blooms in John. The Gospel of John was written about 100 CE (AD), likely near Antioch in Syria. I comment on it after giving some content from it. John did not write for Jews in Israel but for Diaspora Jews that had little Aramaic or Hebrew but did know Greek and Greek ideas, and for God Fearers and Gentiles. Already by the time of John, his mission has given up on Jews in Israel and his mission had transformed accordingly. John wrote in controversy with (at least) Jews who were more conservative (Jesus could not be really God) and with Jews and Gentiles who were more extreme (Jesus was fully only God and hardly human). It would take too much space to show how John's arguments with those groups shaped his theology and how John's theology anticipated later Church theology. You will get the gist of what you need to go on.

The best introduction to John that I can give is John's own opening, which is a long hymn to the Christ. This hymn is not as early as the hymns above but probably predates the Gospel of John. John might have reworked it. He did an amazing job. It is quite a piece of both philosophy and poetry. The paragraphs about John the Baptist are likely not part of the original hymn. They are cleverly woven into the hymn so that they do not disturb it much. Try reading the piece both with the paragraphs and without them. In the first paragraph about the Baptist, some passages about light might be derived from this hymn or other similar hymns.

John 1:1 – 1:18. \* At the start of creation, the Word [Jesus] already existed.

The Word lived in God. God existed and the Word existed.

So the Word existed in God at the start,

And through him [the Word] all things opened into existence.

Not one thing was created without the Word.

All created things shared the life of the Word.

The life of the Word is the light of all people.  
The light pierces the dark, and the darkness has never beaten it.

*Then John arrived, sent from God. John came to proclaim the light so that all people might believe in the light because of John's own words. John was not himself the light, he only came to proclaim the light. The real light that illuminates all people was at the time of John just forming for itself a body for this world.*

He [Jesus, Word, Light] came into the world but the world did not recognize him even though he had created the world and the world depended on him for its being. To all people who did recognize and receive him, to all who transferred their loyalty to him, he bequeathed the right to become themselves Children of God, no longer dependent on human birth, and not limited by the thinking and desire of the body, but the true Children of God himself. So the Word became flesh. The Word came to live among us. We saw the glory of the Word, the glory that can surround only the Father's son, fully of grace and truth.

*Here is what John proclaimed about him. John shouted, "This is the man about whom I said, 'Although he comes after me [in time], he far outranks me. Even before I was born on this world, he already existed in the greater world.'"*

From his abundance of grace we received layers of grace. The Law came through Moses but the Truth came only through Jesus Christ. No person has ever seen God but only God's Son has seen him. God has revealed to us his Son who is nearest to God's heart. \*

Jesus almost certainly never spoke like this, and I doubt that he thought like this. This passage is really not about Jesus at all but about an idealized Christ. It is beautiful and it is inspiring to some people but it is probably not about the person from whom we want to learn morality. For all its beauty, it makes me sad because it leads people away from Jesus to an unreal Christ.

The term "Word" translates the Greek "logos", which is the same root as "logic", and is the "ology" or "ologist" in terms such as "anthropology" and "sociologist". It means something like "the logical structure of being, about which we have faith that it comes from a benevolent mind, and about which we have faith that it can be captured in orderly human speech". Notice that: word equals being equals light equals emanated-level-of-God equals life equals creation equals fullness equals governance equals grace equals truth equals child of God. I do not try to point out what is in all these connections. Modern people would not immediately understand that the real Word, Jesus incarnate, is now a substitute for the Law, derived from Judaism. The Jewish Law was divine words. If Christians can find words that are even more divine, they overcome and subsume the old divine words of the Law. By making the Christ into the Word, the Christ takes the place of the former divine words of the Jewish Law. The new abstract Word takes the place of the concrete practices of the old Jewish Law. Christianity absorbs Judaism.

There is nothing here about Jesus' message. The Word is not Jesus' message or anybody's message with any particular content. The Word is an abstract entity that means "knowledge of knowing" but not knowledge about any real thing in particular. Christians had a lot of leeway to fill the Word in with whatever details suited particular groups. This Word is all about the status of the Christ. Belief and devotion are enough. This text is a basis for the Nicene Creed.

Several passages from this hymn are famous and now stand alone, such as “So the Word became flesh; he came to dwell among us”. The most well-known phrase is probably the opening, in the King James: “In the beginning was the Word. The Word was with God and the Word was God.”

Almost no words that are attributed to Jesus in the Gospel of John are really from Jesus, an odd development considering that Jesus’ prime identity there is the “Word”. If words were so important, John might have stuck more to the books of sayings that claimed to have captured Jesus’ words and that formed the basis for the other three gospels. Probably the real words of Jesus would not support what John wanted to make of Christ. The easiest way to defend this argument about John is to give samples of Jesus’ speech in John that you can compare to any passage of Jesus quoted in previous chapters. In John, Jesus gives impossibly long speeches like a middle-Platonic philosopher trying to show how close he already is to God, and trying to bring others along his exalted path. I do not choose the most philosophic speeches because they can be boring. I choose speeches that convey the appeal of standard Christianity.

John 14:6 – 14:12. \* Jesus replied, “I am the way, I am the truth, and I am life. No person comes to the Father except through me. If you knew me, you would know my Father as well. In fact, from now on, you do know him because you have seen him.” Philip said to Jesus, “Lord, show us the Father and we won’t ask you for anything more again.” Jesus said, “Philip, have I been among you all this time and you still don’t know me? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. Then how can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’ Don’t you believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? I am not on-my-own the source of what I say to you. The Father who lives in me does his own work in having me speak. Believe me when I say that the Father is in me and I am in the Father. If you do not believe my words, then believe my actions. In deepest truth, I tell you, whoever has faith in me will do as I have done. He will do even more than I have done because soon I will return to the Father [die in this world]. In fact, whatever you ask for in my name I will do for you, so that the Father will be honored through the Son. If you ask anything [sincerely] in my name, I will do it [for you].” \*

John 16:31 – 17:19. \* Jesus replied, “Do you believe now? Pay attention. Soon, in fact already, you will all be scattered. Each will flee to his own home. You will abandon me alone. Of course, I won’t be completely alone because my Father is with me. I tell you this ahead of time so that when it happens you will be prepared, not fear, and find some peace [in what has to be]. In this world, trouble for you is unavoidable. Have courage. Regardless of what happens, I have already won. I have already conquered the world.”

Then Jesus looked up to God and said, “Father, it’s time now. Glorify your son [me] so that your son might glorify you. You have made the Son king over all peoples so that all peoples [that receive him] might have eternal life. Eternal life is to know [have a relation with] you who alone are true God, and to know Jesus Christ whom you sent. I honored you by completing the work that you sent me to do. So, now, Father, honor me in front of your face with the glory that has attended me since the world began. I taught men your name, the name that you gave to me from beyond this world. You gave me all the peoples of the world as my charge, and they obeyed your commands. Now they know that all my powers have come to me from you. I taught them all that I learned from you and they listened to all I taught. They know for sure that I came from you. They had faith enough to believe that you sent me. I pray for them. I do not pray for the whole world but only for the ones that you gave me because they are my

charge. All that is mine is yours, and what is yours is mine. Through them [that you gave to me] my glory shone forth. I am going to you. I have to leave the world now but they are still in this world. Father, protect by the power of your name the ones that you gave me so that they may be one [among themselves] as you and I are one. When I was with them, I kept them safe by the power of your name. Not one of them is lost except the one man who had to be lost to fulfill the scriptures. Now I have to go to you but while I am still here I say these words so that they [our people] might be as full of joy as they can. I taught your word to them. The world hates them because they are not a part of the rest of the world, just as I am a stranger to the world. Please, don't take them bodily out of the world but do keep them from the Evil enemy. They are strangers here as I am. Make them sacred [and protect them] with the truth. Your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I send them into the world. For their sake I now dedicate myself so that your truth can make them sacred." \*

Some passages of John are famous and convey an important message whether Jesus really said them or not.

John 3:16 – 3:17. \* God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son so everyone who believes in him does not die but has eternal life. God did not send his Son into the world to judge the world but so that through his Son the world would be saved." \*

John 4:19 – 4:26. \* She said, "Sir, I see you are a prophet. Our fathers worshipped on this mountain but you Jews say the true temple of God's worship is in Jerusalem." Jesus said, "Believe me; soon you will not worship the Father on this mountain or in the Temple at Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship without really knowing what you worship while we Jews do know what we worship. Salvation comes from the Jews. Very soon, in fact already, real followers of God will worship the Father in truth and in spirit. Those are the kind of worshippers the Father really wants. God is spirit, and the people who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth." The woman said, "I know the Messiah (that is, the Christ) is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us." Jesus continued, "I am he, the Messiah. I who speak to you now am he."

If the woman was a Samaritan rather than a Jew, then Jesus was not a Jew in the sense of the word at the time of Jesus but a Galilean. Only later when the Romans had ruined Israel and "Jew" meant "all descendants of Jacob and Israel", would Jesus become just a "Jew". So, when it is convenient to be a Jew, John makes Jesus a Jew. John had to translate the term "messiah" because his intended readers, mostly non-Jews by then, would not have understood it. Too bad Christians and Jews did not pay more attention to the phrase "Salvation comes from the Jews". Too bad everybody has not paid more attention to the idea that God is spirit and truth.

People often say that Christianity is about universal love but usually they cannot say why. Here is one passage to that point. Unfortunately, after a good start, John makes friendship conditional: he says that people are his friends only if they do as he tells them. I think Jesus cast a wider net. I think of it as "you are my friends because you try to follow my message".

John 15:9 – 15:17. \* "As God the Father loves me, so I love you. Live in my love. If you listen to me, you will live in my love as I listened to my Father and have lived in his love. I have talked to you like this so that the joy I feel might be in you and so your joy [in life] will be complete. This is my command: Love

one another as I have loved you. A man cannot show any greater love than to die for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I tell you. I no longer call you servants. A servant does not know why his master does what his master does. I call you friends because I have told you everything I heard from my Father [and now you know why]. You did not choose me; I chose you. I charged you to go out into the world and to bear fruit, fruit that will endure. When you carry out your charge, God will give you all that you ask in my name. This is my [final and highest] command to you: Love one another.” \*

Chapter 21 of John is not by the same person who wrote the first twenty chapters. I do not speculate on why somebody felt the need to add. Chapter 21 does add something that the regular John does not appear to have, specific instructions on how to carry out the commandment to love, including an idea of who to love. For the modern world, to the message of Chapter 21, I add, “Give them clean water, clothe, house, and educate them, make sure they use birth control, and give them medical care, old age care, and responsible limited voting rights, and make sure they do not abuse the system”. But food is the necessary beginning. I am not sure if Simon is the son of John or Jonas.

John 21:14 – 21:17. \* This time was the third appearance of Jesus to his disciples after Jesus returned from the dead. After breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love me above all else?” Simon answered, “Yes, Lord, you know I love you.” Jesus said, “Then feed my lambs.” Jesus asked a second time, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” Simon replied again, “Yes, Lord, you know I love you.” [Jesus repeated] “Then tend my sheep”. A third time Jesus asked, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” Peter was hurt that Jesus asked him three times about his love, so Peter retorted, “Lord, you know everything so you know that I love you.” Jesus said again, “Feed my sheep.” \*

## Chapter 4.08 Paul

This chapter is optional if you do not worry much about Paul. Please do read the last section on anti-Semitism and making Jesus special. Paul was the biggest figure in Christianity after Jesus. He led Christians to focus on a life of church, devotion, and piety. This chapter cannot cover all his influence so it focuses on his idea of Jesus as the divine Lord Christ and on a problem that centers on the term “justification”. Because of Paul’s writing style and the complexity of his topics, it is dangerous to quote him in small snippets. You have to read large chunks or whole letters. This chapter cannot quote large chunks so it does not quote at all.

### **His Life.**

Most facts about Paul come from the Book of Acts by Luke. Dates for Paul are about 0-5 CE to 62-67 CE, half-a-generation younger than Jesus. Paul was a Diaspora Jew, born or reared in Tarsus, a city now in Turkey near Lebanon and Syria. Originally his name was “Saul”. He said he was a strict Pharisee and a Roman citizen by birth. To be a Roman citizen by birth, his father had to be a Roman citizen, unusual for a Jew. He went to Jerusalem when a young man, where he sought to study with Pharisees but ended up working for the Jewish authorities as a spy, provocateur, and hunter of Christians – work he later regretted. To do that work, he would have had to ally with Sadducees, unusual for a Pharisee, and also unusual because Pharisees and Sadducees did not spend a lot of resources hunting down Christians. Some writers think Paul’s claim to be a strict Pharisee who hunted down Christians is an exaggeration to dramatize his change and to dramatize the situation of Christians.

About three or four years after Jesus died, in the late 30s CE, Saul was on the road in Syria, probably on the way to Damascus, when a light blinded him and he fell. Saul “saw the light”, which is probably how that phrase got into Western idiom. His companions did not see the light. While semi-conscious, a voice spoke to him. The voice identified itself as the Risen Christ, and told Saul to stop hurting Christians. Altogether, Saul had at least two such “out of body” experiences, perhaps more, the matter is not clear. In at least one experience, Saul was taken to a middle level of heaven where he saw some aspect of God-Jesus and learned some of the secrets of existence. In the first experience, on the road, when he was blinded, the voice told him to go to Damascus to stay with a particular Christian, where he would get advice. On later accepting Christ, Saul’s sight returned and he was renamed “Paul”. After a while, Paul went to northern Arabia to study, where he stayed for as long as three years. After returning to Jerusalem and Antioch, he worked tirelessly for the Christian movement. Paul worked almost entirely away from Jerusalem, mostly in Turkey and Greece among Diaspora Jews and God Fearers. He worked from about 42 CE up to his death. He founded some churches and helped many others. His letters are the earliest documents of the New Testament and might be the most influential documents in Christianity, as much as the gospels. He suffered many hardships, including whippings and beatings, and had many adventures.

About 60 CE, the Romans arrested him. The governor had the option to send Paul to Rome for trial, and did. Paul planned to continue to Spain after his trial to work more. Instead, he died in Rome. Legend says he died in a persecution. Legend also says Peter and he were in Rome together, which might be true. True or not, the stories fuel the Roman Catholic argument that the Bishop of Rome

(Pope) represents the truest apostolic succession and thus is the highest authority in Christianity.

Paul did not get along with James the Just and appears not to have gotten along with Peter while they were in Syria together. As related in the Book of Acts, James found out that some Christians in Antioch were not following the dietary laws and sent representatives to inquire and to force compliance if needed. Peter went along with James until Peter had his dream. Eventually James and Peter compromised to allow a dual standard, one for Jewish Christians and one for non-Jews. Paul accused Peter of backing down to James and of forcing Christians to revert to Judaism. The truth is more complicated, and it seems to me that Paul backed down, got run out of town, and then projected his own cowardice onto Peter. How various writers see this case depends on their opinions about the standard Christian package. Writers that sympathize with the divinity of Christ, and with the mission to the Gentiles (non-Jews) based on the divinity of Christ, tend to see it Paul's way.

Paul insisted that non-Jewish Christians are not bound by any Law in the Old Testament (Tanakh). He also insisted that all Christians should follow the Jewish Law and the civil laws anyway as much as possible so as to avoid any confusion or bad feelings.

### **Justified in the Risen Christ.**

Most of Paul's explanations of Christianity were done in the context of fixing squabbles in churches. Paul had a difficult if sometimes beautiful writing style. He was very smart. He was a great theological innovator. If he had not been breaking new ground in theology, and did not have to write in the context of fixing squabbles, he would have been a great systematic theologian. Unfortunately, his ideas about Christ, God, Church, and Law, are in bits and pieces between passages in which he admonishes or encourages congregations. It is important to take him in context but it takes a lot of space to do that properly; so I do not quote here him. It is better just to write about him than to misquote him. Christians anguish over Paul, primarily because of passages that have to do with an idea called "justification". I cannot explain Paul here but I can provide enough so that the reader does not have to anguish and can go on to other reading. Paul sought the answers to "Why did Christ have to die?", "Why did Christ have to be resurrected?", and "How does Christ's death and resurrection work to save?" It helps to stick to a few simple facts and ideas:

-Paul never knew Jesus personally, unless we include the brief episode on the road in which Christ spoke to Paul through the light.

-Paul had that experience. That experience dominated his life and changed his ideas. He had to make sense of that experience in terms of Christ, what he often calls "the Risen Christ". He did not start with a systematic theology. He did not have knowledge of Jesus. First he had an experience and then he shaped available ideas to make sense of that experience. For Paul, experience of the Risen Christ is what makes Christianity special and utterly distinct from Judaism. Nothing else rivals that experience for making Christianity special. To Paul, this experience was the "rock and roll moment"; all the rest is only the "mags" and "fanzines" that follow in the wake of the experience; all the rest is only disco or soft rock.

-We will see that the problems came when Paul opposed that experience to the Jewish Law and when he sought ultimate validation for that experience.

-The key to Christ and to the experience was in his death and resurrection. Christ's death and resurrection does everything. Christ's death and resurrection automatically magically does something special for all believers. Everything else had to be seen in terms of Christ's death and resurrection. It is not clear exactly what they do and how they do it. That was what Paul had to figure out.

-Paul was almost completely uninterested in the facts of Jesus' life or in Jesus as a person. He never mentions anything about Jesus' life that does not have to do with Jesus' death and resurrection. Because of that, in most of this chapter I do not refer to Jesus but to "Christ", "the Christ", or "the Risen Christ".

-Paul was not interested in Jesus' message apart from Jesus' death and resurrection or apart from the experience of the Risen Christ. Paul clearly understood aspects of the message such as the importance of love. One of the most beautiful passages in the New Testament is from Paul on love. But he did not seem to care about other aspects of the message. He almost never mentions parables or lessons from the parables. He mentions divorce only because it is a problem in a church. Likely Paul took for granted that people knew the message of Jesus and was more concerned with how to select from it, interpret it, and live it in light of Jesus' death and resurrection.

-Paul almost never calls Jesus by his name. To Paul, Jesus is almost always and only the "Christ" or especially the "Risen Christ". "Christ" is a technical term, the name of a divinity. "Risen Christ" is the key to the identity of the god.

-Paul probably started out expecting a general resurrection and the restoration of Israel as part of the Kingdom of God but he moved from that to an idea of the Church on earth as the Kingdom of God that matters. He talks little about the general resurrection except as a background matter of doctrine that everybody takes for granted. Jesus' death and resurrection were no longer primarily the prelude to a general resurrection but were something magically effective in and of themselves.

-Paul accepts Christ's divinity, Christ's resurrection, baptism for the removal of sins, and the Lord's Supper as givens of the Church that he got from other Christians. He does not invent these ideas and practices, and he does not modify them as far as I can tell. These ideas and practices predate Paul and they were part of the meaning of Christ that Paul had to work into his ideas. If Liberal Christians now see the deification of Christ as the betrayal of Jesus, that betrayal does not begin with Paul. Paul made sense of ideas that other people had already advanced.

-For Paul, non-Jewish Christians did not have to follow Jewish Law. Partly this was a recruiting stance, partly this stance might have been based on Paul's experience as a Diaspora Jew somewhat apart from other Jews, and partly this stance was how Paul understood the efficacy of the Risen Christ.

-For most Jews other than Paul, just by being a reasonably observant Jew, any Jew was pretty well OK in the eyes of God. Jews did not have to do anything special other than be reasonably observant. To Paul, after Christ, that was no longer true. Being a fairly observant Jew was no longer enough. Now both Jews and non-Jews had to believe in the Risen Christ.

-Why was being a Jew now not enough? Before Jews had the Law, so it must be the Law that is now not

enough. Paul had to do three almost incompatible things: (a) find a lack in the Law now, (b) explain why the Law was enough before, (c) and explain why it had still to be revered. Whatever Christians have now has to make up for whatever the Law lacks. Whatever Christians have now must be non-Law and more-than-Law. We can understand whatever Christians have now by contrasting it with the Jewish Law. This is like understanding true rock-n-roll by contrasting it with pop. Understanding something good by contrasting it with something else is dangerous. It tends to make the other thing (the Law) bad even if you do not mean so. It leads to misunderstanding what we do have. Paul took both missteps with the Law.

-Before, being a reasonably observant Jew insured that you would be resurrected and would participate in the restoration and ascendancy of Israel. Now, being a Christian took the place of that. So what did being a Christian insure you? Belief in a general resurrection coming soon was fading, so Paul could not rely on general resurrection as the goal of Christian life. Paul said that being a Christian gave you salvation. It saved you from death and perhaps something worse, although how was not quite clear. Later generations would say that it allowed you to go to heaven to be with Jesus.

-Before, being a reasonably observant Jew insured that you got whatever reward you deserved. Now, Christians had to do something like being reasonably obedient, but not exactly like being reasonably obedient, so as to get their peculiarly Christian reward. What did Christians have to do be sure that they got the reward that was due to them, salvation from death? What was there about Christian life that was parallel to being reasonably observant yet that contrasted enough so that Christians could be distinct from Jews? What was parallel to the Law but not exactly like the Law and that could bring the particularly Christian reward?

-When a person follows any system of law, including Jewish Law, we say that person is a "just" person. That person is "justified" in the law. Following the law justifies that person. So, even though whatever marks a Christian is not about the Jewish Law, let us borrow the term "justified" to describe what a Christian has that is both like and unlike the Jewish Law. Christianity justifies Christians. A Christian is justified before God. Justification brings a Christian salvation and the reward of eternal life.

-Jews get justified by being reasonably observant. How do Christians get justified? The answer is justification by grace through faith. Justification by grace through faith is the big experience that explains the Christ and that gives Christianity its distinctiveness to the Jewish Law.

### **Continuing: Justification, Faith, and Grace.**

Paul has to find out what Christian justification is, what feature of Christianity brings justification, and how that feature works to bring justification. I do not think Paul is clear about this matter. A lot of what we think is in Paul was put into him by later people such as Augustine and Martin Luther; but we are so used to their later terms and ideas that we now read it into Paul automatically. If you have heard sermons about Paul or read about Paul, likely you got a good dose of Augustine and Luther too without realizing it. I try to explain enough so you can decide for yourself if you ever read more.

-I think Paul did not really care about justification that much. It was only a tool to allow him to validate experience of the Risen Christ, allow a contrast between Jews and Christians, allow him to emphasize

the magic of the death and resurrection of Christ, and emphasize faith in Christ. He never meant justification, faith, or grace to become the technical terms they are now. He never meant faith to stand in contrast to works. Church members needed to know what faith in the death and resurrection gave them, especially in contrast to what Jews used to have. Paul offered them handy terms. Paul said faith opened the door to grace, grace really gave you justification, and justification gave you access to Jesus, God, the Church, and heaven.

-Sometimes Paul is like children who first understand Jesus' message, new Christian converts, or some Taoist idealists. Christian children and "newbies", and simplistic Taoists, cannot see why everybody doesn't just "get it" and be good spontaneously, why the true good nature of people doesn't just well up to overcome the bad, why people continue doing bad, and why people are still hurtful. They cannot see why people need rules. If we get the idea and we become good, then why do we need rules to make us Good? We just are good and act well. Good is bigger than rules. If we have Good, we can forget about rules. This is why Paul had such a difficult time with churches where members acted badly and/or squabbled. It was just nonsensical. To correct those churches, Paul had to invoke both the Law and the good that transcended the Law as revealed in Jesus.

-Jews had the Law to justify them. Now Christians have faith to justify them. Faith in what? And what is faith? Christians have an experience of the Risen Christ, faith that the Christ really did rise, and faith that the Risen Christ saves. Faith is the experience of the Risen Christ and his efficacy to save, the experience that Paul had. If you believe that faith can save, then faith can save. If you believe that faith in the Risen Christ can save, then it can. The experience justifies itself and produces justification automatically. Many modern Christians still feel this way, cultivate this experience, and advise other people to seek this experience.

-How does faith justify? It might make sense to say that faith saves directly but Paul says that faith saves by justifying first. That seems odd.

-Paul needed to sustain his contrast between Jews-with-Law versus Christians-above-the-Law. Here Paul does something odd to save his argument, especially for a Jew, and even for a Pharisee concerned with ritual purity. If Jews could have been justified just by being reasonably observant then the Law would have been enough and there would have been no need for the Risen Christ. If jazz were enough, there would have been no need for rock and roll. Paul had to put down pop so as to raise up rock and roll. Paul had to laugh at Paul McCartney so as to crusade with John Lennon. Paul argues that Jews were not justified by being Jews and by being only reasonably observant but needed to be absolutely completely pure observers of the Law to be justified. Just being a Jew and being pretty good at observance was not enough. Paul knew that neither Jews nor anybody else could ever be good enough and pure enough. So although the Law held out the promise of justification, it never really justified. The Law could never be enough because nobody could live up to it. In fact, by pointing out the inability of humans to be perfect, the Law in effect accused us all and condemned us all to death. The Law promised justification but really produced condemnation. We need to be above this trap. We need to have faith in Jesus. Only faith in Christ justifies and brings eternal life despite the Law.

Based on what I have seen among all the normal Jews I have ever known, based on my meager knowledge, even allowing for legendary Jewish guilt, this argument about needing to be perfect in the

Law is really odd. Jews do not feel trapped by the Law. Many Jews feel liberated by the guidance of the Law. No sane Jew expects to be absolutely perfect. That is why the Law allows for absolving and purifying. That is why God is merciful. That is why the Law can be summarized as "Love God, and Love Your Neighbor". When Paul overlooks the fullness of the Law including forgiveness and love, he steps out of Judaism into an artificial hyper-logical world designed to validate his arguments. Paul forced Western Christians into the duality of bad system versus good intuition-faith-grace, from which they have both suffered and benefited ever since.

-(Paul elaborates on the relation between the Law, death, Original Sin, and innate evil in the human soul, but it would take too long to go into those issues here. Augustine used this aspect of Paul heavily. Paul's elaborations are useful to show how any system might lead to confusion and stultification, especially that of Augustine, but that is not the main point in this chapter.)

-Ultimately the Law does not justify even though we need the Law to understand the idea of justification. Faith does justify, but how? Faith cannot justify by itself or we would have anarchy. People could say they believe and are justified by their belief, and then do anything they wanted. In fact, some Christians came to exactly this conclusion and began to fornicate and break the Roman law. Paul had to argue vigorously against Christians that abused faith. So faith does not justify by itself.

-Instead faith opens the door to God's grace. God sees particular people that sincerely believe, and he chooses from among the sincere believers the special people to whom he will give the gift of justification, salvation, and eternal life.

-Nothing we do, including believing really hard, can induce God to save us. We have to have faith first, but faith is not enough. Even if we have that experience of the Risen Christ, that experience is not enough. Even demons know that Jesus is the Christ who will rise. God chooses among the faithful who will be saved. God alone chooses who is to be saved and who is to be damned. If God has criteria for choosing some people rather than others, we cannot know those criteria because then we could follow them mechanically to induce God to save us, and that kind of procedure would be the Law and would not be faith.

-How do we tell sincere faith, real faith, from faith that is not strong enough, fake faith, or faith in the wrong things? This part of the argument is sad: Even though we started from the special experience of the Risen Christ, that experience alone is not enough. There can be guidelines but there can be no ultimate objective criteria that humans can know because, if there were, we would have the Law again. Only God can tell real faith from substandard faith.

-Depending absolutely on God opens the door to the issue of predestination. Some people are designated from before time to be saved or to be damned regardless of what they do. Predestination was a horrendous bad step allowed by the artificial argument of Paul, but I will not go into that question here.

-Again Paul is in an odd position. Rather than doing what Jesus wants, salvation is now the goal. For salvation, Christians must have faith. But a declaration of faith is not enough. Even having the experience is not enough. There can be no objective criteria for faith. So how do Christians know if they

have real faith and are saved? They cannot. By seeking to explain how the Risen Christ saves in opposition to the Jewish Law, Paul actually undermined hope in the Risen Christ. This dilemma opened the way for other abuses, such as using wealth and status as indicators of God's favor and of correct faith, and using poverty as indicators of God's disfavor and of bad faith. To Paul, the Law promised justification but produced condemnation. Paul then substituted a faith that promises comfort and salvation but produces anxiety and damnation. These problems plague everybody even now when rich and middle class Christians look down on the poor, an inversion of Jesus' message.

**Comments So Far.** Paul condemns systematization when he accuses the Law. He raises faith and grace to a kind of anti-logic. Yet he forces a logical system onto ideas about the Risen Christ, Law, justification, faith, salvation, life, death, and grace. We have to be careful when we use logic to condemn the Law (to condemn logic) and use logic to extol escaping logic. It can be done, but not as Paul did it, and not as did later elaborators such as Augustine.

I understand the need to encourage faith and the need to point out that a set of external rules is not enough. We need inspiration too. We stress that jump of inspiration all the time with athletes and children. Even mathematicians rely on faith to be creative, and we encourage business people to "think outside the box". I understand how a belief in a risen God would lead Paul to put faith on the side of life and to put any firm system on the side of death. I have trouble with Paul in general because I disagree with him in some basic points about Jesus and Christ. Paul erred in focusing entirely on the divinity of Christ while overlooking the message of Jesus. He erred in thinking that the magic of the death and resurrection was enough. He erred in focusing on the Risen God Christ while overlooking the living prophet Jesus. He compounded his errors by deliberately mistaking how Jewish Law worked so that he could bolster his experience of the Risen Christ and his belief in the efficacy of faith. He did not originate emphasis on the divinity of Christ but he did give it the kind of systematization, like the Law, that he condemned. We do not need to follow him in his errors.

Standard Christians get caught in a trap of seeking an "out of body" experience, not being sure it is true or enough, trying to make the experience even more intense to make sure, never being sure, falling back on ritual and points of dogma, arguing about when to get baptized and whether sprinkling is enough or if you have to get dunked, and so on – somewhat like drugs, fashions, gadgets, success, or New Age. Particular groups develop criteria for a true experience versus a false one, and for true faith versus false faith, but nobody trusts their criteria other than themselves. The Roman Catholic Church has Confirmation. Many "born again" Protestant groups look for a particular shining moment such as when Paul "saw the light" - without that particular moment, you cannot be a real Christian no matter what you do or what you say; lifelong study of Jesus is not enough; going to church is not enough; Confirmation is not enough. They want to be able to heal people, do miracles, or experience abundant life to be sure they have had a true experience and really are saved. For people who should just believe in Christ and get on with it, a lot of Protestants spend a lot of time worrying about what they have to do (acts) to get into heaven. Rather than freeing Christians from Law, Paul enslaved them to worry.

The best antidote to Paul's bad arguments is not to get involved. Do not worry about strong experiences, the divinity of Jesus, justification, faith, Law, being saved, grace, what it takes to be saved, and damnation. Instead follow the message of Jesus and be useful. If you want a "kick-ass" religious experience to go along with being useful, to make sure you are abundantly alive, then volunteer for

“Doctors Without Frontiers”, a good non-religious group, or something similar.

### **Faith and Works.**

Paul’s contrast of faith versus the Law established another parallel contrast of faith versus works. This contrast too is misleading and has caused a lot of damage. My advice also is to ignore it. You will run into it if you read more, it is a keystone of Protestantism, and it bothers a lot of Americans even now, so I briefly describe it here.

As we have seen, already by the time of Paul, some Christians got the idea that they were above the Jewish Law and above all law; they could do whatever they wanted as long as they believed in the Christ. Paul correctly said, “no”, and reminded them that a true believer could never do anything immoral. It seems the solution to this dilemma is to have people also do acts of faith such as help the poor, especially since they had to go through rituals of faith such as baptism that are clearly acts. Paul did not allow that option because to do so would be to allow the Jewish Law back, especially if we take the Law according to its best version, which blends intent (faith) and works. Some Church Fathers, in the four centuries after Paul, such as Augustine, also insisted on faith above works, even though they were strict about rituals such as baptism and strict about the need not to succumb to persecution. After them, the problem became unimportant for a thousand years as the Church found a balance between faith and works.

As the Roman Catholic Church aged, it slipped into some bad practices. The infamous selling of “indulgences” is a bad practice that helped spark Protestantism in the 1500s and after. The details are not important. Essentially, the Roman Catholic Church said: “If you do this, then we guarantee you will go to heaven eventually. Of course, you have to have faith first, and you must be sincerely contrite about any wrong you might have done, but we assume you already do have faith and are sincerely contrite, or you would not be inquiring of the Church; so that issue does not come up.” In effect, the Church put works before faith, and provided a list of specific works that would guarantee salvation.

Luther and Calvin were outraged. Their response was a vigorous return to Paul, Augustine, and the primacy of faith. In their turn, they overdid it. To get a sense of how far they overdid it, think of Luther’s reaction to the Epistle of James. James advocates balance between faith and works. We need both. In my terms, James says both to have faith and to be useful. In a beautiful phrase, James says that faith without works is empty. Luther prepared a new version of the Bible just for Protestants. He wanted to omit the letter of James from his new Bible because it disagreed with him on this issue, and so it must be wrong, not of the Holy Spirit, and not canonical. Luckily, better people prevailed and James remains in the Bible.

I am not sure why Protestants remain so agitated over the question of faith and works. They use this issue to keep up a contrast to the Roman Catholic Church and this issue gives them a point that they can use as a test of commitment. I think their version of Roman Catholic thought on this issue is just wrong, and they maintain a wrong view primarily to sustain a contrast between institutions. Once you think in these terms, it is hard to get out, and you want everybody else to think like this and share your dilemma. This way of thinking hurts people. People that get lost in this mindset are susceptible to other odd points of doctrine. Often people that are already in this mindset make other people lost in this way too so they

can control the other people. If you begin to think in terms of this dilemma, you will get lost, and will be susceptible. Again, the best tactic is to avoid the trap.

### **The Paradox of Faith, Law, and Institutions.**

It seems as if an emphasis on faith coupled with arguments about the insufficiency of Law would undermine the authority of institutions, including the Church. Some Christians did take it that way, and Paul sternly corrects them. Romantic rebels still take it that way. In fact, for most people, a reliance on faith alone without corresponding actions leads to the paradoxical opposite: it makes them depend on institutions; it strengthens the power of institutions over people. Faith alone is ethereal and a little weird. Most people cannot live with that. They want more structure and security. The less structure and security they get from faith alone, the more they need it from an institution. The more they hear that they have to rely on faith alone, the more they want to rely on the institution that tells them they have to rely on faith alone and tells them what faith to rely on. The closest parallel to this I have seen with my own eyes are New Age, Asian religious, and Christian groups that stress belief and that live apart from mainstream society, that is cults. Any sports team that says, "you gotta believe" is a little like that. The early Church was a little like that - maybe all new groups are- but I do not want to paint the early Church as a weirdo cult to make this point because, on the whole, it was not a weirdo cult.

Did Paul stress faith alone as a way to break down connections with other beliefs and institutions, weld people into the Church, and strengthen the Church? Was Paul something of a cult leader? Probably, yes; but he was not Charles Manson and he did not hand out any poison. He was a strong leader who knew how to use ideas to build a strong institution.

### **The Epistles.**

We do not know Paul's native language. Probably it was Greek. He also knew Aramaic from growing up in Tarsus and knew Hebrew as a student. In any case, the epistles were written in Greek. As was common then, he did not write the epistles himself but dictated them to a secretary. The secretary edited for clarity before sending the letters. For having been dictated, the letters have good overall structure. They also sometimes ramble and they often read as if they are recorded speech. Most epistles were edited again even after the secretary edited them. Scholars argue about the extent of editing and the identity of possible additional editors.

Traditionally, Paul had credit for fourteen epistles, as below. Of the fourteen, scholars accept seven epistles as coming largely from Paul, as below. Of the seven disputed letters, some are likely not from Paul while some are unclear. I do not divide the seven disputed letters into "definitely no" and "maybe", except for one. It is better to find the latest ideas by going on the Internet. The epistle called "Hebrews" definitely was not from Paul. It was passed about as if from Paul; we would call this practice "forgery" today but that word is too strong for ancient practice. The ideas in this letter about the Law have been incredibly influential in Christian history and, tragically, this letter is also biased against Hebrews, including especially Jews, and the bias helped form the basis for later persecution of Jews. The epistle has to be read carefully. I disagree with much of it. If Christians accept all of the New Testament as coming from the Holy Spirit regardless of who wrote or edited any piece, then they can accept Hebrews as from the Holy Spirit; but they should not continue to give it the weight of Paul's authority and they

should think about just what kind of stuff can come out of the Holy Spirit.

*Pauline Epistles.* The seven accepted epistles are listed first.

Romans 1 Corinthians

2 Corinthians Galatians

Philippians 1

Thessalonians Philemon

Colossians Ephesians 2 Thessalonians Titus Hebrews 1 Timothy 2 Timothy

### **Misconceptions.**

Both standard and non-standard Christians have misconceptions about Paul. It is a good idea to clear up a few.

-“Paul introduced radically new ideas into Christianity, such as the divinity of Jesus”. No, he did not. He, along with others such as the John who wrote the gospel and many thinkers around Antioch, stressed new ideas and systematized new ideas, but the ideas were around before Paul and came from people other than Paul. Paul originated some ideas, promoted new ideas, and was important in the success of some new ideas over competing ideas; but he did not originate them alone.

-“Paul’s ideas were all non-Jewish and all purely Greek. Paul Hellenized Jesus.” That is not true. Some of Paul’s ideas were Jewish and some were Greek. It is hard to say which are which. Jewish and Greek ideas were well mixed well before Jesus and Paul, so the distinction might not make full sense. To me, Paul seems more a mediocre Greek philosopher than a good Jewish prophet but I am not a competent judge. Paul did promote a general shift in worldview from Jewish to Greek, and Paul did promote some ideas that went better with the Greek worldview, such as the divinity of Jesus. But Paul did not originate these ideas and he did not accomplish the shift single-handed.

-“Paul founded all the churches outside the Holy Land. When the Jerusalem Church fell, the remaining Christian churches had all been founded by Paul, and thus the Church was Paul’s Church.” No, he did not. Churches existed in many cities where Paul had never gone. Paul is clear that he never went to Rome until the end of his life, yet Rome already had a large thriving Christian community, probably made up of Diaspora Jews. Neither Peter nor Paul founded that community originally. Nobody knows who founded that community originally. A thriving Christian community developed all over Egypt, and Paul had nothing to do with Egypt. Whether or not people wish to see Paul as the real founder of Church communities depends on whether people like Paul and whether they like the original Church after Jesus. If you like both, you want to see him as the founder of it all, of course continuing in the spirit of Jesus. If you like neither, you blame him for it all, of course betraying the spirit of Jesus.

-“Paul returned women to a subservient role”. No, he did not. After Jesus lifted women out of subservience, the Church in general returned them. Paul was both following and promoting the reactionary trend. Paul wanted peace in churches. If suppressing women could give superficial peace, he, as a man, was willing to pay that price without worrying too much about what price women paid.

This return to subservience for women violates the teachings of Jesus but Paul is not alone to blame.

-“Paul condemned homosexuality and thus began the Church tradition of condemning any non-stereotyped gender roles”. It is not that simple. Jews and early Christians both were uncomfortable with non-stereotypical gender roles including homosexuality, promiscuity (sex outside of marriage), and prostitution. People then were probably not as squeamish about homosexuality as people now but that does not mean all people openly accepted it. Paul condemned promiscuity and prostitution most. He condemned homosexual promiscuity and homosexual prostitution. He probably did not think about homosexuality as such very much but saw it as promiscuity because it was sexual activity outside of marriage. Neither Jews nor early Christians would have understood homosexual marriage even though (I think) it did sometimes happen in that world. I do not know if Paul would have condemned homosexuality if done tastefully as in marriage, done without a sense of promiscuity or prostitution, and done so as not to hurt any existing marriage. He seemed to condemn any sex outside of heterosexual marriage. I do not know if Paul was more fervently against non-stereotypical gender roles than the average early Christian but I doubt it. Whether or not you agree with the view of Paul and early Christians is up to you but this view did not originate with Paul. Whether or not you think the view of Paul and early Christians is against the spirit of Jesus’ message is also up to you. Bishop John Shelby Spong thinks Paul was a repressed gay man and that Paul’s condemnation of homosexuality comes out of self-dislike. Paul might have been gay and he might have been repressed, but his advice against promiscuity, gay or straight, did not have to come from there.

In our time, we think of promiscuity as sex that is not aimed at a relationship, is not aimed at gaining beneficial experience, does not make up for loneliness, or hurts an existing relationship. We condemn promiscuity, gay or straight. Allowing for these small differences, we are not far off the view of Paul and early Christians.

-“Paul changed the direction of Christianity away from the social service of Jesus’ message and away from expecting a change of the world towards Church membership and towards inner piety.” Again, Paul did not do this alone. He was part of a general trend among followers of Jesus that happened because Jesus was crucified, Israel was not restored, and there was no general resurrection. The new idea of Christianity that focused on piety within a strong institution was congenial to Paul’s personal outlook, he did promote it, and he likely speeded it up quite a bit; but he did not start it. This kind of shift toward institutions and to inner attitude in the context of an institution happens all the time to all kinds of movements. Moreover, Christians did not stop social action and did not stop following the message of Jesus’ just because they became pious members of a church. The leaders did not write about that kind of beneficial external activity so we do not see it as much in the historical record but that kind of activity was still probably the most important aspect of following Jesus for the average member.

-“Paul was a Jew-hating Jew and a powerful instigator of anti-Semitism.” See below. Paul might or might not have come to dislike Jews as he battled with them over Christ and Christianity. I doubt that he did. That is not as important as the fact that he had to “put down” Judaism in order to “raise up” Christ. I do not think that Paul intended to put down Judaism in the modern sense of denigrating it or demonizing it. He needed to show it was less than Christianity, and so he had to put it down in that sense. He takes pains to show that Jews were the darlings of God, and to show the virtue and sensibility of the Law, at least until Christ came and until faith in Christ superseded the Law. I do not think he was an anti-Semite

of the sort that plagued the West. Unfortunately, his ideas could be used to denigrate and demonize Jews and the Law, and have been used that way. When reading him, try to think of how Americans sometimes laugh at the English, or how the English think about their overseas cousins, or how Americans or the English sometimes feel about the French or the Germans. Then think about the Irish and the English, or sometimes the French and Germans. What starts out as a contrast can get out of hand and can serve other ends.

Paul was the right man, at the right time, to push the Church along toward becoming a strong institution, serving a particular range of people, whose members had the right attitude for life in an institution in a male-dominated family-dominated Empire, including the paradoxical emphasis on faith. He created a convincing theory of the right attitude based on ideas that were available at the time. He did not create the problems.

### **Paul, Special Jesus, Anti-Semitism, and Us.**

If you respect Jesus, it is natural to want to make him and his message special. Jesus developed out of Judaism. If you want to make Jesus special, you have to contrast him with Judaism. You have to find something about Jesus that Judaism was not. As much as we do not want to put down Judaism, in order to make Jesus special by contrasting him with Judaism, we imply that Judaism was inadequate. That was what Paul did. We all become Paul when we want to make Jesus special. Unfortunately, that way does lead to anti-Semitism. At the same time, when Jews think, even without saying it, that Judaism is superior to other religions, and Jews are superior to other peoples, they do the same. Most ethnic groups, religious groups, and countries do the same. That does not excuse the practice. We have to be careful about what we do to extol our leaders.

Probably there is no good way to handle the situation but the best I can think of follows. If we read Paul with an open mind and do not look for anti-Semitism, what follows in this paragraph is similar to what Paul did in his work. Judaism is as good as any system can be that is based on laws. It is as good as Indian Shastras, Chinese state piety, Greek philosophy, English case law, or French rationalism. It is as good as most constitutions of most nations. Judaism is an excellent representation of the Silver Rule and of how far the Silver Rule can be taken as the basis for government, society, and life. But we need something more than the Silver Rule. We need something more than constitutions or law books. We need something clearly positive. That is what Jesus gave us. Other people might have stated the Golden Rule before him but Jesus made the Golden Rule a mission. He made it above and beyond the state and the laws. It is not a denigration of Judaism that Jesus came out of Judaism, and pushed Judaism to its spiritual peak, but an honor to both Jesus and Judaism. Jesus does not put down Jewish Law or any other system because he does not offer another system. There is nothing wrong with good systems such as Judaism as far as they go; but we need more. To appreciate that we need something more, we have to contrast Jesus with what came before. That is all. This explanation does not distinguish Jesus from some other trans-rule religions such as Buddhism, Taoism, and some strains of Hinduism, and it does hold in high regard the many good deeds that Jews and other peoples do on top of their Law; but those are other topics. This version of Jesus is not metaphysically special but hopefully it is special enough.

## Chapter 4.09 Jesus' Intent, Mostly-Was, and All-About

### Review.

A person's "intent" is his-her own goals for his-her own program. "Mostly-was" is how other people understand that person's identity regardless of how the person might see him-herself. Of two high school teachers, one mostly-is a disciplinarian ("Mr. Woodcock") while the other mostly-is an inspiration ("Mr. Chips"). "All-about" is what the person does and the person's long-lasting effects. George Washington was all-about setting up a country of free self-governing people with realistic institutions, staffed by honorable honest self-limiting leaders. A teacher can be all-about his subject, or all-about shaping young people, or sometimes all-about both. The Blues Brothers were all-about two things: a mission from God to save the orphanage and spreading the culture of the blues. Often "all-about" can be decided only in retrospect. We do not yet know what Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama are all-about.

Real people are inconsistent in their intent, mostly-is, and all-about. Unlike normal real people, characters in literature, mythology, religion, history, and the news are unusually consistent because the people that tell their story make them so. The story tellers put consistency into stories so that the stories convincingly say what the teller wants them to say. Republicans speak of Ronald Reagan as if he always knew what he was doing, had exactly the necessary character to do it, and the world turned out just as it should have under his guidance - far from truth. Democrats say the same about Franklin Roosevelt and John Kennedy. Many people see Martin Luther King so. After George W. Bush, Republicans pretended he knew what he was doing all along, was-mostly a defender of freedom and decency, and was all-about making the world safe from terrorism. Usually high consistency indicates that a story has been heavily edited and it is not realistic.

Christians edited the story of Jesus to make him consistent in intent, mostly-is, and all-about, and to make Jesus' story consistent with what people want to get out of it. Not just standard Christians, but nearly everyone that tells the story, or has strong ideas about Jesus, edits his story to make him consistent so they can use him to validate what they want. I do that too but I try to do it as little as possible. This chapter does not force consistency and it tries to deal honestly with inconsistency in the story of Jesus.

This chapter summarizes my ideas about Jesus' intent, mostly-was, and all-about. I do not repeat conservative or liberal ideas. I do summarize some liberal ideas as a way of mild critique.

### Jesus' Intent to Change the World.

Jesus intended to restore Israel, including features that have been explained in previous chapters: resurrection of the deserving dead, return of the twelve tribes, rebuilding of The temple in Jerusalem yet again after Herod, restoration of the proper boundaries of Israel, the leaving of all foreign powers from Israel, the presence of God in the temple, God speaks through the priests to all of Israel and all the world, Israel takes moral leadership of the world, all the peoples and nations of the world recognize Yahweh as the one and only true God, all the peoples and nations look to Israel for leadership, and everybody's heart and mind changes in accordance with the new Kingdom of God.

An integral part of the intended Kingdom of God was a change in the hearts and minds of people and in their resultant social relations. Jesus wanted people to follow the Golden Rule, love their neighbors, and recognize everybody as a neighbor. He wanted the rich to stop acting badly and to start helping the poor. He wanted people to see the effects of their own intentions and to start controlling their minds. He wanted people to see their own hearts, the bad and the good within them, and to correct their own bad before they went after another person. He wanted men and women to have only one spouse and to love that spouse all their lives. He wanted all officials to carry out the duties of their office fully and to do only that. He did not want to eliminate all differences in people but he wanted justice to prevail despite differences. Jesus intended full social justice.

The change of the world and the change in hearts and minds would go along together. The change in the world did not depend on completing the change in hearts and minds first. The change in hearts and minds could occur in some people before the general change of the world. The change in hearts and minds in some first people would start the general change in the world, and the special first people would serve as examples for everybody else during the change in the world.

Jesus' intentions would certainly bring an end to the world as we know it. They would not bring an end to the physical world. They would transform the physical world into something more spiritual. Human bodies would change. It is not clear if people would still be gendered and have some kind of sexual activity but Jesus said they would not marry and have children as before. All these changes indicate not just a change of hearts and minds but something much bigger.

While the world was waiting for the Big Change, believers would live according to what life would be like when it arrived. They would form communities to act as models of the Big Change and to help instigate it. People in the communities have to act toward non-believers as if non-believers are members too or else the ideals are meaningless. Jesus likely expected the communities to be focused around local Jewish temples, but not to interfere in normal Jewish religious life. He saw no conflict. I do not think Jesus intended full equality of wealth and status but he did insist on equality of person and on mutual respect, and he did insist that the rich help the poor. He did not want everybody to be alike; he wanted everybody to be useful, helpful, and respectful. Jesus did not intend sameness between men and women but he did insist that men and women treat each other with respect and that women have opportunities equal to men when it was safe. For example, Jesus likely sent women out as teachers, something ordinarily only men would do. I do not think Jesus intended the communities to become like modern churches or like any big Church; I do not know if any church has to go against Jesus' intentions just because it is any organized institution.

Jesus intended to defeat all evil. He thought at least some evil already had been defeated; more evil would be defeated while people were waiting for the Big Change; and any remaining evil would be eradicated with the Big Change. Jesus might have felt that he defeated Satan in some kind of personal struggle, and felt that his victory began the end of evil but had not yet wiped out all evil. It is not clear what evil meant to Jesus but probably it meant mostly social injustice. As long as any social injustice persisted, then evil had not been fully defeated.

Jesus enjoyed life, and intended to enjoy life. He wanted other people to enjoy life as well. He wanted

people to enjoy life even before the Big Change. He understood that people could be hurt by life, and he did not expect people to be frivolously happy in the fact of hardship.

Obviously the Big Change of the world based on the restoration and leadership of Israel did not happen, at least not as Jesus intended, or not on his schedule. Jesus was wrong about at least this much. Obviously Jesus did not defeat evil fully, and much evil remains for our time. Jesus was wrong about evil too because he was wrong about Satan being the source of the worst evil.

Jesus did not intend to save the world by dying and being resurrected. I doubt he would have understood how that would save the world.

Jesus did know that his mission would attract the attention of the authorities, and he probably knew he would have to deal with that someday. Because his mission was so peaceful, he probably thought that aura would deflect most harm. For a time, it did. He knew he might get in trouble although it is not clear he knew he might die. I think he did not anticipate being crucified. I do not think he went to Jerusalem, and picked a fight with the vendors, so the authorities would kill him, so he would be resurrected, so the Big Change would come. I think he went to Jerusalem out of frustration and out of hope that doing something dramatic there might encourage God to start the Big Change soon.

I do not know if God used Jesus' enthusiasm to get Jesus crucified, so people would believe in him as resurrected and divine, so the message of Jesus would ride on the new religion.

### **Mostly-was.**

This gives my version of who Jesus mostly-was and then lists some of the many ideas about who Jesus mostly-was. People use ideas of who Jesus mostly-was to validate their way of life. They project onto Jesus a particular kind of person, usually the kind of person they wish to be or that they wish other people to be. They think that kind of Jesus would approve of how they live and of how they treat other people. Sometimes they make Jesus represent an ideology, as when pro-capitalists call Jesus the first real capitalist or when Liberals see Jesus as the first Liberation theologian or first feminist. I find some ways of seeing Jesus funny.

### *My Version.*

I rest on the idea that Jesus was a great prophet, and that his identity as a prophet is determined by his message. Jesus was what his message says he was. He had the personality characteristics that are evident in the New Testament where he tells stories and interacts with common people.

I do not know if Jesus thought he was the Messiah because I am not sure what Jews at the time of Jesus thought of the Messiah or what Jesus thought of the Messiah. If the Messiah had to be from the House of David then it is very unlikely Jesus was the Messiah because Jesus was not from the House of David regardless of the contrived genealogies in the New Testament. If the Messiah was the person who restored Israel and changed the world to go along, but did not have to be from the House of David, then Jesus might have thought he was the Messiah and did convey that idea to some of his close followers. If the Messiah had to succeed in exactly that task, then Jesus was not the Messiah. It does not count as

succeeding in that task, toward Jesus-as-Messiah, if Jews restore Israel two thousand years after Jesus, in particular because they have not restored it as Isaiah prophesied. If the Messiah did otherwise change the world, such as by calling for the institutions of good self-government, then Jesus might be the Messiah but not the Messiah of prophecy in the Tanakh, the Messiah as understood in the New Testament, or as understood by the Church for many hundreds of years after Jesus.

### *Views of Jesus.*

Which Jesus is most important varies by group and changes from time to time. The crusader of the middle ages is less important than the business man of our times. These characters blind us from seeing Jesus as he really was, including mistakes and limits. If you are a standard Christian and believe Jesus did not make mistakes or have limits, then these characters blind you from seeing Jesus. If you think Jesus was the first feminist, then you misunderstand both Jesus and feminism.

Rabbi ("teacher", not exactly like a rabbi in current Judaism, but close) Buddha Bodhisattva Zen master Yogi Ryshi (rushi or roshi) Wandering Cynic philosopher Magician Avatar Precursor of Mohammad Communard Messiah The Christ Complete and Perfect Son of God God Lord Founder of the Church Defender of the Church Son of Mary, Queen of Heaven, and her worldly instrument Prince of Peace Divine Warrior and Defeater of the Devil Crusader against any injustice Hyper moralist Wrathful Judge The Man With No Name in the Clint Eastwood movies Any of many modern fictional characters who combine wrath and honor Merciful judge who warns us not to judge King Elder Brother Ideal Son Kindly Father Prototype monk Rejecter of the physical world Rejecter of politics and worldly power Person who says "yes" to life and the world Ecstatic mystic Perfect man Second Adam Opposite of the Devil God of commitment, decisions, and consequences God of the hearth, of family values Anti-Jew Super Jew Forerunner of capitalists Condemner of the wealthy and powerful, friend of the poor Revolutionary freedom fighter Patron of our country, but not of other countries Patron of the New Israel, which is now made up of Christians Patron of our kind of people, our class, our country, our race, our gender Consoler to the lost, forlorn, imprisoned, and sick Carrier of secret knowledge about God, creation, and existence Embodiment of the archetype Wisdom Son of Divine Wisdom and her Representative

### **All-about.**

What Jesus is all-about to particular groups of people usually depends on a vision of an ideal world that the people have or on a reaction against the bad world they believe this world to be. Jesus is all-about bringing in the ideal world. Ideal worlds do not often reflect real human nature and real social life. The ideal people that represent ideal worlds and bring them about are not realistic either. People use the ideal world to justify their way of life, and what they do to neighbors, in this real world.

### *My Version.*

Jesus did not bring about his vision of the restored Israel and the Changed World. Jesus did give us the best available ideal. I do not repeat the specific points of his message here.

Jesus made possible a merger of Jewish ideas of the person, state, and social justice with Western ideas of the same things and with Western religion, science, and philosophy. He laid the foundation for the

important institutions of our time, including democracy and science, even if he was not a scientist and he had no idea of democracy in the modern sense. He gave us the modern idea of building a better world, and he convinced us that we each have a role in building the better world. He began the fusion of thoughts that led to today's ideas of the concerned good neighbor and the involved citizen. At the same time, he made clear that good neighbors and involved citizens are not intrusive self-righteous secretly self-serving busybodies. He increased the scope and urgency of tolerance and inclusion. He instituted the practice of judging people by their minds and their moral content rather than by superficial conditions and alliances. He began the fusion of ideas that led to today's idea of serving the world through our job, our profession, or our role in government. He began the reflective pro-active citizen. He began the chain of ideas that lead to all kinds of activism, and, when needed, to rebellion for social justice and to civil disobedience for social justice. At the same time, he made clear it is alright to accept help and alright just to be a decent person. Without him, we would have no modern schools, hospitals, charities, animal helpers, and organizations fighting for nature.

Even if you do not live in a society where you can work through government to build a better world, if you live in a tyranny, if you live in malignant religious ignorance, Jesus is still all-about building a better world in the scope that you can. You can be a better neighbor, build a better community, help animals, take care of nature, feed the hungry, visit prisoners, tend the sick, and enjoy life as much as possible. You can keep alive the ideas that are needed for a clear and free mind, hopefully ideas that one day are used to build clear and free institutions. You can be decent. You can stop poisoning other minds with stupid ideas, ignorance, and bad attitudes. You can be useful. Other religions teach similar ideals but Jesus laid a general foundation that can be used in various settings, to end some bad situations, and to build good situations.

Jesus brought hope and trust to many people. Jesus emphasized the idea that enjoying life is good under God. As a result, many people now enjoy life who might not otherwise.

Jesus laid the groundwork for common modern personalities: crusader for social justice, moralist, enthusiastic enjoyer of life, person who is not concerned with strong moral judgments, quiet tolerant forgiving person, ordinary Joe or Jane getting along with other people and living decently, giver of help, and receiver of help. These types do not fully blend. We cannot always find the right mix of these personalities in ourselves. Not everybody should have the same mix. Jesus recognized differences, and he would not want everybody to be the same. Different situations require different kinds of people and different mixes in the same person. I do not know how Jesus would advise people about all this. We should not find in Jesus only the kind of personality that we wish to be.

People now follow his message even when they do not realize they follow his message and who might even dislike standard Christianity.

Whether or not the world will turn out alright in the long run as a result of Jesus' life, I do not know. Definitely it has turned out better in many ways. Whether or not God used Jesus to achieve the good ends by having us believe in Jesus as divine so that we would carry his message, I also do not know.

The world might turn out alright not primarily because of Jesus. The big force in the world turning out

alright might be Greek philosophy, British Romanticism, Taoism, a scientific discovery, a lot of hard work by human beings with an evolved nature, or even the whine of moralistic atheists. Jesus still will have contributed something necessary even if Jesus is not the decisive factor. If the world does turn out alright, we probably will never know the decisive factor, so people will credit whatever suits them, including Jesus, science, or PC. If the world does turn out alright but not because of Jesus, I am not sure what that implies for his all-about.

#### *Non-Standard.*

The standard orthodox version can seem a bit bleak, and so people do not usually rest content with that. For example, they supplement it with the idea that Jesus is all-about bringing comfort to the world, and so he has a big heart. Or Jesus is all-about taking good believers to heaven with him when they die. I cannot review all the ideal worlds and ideal Jesus' that people dream of so as to make sense of this world and to validate their lives. What follows in subsections below are only a few examples. See also above on the identities of Jesus where each identity can imply an ideal world.

#### *Perfectible World.*

I tend to go along with this vision. The world has a lot of faults but it is getting generally better and it is perfectible. We can have a world where people have enough material goods if they are not too greedy and do not want large families, with justice, and with reward according to ability and effort. We can sustain science and the arts. This is roughly the world of Thomas Jefferson, Star Trek, and Star Wars before the Sith Lord. Jesus is the person who gave us the basic tools to build this world. He was all-about laying the foundation for this kind of world.

#### *Return of the Righteous King: Restoring Peasant Justice.*

Somehow the world has gotten out of whack. Honest people are poor and powerless. Disgusting bad people of the world are rich, powerful, and successful. Evil rules. A good king will return someday to set it all straight. When he gets power, he will not succumb to temptation and become one of the bad people. It is not clear how he will get power. After he does get power, then every honest person will have enough land to raise a family and throw a party now and again. Every honest tradesman and laborer will have work enough to stand equal with landowners. Nobody will cheat or rob or rape. Jesus is a combination of the major characters in "Lord of the Rings", in particular Aragorn, Frodo, and Gandalf. That is why the third book is called "Return of the King". Even citizens of a democracy tend to see their leaders in these terms too and to have unrealistically high expectations as a result. In most legends before modern times, the King was a man.

#### *Opportunistic Avenger in a Fallen World.*

The world has gone to shit and there is not much we can do about it. Every once in a while, we can clean up a particular situation but bad situations will still prevail. Sweetness, peace, and light do not work. We need cunning and decisive action. We need a hero for an hour. This is Clint Eastwood and Arnold Schwarzenegger as Jesus. This is the hero who stumbles into a bad town, gets caught up in it, gets unfairly accused and punished; but then cleans up the whole mess – and then moves on to the next one.

This is the rebel girl. This image is so common in popular culture that it does not require elaboration. The only surprise is that some people do not realize this myth long predates Jesus, how much this myth colored the story of Jesus in the New Testament, and how much the story of Jesus told in the New Testament colors the retelling of the myth for our modern times of unsolvable social problems. In the first Clint Eastwood spaghetti western, the man with no name rides into town on a donkey and then disrupts the town money changers. The woman's version is "The Quick and the Dead" with Sharon Stone.

#### *Decency.*

The world is not a decent place now but it could be a decent place. People could have decency in their hearts instead of selfishness. Jesus is all-about converting people to decency and thereby making a decent world.

#### *Family Values.*

The world is all-about raising decent families among other decent families. The world is all-about children, kin, neighbors, and community. We have perverted natural drives such as sex so that they no longer serve decent family values. If you do not have a family, then you are not a real person and are not saved. Having a family saves you; especially it saves men and teenage girls, who otherwise would be wild and bad. Jesus is all-about restoring decent family values. Jesus is all-about setting up strict monogamy and marital fidelity. That is why he denied divorce and why he preaches to children. He did not condone adultery when he told the accusers of a woman adulterer, "he who is without sin may cast the first stone"; he told the woman to stop committing adultery.

#### *Effusive Love.*

"All you need is love, everybody". Love can cure everything. If we only love other people enough, they will love us back just as much. Love applies to everyone equally. Then everybody would love everybody else. If we only understood how much we are alike, how much everybody is in everybody else, how nature is all of a piece, then we would all behave very well to each other. There would be no competition, no divisions between people, no groups, no excluding, and no pain. Jesus came to teach us all this. He is all-about universal love. He is the agent of love, and he will build a loving world.

#### *Immanent Transcendent.*

God made the world; the world is not the same as God. Yet God loves the world. God wants to appear in the world that he made. God wants to show what godliness is like to creatures that cannot experience full godliness directly. God wants to come into the world some way. God wants to be both creator and created. Jesus is all-about the incoming of God in the world. After God, through Jesus, shows himself in the world, everything changes. Love, intelligence, decency, beauty, science, self-consciousness and many other wonders come into the world when God comes into the world in the person of Jesus. For a quasi-scientific version of what happens when an author (creator) appears in his own book (creation), see "Godel, Escher, and Bach" by Douglas Hofstadter.

#### *Liberal Social Justice.*

The main problems of the world are social and economic but they can be solved. We need social justice. God commanded social justice. Jesus is all-about making sure social justice prevails in this world. He gave us standards, and he will not let us forget those standards until we have achieved enough social justice. The people that block social justice, or that benefit from injustice, either will have to convert or they will be condemned and cast aside.

### *Jesus as Capitalist.*

"Greed is good". Selfishness can be harnessed under the right socio-economic-political system to provide the greatest good automatically. Under this kind of system, people automatically learn responsibility and other good virtues. Under this system, justice automatically prevails. This system is called "capitalism". It would save the world if only we would allow it to run rampant. This is what Jesus is all-about. He came to teach capitalism, and to found the institutions that capitalism needs to flourish. We can see this in his parables in which he teaches people to work hard, and in which he says that God expects a return on efforts above the initial investment in those efforts. We can ignore any faults of capitalism. We can ignore what Jesus had to say about the rich and the poor.

### *God of Decisions and Commitment.*

Some ideas of mostly-is and all-about particularly reflect their times. The stress on Jesus as God of the hearth (family values) reflects that people now have few children but invest a great deal in each child. Each child is "my precious". Anything that might undermine success for each child, including competition from the poor, must be blocked off.

Recently I have had many people explain Jesus to me as the god of decisions, commitment, responsibility, and consequences. Christians understand responsibility. They understand that other people rely on them. They understand what happens when they let other people down, such as by having pre-marital sex. Jesus as the god of commitment etc. might be a peculiarly modern character, around only since about the late Renaissance and the beginning of capitalism. He is a god for business people, professionals, skilled laborers, soldiers, professors, doctors, teachers, and other people who have to make decisions and live by the results. He is a god for the proud working class, the middle class, and the upper middle class. A recent version is the "What Would Jesus Do" movement. This is the god that parents invoke when they lecture their children about the dangers of marijuana and sex, and of the bad consequences to themselves and others, such as pregnancy, low test-scores, and an unfulfilled life.

### *Theological Imagination.*

I have fun choosing a character for Jesus (mostly-was) and imagining what society would be like if that character dominated, or what kind of a world people want who believe in that kind of character. What do people really want when they see Jesus as the Divine Warrior who conquers the Devil or as the god of commitment, decisions, and consequences? What kind of a world do family values people really want when they make Jesus the god of the hearth? What kind of a world would we have if Jesus were the prototypical monk and everybody had to aspire to be a monk as well? It is fun to go the other way around too. What kind of a world (all-about) would be wanted by a business person, middle class family, Gen-X

family, habitual rebel, or PC person? What kind of Jesus (mostly-is) would he-she imagine to justify that world? People create a mostly-was to support the all-about and to support their way of life. What kinds of Jesus would people exclude from any “mostly-was” so as to protect their all-about? The Jesus’ of family values cannot really also be the Jesus of the poor, so the Jesus of family values is often also the Jesus of capitalism but not the Jesus of Luke’s blessings and curses.

More seriously, what kind of world, and what kind of Jesus, would people want that have real trouble in this world? Is it unrealistic to think Jesus might really be like what they want or might really be able to imagine what they need? What kind of world and what kind of Jesus do the victims of ethnic discrimination want? As an Asian woman in the American South, my wife has been the victim of discrimination from Blacks and Whites. Is it unrealistic to think Jesus might be able to understand what the victims of discrimination need? I cannot dismiss ideas about Jesus because they do not entirely fit in with my picture above.

### **Brief Argument With Liberals.**

Orthodox or not, the traditional (Conservative) Christian understanding of Jesus’ intent, mostly-is, and all-about are fairly straightforward and easy to get. The idea of being magically saved is a bit mysterious, and it is not clear what Christians think will happen to the world; but those are quibbles in the overall framework. I disagree with traditionalists, and I strongly suspect their motives, but at least I know where they stand.

In contrast, the Liberal view is murkier. To the extent they are clear, liberal ideas of intent, mostly-is, and all-about might be inspiring but are not very realistic. I do not get a clear sense from liberals of what Jesus was all-about. Waiting around for the incoming of God to convert everybody to universal love does not seem a good prospect. If the only ways we can get social justice are through revolution or through waiting for Jesus to wander in and clean up the town, then we are in trouble. It might be that Jesus wants us to crusade for the rights of illegal aliens, gay people, women, and the poor, but that cannot be all he is all-about. Since Romanticism of the late 1800s, and especially since the middle 1900s, liberals have been against science, and they have not found ways to use our institutions to solve deep problems of social justice. They have not accepted the realities of capitalism, both benefits and faults. I think we have to work through politics, science, and business to achieve the kind of world that Jesus is all-about. When Liberals cut off normal political institutions and cut off science as ways to achieve social justice, inclusion, and love, then they really obscure what Jesus might be all-about.

Because Liberals are not clear what Jesus is all-about, instead they often stress his mostly-was. They stress identities such as the incoming mystic shininess of God or rebel revolutionary. They try to find evidence that he was a feminist, gay, the incarnation of the Gnostic Sophia-Wisdom, or a misunderstood magician. Liberal scholars do so in part because, as honest scholars, they have to focus on real evidence, and historical evidence is not usually clear on all-about. Liberal theologians do it to provide backing for their particular agendas – just as Conservatives do. They substitute the latest “ism” for common sense and then make out Jesus as the original spokesperson for that “ism” all along. His mostly-was becomes his all-about. Without a clear idea of what Jesus is all-about, these pictures of mostly-was are unconvincing and unbelievable. For example, if Jesus was all-about universal love but universal love does not work, then what? What does it mean to say that Jesus was the incoming

shininess of God? To push the point for clarity: If Jesus was gay, then what? Does he want everybody to be gay? Does his idea of universal love and acceptance come only because he was gay? Do all gay people automatically think like Jesus? If we are not gay, then are we unable to believe in universal love?

I strongly encourage liberals to get a good sense of the realities of the world and human nature, the strengths and weaknesses of capitalism, the truth of science, and of how our political and economic institutions work. You do not have to lose your idealism or your zeal when you find out facts. Get a clear idea of what Jesus is all-about for this kind of world. Then tell us. Lead us. We need good leadership from people who have a clear sense of what Jesus is all-about for this world.

## Chapter 4.10 Inside and Outside

This chapter did not appear in the published book. It has not been carefully edited. This chapter evaluates the idea of salvation as an internal idea. It returns to this theme: Do not worry about salvation, justification, works, faith, grace, saving the world, personal level, or grand scale. Do not get caught in traps. Instead, just do what you can. Work toward a better world. Change as did Bill Murray in "Groundhog Day". If you are only comfortable working at a personal level, then do that. If you can work toward a better world through your job, then do that. If you are informed, have a vision, and are comfortable with politics, then do that. If you sit hunched over a keyboard writing, then do that. If we people do save the world, then good for us. If we do not, then God will explain it after we die. If you are sick, miserable, in prison, or in an evil place and cannot do much of anything except trust and hope, then do that.

On the one hand, getting this idea is purely internal. You can become a member of the Kingdom of God just by wanting to be. You only have to want to be useful and a good neighbor. You do have to really try, but you do not have to accomplish much. You do not have to save the world. Bill Murray did not save the world. You do not even have to be a sweet person.

On the other hand, purely internal ideas of Jesus invite abuses. If we substitute faith and salvation for getting the message of Jesus, we invite abuses. Instead of being a good member of the Kingdom of God, we can sit at home. We go to church to light a few candles while ignoring the food donation box by the door. We can dispute theology while children need medical care. We can just declare that now we are members of the Kingdom of God and have changed the inside while our behavior on the outside remains the same old selfish person. We can even fool ourselves.

Shortly after Jesus died, early Christians interpreted Jesus' message to be about salvation and justification. The internal idea became a matter of correct belief. If you believed the right doctrine then you had the right internal idea and you would be saved. As time went by and theology developed, it became clear that many people could not understand the correct doctrine in its full complexity, so the right idea became the right attitude. If you had the right attitude, then you had the right internal idea and you would be saved. Since the time of the Reformation, the right attitude has been simply faith. Of course, to make sure people did not believe silly things, theologians insisted that people have faith in the right doctrine. Even so, except for horrible episodes in which dogma was used as a tool (such as the Inquisition or the Witch Hunts), theologians have mostly been content to insist only that people have the right attitude of simple faith and consent on the outside to what their church teaches.

With Romanticism after about 1760, the content of the attitude did not matter so much as simply having an attitude and having a stance to go along with the attitude. The attitude is the secular faith while the stance is the secular ritualistic expression of that faith. You do not need faith in God; you need a conviction about life and a stance that acts out your conviction. Since Romanticism in the 1700s, a plethora of attitudes and stances have been acceptable. It would take a large book simply to list the attitudes and stances that modern people accept as indicators of living a valid life and being saved. For example, a right attitude and its expression can consist of being a cavalier highwayman; the stuff of

romance novels. Now it is necessary only to “have an attitude” in the sense of being snotty without necessarily having a particular attitude such as a belief in democracy.

A long time ago, before the Renaissance, Reformation, Enlightenment, or Romanticism, shortly after Jesus died, early Christianity had already gone through a similar process. People then came up with imaginative ways in which the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus could save them through changing their attitude. Some of those ideas were dangerous such as that Jesus had released everybody from all sin and all law, and so people could do as they wished, including adultery and incest, without incurring any guilt or punishment. Paul and the early Church Fathers fought the silly dangerous ideas, which we now call “heresies”. Many of the silly ideas are mental and spiritual traps. They are rationalization for selfishness. Once into them, it is hard to get out. It is hard to stop thinking that way, especially after we do something shameful. This is why the Church Fathers insisted on orthodox dogma to go along with faith. Modern people are rediscovering the traps that people can fall into when they believe that attitude alone can save you if we do not also pay attention to the content of the attitude and if the attitude does not have expression in particular kinds of activities such as charity.

### **Jesus Fails, and Internal Salvation.**

The move to thinking in terms of internal ideas rather than an external kingdom, to thinking in terms of salvation, faith, and attitude, came largely as a result of disappointment over Jesus’ program and over his death and non-return. We need to be honest and clear about this.

Jesus failed in many ways. Jesus aimed his program first at Jews, did not claim divinity, and did not teach salvation except as resurrection. Jesus was probably wrong about the Kingdom of God as he saw it. Early Christians expected Jesus to return within a few years. Jesus was not resurrected, did not restore Israel, did not bring about most of the changes he aimed at, and still has not returned 2000 years later. Jesus did succeed in changing hearts and minds, did create an image of the Kingdom of God much wider than the Kingdom of Judah, and did succeed in giving the world a shot at a real success.

One group of early followers turned toward the inside. They developed the idea of salvation apart from membership in the Israelite Kingdom of God, and they claimed that Jesus saved the world in that way despite the apparent failures. The ideas of the Kingdom and of salvation became internal. If you have faith and are a good member of a church, then eventually you go to heaven to be with Jesus. The Church took the place of the returned Jesus. Membership in the Church set membership in the Kingdom. You had to believe what the Church declared. Theologians developed elaborate ideas of how Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection saved believers, but only believers. People had to believe all this even though Jesus never taught this kind of faith or salvation. Put this bluntly, it sounds like brain washing. It was not. We have to recall the disappointment that believers felt and of the wacky and dangerous ideas that were circulating at the time, and we see this was the safe sane middle of the road approach. While the early Church stressed belief in correct doctrine, it never forgot that people also needed to act on their faith. The Early Church was a powerful force of charity and social relations.

### **Maybe It Worked After All.**

Because of Jesus, the world is a different place, and, on the whole, better. Jesus allowed other countries,

peoples, and groups to become like Israel as instruments of God to teach and to lead. There is not one new Israel now but many new Israels. As one of the Israels, Jews have continued to give knowledge, wisdom, beauty, and leadership to the world. They became something like what Isaiah foresaw even if not as they understood Isaiah and as Jesus understood Isaiah. Did Jesus really succeed in his original program after all? Does all this amount to a success according to Jesus' program? Is this a valid Big Change even if not exactly the Big Change Jesus intended? Is this the real Kingdom of God, or as close as real people are ever going to get? Did Jesus really save the world after all even if not as he intended and not as standard Christianity teaches?

This situation might amount to a success for Jesus if we could be sure the world would continue to get better for everybody and would surely succeed as a prosperous, free, healthy, and ecologically sound place. If so, then Jesus did create a Kingdom of God, create new Israels, and save the world, even if not quite as he originally intended. We are far from the point where we can declare this kind of success so we cannot claim that Jesus somehow fulfilled his mission even in this indirect way.

Until we do succeed in this external way, we have to fall back on understanding membership in the Kingdom of God as much as a question of intent as a question of actual external success. We cannot deny membership in the Kingdom of God to all the people that get the idea and really try just because humanity is too stupid or too vile to succeed in the end. How do we understand membership in the Kingdom of God as largely an internal matter without screwing up?

### **Personal Salvation Through Belief in the Divine.**

People that are not sure about how to contribute to a better world still look to Jesus for personal salvation through the feeling that Jesus loves them and God loves them. This has to be enough for some people. If so, does this count as a success for Jesus too? I am not sure but I hope so. Does this count as salvation? I still am not sure but I do not worry about it very much. It is not my problem. Does this idea of salvation undermine the people that get Jesus' full message and work toward a better world without necessarily achieving it? No.

People need to put the divine into their ordinary lives. People that look to Jesus for connection to the divine tend not to be able to rest with the idea that Jesus was only a prophet or only human. They have to believe that he was fully God. Jesus was not God but a lot of people can only connect to the divine if they believe he was God. This is likely the single biggest reason that people continue to believe in Jesus as the divine Christ and the Son of God without being fully sure what that means and without avoiding heresy. They are not guided by Church dogma but by their need for internal salvation.

Standard Christians are often shocked to learn that other religions offer people an incarnation of the divine, a connection with God, a personal savior, and a relation with their savior, even a personal relation with their savior, although other religions are not also usually monotheistic. What people want and get is not confined to Jesus or to Christianity. If so, does this still continue to count as a success for Jesus? Again I do not know.

### **Salvation as Church Member.**

Some people can conceive of a relationship with Jesus only through their Church. Salvation amounts to Church membership and vice versa. Church membership seems like an external act but it amounts to an internal act of faith.

If their story went only that far, there would be no problem. They would do their thing, we would do ours, and we would both rest happy at each other's success. But their train of thought goes further to undermine our position, and we have to put up mental barriers for protection. If people can get saved outside of church membership, then the people that need their church to be saved could not logically depend on their church for salvation. They would have to worry that being a church member did not really save them. They cannot allow a point to following Jesus other than their kind of salvation, and they cannot allow salvation outside their church or they undermine the reasons to go to church. So, salvation is what Christ is all about, and only what Christ is all about, and salvation can only be given by their church. People outside their church are damned. Christ was all about founding the right Church. I do not know what to say about this view except I doubt Jesus came primarily to found the Church, their church, or any particular church.

Most churches do good work and I do not want to deride them but I doubt that church membership it is the only way to God. No church by itself is the Kingdom of God on earth. No church takes the place of getting Jesus' message. No church takes the place of working hard toward a better world. So I cannot say Jesus succeeded because the Church was founded, any church.

### **Faith versus "Getting It".**

Both faith and getting the message of Jesus are internal ideas of what Jesus was all about. Neither one absolutely requires any external action. Even so, I want to keep them distinct, and I think standard Christians would want to keep them distinct as well but for different reasons. To me, "getting it" is the bigger category. Faith cannot take the place of "getting it" if you do not get it. Faith does act as a substitute for "getting it" among people who cannot get Jesus or will not get Jesus, especially if they have given up trying. Faith is a poor substitute for people that want to have the benefits of salvation but do not want to do as Jesus taught. Getting the idea of Jesus involves understanding some fairly clear goals while having faith seems to have no object except a relation to the Church or sometimes a subjective personal relation to Jesus as Savior. I do not wish to undermine faith but faith has to be about more than correct dogma or "Oh, Wow". There has to be a change of heart and sometimes there has to be a change in behavior too. The standard Christian churches recognize all this in their own ways but do not insist on it too much because it drives people away from the church, undermines need for the church, and seems to place works above faith.

It does not make sense to say that we "get it" if we do not also have some faith in something. The very idea of "getting it" implies that we have faith in what we get or in what lies behind what we get. The difference is that getting it does not require much in terms of specific articles of faith but does require a change of heart and a commitment to acting if possible. It is hardly necessary to believe in Jesus is God and in the magical power of the crucifixion-and-resurrection in order to follow him in building a better world. You just get it and do it. You can abuse the idea of "getting it" by saying that you get it and then doing nothing, or by then working hard to get rich by screwing the poor. Other people will not believe you, and I doubt God will believe you either, but there is no absolute logical grounds to argue with you if you

insist. I do not worry about that case in the same way that a priest has to worry about somebody who passes catechism but then sins daily. The idea of “getting it” is not proof against mental and physical traps but it is better than most versions of standard faith in Christianity or in most other religions.