

in the law covenant but . non-Israelites would merely be *under* it. But matters are not put that way. When the apostle Paul speaks of those in the law covenant arrangement he always says they were *under the law*-never that they were *in the law*:

"Now we know that all the things the Law says it addresses to those *under the Law*, so that every mouth may be stopped and all the world may become liable to God for punishment. "-,-Romans3: 19NWr."And so to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain Jews; to those *under law* I became as *under law*, though I myself am not *under law*, that I might gain those *under law*..."1 Corinthians 9:20 NWT." But when the full limit of the time arrived, God sent forth his Son, who came to be out of a woman and who came to be *under law*, that he might release by purchase those *under law*, that we, in turn, might receive the adoption as sons." - Galatians 4:4,5 NWT.

If we apply Watchtower logic to the fact that Jesus was a descendant of the tribe of Judah through David then we would have to conclude that Jesus was born *in* the law covenant-not *under* it. But Paul says he was born "*under law*." In all of the scriptural applications

just considered being under the law meant being an active member of those separated to God by means of the law. Being under the new covenant would have to mean the same thing-being separated to God by means of it. The Watchtower Society, by inventing these distinctions and reading them into the Bible succeeds in advancing (at least in the minds of Jehovah's Witnesses) its two-classes of Christians doctrine. It is illogical as well as unscriptural to teach that there are millions of people who do not enjoy the blessings and benefits of the new covenant but are obliged to live up to its terms. This is crazy!

So, when the millions of Jehovah's Witnesses file into their Kingdom Halls to observe the Lord's Evening Meal this year they will be denied the right to partake of the emblematic bread and wine just as they are denied the complete forgiveness of sins offered to those putting faith in Jesus Christ. They have no mediator and they have no priest-king because the new covenant priesthood only function towards within the new covenant family. What annually takes place in the Kingdom Halls of Jehovah's Witnesses is a mockery of what Jesus intended. □

Phoenix and Pasadena Conferences Report

(Number 43. Originally published May 23, 1988)

Seminars and conferences held by former Jehovah's Witnesses prove helpful in a variety of ways. One benefit is the opportunity to fellowship and worship with other Christians who can relate to a common experience. Another benefit lies in being able to explore issues that are of special concern to those trying to find their way-religiously speaking. Many have found such gatherings upbuilding and encour-aging-others less so. Whether one is benefitted or not depends, to a large extent, on what expectations they bring with them. Those who are looking for confirmation and reinforcement for a particular doctrinal position may not find what they are looking for. Others are hoping for complete unity of thought on every matter-one that comports to their own belief system. If this is not found they, too, will go away disheartened. Those best served by these conferences are those who are willing to accept differences and are able, as it were, to separate the "wheat from the chaff" in what is presented on the program as well as that gleaned from private discussion.

Why is it that someone's putting forth a view different from our own can be so discomforting? Is it

because we are so sensitive about the "truth" that we cannot tolerate anything that challenges it? Or, could it be that we are fearful of having our conclusions challenged or threatened? It is something that each of us needs to reflect on. Having left the comfort (?) of an organizational structure that dictated every position on every matter in an environment wherein there was never the sound of complaint, doubt or disagreement (at least not publicly) some are still ill at ease with freedom and the responsibility freedom brings. In some ways it reminds me of the Israelites who left Egypt under the direction of Moses. They had been suffering oppression for hundreds of years in a slavish condition. Their situation was intolerable and they cried out for deliverance to the God of their forefather Abraham. When they were finally delivered from this slavery they experienced a brief period of euphoria. Their joy, however, soon turned to bitterness when they found themselves in a desolate wilderness. This was no "land of milk and honey" that they had been promised. In anguish they cried out to Moses and Aaron: "Why did we not die at Yahweh's hand in the land of Egypt, when we were able to sit down to pans of meat and could eat bread to our heart's content! As it is, you have brought

us to this wilderness to starve this Whole company to death!" -Exodus 16:3 *Jerusalem Bible*.

In some respects those of us who have . been delivered from spiritual bondage find ourselves in a sort of 'wilderness' situation. We are still in the world even though we are not a part of it; we are yet to reach our final destination. Until then we must make our way through the 'wilderness.' It is not an easy journey. Nor was it promised to be. We must have what the Israelites lacked, namely, *faith!* Otherwise we may be shortsighted as was the Israelites who quickly forgot what they had been saved .from and grumbled and complained about their lot .. As former Jehovah's Witnesses we are rebuilding our spiritual/religious lives. It is appropriate, I believe, that we reach out by various means to gain wisdom and understanding as to how we can best demonstrate the will of God in our lives. It is in this respect that I think seminars and conferences have their value. They can supplement whatever other local association and worship in which we may share.

When differences in doctrinal positions present themselves we can listen with an open mind . and reserve judgment until we have searched the matter out in the Bible. In this way we can "Test everything." and "Hold on to the good." -1 Thess.5:21 *NIV*. We ought to be able to do this with a measure of comfort. Why should we be upset if others challenge ""hat we personally believe? If we are standing On Solid scriptural ground we should not be intimidated by what others say. Nor should we. feel cOll1pelled to discard everything we learned as Jehovah's Witnesses. As .brother Bob Righetti said. at .the . recent Pasadena seminar: "We don't want to through the baby out with the bath water." We possess the tools to grow spiritually; we are not disadvantaged. We should stop thinking of ourselves as. victims and rejoice in the Christian freedom we have received. But, as said above, freedom brings responsibility. We can, and must, build on the foundation of Jesus Christ and move beyond just the elementary doctrines related to salvation: "Therefore let. us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the .foundation of repentance. from acts that lead to death, and faith in God, instruction about baptisms, the laying On of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. And God permitting, We will do so. " Hebrews 6: 1-3 *NIV*.

Obviously, following this inspired counsel Will not be easy. There will be difficult choices to make -

choices that may lesson. our value .as a Christian in the eyes of some. This is unfortunate, but true. There may be .some comfort in knowing that everyone is someone's heretic. Some things may be left not fully resolved regardless of how much study and investigation we make. We can go only as far. as the facts take us. Beyond that we get into the labyrinth of human wisdom and speculation. We need to discern the difference between Divine wisdom and human wisdom. Regardless of how we structure our house of faith and practice we are not going to please everyone. We may not even please ourselves-if some cherished belief we previously held is demonstrated to be an error. Keep in mind that our Lord came into this world determined to do the will of his Father. That should be our determination. If it is we can be assured of the Father's blessing as well as that of the Son. It is their approval we are seeking-not men! With these thoughts in mind I would like to share some of the things I gleaned from the Phoenix and Pasadena meetings:

These gatherings were sponsored by Christian Renewal. Ministries, a group made up of former Jehovah's Witnesses and several members of the Berean Bible Student community. They used this occasion to release the first issue of *The Christian Quest*, a quarterly produced by CRM. More than a hundred pages in length this issue featured articles by M. James Penton, Robert Righetti, Larry Urbaniak, William E. Eliason and myself. This first number contains the articles .of incorporation for CRM and outlines the goals for the journal.

The publishers describe. the objective of *The Christian Quest* as follows: "THE CHRISTIAN QUEST is a quarterly journal of independent thought. Claiming no inspired insights or authority over anyone, its commitment is to help its readers come to an appreciation of the two great precepts of the Christian faith-love of God and love of neighbor. .. Its articles will deal with a broad variety of subjects. Some will be primarily doctrinal and biblical in nature. Others will deal with historical, ethical and social matters ... allowing a variety of individual views to be expressed in its pages so long as they are in har-mony with the spirit of Christ. " -V 01.1, No.1, pages 1,2.

The first seminar was held March 19, 1988 at the Ramada Inn-Metro Center in Phoenix. As the program unfolded it. became clear that the. focus was clearly on God, Christ, the gospel. And the Christian community. Those fearful of being pressured in some way were relieved to find that this was not to be the case. One

covenant. He also applied the matter of sitting on thrones as discussed in Revelation 20 as applying to covenant heirs and undergoing fulfillment now-not future. He argued that the "rest of the dead, " destined to come to life after the 1000-year reign refers to unregenerated mankind. The matter of coming to life and reigning with Christ during the millennium applies *now* to Christians according to Ed's view of matters.

Jim Penton urged, as he always does, for the need of community. Jim has been very active in trying to bring former Witnesses into contact and association with the Free Bible Students. The term (Free Bible Students) is a generic one within which there is fundamental agreement on some matters but variations on others. Because of sharing something of a common tradition Jim feels that many former Witnesses could be comfortable with this fellowship. "We need a relationship with others and not a lone ranger attitude. It is one thing to be forced to be alone but quite another to choose to be alone," Penton said. These sentiments mirrored what he had to say about the matter at the Phoenix meeting the previous week. At that time he said: "We are in a period of individualism and may miss the point of collectivism." In this way he stressed that a personal relationship with God needs to be balanced with a community relationship.

Ray Franz, in his presentation, took issue with the suggestion that leaving the Watchtower organization is always for the best. He cited examples of those whose lives turned very much for the worse after leaving the organization. While it was not all bad it did produce people who were like "peas in a pod," Ray said. The Society was guilty of keeping people in a childish, dependent state according to Ray. He remarked that the Society often put people on the horns of a false dilemma. For example, they would argue that it is better to set forth wrong expectations regarding the time when the world will end than to ignore the subject altogether. As though that were the only two choices we had. This, he argued, was false logic.

Michael Welte presided over a discussion regarding the raising of children outside of the highly regimented structure of the Witness community. He asked his audience: "Do you want to bring children up in the pain of leaving the Watchtower organization or in a happy; positive atmosphere with self-respect; concern and love of Christ?" A number of people offered comments during this portion of the program. Some were very painful but there was also a positive note sounded.

sister talked with me the day following the seminar to

explain how she felt coming into the meeting hall: "I came to the conference or seminar or whatever you call it determined not to join anything. I sat through the first talk like a turtle with its head tucked back into its shell. Little by little, as the program went on, I was able to stick my head out and look around." -name withheld to protect her anonymity. She made these remarks in the form of an apology. I assured her she had nothing to apologize for. She had every right to feel as she did. I commended her for overcoming her apprehension and attending the seminar despite her fears. The program was intended to be healing and forward looking. I believe that it was. Each presenter spoke out of his own experience and perspective but there was firm continuity in the faith that God and Christ can be trusted and that the Bible clarifies God's will for us.

Ray Franz discussed the problem of coming out of a totalitarian organization. He pointed out that freedom can be frightening to those who do not wish to take individual responsibility for what they believe and do. It is more secure and comfortable for some to be told what to believe and what to do. However, he pointed out, "The law of love defies codification.:" There is no way that faith being made known through love can be determined by organizational structure. The early Christian community was controlled, not by a governing body but by the spirit of God. He explained that the various ministries (teaching, healing, tongues, interpretations, etc.) could not be assigned by a body of men. They all were the product of God's spirit working in and through individuals.

Even though the Church was founded by the Son of God there was the presence of both 'wheat and weeds' in the community of believers. He used an illustration to demonstrate the value of both being allowed to exist side by side. In the dining rooms at Bethel there are ten places at each table. Food is passed around the table in family style. Time and time again, Ray said, a large platter of chicken would make its way around the table and all the choice pieces of chicken would be gone by the time the platter reached the tenth and last person which, at Ray's table, was himself. Different ones would take as much as three choice pieces with apparently no thought about the fact that by the time the plate reached the last person only the backs of the chicken remained. Someone suggested using a partitioned platter where 10 sections would be divided off and each one containing a certain amount of chicken-a system that would fairly proportion the serving. But one brother pointed out that if they did

that they would never know who among them were selfish and unselfish. The point Ray was making was that God has allowed a situation to exist in the Christian religion that permits us to demonstrate what kind of person we really are. In this way there is value in the 'wheat and the weeds' growing together.

Ed Dunlap stressed the fact that Christians have no condemnation. He reminded us that when people speak against us the Lord said we should jump for joy! "Christians," he said, "live in a new sphere—a new world." He said that the coming of Christ in the first century was the greatest thing in history and that since that time we have been living in the "last days." The thrust of Ed's presentation was to assure his audience that they lacked nothing of value as respects their spiritual security. Everything we need as Christians is available to us. "Each one of us is face to face with Christ," he said. This means that we do not need anyone else—such as a governing body. Ed argued that the "New heavens and new earth" spoken of at 2 Peter 3: 13 is now a reality. We Christians are the "new creation" and are like kings on the earth, " Ed said. (2 Cor.5: 17)

I spoke about recovering from spiritual/religious abuse. One of the products of abuse is that it can do serious damage to one's self-image. A child, for example, who has been physically and emotionally abused may conclude that he/she is unlovable and is responsible for the abusive treatment. This psychological reaction may manifest itself in a number of ways; anti-social behavior, withdrawal, self-destructive conduct, etc. Even when taken out of the abusive situation the effects of the abuse, unless addressed and treated, can remain with a person all through their life. I used this foundation to demonstrate that we, too, could be suffering from the effects of spiritual abuse even though we are no longer in that abusive environment. As Jehovah's Witnesses our worth as Christians was determined by others. Organizational works and activities were the measure by which we were allowed to feel good about ourselves. If we failed to measure up to the expectations of the elders we could not have their approval. Even our standing before God was questionable because our forgiveness was only partial-conditional Unless we were obedient to the organization we were at risk. We often heard the text at Zephaniah 2:3 applied toward us: "Seek Jehovah all you meek ones of the earth, who have practiced His own judicial decision .. Seek righteousness, seek meekness. Probably you may be concealed in the day of Jehovah's anger.

The thought of *probably* being concealed kept the whole matter of salvation in an 'iffy' context. In this way we were denied the spiritual security God intended for us to have. The new covenant promise was that God would forgive error and not remember sins anymore. (Jeremiah 31:33,34) In the New Testament this is spoken of as *justification* or being *declared righteous*. (Romans 5: 18) This means that Christians are more than simply *not guilty*. It means that they are *acquitted* from all sin. In Hebrews we read of the superiority of the new covenant to the Law covenant. In chapter 10 the weaknesses in the sacrifices offered under the Law are contrasted with the sacrifice of Jesus Christ "once for all time." And that those cleansed in this way "would have no consciousness of sins anymore." (Hebrews 10:2) This perpetual cleansing comes to us via faith. This is how God views us—as clean! That's how we should view ourselves. In this way we can overcome the negative image of ourselves that came as a product of spiritual abuse. In order to fulfill the law of love, namely, that we "love our neighbor as ourselves," we need to have a healthy self-love. This is not thinking more of ourselves than we should; but, rather, loving ourselves as God loves us. We can hardly love others unless we first of all love our own person. These are just a few of the points that were developed during the course of the program. Space does not allow for sharing other/fine points developed by Jim Penton and others.

On March 27 there was another seminar held which was also sponsored by Christian Renewal Ministries. This one was in Pasadena at the Pasadena City College. The format was essentially the same as the one in Phoenix and featured the same speakers with the addition of Fred Maes and Michael Welte. Robert Righetti opened the program following a short musical introduction by Robert Muszynski. In his opening remarks Righetti said that we were not there to "bash the Watchtower Society." We had many good things we learned as Witnesses that we can take away with us, Bob said.

Ed Dunlap tied in the discussion the two women: Hagar and Sarah, as representing the two covenants as found in Galatians chapter 4 with the woman discussed in Revelation 11. He argued that the woman of Revelation 11 represents the new covenant and that her children are those brought into the new covenant. He also applied the matter of sitting on thrones as discussed in Revelation 20 as applying to covenant heirs and undergoing fulfillment now—not future. He argued that the "rest of the dead," destined to come

to life after the 1000-year reign refers to unregenerate mankind. The matter of coming to life and reigning with Christ during the millennium applies *now* to Christians according to Ed's view of matters.

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Fred Maes shared his insight with the audience regarding finding our place in what he called "The real

world." He discouraged those present from feeling sorry for themselves and urged them to use their gifts and abilities to get on with life. His own experience of how unprepared he was to face the "real world" had a touch of humor in it. Recalling his years at Bethel and work as a District overseer and helping to organize large international conventions he said this resume of activity "Wouldn't buy him a job at Wendys." With reference to Ed Dunlap he said he heard someone say: "Poor Ed is in his seventies." Hopefully, he added, we will be able to say poor Ed is in his nineties!" The point being that we should be glad that Ed is alive at any age and stop looking at things in a negative light.

These are but a few of the things discussed during the two seminars. I came away feeling richer for the experience. The hospitality and brotherly affection shown was very much in evidence. It convinced me that whatever spirit of brotherly love we had as Jehovah's Witnesses was alive and well outside of that religious system. It would not be accurate to say, however, that there was not a measure of tension apparent at these meetings. Former Witnesses are not all in the same camp, as it were. There are very serious differences between them. I see no way that these differences are going to go away. The best we can hope for is a measure of forbearance and mutual respect. Those attending these two seminars displayed a commendable degree of control in these areas. At least that is my opinion. As I expressed earlier these gatherings serve, I believe, a valuable function and I would urge more of them. Not everyone can travel great distances, however. There is a need for smaller, local seminars. It only takes a few people to get together and discuss issues that are of serious concern to them. Videos or cassette tapes can be played where there is a shortage of speakers. □

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