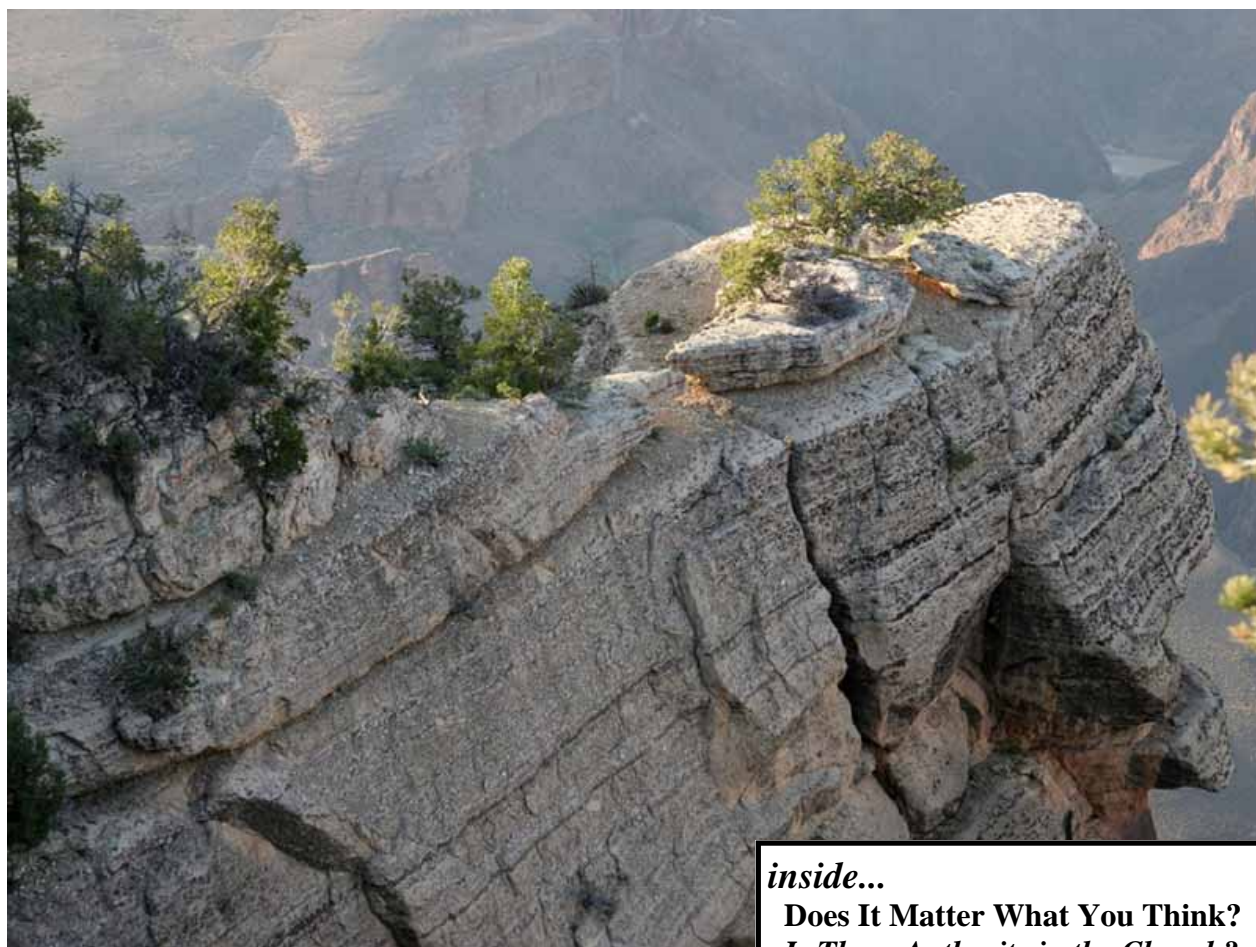


NEW Horizons

Vol 12 No 1

January/February 2008

addressing the important issues for today and tomorrow



inside...

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CGOM

Churches Of God Outreach Ministries

**With around two thousand
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vying for your attention, it's
easy to miss the important
issues of life and religion.
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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 Scrip-
tures. Over the centuries
that truth has been buried,
dug up, buried again. Our
desire is to restore the sim-
ple apostolic message. We
hope you will be excited
by what the Scriptures re-
veal about life, and the
horizons beyond**

*the views expressed by the writers are not
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new Horizons

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How do you deal with your conscience?

What is 'morality'?

Every human activity begins with a thought: A complex scientific advance. An architectural masterpiece. A beautiful work of art. Literature. A business. All originate in a human mind. But so, too, any type of negative behavior, and all criminal activity. So, too, what has been called 'psycho-somatic illness.' Clearly, *what we think* is important. It does matter.

Faced with any situation we make a judgment as to how to react, colored by our past experience and training.

Daily we face choices, most of which are just routine. On occasion, however, there's a moral choice. Do I lie to save face? Should I swipe the office stationery? Can I get away with a tax scam? Is this relationship in everyone's best interest?

What is Conscience?

Of course, persist in an activity and we will at length feel comfortable with it. But what, first time round, caused us to pause for thought? We hear of the 'little angels' on our shoulders, one says 'do it,' the other 'don't.' What is this still small voice in our ear? What is it that keeps us from enjoying what we know we shouldn't do? We call it 'conscience.'

Of a former Prime Minister it was said: *'[His] conscience never troubled him since he never has had oc-*

casion to use it.' Tongue in cheek someone said *'it's the inner voice that warns us someone may be looking!'* How does it arise? Why is an action okay for one person but taboo for another?

Origins

Conscience is the faculty, possessed in degree by all of us, to pass judgment on ourselves. All our actions are according to conscience, or contrary to it.

The apostle Paul uses the word 'conscience' [Gk *suneidesis*] some twenty times in his writings. It is, he says, not limited to the 'godly' but in-

-built in everyone, summed up as: *'...Some people naturally obey the Law's commands, even though they don't have the Law. This proves that the conscience is like a law written in the human heart'* (Romans 2:14

-15 CEV). (For example, don't murder, don't steal, don't cheat on your family.) You don't have to know the ten commandments to have a conscience!

Professionals are at a loss as to how conscience, our moral sense, began. Simple, when you put the Creator into the equation. We are designed to God's specifications and, like any human invention, function when in harmony with the inbuilt operating instructions. For man that is our sense of right and wrong, our conscience, our 'super-ego.'

Is It Sin?

Paul intimates that conscience can be both overly scrupulous (eg I Corin-

thians 10:25-33), and 'seared,' branded, cauterized, by abuse (I Timothy 4:2).

King Solomon perhaps refers to this super-scrupulous approach: *'...don't destroy yourself by being too good or acting too smart'* (Ecclesiastes 7:16 CEV). Religious folk, especially, are bothered by this. For example, some Christians, though this perhaps should now be past tense, believe without Biblical foundation that it's sin to dance, or to play cards or to drink alcohol. (Though some uses may well be sin!) Or that it's sin to play a musical instrument in church.

Paul gives another example. Writing to the Roman brethren (*ch* 14) he highlights one who is vegetarian, such being a 'weakness of faith' (v.2). He adds: *'...What you believe about these things should be kept between you and God. You are don't have the Law. You are fortunate, if your actions don't make you have doubts. But if you do have doubts about what you eat, you are going against your beliefs. And you know that is wrong, because anything you do against your beliefs is sin'* (vv.22-23 CEV).

On the other hand, there's the seared conscience. Christian teachers, for example, who have deceived others: *'...God's Spirit clearly says that in the last days many people will turn from their faith. They will be fooled by evil spirits and by teachings that come from demons. They will also be fooled by the false claims of liars whose consciences have lost all feeling'* (I Timothy 4:1-2 CEV). We ought to choose a middle way!

The Clear Conscience

Paul, however, and an example for us, had a 'clear conscience' which he defined as *'...blameless towards God and men'* (Acts 24:1, 16). And:

'...We can be proud of our clear conscience. We have always lived honestly and sincerely, especially when we were with you' (II Corinthians 1:12 CEV). How do we get that? Paul again: '...we were guided by God's wonderful kindness instead of by the wisdom of this world'. And '...in all good conscience [I] have lived to God until this day' (Acts 23:1).

Conscience, then, is influenced by both internal and external factors. Internally, by our thought processes we either assent to what we think is 'right,' or we dissent; we reject the promptings urging us to act in a particular, and proper, manner. That is, we defile our conscience.

The apostle Paul provides an illustration: '...many people have grown up with the belief that idols have life in them. So when they eat meat offered to idols, they are bothered by a weak conscience. But food doesn't bring us any closer to God. We are no worse off if we don't eat, and we are no better off if we do' (I Corinthians 8:7-8 CEV). But acting contrary to conscience is a serious matter: '... if you do have doubts about [an action], you are going against your beliefs. And you know that is wrong, because anything you do against your beliefs is sin (Romans 14:23 CEV). It is sin. What we think matters!

But what determines conscience? We have seen that we are born with a notion, however vague, of right and wrong. Externally, in our early years conscience is honed by parental and educational influences. Teach a child, by example, perhaps, that street drugs are okay, or abusing alcohol, or that homosexuality and promiscuity is 'normal' (and Government is hell-bent on programming the conscience of our school children about this), teach such beliefs and conscience is defiled.

Teach a young child a raft of positive beliefs, courtesy, honesty, kindness, work ethic, personal responsibility, respect for life etc, and conscience is positively fuelled. Teach a child a

"Guilt

The dictionary defines the word "guilt" as a "feeling of responsibility or remorse for some offence, crime, wrong, etc., whether real or imagined." Guilt is that part of the human conscience that brings us up short and convicts us for actions and thoughts. Guilt is an inherent human trait that should be seen as a gift... rather than deal with guilt, we naturally attempt to squelch it. However, guilt is that nagging voice within us all that is like water upon a stone and is meant to bring us to a realization that there is a standard and we have fallen short; but whose standard is it?

"Seeing guilt in its proper light allows us to understand that it is a safety valve for the human condition. Guilt means there is a right and wrong way for us to operate and there are standards of what is good and what is worthy of guilt. The guilt "gene" is something that we are born with" *internet*

Guilt, however, is not just a 'feeling.' It is the mechanism that informs us we have violated our conscience and the universal principles of right and wrong. And it is tangible, it has an effect on our physiology and on our mind: *depression*, for example. And if our action or thought is contrary to the Creator's standard, even if we don't 'feel guilty,' we still experience the consequence. If, for example, I habitually lie then I will not consider it wrong and I 'sear' my conscience.

Realize that we have indeed erred, and then face and put right the error and guilt is assuaged. Yet it remains sinful, and the only 'cure' is forgiveness through the suffering and death of Jesus Christ, whatever your religion.

catechism of false religious beliefs (eg Christmas, Ramadan, Santa Claus, worship on Friday or Sunday, immortal soul) and in later life it takes a spiritual earthquake to shift those deeply entrenched beliefs.

Life Resources

We must become fully convinced in our minds if a radical change of be-

liefs is not to be superficial or sinful. Paul has more to say on this: '...One indeed judges a day above another day; and another one judges every day alike. Let each one be fully assured in his own mind' (Romans 14:5). Note: 'one judges,' (Gk *krino*) a thought process based on evidence; 'fully assured,' (Gk *plerophoreo*) completely convinced, persuaded by the evidence.

For Christians there is but one place to source the evidence on which to judge. It is a Biblical, God-centered mind-set, found only in the inspired Scriptures of truth: '... Since childhood, you have known the Holy Scriptures that are able to make you wise enough to have faith in Christ Jesus and be saved. Everything in the Scriptures is God's Word. All of it is useful for teaching and helping people and for correcting them and showing them how to live' (I Timothy 3:15-16).

A new Christian, then, may have inadequate understanding of days, or food, or idolatry. But by this exposure to the Word of God he or she can over time come to a Godly view. That's what it means to be Christ-like, 'perfect,' one in Christ.

But to willingly remain in ignorance of what God teaches us in His Word, to stagnate in our beliefs, that leads to the fading of the Spirit's influence. And ultimately to spiritual death: '...*Quench not the Spirit,*' says Paul (I Thessalonians 5:19, Hebrews 10:26-31).

As ever, Paul's writings are full of godly examples. Some, he says, are 'weak in the faith,' they refuse foods which God has '*sanctified,*' set apart for our nourishment. By exposure to the Word of God (Leviticus 11, I Timothy 4: 5) their conscience is enlightened. The principle of a 'clear conscience' applies even to our relationship with the secular authorities (Romans 13:1-8). And to social arrangements with our friends and acquaintances (I Corinthians 10:27f).

cont'd p.8

In today's world 'authority' is despised. Is there a place for it in the church of God?

Most 'mainstream' churches are light on the exercise of authority. The big exception, of course, is the Church of Rome, which has a strict hierarchical structure headed by the Pope, and which exerts powerful influence over its adherents, and indeed over secular governments. Some consider such a structure to be worth emulation. What was the position among the first Christians?

All Christians recognize Jesus Christ as the supreme authority in the church. He said '*...I will build my church, and death itself will not have any power over it*' (Matthew 16:18 CEV). Jesus, one part of the God Family, was sent by the Father to perfectly reflect His will among men. He is '*the Apostle and High Priest of our confession*' (Hebrews 3:1). As part of the process he appointed the apostles as the repository of his teaching, and commissioned them to spread that teaching worldwide. During their lifetime they had, in full, his authority. They guarded the treasure-house of his true teaching, and with their passing nothing different was to be added: '*...contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints*' (Jude 3).

The apostle Paul wrote to the evangelist Timothy: '*...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). No longer (after the death of the apostles and to this day) were there fully inspired, and infallible, men to whom recourse could be made on matters of doctrine and church practice. Those who followed were to look to the recorded words of Jesus and the writers of the New Testament for guidance, and to faithfully teach them.

The apostles died, the last, John, probably around 90AD. Since the resurrection of Jesus they had fought the rising tide of false teachings that swirled around the churches. It's a battle that faithful believers have fought through the intervening centuries, sometimes with success, sometimes not.

At times men have arisen who, with varying success, have, in part, restored the

apostolic teachings. But the passage of time, the changes of culture and of language, archaeological and historical discovery block a crystal clear understanding or shed new light. The apostle Peter tells us that full understanding awaits the return of Jesus '*...whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began*' (Acts 3:21). In the meantime let's be dogmatic only where the Bible is crystal clear!

Today, our understanding of the Scriptures can never be 'set in stone,' there's always room for some fine tuning! We must, in all humility, acknowledge that we 'don't know it all' but are striving to '*...grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and for ever*' (II Peter 3:18) For in Jesus are '*...all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hidden*' (Colossians 2:3).

In sum, in his day Jesus was the only authority for what the Father wanted. He passed on that knowledge to his apostles and together with the record of the life and words of Jesus in the four Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, their testimony is recorded in the writings of the New Testament. None dare take from or add to that witness. However, our 21st century understanding of the pure apostolic teaching is at best blurred, and may include error. In humility we seek greater light.

Authority Today

But what of the exercise of authority in today's church? Do the Scriptures require 'one head'?

Unsurprisingly, the apostles not only proclaimed the pure Gospel, explained to them by Jesus himself, and established local churches but they also exercised

Each quotation from the Bible in New Horizons is from the translation which most clearly expresses the original thought

Is There Authority in the Church?

some authority over those they planted, setting precedent by example to all generations of how to govern each local assembly. These traditions [the word means *transmission*] were to be passed down the generations (II Thessalonians 2:15). Inevitably, human frailty distorted the pure apostolic teaching.

As years rolled by the desire for power over people obliterated the pattern Jesus had set. Note:

Jesus called the disciples together and said: You know that foreign rulers like to order their people around. And their great leaders have full power over everyone they rule. But don't act like them. If you want to be great, you must be the servant of all the others. And if you want to be first, you must be the slave of the rest. The Son of Man did not come to be a slave master, but a slave who will give his life to rescue many people'
Matthew 20:25-28

It's an admonition so important that it is repeated in three of the Gospels. Yet dominance, not service, became the goal. Church leadership, especially in Rome, arrogated power to themselves and over the years claimed primacy and authority over the brethren, first locally and then universally. Contrary to the design of Jesus and the apostles there developed an authoritative hierarchical governance of the church.

Church Governance

How, then, was authority exercised in the early church?

As men and women were converted they gathered in local assemblies, based on the synagogue model, not the priesthood, from which most converts derived. Wherever located each of these local 'churches' was subject directly to the Head, Jesus. He, as illustrated in the '*letters to the churches*' (Revelation 2,3), oversees each assembly, both encouraging the brethren and correcting them.

Inevitably there was, as in any commu-

nity, a need for leadership. Clearly, there was, too, a need for order, as in any organized body. There were those who were appointed *overseers* ('bishops' in the *KJV*), men, chosen from the brethren, who were qualified by their God-given spiritual gifts and by character to serve the brethren. And there were *deacons*, men and women chosen for their administrative abilities. Paul lists the necessary qualities for both offices in I Timothy 3 and in the letter to Titus. The apostles left clear guidance as to their appointment. Other 'apostles,' *eg* Titus, were '*messengers* [Gk *apostolos*: 'one sent'] of the churches' (II Corinthians 8:23) sent out as appointed emissaries of a local church. But 'the Twelve' and Paul are unique (Revelation 21:14).

This appointed leadership in the local churches was responsible to Jesus Christ and to their congregation to maintain order and doctrinal stability and to generally oversee the activities of the congregation. When the apostles finally died each assembly was guided by their words, words inspired by Jesus.

When John, the last apostle, died the 'Word of God,' not any leader, was the standard to measure orthodoxy. From that time each congregation looked to that Word for guidance. There was no other inspired authority. There were men of influence, Polycarp, for example, who adhered to the true teachings of Jesus and the apostles and who were a calming influence on heresy. But none of these men exercised authority over the entire church of God scattered around the world.

The church grew in numbers and scattered, expanding into distant parts, often beyond the reach of the apostles and their direct influence. Varied administrative forms evolved, leading, for example, to

dox or the Church of Rome or the Celtic church or the Church of Rome or the Celtic church. Each evolved its own form of governance which inevitably, given human nature, sank into a hierarchical structure (or to oblivion) with the leadership lording it over the brethren.

Congregational Structure

Hierarchy persists to this day in some denominations, administered with varying degree of authority. It is an open door

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The *Outreach Ministries* (publishers of *New Horizons*) believes that each congregation is directly responsible to Jesus as Head of the church, and to his Word, and not to a 'headquarters' which dictates local policy, finance and doctrine. Each associated congregation voluntarily subscribes to our *Statement of Beliefs* and is independently administered. Each determines in what measure by its resources of finance and manpower it may support the work of the *Outreach Ministries*.

The elder/pastor of the congregation, qualified in accord with Biblical criteria, is chosen from and approved by the congregation and is appointed by a recognized elder of influence from an established congregation.

'Independence,' however, does not mean there isn't structure and discipline in an assembly. The pastor is responsible, in love, for general oversight of teaching, order and discipline. Each congregation determines how it can support the joint activities of the *Outreach Ministries* in its worldwide mission.

As appropriate, where there is more than one Church of God congregation in an area (*eg* in a city) the elders would form a 'college of elders' working in harmony and in mutual submission.

to the dissemination of heresy. The 'top man' has what he believes is an inspired teaching, and imposes it on the entire denomination. Fine, if it is a true reflection of the Word. But as often as not, heresy, false teaching. It spreads like a cancer to all under his or her authority and corrupts the brethren. Modern examples could be cited. The 'top table' mentality also generates cliques further down the tree, among the brethren.

Believe the Word

Couple heresy with the tendency in such organizations for the membership to supinely and unthinkingly acquiesce to what the Leader dictates and what may have been a true church of God joins the ranks of deceased churches (though often still visibly present!), their lampstand removed by the Head of the Body, Jesus.

The guidance, from Paul to his assistant Timothy but surely applicable to all of us, is: '*...give diligence to present yourself approved to God, a workman unashamed, rightly dividing the Word of Truth*' (II Timothy 2:15 *LITV*). Writing to the brethren in Thessalonica, Paul said: '*...Quench not the Spirit. Despise not prophesyings. Prove all things; hold fast that which is good*' (I Thessalonians 5:19-21). And John adds: '*...believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world*' (I John 4:1).

Properly administered a hierarchy can give the appearance of unity and harmony. But given corrupt human nature it degenerates.

The 'synagogue model' of governance (independent congregations subject directly to the Word of God) though imperfect in the hands of man avoids the inevitable outcomes of the hierarchical model. It is a true reflection of the structure of the first Christian congregations, and worthy of emulation. Ω

Annual Festivals 2008

Lord's Supper:	evening of April 18
Unleavened Bread:	April 20-26
Pentecost:	June 8
Trumpets:	September 30
Atonement:	October 9
Tabernacles:	October 14-20
Eighth Day:	October 21

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Bill Fowler
1931-2000

When I was in my early teens, my dad gave me some advice that I have remembered over the years, although I have not always followed it as I should have. He said, "If you want to be happy and effective in life with it's continuing problems, then you need to apply this principle."

It's basic, it's simple and it works. Here is the simple but wise counsel he gave me: "*When you have a decision to make, if you are not positive it's the right thing to do, put it off for now and come back to it later, if the thought stays with you. You will make fewer mistakes in life if you are confident that your decisions are correct. Don't make hasty decisions, get the facts first.*"

How could anything be simpler? Yet, it is not a way of life with so many in our "buy now-pay later" society. It feels good, I've got to have it! Now! We have learned over time that the things in life that are really worthwhile are worth planning for and waiting for. All good decisions are based on proper knowledge and proper timing.

Two statements in Proverbs certainly support this principle of not rushing into important decisions: "*The plans of the diligent lead surely to plenty, but those of everyone who is hasty, surely to poverty*" (Proverbs 21:5, NKJV).

"*Do you see a man hasty in his words? There is more hope for a fool than for him*" (Proverbs 29:20, NKJV).

I really came to understand this principle in 1966 when I was first exposed to the Sabbath day and the commitment required to respond to the calling of God.

I grew up in the Methodist church.

The Sabbath: *A Prophecy of Eternal Life*

Keep the sabbath day to sanctify it, as the LORD thy God hath commanded you. Six days thou shalt labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor your ox, nor your ass, nor any of thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates; that your manservant and your maidservant may rest as well as you. And remember that you were a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the LORD your God brought you out thence through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm: therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.

(Deuteronomy 5:12-15)

We had many good friends and were involved in Sunday School class, youth activities, men's prayer group and all the holidays. We were having a good time, it was family. My brother and his family had not been to services for a couple of weeks, so I called him to see if someone was sick. He said, "No, we don't go to church on Sunday anymore, we go on Saturday, the Sabbath of the Bible." "You WHAT?," I said. I didn't have a clue what he was talking about.

It didn't make sense to me, but I wondered if he was going to convert to Judaism. The weeks passed into months. One day I was driving by a park area on my way to see a cus-

tomer, and I saw my brother and his family having a picnic. I wondered why he was doing this on a weekday. Why wasn't he at work? I stopped my "cool" '29 Ford Model A coupe, honked at him and waved him over to where I was parked. "What's going on," I asked. He said he was observing the Days of Unleavened Bread. I thought he had gone over the deep end. I knew my brother was intelligent; he was an aeronautical engineer with a masters degree. Why was he doing all this Jewish stuff?

It was time to get serious and show him how he was wrong in rejecting Christian traditions. Dad's advice came to my mind, I knew I had to approach this in a logical way. Don't make hasty judgments, do some logical research to prove him wrong. I knew this was going to be an easy job; the majority of all churches observe Sunday, the Lord's day. Yes sir, I won't be hasty, I'll have the facts to show him. This wouldn't take long at all.

After about six months of intense study and research at the library and at home, sometimes until several hours after midnight, I knew I had a problem. I could not prove my brother wrong. It wasn't only the Sabbath and the Holy days, it was Xmas, Easter, Valentine's Day, Halloween, all ten of the commandments. It would mean a major change of lifestyle. I was overwhelmed.

We started attending Sabbath services. It was quite different than what we were used to, going to church on Saturday, but the warmth of the people was so helpful, we were treated like longtime friends. Passover was coming up in a few months and we were not yet baptized.

My wife was pregnant with our fourth child. Many of the women

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then were having “natural childbirth.” I told her, maybe “WE” should have this fourth child by natural childbirth. She thought I was crazy! I was pushing her. What I had learned in the last six months was so exciting and invigorating that I forgot my dad’s advice about not rushing into a decision. I knew we had entered into a new way of life, but I didn’t realize then how much change was to come into our lives and the trials of overcoming that would test us greatly. With some wise counsel given by the local pastor, I slowed down, eased off on my wife, and she chose to have a natural delivery. This birth of our last child was the easiest of all, and I was able to see our daughter enter this life.

We have been blessed so much since that time 34 years ago, and it all started by trying to prove the Sabbath was not the day that our Heavenly Father had set apart for us to be with Him and our Savior. We entered into a rest that has changed our lives, like many others, and the end result will be eternal love, joy and peace.

As the months turned into years, with new tests and trials to strengthen us, our understanding of the reality of the Sabbath day has become our motive of striving to walk in His way. The Sabbath has been a major factor in our understanding that the very purpose of life is to be at rest as sons and daughters of the Eternal, forever. The purpose for mankind is revealed in the “beginning” book of the Bible:

“And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them” (Genesis 1:26-27)

After creating mankind in their image and to be like them in character, the Sabbath was made for mankind.

Jesus made that clear when He made this statement: *“And he said unto them, the sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath”* (Mark 2:27).

The Sabbath was intended to show man the ultimate rest of being born again, resurrected into the very Family of God.

Mankind has not learned this principle, because of continual rejection of God’s laws of love, the Ten Commandments. It takes time and the experience of living to grasp the magnitude of creation, and the Sabbath rest that follows.

Several years ago I heard a “saying” that I’ll never forget and that has helped me to better understand God’s creation of mankind, to be like Him: *“Think about your life as if it were a bank account”:*

“A false balance is abomination to the LORD: but a just weight is his delight” (Proverbs 11:1).

“Divers weights are an abomination unto the LORD; and a false balance is not good” (Proverbs 20:23).

“Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and for ever” (tomorrow) (Hebrews 13:8).

- **Yesterday** is a canceled check, you can never spend it again
- **Tomorrow** is a promissory note, you can’t receive its value yet
- **Today** is cash, spend it wisely and it will pay great dividends.”

Our bankers want us to make wise decisions to make sure our account is balanced, with plenty of reserve to sustain us in times of uncertainty and the possibility of depression. Our Heavenly Father also wants us to “balance” our account with him, with a reserve of faith to carry us through the times of trial that He permits for our strengthening. A major factor He gave to mankind, to help us stay “balanced” in life, is the holy Sab-

bath day.

Our Spiritual Bank Account

- **Yesterday** (history) *“And Jesus said unto him, ‘No man, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God”* (Luke 9:62)
- **Today** (overcoming) *“Give us this day our daily bread”* (Matthew 6:11) *“For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end; While it is said Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation”* (Hebrews 3:14, 15)
- **Tomorrow** (Kingdom of God)

“Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof” (Matthew 6:34).

“And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life? And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments” (Matthew 19: 16 -17).

“He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal” (John 12:25).

“And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent” (John 17:3).

“Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus. And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them” (Revelation 14:12 -13)

Let’s look at the Sabbath command from the book of Deuteronomy:

cont’d p.8

The search for 'something new' has its dangers

In each of us there's at least a glimmer of a desire to learn something new. The apostle Paul met this when he visited Athens: '*...More than anything else the people of Athens and the foreigners living there loved to hear and to talk about anything new*' (Acts 17:21 CEV).

No-one, surely, would claim they 'know it all'. That's true in any field of human endeavor, in science, in philosophy, in economics. And certainly religion should not be excluded, though many Christian sects do indeed believe they have all that needs to be known, and their teachings are thus set in stone. Curiosity may have 'killed the cat,' but it also drives human progress.

Jude, of course, wrote that we should '*... earnestly contend for the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints*' (v.3). Paul, to Timothy, confirms this view: '*...the things that you have heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit you to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also*' (II Timothy 2:2). Jesus, too: '*...teach all nations ...teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you*' (Matthew 28:19-20).

Those statements have been used by some to cap the knowledge they already have. '*What I now believe says it all. The truth has been restored*'. So, has that teaching remained unaltered throughout the intervening centuries?

Consider. Does your church denomination teach *Sunday* observance? Or, for that matter, *Christmas* as the birthday of Jesus? Now how does that square with what Jude and Paul told their hearers?

Just a little bit of research, try most encyclopaedias, will make clear that those two stalwarts of the faith knew nothing of their observance. Surely that means those beliefs are not apos-

tolic teaching. Therefore should

you not follow Peter's advice to '*... grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*' (II Peter 3:18)?

The implication of the apostles' words are that all our 'knowledge' must be in harmony with what they taught, nothing more, nothing less. Another apostle, John, wrote:

...I testify to every man that hears the words of the prophecy of this book, if any man shall add to them, God shall add to him the plagues which are written in this book: and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the tree of life, and out of the holy city, which are written in this book

Revelation 22:18-19

This applies to all of the divine revelation.

Lost Truth

Over the past two millennia layer upon layer of error has obscured the teachings of Jesus and the apostles. It's a brave, perhaps arrogant, man or woman who claims they have pinned it all down! Yet millions slavishly follow the teachings of one or other, male or female, dead or alive, charismatic leader. They 'go to church' and as they enter check in their enquiring mind at the door.

In a sense there is no 'new truth'. Truth *is* there in the Scriptures, somewhere. It is the divine wisdom, the '*pearl of great price*' for which we are to sacrifice all. Wise King Solomon: '*... if thou cry after discernment, And lift up thy voice for understanding; If thou seek her as silver, And search for her as for hid treasures: Then shall thou understand the fear of Jehovah, And find the knowledge of God*' (Proverbs 2:3-5)

As Christians we are to diligently read the Scriptures, and apply them to our daily life. We are to be people who '*...have ears to hear,*' are atten-

New Truth... *the search*

tive to what Jesus taught personally and through his apostles and prophets. We are urged to '*...prove all things; hold fast that which is good*' (I Thessalonians 5:21).

Truth

Down the centuries Christian thinkers have uncovered strands of truth from the Scriptures. But, as in science, always that 'new truth' is open to scrutiny. New light from various disciplines, archaeology, philology, astronomy *etc.*, modifies previous certitudes.

Without God's Spirit man (the '*natural*' man) is unable to 'see,' understand, spiritual truths. But with the Spirit influencing us, our mind is open to them, however hazily:

Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searches all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knows no man, but the Spirit of God
I Corinthians 2:9-11

When we accept an aspect of God's Word then a door will open to further understanding. Reject a 'new (to us) truth' and we stay mired in ignorance. (A parallel to this is the growth of scientific knowledge.)

Only the original Apostles and prophets were fully and perfectly inspired. Men have since arisen who shed light on buried truth, but always their teaching is open to scrutiny and must not be paralleled with the New Testament writers. To do so blinds us to the possibility of 'new truth,' and growth in the '*grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*'. Ω

Sabbath... cont'd

"a stretched out arm: therefore the LORD thy God commanded thee to keep the sabbath day" (Deut 5:12-15).

We see from the Scriptures that we are to cease from our labors, the carnal works of mankind. This ceasing from our labors and doing the works of God is what the Sabbath is about, for eternity.

God's people were slaves, in bondage to a people that did not know God. Just as He took them out of physical bondage, He is calling His creation to cease from the works of unrighteousness and do His works, with Him and Jesus for eternity. No more works of men; instead, His born-again children doing His will in love, joy and peace.

Sabbath Rest

The universe will see the results of the "Sabbath rest" for eternity. Just like the prodigal son, His children have come home, wanting to do His will:

And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said to his servants, bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: And bring hither the fattest calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry" (Luke 15:21-24).

Rejoice in the Lord always: and

again I say, Rejoice. Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand. Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things"

Philippians

As we think on *verse 8*, we know that "*these things*" will be a part of the Sabbath rest now and forever. The Sabbath is a "shadow" of great things to come! **Ω**

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Sabbath - Or Sunday?

[Use an encyclopaedia and your Bible to answer these questions]

- I *Did the Jews alone observe a seven-day week?*
- known in all ancient societies
- not dependent on the movements of the planets
- cf year, month, day which depend on earth-moon-sun
- what does this signify? *Seventh Day* unique
- II *When did seventh-day religious observance begin?*
- origin at man's creation
- Genesis 2:1-3, Mark 2:27-28
- observed before the Law given at Sinai through Moses
- by Abraham (Genesis 26:5)
- leaving Egypt and before the Law given (Exodus 16)
- for Jew and Gentile
- Mark 2:27-28, Isaiah 56:1-8
- rest day in many ancient nations
[encyclopaedia again]
- many modern languages use some form of "sabbath" for Saturday [*eg subota* -Russian, *sabtu* - Indonesian, *al-sabt* - Arabic, *szombat* - Hungarian]
- III *Was the 7th Day Sabbath special to Israel?*
- special to the *nation* of Israel
- part of the national Constitution (Exodus 20:8-11)
- an identity sign: (Exodus 31:12-17)
- exiled for profaning it: (Ezekiel 20 & 22)
- special to *spiritual* Israel, the Church
- the Church is the New Covenant Israel: (Galatians 6:16)
- special to Jesus Christ: Luke 4:16ff
- special to the Apostles
- *annual* Sabbath: Acts 2, I Corinthians 16:8, Acts 12:3, 20:6
- *weekly* Sabbath: Acts 13:42, 15:21, 16:13, 18:4 *etc*
- IV *Will the 7th Day Sabbath ever be observed for worship by all mankind?*
- to be observed by all in the millennium: Isaiah 66:23, Ezekiel 44:24, 46:3
- annual Sabbaths included: Zech 14:16-19
- it's sin not to observe it: Matthew 5:17-20, Revelation 12:14 I John 3:4
- V *Shouldn't you observe the seventh-day Sabbath - now?*

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Why Do You Observe Sunday
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Prepare for Sunday*

Believe...? cont'd

So by a careful consideration and acceptance of the inspired Scriptures, 'the sword of the Spirit' (Ephesians 6:17), we align our thought processes with what God wants. It's our responsibility to 'become fully per-

suaded,' to nourish conscience and behavior as God would have it.

As wrote the Psalmist: '*...I deeply love your Law! I think about it all day. Your laws never leave my mind, and they make me much wiser than*

my enemies. Thinking about your teaching gives me better understanding than my teachers' (Psalm 119:97-99 CEV). And: '*...I have hidden Your Word in my heart, that I might not sin against You'* (Psalm 119:11). And: '*...If you have good sense, you will listen and obey'* (Psalm 10:8). **Ω**

MiniStudy**Is Jesus God**

'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God' (John 1:1)

As famously noted by a past US President, clarity often hangs on word meaning: "It depends what the meaning of 'is' is." Perhaps surprisingly it is pertinent to the answer to our title question

- Controversy surrounded the life of Jesus of Nazareth from birth. The circumstances of his birth were mysterious. His early life was unique. Certainly so, too, were the circumstances of his death. And it didn't end there. Even the apparently simple question *Who was he?* follows Jesus to this day.
- The battle-lines are drawn along the lines of *Is he God - or man?* The established church of the fourth century thought they could bury the question, much debated until then, at the Council of Nicea. Overawed by the Emperor Constantine a compromise was decided, Jesus was *both God and man*. However illogical that may seem it is present orthodoxy. It continues a matter of debate
- The history of Jesus pre-dates his conception. Only in recent years has the true story become confused. Theology has long equated Jesus with the LORD of the Old Testament, *Jehovah* (JHVH), the true *Elohim*. He is presented to us as 'The Word': *'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God'* (John 1:1). That is, Jesus was fully God and perfectly at one with the Father, co-existent with Him
- In the New Testament we also learn that Jesus was the interface with the Father's creation, the intermediary by which the unseen Father created the Universe: *'For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist'* (Colossians 1:16-17). As LORD Jesus sustained the Father's creation: *'You even you, are LORD alone; you have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth, and all things that are therein, the seas, and all that is therein, and you preserve them all'* (Nehemiah 9:6). To Him the Father has committed all His dealings, at this time, with His creation: *'[the Father] has given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man'* (John 5:27)
- The divine purpose of creation is to enable mankind to become part of the Family of God. Before creation (before sin entered) God provided a way to reconcile us to Himself, through His Son (Ephesians 1:4-6). The LORD relinquished His divine status and powers: *'Christ Jesus...Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men'* (Philippians 2:6-8). According to Paul *'...God sent forth his Son, made of a woman'* (Galatians 4:4)
- That woman was Mary. She said *'...from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. For he that is mighty hath done to me great things'* (Luke 1:48-49). The *'great things'* are recorded by Matthew: *'...Mary had been betrothed to Joseph. Before they came together she was found with child of the Holy Spirit'* (ch 1:18). It was the fulfillment of an ancient divine prophecy: *'Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, And they shall call his name Immanuel; which is, being interpreted, God with us'* (v.23, Isaiah 7:14).
- As a human Jesus *'... took on him the seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it [was necessary for] him to be made like unto his brethren'* (Hebrews 2:17), and he *'...was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin'* (Hebrews 4:15). Jesus, writes Paul, was *'.. born of the seed of David according to the flesh'* (Romans 1:3)
- But Jesus is also called *'Immanuel; which is, being interpreted, God with us'*. The Spirit of God physically engendered him and, as with all Spirit-begotten children since his resurrection, Jesus was indwelt by the Father, though from his conception (John 14:11, 20). Though he encountered temptation (like all humans) Jesus never once transgressed the divine Law, never, unlike us (Romans 3:23), fell short of the glory of God. Jesus never sinned and thus, by virtue of his divine origin, he became the perfect atonement for all of mankind (I Peter 2:22, Hebrews 5: 7-10). While on earth Jesus was totally at one with the Father: *'I and my Father are one'* (John 10:30), and *'...I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me'* (John 8:28)
- The evidence for this can be summed up in the words of the apostle Paul: *'...[Jesus] was made of the seed of David according to the flesh; And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead'* (Romans 1:3-4). The status of Jesus as the Son of God was powerfully and irrefutably demonstrated by his resurrection from the dead, the truth of which was witnessed by many hundreds (I Corinthians 15:5-8)
- At His resurrection Jesus was restored to his divine status, authority and powers: *'God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father'* (Philippians 2:9-11) (*Ephesians 1: 17-23, Colossians 1:15*). Now, exalted at the right hand of the Father *'...in him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily'* (Colossians 2:9) Ω

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