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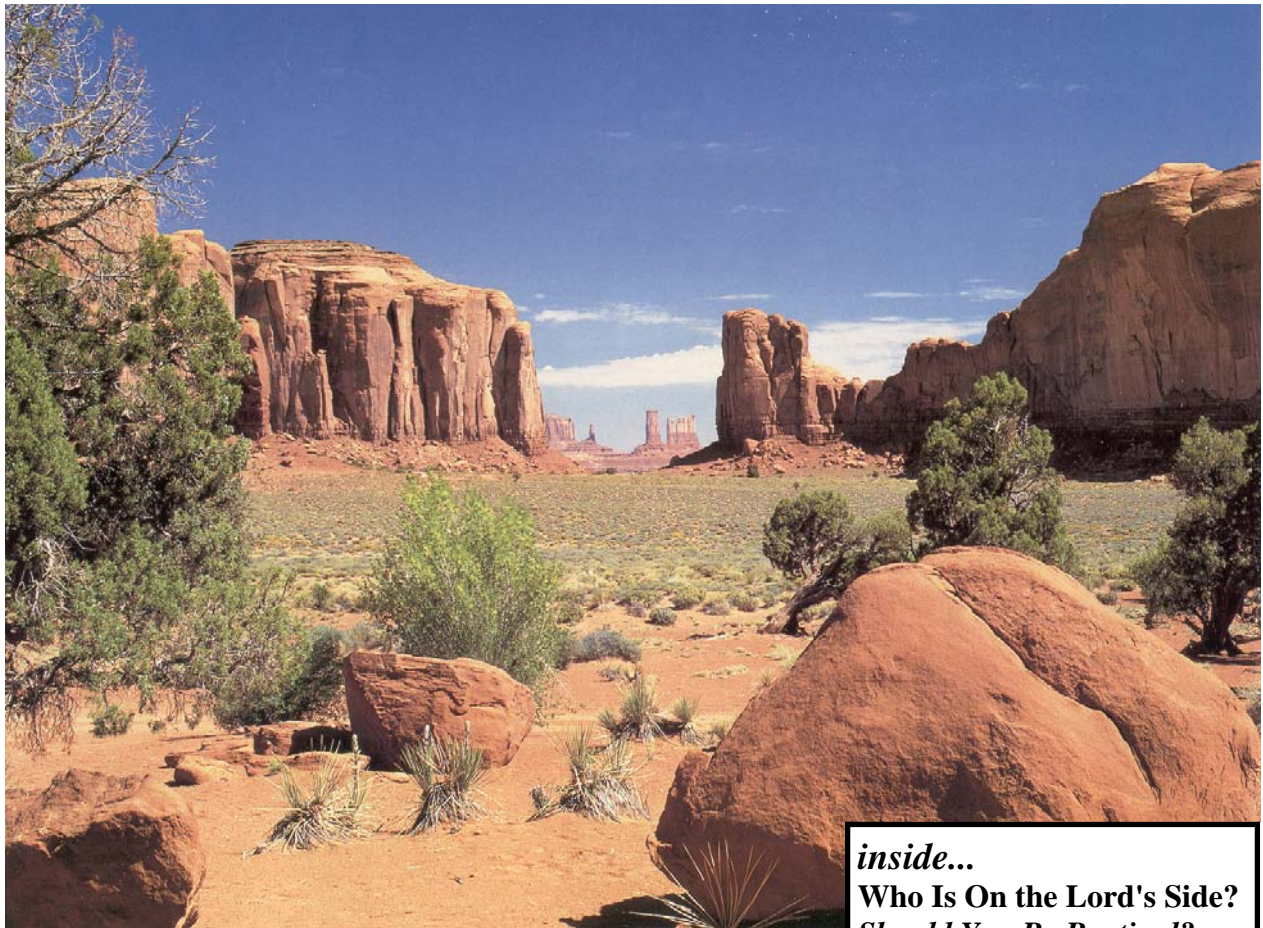
# **Horizons**

*Vol 10 No 4*

*July/August 2006*

*addressing the important issues for today and tomorrow*

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*inside...*

**Who Is On the Lord's Side?  
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**CGOM**

Churches Of God Outreach Ministries

**With around two thousand Christian denominations vying for your attention, it's easy to miss the important issues of life and religion. It's our hope that through *New Horizons* our readers will come to understand the true meaning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.**

**The Gospel was proclaimed by Jesus and by his apostles in the clearest of terms - and recorded for us in the Scriptures. Over the centuries that truth has been buried, dug up, buried again. Our desire is to restore the simple apostolic message. We hope you will be excited by what the Scriptures reveal about life, and the horizons beyond**

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**Jesus tells us that 'few' will find the narrow entrance to eternal life. How come there are two billion Christians?**

Thousands jam St Peters Square to hear the Pope's Easter message. Multiple millions crowd a variety of church buildings every Sunday. Thousands of 'evangelists' daily proclaim the Christian message and missionaries stride the world. Vast sums are annually poured into its propagation and maintenance. Church fabric, stipends, missionary activity, seminars, convocations - all call for huge financial outlay. The Christian faith is big business. And as the effort is, presumably, in service of the great God - why not? Whole nations claim to be Christian.

Switch on television for a religious service and often as not you will see a deliriously happy crowd at worship.

All ages, all colours assembled in worship of the God of the Christian Scriptures. Their expression radiates joy and sincerity. Vast auditoriums overflow with the faithful. There's miraculous healing of the sick. Even raising the dead is claimed. Surely God is at work and in a big way. Where, then, are the 'few'?

### The Few

Why then did Jesus say: "Go in through the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and many are the ones entering in through it. For narrow is the gate, and constricted is

the way that leads away into life, and few are the ones finding it." (Matthew 7:13-14). Are all these good folk - two billion, remember, a third of mankind - on that 'narrow way'? Is it possible that what Jesus then adds has gone unheeded? "But beware of the false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inside they are plundering wolves"(v.15)?

Clearly, Jesus expected trouble ahead. 'Narrow...constricted', he warns, will be the path to life. Yet - are all two billion on that path? A billion? Even half that? When in the flesh he saw his following as a 'little flock'. In the first outpouring of Spirit power following the first Christian Pentecost Christians remained a minority sect. There was indeed widespread knowledge of Jesus' work, for

even kings knew of him: "For the king [Agrippa] knows of these things, unto

whom also I speak freely: for I am persuaded that none of these things is hidden from him; for this hath not been done in a corner" (Acts 26:26). News of his miracles, teaching, suffering, death and resurrection permeated the Roman world.

The faint response to the Gospel message isn't surprising. After all, Jesus said: "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever would save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's shall save it" (Mark 8:34-35). To embrace

Christianity could be a death sentence! Indeed it has over the centuries meant martyrdom for countless men and women. So why such enthusiasm - at least in our peaceful West?

### Empty Worship?

In the days of Jeremiah the prophet, crowds worshipped in the Temple. But it was empty worship, despite their enthusiasm. They lacked the substance of true worship: "Behold, you trust in lying words, that cannot profit. Will you steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and burn incense to Baal, and walk after other gods that you have not known" (Jeremiah 7: 8-9). Their behaviour failed to match their religious enthusiasm. Personal lives lacked holiness, and their public worship - though carried out in God's Temple - owed more to the surrounding pagan cult than to God's revealed worship pattern.

Israel failed to heed the warning given through Moses just before they entered the 'land of promise':

"When Jehovah thy God shall cut off the nations from before you, whither you go to dispossess them, and you dispossess them, and dwell in their land; take heed to yourself that you be not ensnared to follow them, after that they are destroyed from before you; and that thou inquire not after their gods, saying, How do these nations serve their gods? even so will I do likewise. Thou shall not do so unto Jehovah your God: for every abomination to Jehovah, which he hates, have they done unto their gods; for even their sons and their daughters do they burn in the fire to their gods. What thing soever I command you, that shall ye observe to do: you shall not add thereto, nor diminish from it"

Deuteronomy 12:29-32

## Who Is On the Lord's Side?

In effect, Israel abandoned the one and only God: *“Has a nation changed its gods, and they were not gods? But My people have changed their Glory without profiting”* (Jeremiah 2:11).

It's a message Jesus himself repeated:

*“Not every one that says to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy by your name, and by your name cast out demons, and by your name do many mighty works? And then will I profess to them, I never knew you: depart from me, you that work iniquity”*

Matthew 7:21-23

No - mighty works, religious empires, miracles, martyrdom even (I Corinthians 13:3), are effective only when God is honoured through obedience to His revealed will and Word.

### **False Faith**

The sad fact is that modern Christianity bears little resemblance to the teachings of Jesus. The terminology may coincide but the meaning is at variance with the true Biblical faith. Christianity didn't come on the scene with Jesus! [see our article **6000 Years of Christianity**] What he did was clear away the religious detritus accumulated in Judaism over the centuries. The true faith remained unchanged, solid as a rock.

Yet even before the apostles died the faith they promoted was under fierce attack. Paul, for example, warned the Ephesian elders: *“For I know this, that after my departure grievous wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and out of you yourselves will rise up men speaking perverted things, in order to draw away the disciples after themselves”* (Acts 20:29-30). Indeed the spiritual inheritance left by Jesus was squandered away within a mere half century. Only a remnant remained.

The church of the second century would not be recognized by the first Christians.

### **No Change**

Twenty-first century Christianity bears little resemblance to 'the original'. Yet by mid first century the faith was a 'closed book'. Wrote Jude, a brother of Jesus: *“I was constrained to write unto you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints”* (Jude 3). Peter said the same (II Peter 2:21). Paul, too (II Thessalonians 2:15), adding to Timothy: *“guard that which is committed to you, turning away from the profane babblings and oppositions of the knowledge which is falsely so called; which some professing have erred concerning the faith”* (I Timothy 6:20).

The teachings of Jesus were committed to the apostles who passed on the authentic Gospel to others in an unending chain: *“And the things which thou hast heard from me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also”* (II Timothy 2:2). To meddle with, to change, that deposit of truth endangers salvation. Paul again: *“But even if we, or an angel out of Heaven, should preach a gospel to you beside the gospel we preached to you, let him be accursed”* (Galatians 1:8).

### **Gospel of Grace**

First-century Jews in general were diligent in their outward observance of the divine revelation. But as in the days of Jeremiah (at the time of the exile) religion was superficial and grossly distorted. Many of the Jews - including many priests - embraced Christ's teachings. Some however, failed to grasp the inwardness of his teachings and sought to impose a legal straitjacket on the brethren.

With the coming of the holy Spirit following Jesus' resurrection, the Law became, as prophesied, a matter

of the heart: *“After those days, declares Jehovah, I will put My Law in their inward parts, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people”* (Jeremiah 31:33). Its purpose is to define boundaries. The Spirit-led Christian applies it from the heart, from a desire to become Christ-like. *“Follow me”* said Paul. *“as I follow Christ”*.

Note that the Law (the embodiment of the original true faith) remained unchanged - just as Jesus said (Matthew 5:17). But divine power could so change the hearts of men that they would willingly submit to it. In the Christian faith it was not imposed by an external legal system but by .grace - the open-handed forgiveness of our lawlessness through acceptance of the sacrifice of Jesus: *“...not of works lest any man should boast”* (Ephesians 2:9).

Many of those who today wave the Christian banner are sincere in their worship - but misguided. The Israelites before their apostasy, would - without the indwelling Spirit - joyfully worship JHVH as He prescribed - on the weekly seventh-day Sabbath and on the annual holy convocations. These divinely appointed days were - and remain - the framework of true worship. Wrote the Psalmist: *“Worship Jehovah with gladness; come before His face with joyful singing. Know that Jehovah, He is God; He has made us, and not we ourselves, His people and the sheep of His pasture. Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, into His courts with praise; be thankful to Him; bless His name”* (Psalm 100).

The early church followed suit, worshipping on the days the LORD had prescribed - from the heart *'in spirit and in truth'*. But as pagan culture enveloped them those who retained the true worship were under increasing pressure to conform. Few were willing to make the necessary sacrifices demanded by Jesus. **cont'd p.8**

**Across most Christian denominations baptism is seen as the “admission ticket” to the faith. Is it free? Or is there a price attached?**

Baptism is one of the “rites of passage” in many religions, not least in Christianity. The rite was practiced, for example, by the Sumerians (3rd millennium BC). It was integral to those embracing Judaism. And, of course, is particularly known to the Christian world through John the Baptist. Jesus, himself baptized by John, commanded his disciples “...going, therefore, disciple all nations, baptizing them...” (Matthew 28:19). And from the earliest beginnings of the Christian church the rite was enjoined on all converts to the faith. The apostle Peter on the first Christian Pentecost urged his hearers to “...repent, and be baptized” (Acts 2:38).

In Roman Catholicism baptism is one of the seven “sacraments”, and is administered almost always shortly following the birth of a child into a Catholic family. Most denominations today baptize infants. But it wasn’t always so. Peter’s hearers, for example, were mature adults.

**Lesson From History**

During the first couple of centuries of the Christian faith, baptism of adults was the sole practice. To become a Christian was a serious life choice. Jews who accepted Jesus as the Messiah were ostracized from the community, with loss of job, status, family ties. They were even beaten in the synagogues. Peter’s hearers were entirely Jews (or proselytes) gathered from around the world in Jerusalem for the age-old festival of Pentecost. They were totally committed to the divinely revealed faith of Israel - to the observance of the weekly Sabbath and the annual holy days (see Leviticus 23) and to the precepts of the “Law of Moses”. But something was missing.

At Sinai, some fifteen hundred years before Jesus’ birth, Israel had entered into a covenant with God. They would, in return for obedience to God, be “a special treasure to Me above all people” and they would be “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exodus 19:1-8).

As a nation, they failed to keep their side of the covenant and lost God’s protection. The separate House of Israel and the House of Judah were taken from the land of promise and exiled to Assyria and Babylon. Only the House of Judah returned, and chastened by seventy years of exile they were diligent in observing the Law. But the general ethos of the nation in the time of Jesus - as today

## Should You Be Baptized?

- was one of outward observance. Just as today, there was lip service paid to “being good”. But the hearts of most people festered with self-serving which surfaced in violence, greed, oppression, tax fraud, aberrant sexual behaviour. John, Jesus - and the apostles - challenged this.

**Change of Heart**

The challenge of the teaching of Jesus demanded a fundamental *change of heart*. Not just the outward obedience of the Ten Commandments but a new and personal relationship with the Law-giver.

The guilt associated with all human sin could, in Israel, be removed through the tiresome round of divinely prescribed animal sacrifices. But these could never bring forgiveness: “For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sin” (Hebrews 10:4).

The awfulness of human sin demanded a greater sacrifice. But now in Jesus, the divine representative, all

sin could be forgiven. He is “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).

**God’s Grand Design**

In further revealing God’s grand design for mankind, Jesus unveiled a new covenant. Now the same divine Law would no longer be written on stones but in the human heart. The power that enabled Jesus to live in perfect harmony with the heavenly Father was now - through his sinless life, death and resurrection - made available to humankind. God would dwell in us by means of His Spirit and we could literally become His sons and daughters, and brothers and sisters of Jesus His Son.

But it required “repentance” - a genuine sorrow for our transgression of the divine Law which results in a changed life. Repentance demands mature reflection on past and present behaviour. It demands an understanding of “sin”. It demands a readiness to count the awesome cost of discipleship - to the point of martyrdom, if need be.

It required, too, the knowledge that only the sacrifice of “the Lamb of God” - Jesus of Nazareth, God’s appointed victim - was sufficient to bear away all the sin of mankind.

Baptism, then, is possible only for someone of mature mind.

**A Watery Grave**

In the Scriptures there is but one form of baptism. That’s by the submerging of the repentant individual in water. The apostle Paul describes it as a watery grave: “Do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him through baptism into death” (Romans 6:1-11). And emerging from this watery grave - we would drown if we stayed under the waters! - is symbolic of our resurrection as “a new creature in Christ” (vv. 4-5). Mere sprinkling -

or hosing - fails to convey this fundamental significance!

Rising out of the water, every sin has been forgiven. We are clean! The Lamb of God, Jesus of Nazareth, has taken all the sin of each of us upon himself through his suffering and his sacrificial death on the hill of Golgotha - "the place of the skull". His life blood, lanced by a Roman spear, poured from his lacerated body.

Until Jesus returns (unlike the sacrifice of the Passover which will be

observed after he comes back), baptized Christians annually observe a memorial of his suffering and death in the Lord's Supper *'on the night he was betrayed'* (I Corinthians 11: 20-26).

Also significant in baptismal symbolism is the concept of being washed - again perfectly represented by immersion. Paul was confronted by Jesus for persecuting believers. He

said: *"Arise and be baptized [Gk = immersed], and wash away your sins"* (Acts 22:16, Hebrews 10:22).

The water here is symbolic of Christ's blood shed for us: *"...to him who loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood"* (Revelation 1:5).

#### Your Choice

Every one of us - all mankind - has *"fallen short of the glory of God"*.

His plan for each of us is that we share in His glory - a process that requires we become spiritually mature. By nature God is absolutely pure, and none of us can enter the divine Family loaded with our sin. God's love for us has in Jesus the Messiah provided a path to forgiveness. In baptism we acknowledge our determination to change our inborn hostility to God and His law ("repentance"), emerging from the water clean in His eyes through the righteousness of Jesus.

God's "glory" is not some ethereal pie-in-the-sky. He offers us (John 3:16) the choice of extinction - or of living for ever in partnership with Him as joint-heirs with Jesus Christ in a real material universe in which the divine plan will endlessly unfold.

The example of Jesus, himself immersed by John, and the example of the practice of the early church confirms that baptism is the prescribed path into the Body of Christ, his church. It is symbolic of our death to the *'old man'* - that nature we brought into the world with us. It is symbolic of our *'resurrection'* as a new creation in Christ. It is symbolic of the washing away of our sin - our falling short of the glory of the Creator - in the shed blood of our Saviour.

If you are willing to pay the heavy price of discipleship, you must counsel about baptism. Each of us is faced with a stark choice of living for ever - or death.

*God wants you to choose life!*     **Ω**

## First There Was Nothing...

**"The world began without any beginning". So imply some evolutionists. How come?**

First there was absolutely nothing - not even God. No life, no Earth, no planets, no stars, no dark matter. Nothing. Total emptiness.

Then out of this black nothingness magically appeared those physical laws which would be essential for future development. Next, another miracle, there emerged - from 'nothing' - inorganic matter: water, rocks, soil *etc.* From these inert materials miraculously sprang the most primitive form of biological life.

Over more billions of years life became increasingly complex, culminating in the incredible complexity

that is modern man.

Observing from the commanding heights of gross ignorance, pundits claim that life - having evolved gradually from nothing - has existed on our planet for millions of years. Let's analyze that a little.

#### Origins

Assume the impossible presence, somewhere in the universe, of the first and simplest primitive living creature - maybe an amoeba. Let's call it Eve - the 'mother of all living'. There she quivers in a rock pool complete with the incredible genetic complexity even a bacterium must have to sustain life.

By some miracle she divides and reproduces herself. (Did 'she' include male or female chromosomes, or both?) Many generations later - perhaps a million years - one of them

acquires a new gene that has formed itself out of the nothingness.

Multitudes of changes (mutations) follow - eventually, millions of years later, enabling a *Tiktaalik Roseae* to crawl on newly-evolved shoulders from the sea to become the first land creature, and in time - lots of time - becoming the first pre-human. Our ancestor.

#### Unnatural Selection

The changes essential to leap from pre-human to human would result from random mutations - which are almost always deleterious. According to evolutionists they take vast aeons of time. (We could ask *where* the new genetic material came from to make this miraculous leap.)

*Homo Sapiens* is by definition wiser, more advanced, than his predecessors. Picture it. Two     **cont'd p.6**

# TRUST ME – I'M GOD

## 'Increase our faith' requested the disciples of Jesus. How?

The power and authority exercised by Jesus awed his disciples to ask him to increase the deficit of faith in themselves. Faced with a 'spiritual mountain' - casting out a demon - they had failed miserably. Lack of faith, it is clear, hinders our spiritual activity. Yet 'faith' is an essential element of the Christian's life.

Faith, according to the apostle Peter, is the foundation of our life in Christ (II Peter 1:1-7). It is the spiritual basis for our calling to 'glory and virtue', an assurance that we will be 'partakers of the divine nature'. Upon it we, with due diligence, build Christ-like character.

To faith we are to add virtue (strength, courage), knowledge, self-control, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, love. All character traits of Jesus. Continues Peter:

*"For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that you shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacks these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and has forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if you do these things, you shall never fall"* (vv.8-10)

### Godly Example

The people of God through all ages have lived by faith. Many have suffered persecution, torture, mocking, jail, stoning, destitution, have become wandering refugees. All because they lived their faith for the divine promise of life for eternity (see Hebrews 11:36-40). We don't

blood-stained history of Christianity - to uncover 'religious folk' persecuting and killing faithful believers.

Indeed Jesus predicted that persecution of his followers would continue into our own time. Are we prepared? Will our faith be sufficient? How can we 'increase our faith'?

### Building Faith

With little effort we can have some-one top up our oil tank or our glass. Can we top up *faith* - just by asking? Certainly it can't be bought. No amount of charitable giving or charity work will buy it. But if you do recognize your need and ask Jesus for 'more' - *then be prepared for a challenge!* Muscle isn't built by indolence - *nor is faith.*

Jesus answer to the disciples' request was to point out the necessity of 'prayer and fasting' for the task at hand - the expulsion of that particular and powerful demonic presence. They had already been given the authority by Jesus to expel evil spirits (Matthew 10:1) - this was a lapse of faith and not the sustained faith of maturity.

So, faced with a 'mountain' Jesus prescribes the considerable self-discipline of 'prayer and fasting'. But there's more. Let's first define faith.

Faith is a quality we use every day. Faith that the bus driver will get us to our desired destination. Faith that the sun will come up. Faith that the lights will go on, that we will survive the day.

Similarly, the word as used in the New Testament (Gk. *pistis*) simply means reliance - reliance on a God who is totally trustworthy. Writes one commentator: 'Such reliance enabled the believer to treat the fu-

ture as present and the invisible as seen'.  
delve in seen'.  
history -  
even the

It is, in essence, *trust*. And there's no point in religion unless we have it:

*"But without faith it is impossible to please God. For it is right that the one drawing near to God should believe that He is, and that He becomes a rewarder to the ones seeking Him out"* (Hebrews 11:6)

### The Unchanging God

The ancient 'gods' couldn't be relied upon. They were fickle, and indeed were mere expressions of human nature, gods created in the image and likeness of man. The Creator God is not so. The God of the Jewish-Christian Bible assures us '*I am the LORD. I change not*'. What God has accomplished for us, done for us, how He cares for us, never changes. Jesus is "...*the same yesterday, today and forever*" (Hebrews 13:8).

No matter what era of human history, no matter where we live, no matter what our religious belief or lack of belief - then and there we face uncertainty. Our world is troubled. A relative few are financially stable, but most struggle to some degree. A long life unaffected by disease or injury escapes virtually all of mankind. Stable family life is increasingly but a dream of new love. We can't even trust the ground under our feet.

Jesus recognized these universal needs, and provides the solution: "*Come to Me*", he said, "*all those laboring and being burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, because I am meek and lowly in heart, and you will find rest to your souls*" (Matthew 11:28-29).

That's a gold star promise. Solomon, too: "*Trust in the LORD with all your heart and don't lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will direct your paths*" (Proverbs 3: 5-6). He

knows us intimately, knows what is best for us in every circumstance of life.

### Expect Trouble

In no way, though, does the Father imply a stress-free life for those who believably come to Him. He 'promises' trials, persecution - even death - for maintaining our faith. His concern is for our spiritual welfare: the material is important only as it affects the spiritual. Hence He may not heap on us the riches we desire. He may answer prayer with a resounding 'No' or 'Not now' or 'You are not yet ready for it' or 'You've got to be joking!'. He may allow persecution for our beliefs.

Indeed it is by such means that we 'increase our faith'. Just as an athlete must train, train, train to attain peak performance, so the weight of life's experiences can - if we react to them positively - strengthen our 'spiritual muscle' and prepare us for service in 'our Father's House':

*"If you endure discipline, God is dealing with you as with sons; for who is the son whom a father does not discipline? ...And all discipline for the present indeed does not seem to be joyous, but grievous; but afterward it gives back peaceable fruit of righteousness to the ones having been exercised by it"*

Hebrews 12:7-11

Yet *"...No temptation [adverse experience] has taken you except what is human; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted above what you are able. But with the temptation He will also make the way out, so that you may be able to bear it"* (I Corinthians 10:13).

Whatever befalls the faithful is within the bounds of our ability to cope. There is always, says the apostle, 'a way to bear it'.

### Trust God

Wisdom dictates that we don't make blind purchases - we first put them to the test. We don't immediately trust people we meet - only through prolonged experience do we trust them. Yet for as long as mankind has walked the earth God has proven Himself perfectly trustworthy. He does what He promises., If we but believe Him, trust Him.

So trust God. He says:

*"...cast all your anxiety upon him, because he cares for you (I Peter 5:7). And: 'Do not be anxious for your life, what you eat and what you drink, nor for your body, what you put on. Is not the soul more than the food and the body than the clothing? Observe the birds of the heaven, that they do not sow, nor do they reap, nor do they gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Do you not rather excel them? But who of you by being anxious is able to add one cubit onto his stature? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow. They do not labor nor do they spin, but I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory was clothed as one of these. If God so enrobes the grass of the field (which is today, and is thrown into a furnace tomorrow) will He not much rather you, little-faiths? Then do not be anxious, saying, What may we eat? Or, what may we drink? Or, what may clothe us? For after all these things the nations seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you have need of all these things"* (Matthew 6: 25-32)

Just do it. Trust God - it's the best course for you!  $\Omega$

Request the related article:  
**God's Academy**

### OUTREACH

In association with the *Outreach Ministries, the Churches of God, UK* publish a bi-monthly internet News-

### Nothing.... cont'd

pre-humans have been happily procreating their own kind as did their ancestors for countless generations - just as their Creator intended (Genesis 1:24ff).

But one of the pair has an 'attack of the genetics'. (Perhaps he or she was struck by a bolt of lightning.) A gene mutates and there is, at most, a fifty percent chance the change will be passed on to the offspring. And so on for uncounted generations of similar change.

But get this - each tiny change would have *negative* impact, resulting in something *inferior*.

### An Eye on Evolution

We could ask how an eyeless amoeba could *gradually* evolve an eye - even over millions, billions, of years. The eye is functional only if its 'evolution' were complete in one giant step, and until that moment is useless. The process of natural selection can do nothing about that. Vision requires a complete eye linked to and interacting with a prepared and fully-functioning brain.

This applies, too, to other body systems - to hearing, to respiration, to the nervous system *etc.* All require incredibly complex chemical and neurological processes. In fact, the human body can function only as an integrated unit - completed in one powerful action.

It is designed and created by an unimaginably superior intelligence - the Creator God.

*The only reason to reject a divine Creator is to kid ourselves that He must not be obeyed!*  $\Omega$

letter with news and views of the churches, and brief topical articles.

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### **'THERE IS NO GOD...'**

...So said a correspondent on the BBC *PM* programme. Yet the Psalms tell us: *"Only fools say in their hearts, "There is no God." They are corrupt, and their actions are evil; not one of them does good!"*

In our cosy - and somewhat arrogant - Europe over 30% of the populace would reject the Psalmist's view (although half say there's an after-life!). But in the wider world the so-called 'atheist' is a figure of derision. Maybe 90% of Earth's six billion have a firm belief in a 'God'. The demise of Communism in Russia uncovered a residual deep-seated underground faith clung to through the dreadful decades of that atheistic ersatz faith. 87% there are declared 'believers'.

China, too, with its billion plus population despite sixty years of suppression, has its vast 'underground church' and even more who subscribe to the 'superstition of a deity'. Then there are those billion believers in India - Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, Moslem, Christian - and the multiple millions throughout South East Asia. Skip an ocean and there are teeming millions of believers in a God in the Americas.

So, tell that (*'There is no God'*) to the billions of believers around the world.

Europe is very much out of step. The past couple of centuries has seen the decline of a live 'Christianity' - replaced by attempts to forge a humanist secular, federal United States of Europe.

### **Outreach Ministries**

The *Churches of God Outreach Ministries* is an international association of independent local assemblies - Christians who meet together for worship, instruction in the faith and fellowship. Each assembly is self-governing according to Bible principles, but co-operates through our Conference with other like-minded assemblies to work towards agreed evangelistic goals.

These goals are within the framework of the commission set for his church by Jesus: *"going, therefore, disciple all nations, baptising them...and teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you"* (Matthew 28:19-20). He further commanded that we *"Shepherd...[and] feed my sheep"*.

To these ends we publish Bible-based literature (eg our quarterly *Newsletter*, a bi-monthly outreach magazine *New Horizons*, the *Bible Basics* and our extended 32-lesson home study course).

The *Outreach Ministries* also supports a network of independent fellowships and scattered brethren.

We cordially invite all independent fellowships of whatever size - or individuals - to associate with us in this worldwide ministry. Our *Statement of Beliefs* and a *Publications Catalogue* is available from any of our addresses or may be viewed on our website.

We are pleased to offer you, without charge, any of our publications.

Professed atheists (aren't they are due for a surprise!) such as Richard Dawkins, however, confuse the varieties of belief with the true faith of Jesus Christ and the Bible.

### **True Faith?**

Religion as we know it has indeed been responsible for myriad vio-

lent deaths. Christianity has spawned the Crusades. It provided us with the murderous Inquisition and the many deaths under early Protestantism. The 'Hundred Years War' was largely a European religious war. Out of Christianity came the Irish Republican death squads and the massacres in Christian Serbia.

But this is not real Christianity!

Said Jesus, *"My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence"* (John 18:36).

Further, few Christians today are willing to follow the Scriptures in how they worship. Pre-Christian practices - as Christmas, Easter, Sunday, All Hallows - are substituted for the divinely-inspired Biblical observances. Many church leaders even reject the foundation of the faith - the resurrection of Jesus. It's no wonder Christians are seen as hypocritical. And a gullible public eagerly swallows such myths as the *DaVinci Code*.

If God does not exist then Jesus - a proven historical figure - is just bones and dust. He could not have been resurrected. Yet the empty tomb is an incontrovertible witness that a living God raised him from among the dead. **Ω**

*You are invited to request the free articles:*

***The Empty Tomb  
The Resurrection of Jesus -  
just a sham?***

## LORD'S`SIDE...?

Jesus affirmed that his church would never die (Matthew 16:18). At his promised return it will still be here. Small, perhaps - but still maintaining 'the faith once for all delivered to the saints'.

### Open Invitation

If I advertise nationally an employment opportunity I'm initially inviting all and sundry. Those who apply 'self-select'. It is then my responsibility to choose the most suitable candidate.

The Father has an open invitation for anyone to come to Him by way of His Son. Wherever the Gospel is proclaimed there is His calling card.

However, in some manner the Father chooses from among mankind those whom He will 'draw' to Jesus, those who apply to His invitation, whom He will prepare to serve in His Kingdom.

Said Jesus: "All that the Father gives to Me shall come to Me, and the one coming to Me I will in no way cast out" (John 6:37). And: "No one is able to come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him" (v.44).

That, of course, doesn't exclude human choice. We are free to accept, ignore or reject the invitation: "...the ones with Him are the called and chosen and faithful ones" (Revelation 17:14). It's commitment for life.

Sadly, all shades of culture, religious diversity, personal circumstances, education *etc* - aided and abetted by 'the god of this world', Satan - have

cast a veil over the eyes of mankind, blinding us to the divine plan, the Gospel. But, wrote the apostle Peter (II Peter 3:9): "God is not willing that any of us should be destroyed [in Ge'Henna, 'hell'] but that all should come to repentance".

In God's time that veil will be lifted; "And He will destroy in this mountain the face of the covering which covers all people, and the veil that is woven over all nations" (Isaiah 25:7). That time is when Jesus the Messiah returns to reign as supreme ruler of the planet, the 'King of kings'.

But not just those who are alive at His coming. All who have breathed will, in God's time, be raised from their graves and they, too, will be free to accept the invitation. "Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming in which all those in the tombs will hear His voice. And they will come out, the ones having done good into a resurrection of life; and the ones having practiced evil into a resurrection of judgment".

You are invited to enroll for our 32-lesson **Bible Study Course**.

It covers comprehensively most of the questions you may have about the teachings of the Christian Scriptures.

There is no charge, and no-one will call on you uninvited. Just contact us at any of our addresses, or by e-mail or phone.

Lesson 1: *Why Study the Bible?*  
Lesson 2: *Coming World Peace*

### Few Called

Unless an outside power works on the human mind, the beliefs we are born into and grow into are like chains. They mentally bind us, and we make fundamental change only rarely by human will. Witness the power of religious belief which - as we see in contemporary Islam or with the 'Christian' paramilitaries - drives men and women to murder for their faith.

Given such powerful mindsets and given the all-invasive Western secular culture it is no surprise that when we meet the challenge of Jesus Christ so few take up the challenge.

The good news is that the spiritual blindness will be removed. Man will be freed from the shackles that bind us in darkness: "And He will destroy in this mountain the face of the covering that is cast over all peoples, and the veil that is spread over all nations" (Isaiah 25:7)

If you are experiencing that divine 'draw' - don't ignore it! Whatever the challenges you may face as a true disciple of the Saviour of the world the reward - serving Him for eternity in a perfect spirit body - is way beyond human imagination.

Should you wish to discuss this in more detail, we will be available to answer any questions you may have. Write to us at any of our addresses (inside front page). We may be able, if desired, to arrange to answer your questions face-to-face. **Ω**

## **CALLING ALL INTERNET USERS!**

The *Outreach Ministries* website lists over a hundred Bible-based articles which address issues frequently on the minds of Christians. You may download any, or request print copies. There is, too, a section of on-line audio sermons, links to associated groups, back issues of *New Horizons* and an on-line magazine for our younger readers. Be sure to take a look at

**www.cgom.org**

MiniStudy**Is Hell Real?**

*And be not afraid of them that kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell* (Matthew 10:28)

*And Jehovah God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul* (Genesis 2:7)

The 14th century *Dante's Inferno* firmly set in the human psyche the concept of 'hell' as a raging fiery furnace in which is confined the unsaved - tormented for all eternity. It has served to cement in the mind of many the notion of God as a callous monster. Others justify it as proper punishment for failing to accept Jesus as Saviour. If true, then the vast majority of human kind are destined for billions of years of horrendous torment. What about the billions alive today who reject Christianity or have never even heard the name *Jesus*. Or the countless men, women and children alive before his coming. Will they suffer the same awful fate? Is this what the Scriptures teach?

- first, it must be understood that for every human being who ever lived there will come a time of just judgment before the bar of God (John 5:28, 29)
- *but hell is real!* There's no escape from this teaching in the Christian Scriptures. What's unreal is the widely accepted meaning of the word. In fact, the concept is represented in Scripture by more than the one word *hell*, and in different original words
- it perhaps shocks to know that Jesus himself rested three days and nights in hell. Indeed his 'companions' there included faithful Abraham, Moses, David - and the murderer Cain - together with every individual who had died until that time (Acts 2:29-31)
- the Hebrew word for hell is *sheol*, the grave and cognates. The equivalent Greek is *hades*. It represents the resting place of all the dead
- another Greek term is *gehenna*. This word indeed refers to a fire - the final post-judgment outcome for the unrepentant. The term derives from *Ge-Hinnom* - the Valley of Hinnom, where Jerusalem's waste was burned or consumed by worms
- at the time of Jesus no human had been to Heaven (John 3:13). How come?
- in fact, the whole concept of the unsaved being consigned at death to a burning hell derives from the first ever lie. Most religious folk believe that Hell is the domain of Satan. Our first parents would have remained alive as long so they didn't sin. Satan, the father of lies - taught that even if you sin you won't ever die (Genesis 3:4)
- man was created from earth's elements (Genesis 2:7). God animated the clay model '*...and man became a living soul*'. The soul, we are told, can die (Ezekiel 18:4)
- upon death we (eventually) return to the soil (Genesis 3:19), without conscious existence (Ecclesiastes 9:5)
- at the return of Jesus all those in whom dwells God's Spirit will be resurrected to eternal life. All others will be resurrected (in a material body) to face a period of judgment. The unrepentant die and their bodies consumed by fire in *Gehenna, hell* - eternal annihilation
- "*But the day of the Lord will come as a thief; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall be dissolved with fervent heat, and the earth and the works that are therein shall be burned up*" (II Peter 3:10; Revelation 21:8) Ω

Request: **When Someone Dies**

*New Horizons* may be viewed  
on our web-site  
**www.cgom.org**  
e-mail: **coguk@aol.com**  
**information@cgom.org**

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*Onward Christian Soldiers...?*

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**When Someone Dies**

**The Two Nations of Israel**

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***Bible Basics***

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The introductory lesson gives  
some hints about how to  
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Don't miss out on a single issue of the *New Horizons* magazine!  
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