

To the Christian community in Venango County,

February 2023

Beloved brothers and sisters in Christ, as men and women called by God and entrusted with the responsibility to shepherd the sheep and protect the flock, it is our responsibility to shout out a warning when dangerous individuals, groups, or ideas affect our communities and churches.

This is sadly the case with regards to the spread here locally of Torah Clubs sponsored by the First Fruits of Zion.

While we enthusiastically support deep study of the Bible, including its Jewish cultural and linguistic roots, all such study should occur within the framework of a Church history-based orthodoxy, and an apostolic understanding of the Gospel.

Why do groups associated with the Hebrew Roots Movement, in general, like the First Fruits of Zion, in particular, fail this test? Our **accompanying documentation** will demonstrate from **primary sources**, in their own words, that the First Fruits of Zion organization, and the Torah Clubs materials they publish, are replete with the following theological errors and/or heresies:

1. A non-Trinitarian view of God in the forms of two ancient heresies rejected by the Early Church: Modalism and Subordinationism.
2. A substandard hermeneutic {including the use of paraphrases and word substitutions resulting in more palatable texts} for interpreting scripture that contends that all relevant passages have been wrongly understood throughout Church History, and in fact mean nearly the opposite of what the Church has always taught.
3. A hostility toward the Church which is seen as the 'mission field' in need of correction to bring it back to its supposed roots as a Torah observant movement within Judaism.
4. That the books of Moses, the Torah, are more fully the words of God than other portions of holy scripture, making them the lens through which all scripture must be interpreted. Even Jesus Christ, the eternal Word of God, has no authority to establish anything beyond the Mosaic Law.
5. That Jesus did not fulfill the Mosaic Law, rather it is still operative and normative for all of God's people, Jews and Gentiles alike.
6. That there is no covenant with the Gentiles, thus all followers of Jesus Christ accepting the Gospel must be grafted into Israel by 'becoming a Jew' in spirit, and in Torah observance.
7. That on this basis true Christian discipleship requires the keeping of the Mosaic Law, including the dietary (kosher), Sabbath, and festival provisions, which is how Christians demonstrate their love of God.

If the tree is diseased, so will its fruit be. We would warn against the use of bible study materials produced by the Watchtower Tract Society (JW) or LDS (Mormon) organizations, even if locally 100% of the parent organization's theology was not being adopted. The risk that heretical teachings would gain a foothold is simply too great. If the desire is to learn from Judaism or Messianic Judaism, a host of materials from an orthodox point-of-view are available for Christians to use in our churches, to use that which comes from the FFOZ is an unnecessary risk, plus a union with an organization whose stated goals would harm the Church and warp the Gospel.

In the end, while protesting that they do not offer a works-based salvation, and claiming that faith in Jesus is sufficient, this movement is built upon and structured around the claim that all faithful Christians will begin observing the Law of Moses once they become followers of Jesus, that faithful Christians will, in essence, live like Jews. They may not outright claim the Law of Moses as the gatekeeper to salvation and Christian discipleship, but when you make it the gauge of genuine faithfulness you are adding it to the Gospel message, casting dispersion upon the faith of 99% of the world's Christians, both past and present, and spreading doubt and division within the Church. This movement is no benign appreciation of the scriptures, but rather an aggressively proselytizing misappropriation of them contrary to the established teachings of Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant Churches alike.

Given this, our duty requires that we warn our congregations against participation in these groups, and call upon those who do so now, and especially those who are promoting them, to repent and return to the faith our ancestors rejoiced in as, *"you are not under the law, but under grace."* (Romans 6:12)

By unanimous affirmation of the Franklin Christian Ministerium,

Rev. Shawn Clerkin, Vicar/Pastor, St. John's Episcopal Church/Grace Lutheran Church, Franklin

Deacon David Betz, St. John's Episcopal Church, Franklin

Pastor James Flaherty, Grace Community Bible Fellowship, Franklin

Rev. Dr. Darrell L. Greenawalt, Christ United Methodist Church, Franklin

Rev. Larry A. Myers, Polk Presbyterian Church

Rev. Eric Phillips, Redeemer Anglican Church, Franklin

Pastor Randy Powell, First Baptist Church of Franklin

Pastor Chad Troup, Fox Street Church of God