

THE FOUNDATIONS OF CHRISTIANITY

CHAPTER 7:

THE CHRISTIAN, A DISCIPLE OF CHRIST

IMPORTANT NOTICE:

This course is a revised translation of the work "I Fondamenti del Cristianesimo" written by Rev. Piero Ottaviano and Didaskaleion.

The course is divided into units with a logical sequence. Therefore we suggest you to read them following their progressive order.

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7 THE CHRISTIAN, A DISCIPLE OF CHRIST

In this section we shall deal with:

- Grown-up Christians
- The Law of Jesus
- Christian life and eternal laws
- Human life in the light of Jesus' resurrection
- Sin

7.1 WHAT IS A CHRISTIAN LIKE?

A (grown-up) Christian is someone who decides...

1. to trust the Christian communities (= the Church), which present the New Testament as the true apostles' teaching, handed on and interpreted correctly (oral and written tradition);
2. to trust the disciples, who are at the origin of tradition - namely, to agree that they saw and reported correctly what Jesus said and did, particularly his resurrection.

The apostles' testimony has been handed on and ensured by Christian communities.

Therefore, the act of faith in the apostles necessarily implies an act of faith in the Church as for the choice of the official texts of Christianity, as well as their correct transmission and interpretation over centuries;

3. to trust Jesus, whose acts and words make up the tradition; particularly to acknowledge that Jesus is indeed what he said he was, namely:
 - the Son of God (Matthew 3,17; 16,15-17; 17,5; 26,63,64; Mark 1,11; 14,61-62; Luke 1,32.35; 3,22; 22,70; John 1,49; 6,69; 10,36; 11,4.27; 19,7);
 - the Master (John, 13,13);
 - the way, the truth and the life (John, 14,6).

The guarantee that Jesus gave in order to be believed: his resurrection (Matthew 12,40; Luke 11,29; John 2,18-22)

The acts and words of Jesus have been handed on through the apostles' writings and their direct listeners'. As a matter of fact, Jesus wrote nothing that ever reached us. Therefore, an act of faith in Jesus necessarily implies an act of faith in the apostles;

4. to live according to what Jesus taught;
5. to become a member of the Church through the sacraments, particularly the Christian initiatory sacraments.

To sum up, a Christian can be described as a disciple of Christ, namely someone who has freely decided to take up his teacher's way of living.

Christian = disciple of Christ

7.1.1 ESSENTIAL DOCUMENTATION

The whole of the new Testament is an important reflection on what a Christian is and how he is supposed to live. Here are three among the most significant texts.

1st document: Acts of the Apostles (chapter 2) - A.D. 61-63

Here is the closure of the first speech that Peter held in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost (see section 3, chapter 2, 2nd document).

36. *"... Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ".*

37. *When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles: "Men, brothers, what shall we do?"*

38. *Peter replied: "Change your heart, everyone, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*

- To the Jews, baptism (immersion into water) was a ritual of purification from defilement. It was sometimes a sign through which a man would express his will to become a disciple of some teacher (Rabbi), who in turn would thus declare to accept him as a disciple. Therefore, being baptized in the name of Jesus Christ was becoming his disciples.

39. *In fact the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, for all whom the Lord our God will call.*

40. *With many other words he warned them /he gave his testimony and urged them: "Save yourself from this wicked generation"*

41. *So those who accepted his word were baptized and about three thousand people (literally: "souls") were added to their number that day.*

42. *They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the communion (= life in common) and to the breaking of bread and to prayer.*

- the breaking of bread = almost certainly the Holy Communion, a mass.

2nd document: Paul's epistle to the Colossians (chapters 2-3) - A.D. 61-63

[Chapter 2]

6. *So then, just as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, do walk with him,*

7. *rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.*

8. *See that no one take you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy which depends on human tradition, rather than on Christ.*

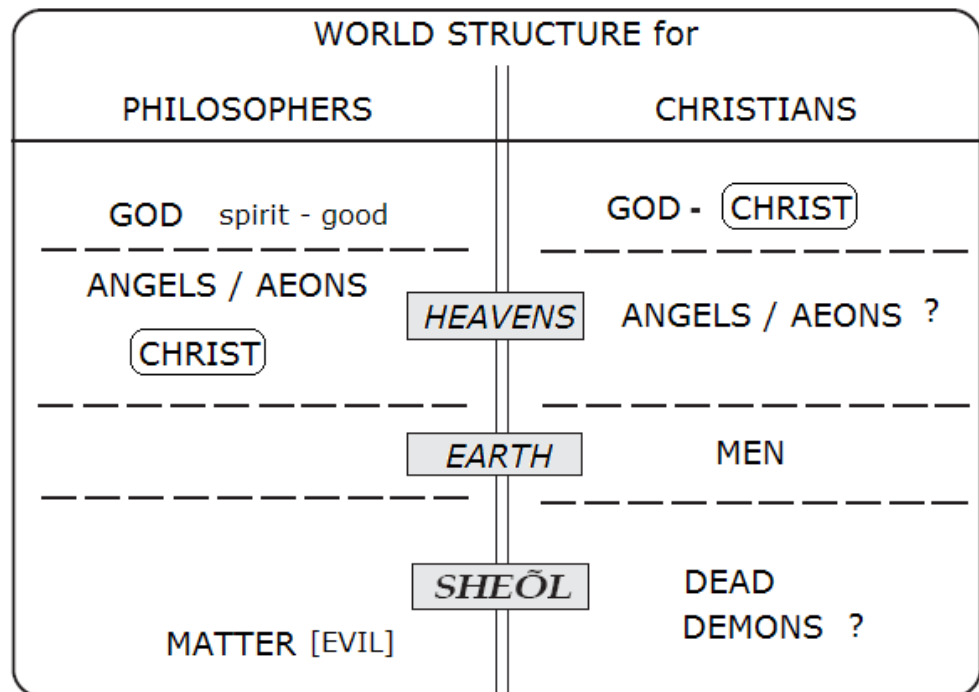
- the author denounces here a doctrine (philosophy) that some people were spreading in Colossus which revealed the existence between God and men of many intermediate beings (angels, the princes of the world!) whom man's life was said to be depending on:
 - above, over the skies, was God's dwelling place;
 - beneath the sky, within concentric hemispheres, there lay various skies and each one of them was said to be ruled by some angelic power (aeon); the last one of such beings, being closest to man - and consequently the less perfect one - was said to be the Christ.
 - earth, namely, man's dwelling place;
 - underground, in a place called Sheol, would dwell the dead and the demons.

See in the following passage the reason to "walk with Christ":

9. For in him all the fullness of the deity abides in bodily form from above

- From above = Hebrew expression meaning "from God". According to the Jews, God dwells above, beyond the sky, and His name is never to be uttered.

10. and be replenished of him, who is the head over all principalities and powers.

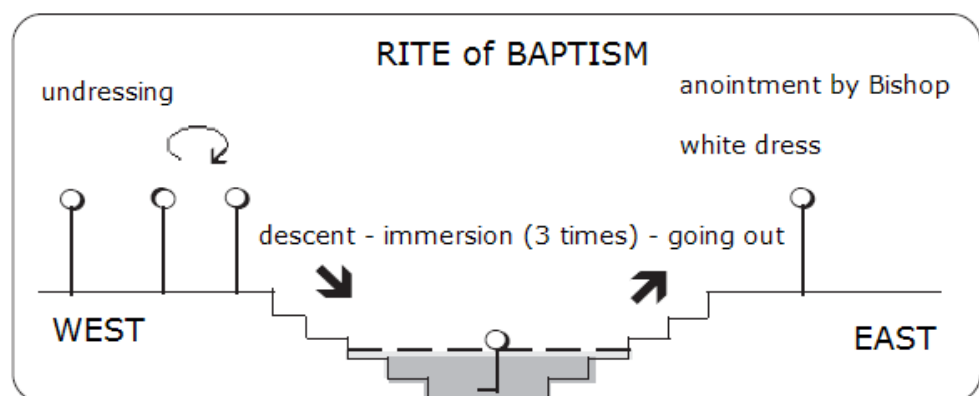


11. *In him you were also circumcised, not with a circumcision done by hands of man in the putting off of the flesh, but in Christ's circumcision.*

- Sensing that circumcision might be an obstacle to the conversion of pagans (since it would plainly betray them to belong to the Jewish people, whom Gentiles hated), Paul did not hesitate to call it off (along with the observance of great part of the Mosaic law).
- However, in the Old Testament - which is the word of God - God had related his promise of salvation to circumcision.
- "And my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant..."
- Any uncircumcised male has broken my covenant: be cut off from his people" (Genesis 17,13-14).
- As a result the Christian community went through some difficulties as for the solution of this problem: how can one belong to the people of the promise without being circumcised?
- Paul's answer is that a Christian, having been engrafted in Christ through baptism, is one with Him (who is circumcised) and that therefore he no longer needs to be circumcised himself, for he belongs to the people of the promise through Christ's circumcision.

12. *having been buried with him through/in baptism and also raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who awakened/raised him from the dead;*

- Here we find another form of the central nucleus of Christianity: baptism is the sign of one's immersion in Christ's death and resurrection. By accepting to be baptized Christians express their belief in the power of God, which can deliver them from death. (Christians are so sure about the power of God that they already live with Jesus as resurrected people.)



13. *and you, who were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive along with him by (for)giving you all your sins.*

- those who were without salvation (=dead), both because of their sins and because they did not belong to the Jewish people, were made alive by God through the very life of Christ. How did it happen? "By forgiving all sins". According to the Jewish outlook, law - sin (Law-breaking) - death are three kindred realities (cp. Genesis 2,17). Therefore, as Jesus conquered death, he also conquered sin and the Law.

THE MEANING OF THE BAPTISM'S SIMBOLS	
GESTURES	MEANING
The persons to be christened would gather on the westward edge of the christening pool and would turn westward (the direction of the setting sun)	Twilight of the old life: the darkness, the sin
everybody undressed	drop off the old lifestyle
turned to east	turn to the dawning light: Christ, the sun of justice
descended into the pool	descent into the tomb with Christ
was totally immersed in water to die with Christ	immersion in Jesus' death; purification from sin
got out of the pool	shift from death to life; resurrection with Christ
was anointed by the bishop	God gets hold of him
was clothed in a white robe	the start of a new life

14. Having ripped the bill that was against us and got rid of it by nailing it to the cross,

- The bill is the Mosaic law. Paul wants to demonstrate that the (Mosaic) law has been overcome/is obsolete and is therefore no longer binding to the Christian, who has by now another life standard. This is what his outlook should read as translated into occidental terms:
 - Through Moses the Jews made a covenant with God (the tables of the Law) and engaged themselves (see: the bill) to honour it. Circumcision is the sign of such covenant.
 - But the Jews have not succeeded in observing the law (cp. Acts 15,10). Therefore, the law would testify against them.
 - And since law breaking is a sin - and sin is punished with death - according to the law of Moses, the Law has condemned all Jews to death (actually not only the Jews, but all mankind as well: as a matter of fact, all men eventually die; cp. Romans 5)
 - Such condemnation would spare nobody: nobody would escape this condemnation, not even Jesus, innocent though he was (but he rose from the dead!)
 - Rather, by killing Jesus, the Mosaic law destroyed itself. As a matter of fact: It is written in the Law that the one who kills an innocent must be put to death (Deuteronomy 19, 11-13);
 - The Law killed indeed an innocent: Jesus (he conquered death by rising from the dead, thus proving he was no sinner);
 - Therefore the Law must be put to death.

15. and (God), having deprived of all authority both the principalities and the powers, made a public spectacle of them, bringing them along to witness the triumph in/with Christ.

16. Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to festivals, neomenias or Sabbaths,

- Neomenia: a festival which they celebrated at the beginning of every month.

17. such things being nothing but the shadow of the things that are to come, whereas the body (belongs) to Christ.

- Paul states: "Be free from all these trifles (shadows=appearance)" No external law/commandment can save man.
- The body (belongs) to Christ" - interpretations:
 1. the reality - of which all other things are shadows - is the Christ. Namely: Now that reality (Christ) is there, do leave all those shadows (appearances) behind you;
 2. Man belongs to Christ:
 - a. man does not depend on any intermediate powers but on Christ only;
 - b. man's life no longer belongs to man, but to Christ;
 - c. The church belongs to Christ. Christians agree to depend on Christ only and not on angelic powers; therefore, anyone agreeing to depend on the latter does not belong to the Church of Christ any more (cp. verse 19).

18. Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize: such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions;

19. he has lost connection with the Head (Christ), from whom the whole body (the Church), supported and led together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow.

- This is the concept Paul tries to contend with, namely, salvation through the works of man. Such human-carnal life gives man a certain elation about self-realization and fills him with pride and self-sufficiency. But both self-sufficiency and man's will to break loose from God are sin.

As a result:

20. If/since you died with Christ to the basic principles of the world, why do you submit to such rules - as though you still lived in it - as:

21. "do not take" and "do not taste" and "do not touch"

- verbs with and understood object: food

22. which are all things destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commandments and teachings

- this comment of Paul's is seemingly an incidental one (to be put in brackets): all these things are destined to perish as time goes by.

23. Such things (literally: facts, words) indeed have an appearance of wisdom, as regards their self-imposed worship and humility and harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual gratification

- These things have no intrinsic value, they only lead to self-satisfaction (Luke 18: the parable of the Pharisee saying
- "Thank you Lord that I am not like other men... whereas I, instead...)

Chapter 3

1. Now then, if you have indeed raised with Christ, do look for the things above

- Here is the program of Christian life: "since you belong to the resurrected Christ (having risen to a new life), you are definitely over with the world and so you have to look for the things of God (above)" where the Christ is, seated at the right hand of God;
- It was customary to Eastern kings to have their firstborn sons sit at their right hand (cp. Psalm 110, 1): Jesus is the Son of God.

2. Think about the things above, not about earthly things

- the struggle between two realities - heaven and earth - dwelling within the life of a Christian is clearly showing. This is not an invitation to shun worldly commitments, but to shun sin.

3. In fact you died and your life has been concealed with Christ in God

- Christians are like dead people, as far as the principles of the world and all its passions are concerned, for they have given them up through baptism

- The life that God gives is already there, but it can be neither revealed nor seen yet, but:

4. when Christ, who is our life, appears, then you will also appear with him in glory.

5. Mortify (literally: put to death) your earthly limbs, fornication, passion, impurity, evil desires and covetousness, which is idolatry,

6. for which/because God's wrath is coming

7. in which you also used to walk/indulge when you still lived among them;

8. you must lay them (these things) down: anger, avidity, malice, blasphemy and coarse language from your mouth;

9. and do not lie to each other, since you have divested your old self and all of its works

- here is a cross-reference to getting undressed before being baptised: one should definitely give up one's old way of living

10. as you have put on the new self

- Another cross-reference: wearing the new garment after being baptized. The new man is the Christian or, rather, Jesus as a model for the Christian.

which has been renewed in knowledge

- i.e., the one who received new enlightenment and new knowledge in the likeness of the one who created it.

according to the image, i.e., the standard, that the Creator had in mind

- as he created man. This "image" (cp. Genesis 1,26-27: "Let us make man in our image") is Jesus - the Son of God, the firstborn over all creation - (cp. Colossians 1,15-17; Ephesians 1,3-5).
- This means that, as He created man, God actually meant to create someone who would turn out to be like Jesus - who had become the standard as set by God in every man and as revealed in the completion of times - so that he could turn out to be upright out of his own will, thus agreeing to be up to them standard as set by God within man himself.

11. where

- = in this image, which God had in mind as he created man

there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, slave or free

- Galatians 3,28 has in addition: "...male and female...": the overcoming of all kind of racism!

but Christ is all and is in all.

Third document: Paul's epistle to the Romans (Chapter 14) - A.D. 57

The question: Is it allowed to eat meat sacrificed to idols?

Some Christians would answer "No", meaning that eating meat sacrificed to idols is an offence against the true God.

Some would answer "Yes", meaning that idols are nothing and that therefore, the meat is sacrificed to nobody at all. Eating it becomes then an act of faith in the only God.

This problem would cause the early Christian community to split, especially during the community meals (the Lord's Supper?) and Paul finally dealt with it in the first epistle to the Corinthians, chapter 8.

Here is Paul's answer:

- anyone is to follow his own conscience:
 - he who eats meat does so to God;
 - he who does not eat meat does so to God;
- Christians may have opposite attitudes, but they surely meet as regards their motive: whatever they do, they do so to God.
- he whose faith is strong have respect for the conscience of the weak: anyone is answerable before God only.

Chapter 14

1. Accept him whose faith is weak without passing judgment on disputable matters

2. One man thinks he may eat everything, whereas he whose faith is weak eats (only) vegetables

- the community was divided because those who ate meat would look down on those who did not, whereas those who did not were scandalized at seeing their brothers in faith eat meat sacrificed to idols and considered them sinners.
- Paul tries to settle this dispute through a fundamental principle: everyone has the right to be respected - whatever the stage of his faith - for that what keeps everybody together is obedience to the one and only God, according to each one's comprehension of His will.

3. The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not pass judgement (condemn) on the man who does, for God has accepted him.

4. Who are you to judge someone else's servant? (it depends on his own master) whether he should stand or fall; but he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

- It is so easy for either party to condemn one another: but it is as arbitrary. In fact, each believer - whether his faith is strong or weak - has personally accepted both Christ and God. Anyone judging from the outside places himself in a wrong perspective: he is like somebody who claims to judge a servant without being his own master. What does he know about the orders the servant was given by his master?

5. One man considers one day more sacred than another, another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind.

6. He who regards one day as special does so to the Lord. He who eats meat does so to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God, and he who abstains does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God.

- Any attitude is good, provided it comes from good faith, for whatever one does, he does it to the Lord.

7. For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone;

8. in fact if we live, we live to the Lord and if we die, we die to the Lord. So whether we live or die we belong to the Lord.

9. For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life (literally: lived) so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living.

10. Instead, why do you judge (condemn) your brother? Why do you look down on your brother, since we are all to stand before God's judgment.

11. It is written: "As sure as I live, says the Lord, every knee will bend before me and every tongue will confess to glorify God (Isaiah 45,23)

12. So then each one of us will give an account of himself to God.

- It is typical of Paul to express the same concept in other words, as though he wanted to drill them into the readers' mind. The idea being expressed here is the same as expressed in verse 10.
- "Bending the knee" was the gesture people made in front of a king, who had full powers, included judicial power.

13. Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any obstacle or scandal (stumbling block) in your brother's way.

14. I know and am fully convinced through my abidance in the Lord that no food is unclean in itself, but if anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it is indeed unclean.

- This is the nucleus of Paul's thought as expressed in this chapter: it is the triumph of conscience!
- Paul states, by quoting Jesus' very words - even in form of an oath - that good and evil do not dwell in any food (or anything external to man) but in one's conscience. (In Mark 7,17-23 Jesus was talking about man's heart and declared all food "clean").

15. If your brother is troubled because of what you eat, you are no longer acting out of love. Do not by your eating destroy him for whom Christ died.

- You would better let your weak brother have his own convictions, wrong though they may be - since he is not yet able to understand the whole truth - than causing him even bigger discomfort, which might bring his faith to a crisis. This, in turn, would be a true lack of charity.

16. Do not allow what you consider good to be spoken of as evil.

17. For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit;

18. as a matter of fact, anyone serving Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men.

19. So let us make for peace and (works of) mutual edification.

20. Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food.

- the work of God is, probably, faith.

All things (are) clean but (it is) wrong for a man to eat anything (= if he realizes that by doing this he would cause his brother) to stumble.

- Paul stresses the principle expounded in verse 14 and highlights that "evil is what you make it".

21. It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or (to do anything) else that will cause your brother to fall (some manuscripts: or to be scandalized).

22. You are to keep your faith (=conviction?) between yourself and God.

- You cannot ask of a man whose faith is strong to give up his own convictions (it would be illogical, especially after all that has just been said), but simply ask him to count charity in among them, so that he can give up a little bit of his own freedom in order to keep his brother from being troubled, for God has given up his very life for him.

Happy is the man who does not judge himself by what he approves.

- It is a difficult sentence to interpret. We believe that it means "blessed is the man who does not judge by two different standards" i.e., "Blessed is the man who, having accepted the principle of freedom for himself, does not deny it to his weak brothers by judging/condemning them".

23. But the man who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; everything that does not (come) from faith is sin.

- Faith = according to a great number of biblists: good faith.
- The man who, due to poor faith, believes that there might be some negative relationship between his conscience and his eating meat sacrificed to idols, condemns himself if he eats it, for he is no longer guided by his own faith/conscience. And since all Christians should live by faith, any foreign element that man does not let into this circle is sin.
- There is no alternative: either faith - affecting everyday's life and thus becoming conscience - or sin (=bad faith)

- To sum up, starting from a particular case, Paul theorizes the principle of conscience: everyone has to imitate Jesus (which is the objective principle of Christian morals) for as much as he knows about him (subjective principle of Christian morals).
- God attaches more importance to the motive than to the works. And that notwithstanding, Christian liberty is not will/free will. (See another text by Paul: Epistle to the Galatians 5,13) "You, my brothers, were called to be free: but do not use your freedom to indulge in the flesh (to live by doing as you like), rather do serve one another with charity/in love.

To sum up: CHRISTIAN MORALS:

- **IMITATE JESUS** (objective aspect)
 - AS PORTRAYED BY THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY (THE APOSTLES)
- **ACCORDING TO ONES' KNOWLEDGE OF HIM** (subjective aspect)
 - CONSCIENCE, HOWEVER IS NOT AUTONOMOUS, BUT ENLIGHTENED BY JESUS

7.2 THE "LAW" OF JESUS: LOVE

The law of Jesus, which Paul calls "Law of the Spirit of life " (see Romans 8,2) is a new kind of law; so much so that the very word - law - is not well suited to it at all.

The "Law of the Spirit" does not differ from the Mosaic law - or any other law - only because it shows a higher ideal for life - or, because it offers salvation at a lower price (this would be a scandal, indeed!), as if Jesus had replaced the Sinaitic law's heavy yoke with some "easy morals". The difference lies in the very nature of the law of the Spirit: no codes ruling external behavior, but, instead, an inner principle of action, a "spirit", the Spirit of Jesus Christ (Romans 8,14-17).

In virtue of such principle, the Christian no longer responds to a command coming from outside him (slave's morals), but he is rather acting out of love (son's morals) (I John, 3).

Love is to give oneself up to God and regard Him as a Father. This is what Christian morals are all about (Romans 13,8-10). Where such love abides, external laws are no longer needed".

Christianity is therefore not a moral law, but the law of love.

- Law's morals lead to a moral minimism: God is treated like a "tax collector" to whom one tries his best to pay the least possible amount, just in order to keep him from "getting angry".

7.3 CHRISTIAN LIFE AND EXTERNAL LAWS

Through what has been said so far we can clearly see that the principle of Christian morals is to imitate Christ out of love.

Within the Christian standard of behavior there are no such things as the Ten Commandments, or any other law, whether old or new.

Should we therefore assume that the Christian is free of the Law?

The gospel and Paul alike (Luke 18,9-14; Galatians 2,19; 3,1-25; 5,18; Romans 6,14; 7,4-8; 2nd Cor. 3,6; Acts 15,10; and so on) would lead us to presume so. The very law which had sin connected to death (Genesis 2,17) was demolished by the death and resurrection of a man who had not sinned.

- Such a blunt statement can be kind of amazing, especially when one thinks about the quite common teaching according to which the Ten Commandments are the heart of Christian morals¹. But such is neither Paul's nor the Christian outlook.

7.3.1 ESSENTIAL DOCUMENTATION

So the law became our pedagogue (the slave who was put in charge to take the children to school) to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. Now that faith has come we no longer depend on any pedagogue (Galatians 3,24-25).

You who think you are justified by law, have gone astray from Christ, you have fallen away from grace. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law. (Galatians 5,4.18).

For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace. What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! (Romans 6,14-15).

So, my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit to God. For when we were under flesh (controlled by the flesh) the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our bodies so that we bore fruit for death; but now we have been released from law (we are no longer under law), dead to sin which once beheld us, so that we now serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code.

What shall we say then? That law (is) sin? By no means! Indeed I would not have known what it was to covet if the law had not said, "Do not covet". But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment produced in me every kind of covetous desire: for apart from law sin (is) dead" (Romans 7,4-8)

¹ It is worthwhile noting that there are no less than 613 precepts from God in the Old Testament. What is the point in choosing only ten? If they are truly the Word of God, they must all be obeyed! Sorting only ten out of 613 means "judging" the Word of God! On what basis is such "judgment" made?

Therefore Christian morals transcend any law which is outside man

7.3.2 INSIGHT: THE FUNCTION OF EXTERNAL LAWS

What has been said might lead to assume that the morals of the New Testament do not imply either obligations or sanctions. Yet both Paul and the whole of the New Testament do issue laws. Why? What are laws for to Christianity?

1. They put Christians on the alert when they are no longer made alive by the Spirit.

Paul maintains that the law was not made for the righteous but for sinners (I Timothy 1,9).

- If all Christians were upright it would not be necessary to give them commandments through any law. The law does nothing but intervene when turmoil has already broken. For instance, as long as the Christians frequently went to Mass and to Communion, ecclesial authorities would never even dream of forcing them to "communicate themselves at least on Easter Day" threatening deadly sin.
 - But as fervor was growing cold, the authorities of the Latin Church started promulgating precepts (Lateran Council IV, A.D. 1215), just to remind people that faith cannot be maintained without giving any signs testifying to it.
 - Actually, although it binds everyone, this commandment was not meant for sound Christians, who communicate themselves not because the Church urges them to, but as a result of a need inside urging them to communicate themselves all year, whether on Sundays or even every day.
 - Not that a true Christian is not subject to such precept: only, he is likely to comply with it without even referring himself to it. Should God's love no longer stir his faith, the law would indeed serve as a reminder, thus making him realize that the Spirit is no longer stirring him.
 - Law is to the Christian what the Mosaic law was to the Jews: nothing but a tutor to take them to Christ, to enable them to realize their sinful state - i.e., the state of whomever the Spirit is no longer moving - and to urge them to come back to Christ with all of their being.
2. They help also the conscience of the righteous (but they do not replace it!)
 - As long as the Christian lives in the world and has nothing but the first fruit of the Spirit (Romans 8,23;
 - II Corinthians 1,22) he finds himself in an unstable position; therefore, the external law, being an objective commandment for behavior, may help his conscience - which gets easily clouded by passions - tell the works of the flesh from the fruit of the Spirit and keep him from "mistaking his wits for heavenly teachings".

7.3.3 CONCLUSION

- As long as the Christian does not get fully realized in his homeland - heaven - his liberty will remain imperfect. As a result, love, which is the main and the only justifying element, will be backed up by the law (in turn, a secondary feature, as unable to justify man as the ancient law was) which is anyway essential to sinners

and not unnecessary to those imperfect righteous people, such as all Christians are expected to be.

- On condition that it remains a subordinate element, and does not tend to insensibly take up the function of a main feature, like it happened with the Mosaic law (as one might think himself righteous just because one keeps to the law; cp. the Pharisee in Luke 18,9-14).

7.3.4 CONSEQUENCES

- a. Mere outward law-breaking (namely, without any relationship between law-breaking and love for God) cannot be considered a sin (at least, not a deadly one). But obeying the law without love does not make sense, either.
 - The Christian is not to neglect the rules, but he will above all take care of the Spirit.
- b. An external law will not submit to the Christian an ideal to be contented with (cp. this kind of question, which is very often being asked: "How far can I get without committing sin?") but will place some limits, which, if passed, will make him realize that he is surely no longer a Christian.
 - To overcome the law does not mean that the law is abrogated.
 - The Christian must not be immoral - nor anarchic - rather he should engage himself to obey the law (Romans 13); but he should not do so just because it is the law, but because it is right. The standard which Christians should refer to in order to establish whether a law is good or bad is Jesus' teaching.

7.4 HUMAN LIFE IN THE LIGHT OF THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS

7.4.1 THE MEANING OF LIFE: THE ANSWER GIVEN BY REASON

Every man wonders about life's meaning, thinking that a correct answer would make him totally satisfied and happy.

The first tool which man avails himself of is his own reason. That is where some standards of behavior come from, thus making up natural morals.

- However, reason cannot understand everything. Therefore, one can never be sure whether the answer given by reason as for the "meaning of life question" is correct.

In order to ascertain that the answer is correct - or have one answer suggested when at a loss to find one - man tends to trust some teachers, whom he holds more proficient than himself (teachers, psychologists philosophers, wise men...).

- Unfortunately, however, the answers as given by such teachers cannot provide any certainty, because:

- the teacher is not in a position to seize the problem being submitted to him;
- his life experience is not complete (having not experienced death, for instance);
- his advice might not be entirely unselfish. Besides, man knows that one day he will have to face death, destruction of his being, failure of his existence -. There is no way of choosing how to get fulfilled: one cannot choose not to die!

7.4.2 THE CHRISTIAN ANSWER: "BEHAVE LIKE JESUS!"

However, if man chooses both to believe that Jesus has risen again and to trust him, a lot of questions concerning the meaning of life do indeed get an answer. As a matter of fact, to accept that Jesus rose from the dead means to believe that:

1. He is what he had said he was, namely the Christ, the Son of God, the only Master (Matthew 23,8-10; John 13,13), the way, the truth and the life (John 14,6);
2. He has a thorough experience of life, including death;
3. What he experienced (resurrection) everyone will experience also: anyone having lived the way He lived will rise and live again, while those who lived opposite to him will rise and be condemned (John 6; I Cor. 6,14; II Cor. 4-5...)

To sum up: according to Christianity (in order to have his own life fulfilled) man is to imitate Jesus by living according to the things he taught and the way he lived.

THE MEANING OF LIFE? = TO BEHAVE LIKE JESUS!

- Needless to say that the way to imitate Jesus is not to be a formal one, but a substantial one: it is a matter of taking up His spirit's attitude. Jesus put forward some principles and any Christian should understand from them how he is to behave.
- No wonder if, starting from the same principles, some Christians actually work out a certain line of conduct whereas other Christians develop a different one.
- The important thing is that everyone act out of good faith (Romans 14) and willingly exchange points of view with other Christians.
- This might give cause for subjectivism, that is to say that Christians might risk to describe Jesus according to their own standards: some Jesus who is tame and fit for their own purposes. Christians can easily overcome this danger by accepting Christ as introduced to us by the Church.

But how did Jesus live?

From the apostolic preaching as reported in the New Testament (which, in turn, is the only way for anyone who has not known Christ to get to know about his teachings) we understand that He obeyed God to death (Philippians 2,7-11). Man's true fulfillment consists in becoming obedient to God to a possible destruction of himself (his selfishness) - such destruction being, among other things, only apparent - for it is from the destruction of what is only human that true life arises, i.e., the one which is no longer subject to the slavery of time.

7.4.3 HUMAN (NATURAL) MORALS AND CHRISTIAN (REVEALED) MORAL

How can one get to know about God's will?

The apostles' answer: God has spoken through the creation, (Romans, 1) the Old Testament and, definitely, through Jesus' life and teachings (Hebrew, 1). To the Christian, obedience to God consists in imitating Jesus. Faced with the problems of ordinary life, the Christian is to ask himself constantly: "What would Jesus do if he was here now, in my position?"

Everyone should have his own answer, namely, live according to his actual knowledge about Jesus at a moment certain (Christian conscience). However, so the apostles say, such principle does not apply to Christians only, but to all mankind as well, for Jesus, having risen, is the man whom God had always wanted man to be (the new and true Adam)

7.4.4 ESSENTIAL DOCUMENTATION:

For just as through the disobedience of the one man (Adam) the many (=all) were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man (Jesus) the many (=all) will be made righteous (Romans 5,19; 5,12-21);

For since death came through a man (Adam) the resurrection of the dead came also through a man (Jesus); for as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive (I Cor. 15,21-22);

So it is written: "The first man, Adam, became a living soul", but the last Adam a life-giving spirit. The spiritual body did not come first, but the natural, and after the spiritual. The first man was of the dust of the earth, but the second man from heaven. As was the earthly man - made of dust - so are those who are of the earth, whereas as is the man from heaven, so will also be those who are of heaven. And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven (I Cor. 15,45-49);

The Lord does not want anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance (II Peter 3,9). Therefore, Jesus is the teacher and the standard for behavior for both Christians and for everyone else. (Non-Christians would not accept this, but, according to Christians, that applies to everyone all the same).

According to the apostles, therefore, the basic principles of human natural morals (= valid for all mankind) can be formulated as follows:

- Each man has to live according to the truth he has found (one cannot ask of a man to behave according to some truth that he knows nothing about).
- The exact equivalent is that each man has to behave according to his own conscience.
- Equal, still: each man is saved (fully realizes himself), provided he is acting out of good faith, and believes he is doing the right thing.

7.4.5 CROSS-REFERENCES

God wants all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of truth (1st Timothy 2,4);

I know and I am fully convinced that nothing is unclean in itself, but if anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it is unclean.

Everything that does not come from faith (implicitly: good faith) is sin (Romans 14,14.23);

Jesus said, "A time will come when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God. And they will do such things because they have not known the Father, or me. (John 16,2-3).

By the way, here is a precise statement by St. Thomas Aquinas:

"To believe in Christ is a good thing, but it would become a deadly sin for a man to believe while his reason tells him not to. One has to obey one's own conscience, misleading as though it might be". (S.Th. I.II q.19 a.5)

What is then, according to Christianity, the difference between natural morals and Christian (=as revealed by God through Jesus) morals?

The principle of Christian morals is brought in like a specification of a more comprehensive principle of human morals:

- Each man is to live according to the truth he has found (human natural morals);
- Christians believe Jesus, who said he is the truth (cp. John 14,6);
- Therefore Christians are to live according to what they have found about Jesus (Christian morals).

Hence it can be assumed that, according to Christianity, there are two ways of imitating Jesus:

1. **implicitly:** by behaving according to the truth one has found (natural morals); that is typical of people who either do not know Jesus or do not think he IS the truth;
2. **explicitly:** by openly following the teachings of Jesus, who is God's spokesman, (morals as revealed by God) which is typical of Christians.

7.5 SIN

The deliberate choice to act against the truth one has found is called sin.

According to Christianity, this concerns each and every man.

To the Christian, sin is the deliberate refusal to follow Jesus.

Notice that, according to the Christian teaching, sin is in man's heart - a decision taken from within, not an outward act -.

7.5.1 DOCUMENTATION

Jesus said, "Don't you understand that nothing that enters a man from the outside can defile him, since it doesn't go into his heart?... It is what comes out of a man that defiles man. For from within - out of man's heart - come evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, (bad eye), slander/blasphemy, arrogance, folly. All these things come from inside and defile man (Mark 7,18-23).

Thus we ought to make distinction between sin and crime.

- Sin is the clear and deliberate opposition to the truth which has been found (opposition to moral order): it is a decision coming from within, which might not be brought into action;
- A crime is the breaking of an external law (the breaking of juridical order) and is therefore an outward action which can be controlled and judged by other people.

These are two separate situations: either can exist without mutual relationship.

What is being taught here is no revolutionary news: any manual of Christian morals would - and still does - teach that:

- The closest ruler of any action is one's own conscience.
- Sin consists of:
 - serious matter (objective factor)
 - full awareness (both are subjective factors)
 - deliberate consent (both are subjective factors)