

new Horizons

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addressing the important issues for today and tomorrow



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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

Who We Are

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 bi-monthly Newsletter OUTREACH, NEW HORIZONS magazine, the BIBLE BASICS on-line home study course, and the 32-lesson Study Course. The *Outreach Ministries* also supports a network of independent fellowships and scattered brethren

We cordially invite all independent fellowships of whatever size - and 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 from our web site www.cgom.org. We are pleased to offer you, without charge, any of our publications

New Horizons is published by the *Churches of God Outreach Ministries*, an association of independent churches, to make known the good news of the soon-coming Kingdom of God

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If you would like a copy of our *Statement of Beliefs* please request it from any of the addresses listed

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What role does conscience play in our Christian walk?

Ask a committed Christian to cease observing the yearly church festivals and you're likely to have a negative response. You would expect the same response to an invitation to abandon regular corporate weekly worship, or even Communion. And he would vehemently refuse to accept that theft or adultery or murder is acceptable behaviour for one who follows Christ. It's part of the faith.

Yet believers differ widely on many aspects of the faith. Half of the Christian community, for example, believes the Pope is God's representative on earth. The other half don't. Even within the Roman and Protestant communities there are sincerely held differences. But is *sincerity* all that matters?

If so, any belief system should pave the way to heaven. Yet the Bible is clear there is but one way—through Jesus the Messiah. And Jesus narrows it further saying, '*...the gate to life is very narrow. The road that leads there is so hard to follow that only a few people find it*' (Matthew 7: 14 CEV). Then he follows up with a dire warning against false teachers.

Simply believing something,

then, doesn't make it right. Your conscience may mislead! *Your* conscience may allow something that mine wouldn't. Who is right?

An Informed Conscience

In theory, we could examine ourselves and come to a proper conclusion as to what God requires of us. Most believers drift into the faith—by birth, family, associates, church. Rarely is it a conscious and informed decision. We accept our beliefs as they are handed to us from such sources, and are—unless challenged—unlikely to change. They become imbedded in our conscience. But the apostle Paul tells us to '*... be*

Right or Wrong?... the role of conscience

fully persuaded in [your] own mind' (Romans 14:5). That is, we must have an *informed* conscience. Is it okay to steal or kill or mistreat parents? (Many do!) Or, what of my religious observances? The apostle Paul cites the example of animal meat sacrificed (by pagans) to idols. Is that right or wrong? How can I be 'informed'?

We are back to Jesus and the apostles (men inspired to represent him)—as recorded in the Christian Scriptures. On the foundation of our commitment to the Father through His Son we are to build a life patterned on his teach-

ings. Study the Scriptures, as did the Jews in Berea: '*...These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so*' (Acts 17:11).

Tradition

In the modern world Christians have to hack our way through the thick and tangled undergrowth of inherited traditions to a right understanding of the true faith. Our beliefs, in other words, have to be shaped by the Word of God. Our *behaviour* is determined by its teachings. How and when to *worship* is determined by the Word. Our *relationship* with God, too, is shaped by it.

The Pharisees in the days of Jesus were convinced in conscience that their traditions were what God required, and Jesus had to forcefully correct them (eg Matthew 23!). Many, though they converted, had to be disabused of their error (Mark 7:7-9).

Conscience...the faculty of recognizing right and wrong in regard to one's conduct

Simply saying '*I believe*' has to be followed by action, and that is mirrored in the life of Jesus and of the apostles (I Corinthians 11:1) and conveyed to us through the Scriptures.

In his discussion concerning our protection from Satanic deceit Paul urges us *cont'd p.7*

What makes a 'great generation'?

Steven Kieler

Tom Brokaw wrote a book titled "*The Greatest Generation*" in which he describes many great qualities found among those who endured the great depression then went on to fight in World War II. He also recognized those who produced the war machines and kept the home fires burning.

I don't want to take anything away from these brave and industrious peoples but a scripture comes to mind: Ecclesiastes 7:10 "*Say not thou, What is the cause that the former days were better than these? for thou dost not enquire wisely concerning this.*" Was this truly the greatest generation?

Let's consider that generation with Ecclesiastes 7:10 in mind. The "Greatest Generation", with all their industriousness, ingenuity, and bravery, produced succeeding generations that seemed to have fewer admirable traits than their forefathers. Is it possible to be a great generation without producing the following generation that is at least as good if not superior. Could it be that we truly are not wise in presuming that one generation is better than another?

The answer is plainly explained in Romans 3:9-12 "*What then? are we better than they? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin; As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not*

The Greatest Generation?

one: There is none that understands, there is none that seeks after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one."

That certainly applies to us as a nation and also to us individually.

It seems apparent that man measures success using physical measures but God has a different "yardstick", a moral one.

We all have a few good character traits along with some undesirable habits. We all think that we are doing right but the apostle Paul gives his insight that I quote here in the *Weymouth* translation. Please read it carefully:

"For what I do, I do not recognize as my own action. What I desire to do is not what I do, but what I am averse to is what I do. But if I do that which I do not desire to do, I admit the excellence of the Law, and now it is no longer I that do these things, but the sin which has its home within me does them.

For I know that in me, that is, in my lower self, nothing good has its home; for while the will to do right is present with me, the power to carry it out is not. For what I do is not the good thing that I desire to do; but the evil thing that I desire not to do, is what I constantly do.

But if I do that which I desire not to do, it can no longer be said that it is I who do it, but the sin which

has its home within me does it.

I find therefore the law of my nature to be that when I desire to do what is right, evil is lying in ambush for me For in my inmost self all my sympathy is with the Law of God; but I discover within me a different Law at war with the Law of my understanding, and leading me captive to the Law which is everywhere at work in my body--the Law of sin. (Unhappy man that I am! Who will rescue me from this death-burdened body?

Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!) To sum up then, with my understanding, I--my true self--am in servitude to the Law of God, but with my lower nature I am in servitude to the Law of sin."

Romans 7:14-25

The physical and spiritual /moral tracks can and should run parallel. But, when the physical side predominates and goes on its own way without its regulating spiritual control, we are derailed and sooner or late will crash and burn.

The depression/WWII generation did a magnificent work but then so did the Pilgrims, the Founding Fathers, the patriots leading us through the revolution, and all those who have put their lives on the line for a greater cause and their fellow man.

Great works by great minds are worthy of recognition—but one must have a continual awareness of his internal motives to ensure that they are in accordance with the law and will of God.

If you can meet that challenge you could be a part of the truly greatest generation. **Ω**

Quotations from the Bible in New Horizons are from translations which clearly express the meaning in modern terms

Sabbath Fellowship

One of the greatest blessings God has given mankind is His holy Sabbath day. Every seventh day has been set apart, sanctified and made holy from creation (Genesis 2:2-3). This is a special time reserved each week by God for man's spiritual and physical welfare

Lawrence Gregory

Man is a unique social being needing the companionship of others as he goes through life. We are born and reared in a social environment - our lives intertwine with many others.

"For none of us lives to himself, and no man dies to himself" (Romans 14:7).

God realized this when He created Adam, for He observed, *"it is not good that the man should be alone"* (Genesis 2:18). So He created woman, for the man's companionship, and sanctified the Sabbath as their day of rest (Mark 2:27).

Solomon understood this fact when he wrote, *"Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow; but woe to him that is alone when he falls; for he has not another to help him up. Again, if two lie together, then they have heat; but how can one be warm alone? And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a three-fold cord is not quickly broken"* (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12).

give and take, mutual help, encouragement, strength and protection.

The opportunities to speak words of cheer (Malachi 3:16), to delight in going to church meeting (Psalm 122:1), praising God on His Sabbath together with family and friends (Colossians 3:16), are precious. The preaching service, prayer and Bible studies give us a spiritual uplift that cannot be obtained in any other type of meeting.

David, *"a man after mine own heart"* (Acts 3:22), eagerly looked forward to the times he could be with others before God in worship (Psalm 111:1; Psalm 122:1). Paul *"as his manner was"* (Acts 17:2; 6-13) regularly sought to be with others on the Sabbath.

Throughout the ages, *two signs* have been given to identify the true people of God; (1) the *Sabbath day* (Exodus 31:16,17) and (2) *love* (John 13:35).

We know love is keeping God's Commandments and *"he that says he abides in him ought himself also so to walk [live], even as he walked [lived]"* (I John 2:6).

If we withdraw ourselves and become "closet" Christians, avoiding other believers, we lose great opportunities to express the love of God that dwells in us. In fact, it is risky to try to dwell alone without Christian fellowship. The sheep fold provides special protection for the flock from the

Our lives were intended to be a balance of

wolves and elements of danger a lone sheep is exposed to.

Webster's Dictionary describes a sheep fold as: a pen or enclosure for sheep or similar animals; a flock of sheep; a church or its congregation; any group having common goals, values and beliefs.

The Shulamite maiden in the Song of Solomon, chapter 1:7, asks the shepherd whom she loves; *"Where you feed, where thou make your flock to rest at noon day: for why should I be as one that turns aside by [departs from] the flocks of thy companions?"*

We can ask the same questions of Christ, whom we love. Where will we find Him and those whom He has called and separated from the "heat" of the day? Where do they "feed" and "rest" together? Why should I be like others who depart from their fellowship?

The shepherd's (Christ's) answer in verse 8 is very interesting, informative and gently corrective; *"if you know not - and we should know - O you fairest among women [individual], go your way forth by the footsteps of the flock [church], and feed [give and serve] your kids [children, family, friends] beside the shepherd's [minister's] tents [congregation]."*

Christ kept the Sabbath

If we desire to fellowship with Christ more closely, we can do so by going where He is each Sabbath day - *"Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of*

them” (Matthew 18:20).

This does not mean we cannot have fellowship alone, privately, with God, but that a special blessing of His divine presence is manifested in the Sabbath assembly.

Jesus left us an example of going to church services *regularly* (Luke 4:16) on the Sabbath day. He ate with (Luke 14:1), taught (Mark 6:2), healed (Luke 6:6-11), did good (Luke 6:9) for others on the Sabbath day. Certainly at times He was alone on the Sabbath, but his “*custom*” was to spend part of the day in a public church service.

His whole life was dedicated to doing as Caiaphas, the high priest, prophesied: “*That also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad*” (John 11:52).

It has not been left up to us to rationalize about the Sabbath day. We have been given a specific command: “*Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labor, and do all your 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 thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed The Sabbath day, and hallowed it*” (Exodus 20:8-11, Matthew 12:12).

It is (1) a holy commanded as-

sembly (convocation) and (2) to be kept in our homes (dwellings) (Leviticus 23:3).

To do neither one when possible is breaking the Fourth Commandment, disobeying God and cheating ourselves.

“*Let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good work: not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together* as the manner of some is, but *exhorting one another*; and so much the more as you see the day approaching” (Hebrews 10:24, 25).

And “*Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also you do*” (I Thessalonians 5:11).

Isaiah said in chapter 58:13, 14: “*If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, and holy of the Lord, honorable; and shalt honor him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words: Then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.*”

Why Observe?

Now let’s consider several reasons for our Sabbath fellowship:

- *It encourages others* when they see they are not alone in this way.
- We in turn are encouraged.
- It is a *public witness* to our neighbors, friends and rela-

tives each week that we are following Christ.

- It enables the *social* and *spiritual* function of the local church group to *develop* and operate more effectively.
- We are inspired, taught and corrected through public preaching and worship.
- We rehearse each week the spiritual type of living together in harmony during the millennium.

Perhaps some will say, “I don’t need to attend church. I keep the Sabbath, I love the truth, I have His Spirit, I fellowship alone with Christ and the Father, or I listen to sermon tapes each week at home.”

Granted this may be true, but why not *share* this day *with others*? Why not “*let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven*”? (Matthew 5:16).

Are there any legitimate reasons for not regularly attending the Sabbath service? Let’s consider a few:

- illness
- distance (*ie.* transportation costs, *etc.*)
- occasional outings, family visits, out-of-town trips, *etc*
- an unexpected “ox in the ditch” situation
- special times of retreat for private devotional periods

What is the difference between a Sabbath *reason* and an *excuse*? That which is allowed to repeatedly and voluntarily dominate and control our Sabbath time is an excuse - that is, when *cont’d p.8*

The seven day week is almost universal in our century. The Creator says the seventh day is special. Here is its story

Alone in creation, man generates some form of counting time—we call it a ‘calendar’. For the rest of creation it is ‘built in’, instinctive. The format for a calendar has varied from people to people, but there is a consensus to divide time into portions; we call them weeks and months and years, for some system is needed to mark events.

The choice of months and years, based on movement of the heavenly bodies, is obvious. Weeks—not.

There’s no obvious reason to have a *seven day* ‘week’; any length would suffice (The 4-day week up to 10-day have been used). It has no relation to the movement of sun or moon or stars, yet is now used almost universally. One of the oldest human records, however, tells of its origin: the Hebrew Scriptures.

Here’s how it is described: ‘... *God blessed the seventh day and made it special because on that day he rested from his work* (Genesis 2:3). He had made everything in six (probably symbolic) ‘days’. As Moses records: ‘...*In six days I made the sky, the earth, the oceans, and everything in them, but on the seventh day I rested. That’s why I made the Sabbath a special day that belongs to me*’ (Exodus 20:11). To this day it is Judaism that has the highest profile observance of the seventh-day Sabbath.

Sabbath Sign

There’s no reason to assume that the

seventh day observance was abandoned after Adam’s expulsion from the Garden in Eden. Certainly ‘seven days’ features in the Flood account (Genesis 8). And Abraham is recorded as having ‘...*obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws [Heb. torah]*’ (Genesis 26:5).

Even before the Exodus from Egypt (c. BC 1500) his descendants had fallen into idolatrous practices. Despite God’s warnings to them while still in Egypt (Ezekiel 20:5) they worshipped the Egyptian gods (Joshua 24:14). [Ra, the sun-god, was the major Egyptian deity.]

God had to re-introduce His *torah* to Israel in the wilderness: ‘*I gave them my sabbaths, to be a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am the LORD that sanctify them. But the house of Israel rebelled against me in the wilderness: they walked not in*

Sabbath...

...a brief history of time

my statutes, and they rejected my judgments...and my sabbaths they greatly profaned’ (Ezekiel 20:12-13, 20). Even immediately after their miraculous world-shaking deliverance from slavery Israel continued to lust after the sun-gods of Egypt!

The Sabbaths, then, since man’s beginnings are a sign that identifies the one true God, sets Him apart from all the other non-gods.

Idolatrous Israel

Fractious Israel entered the ‘land of promise’ and at least nominally

continued to observe ‘the sign’. Because it was the backdrop of their religious observance, Sabbath isn’t always highlighted in the four centuries when the Judges presided over Israel, or the days of the Kings (eg II Kings 4:23). However, the priestly system maintained, in Tabernacle and Temple, the public worship which centred on the weekly and annual Sabbaths.

After King Solomon the nation divided into two Kingdoms. The northern Kingdom—the ‘House of Israel’—from its inception became idolatrous under its first King, Jeroboam. In opposition to God, and influenced by his long exile in Egypt, he established two centres of idolatrous worship (I Kings 12:32).

After Eden God’s instructions [*torah*] filtered through following generations. Abel (Hebrews 11:4) and Enoch (seventh generation from Adam—Jude 14,15) were faithful, as was Noah ‘...*a preacher of righteousness*’ (II Peter 2:5), and Abraham (Genesis 26:5). Deception entered the populace and the original truth became distorted, devolving into idolatry (Romans 1:21)

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is for many a
‘Book of Mystery’

unsigned articles are by the Editor

The centres were serviced by (non-Levite—I Kings 12:31) priests recruited from the dregs of society. Jeroboam introduced new religious festivals \a times not authorised by God and was ever after branded by God as the one who ‘...made Israel to sin’ (ch 14:7-10). This was blended with elements of the true faith. Exiled to Babylon (8th century BC) they carried this false religious baggage with them as they dispersed westward to Europe in succeeding centuries. The prophet Ezekiel (ch 20) emphasises their continued rejection of that identifying sign—the seventh day Sabbath.

Judah, too

The House of David (Judah, Benjamin, Levi) remained faithful—but just for a time. Jeremiah chronicles their decline and God’s patience finally ran out: ‘...if you will not hearken unto me to hal-low the sabbath day....then will I kindle a fire in the gates thereof, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem, and it shall not be quenched’ (ch 17:27).

They, too, began to ignore ‘the Sign’ and as a result were exiled for seventy years in Babylon, until released by Cyrus around 516BC. The prophet adds: ‘...This country will be as empty as a desert, because I will make all of you the slaves of the king of Babylon for seventy years. When that time is up, I will punish the king of Babylon and his people for everything they have done wrong, and I will turn that country into a

wasteland forever (ch 25:11-12).

Jewish church

The returned exiles had learned their lesson as to that Sign, and for the next five hundred years were careful in their Sabbath observance. Indeed they protected it by adding numerous burdensome but unnecessary restrictions—restrictions which Jesus had to combat (Matthew 12 has some examples).

It was into this Sabbath-observing environment that Jesus was born and in which he taught.

The ‘platform’ on which Jesus himself, and the apostles, taught was one of Sabbath observance. As the New Testament records, they were regular worshippers on the seventh day—a practice unbroken to this day in Judaism. (Note that the Jews were observing the same weekly and annual worship days as Jesus.)

It should, then, be clear that the first Christians followed their example. Indeed many Priests and Pharisees became believers (Acts 6:7, 15:5), with no hint that they abandoned this precious Sign.

As Gentiles became believers they joined these Sabbath-observing assemblies. The leader of the churches in Jerusalem, James, had this to say: ‘...Moses of old time has in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues

every sabbath day’ (Acts 15:21). That is, James encouraged all believers to attend synagogue—on the Sabbath.

Towards the end of his ministry (and his life) the apostle Paul affirms his Sabbath-keeping credentials: ‘...Neither against the law of the Jews, neither against the temple, nor yet against Caesar, have I offended any thing at all’ (Acts 25:8). Earlier he had asserted before Governor Felix: ‘...[I believe] all things which are written in the law and in the prophets’ (ch 24:14). And Paul was no hypocrite—he acted as he believed!

The saga of how the Sabbath was changed to Sunday in the early history of Christianity is detailed in the book by the late Samuel Bacchiocchi:

From Sabbath to Sunday

Not only so, for he also urged the brethren in Corinth ‘...You must follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ’ (I Corinthians 11:1).

2000 Years

Two millennia have almost passed since the beginning of Christianity. The observance of *Sunday* as the Christian day for weekly worship has become embedded in Christian practice as a ‘given’. It is a reflection of the prophecy given through Daniel just as the seventy-year exile for Judah’s Sabbath pollution was ending.

In the context of the reign of the ‘fourth kingdom’ (Rome—which continues in various forms until the return of Jesus), a powerful ruler will ‘...speak evil of God Most High, and he will be cruel to God’s chosen ones’. Among his activities ‘...He will try to change God’s Law and the

‘Sunday Texts’

Some New Testament texts are proffered as evidence for a change from Sabbath to Sunday observance. They are full explained in our small booklet

Why Observe Sunday?

It is available, free, from any CGOM office.

Conscience ...cont'd

to '...put on the whole armour of God' (Ephesians 6:11-18). Prominent is '...the sword of the Spirit', defined as '...the Word of God' (v.17). That is, the ever-living Messiah as expressed through his written word. The divine Spirit recalls for us how we should behave—if we have immersed ourselves in it! Wrote the Psalmist: '...Your word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against you' (Psalm 119:11).

If you are new to the Bible, our Bible Courses will be a helpful guide. There is no charge

In sum, how we live as Christians is modelled on the way recorded in the Scriptures and not on extraneous traditions unsupported by God's Word: '... in vain do they worship me, teaching as their doctrines the precepts of men' (Mark 7:7). We must inform our conscience by an examination of—and our submission to—the Scriptures. **Ω**

Sabbath Fellowship ...cont'd

we habitually allow other things we could do on other days or on an occasional Sabbath to interfere with our regular attendance in the service. *Perhaps we have not considered Sabbath service attendance as being as important for ourselves and others as it is.*

If you would like to share in the Sabbath blessing of being with others "like-minded," please write our offices for further information. The CGOM website (www.cgom.org) lists some local fellowships who will welcome you. Why miss out on one of the greatest blessings God has provided for us?

Fellowship on the Sabbath - *this week!* **Ω**

Bible Feasts 2011

Lord's Supper	April 17 pm
Unleavened Bread	April 19-25
Pentecost	June 12
Trumpets	September 29
Atonement	October 8
Tabernacles	Octob 13-19
Closing Day	October 20

In the Name of Religion

Some of us do strange things—even in the name of that most sober and fundamental of human interests, religion. A few—mercifully a few—Christians handle poisonous snakes. (some die in the process). Muslims can earn their way to Heaven by killing themselves (as long as they take others with them).

Come mid-winter, forests are raided to provide evergreen trees to decorate churches, homes and town squares. To celebrate the

birth of Jesus. At that time it's not considered wrong to lie to children about a man in a red suit. And to become extremely 'merry' through over-indulgence in food and alcohol and a pile of gifts. In the name of the religion of Jesus Christ.

Then, come New Year, shop shelves swell with chocolate eggs and chicks and rabbits (furry) to feed the spring-time Christian celebration of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Dyed eggs are hidden and sought for by the children. Some crawl on their knees for miles to some shrine, while others have themselves attached to a cross. In the name of Jesus.

There are other curious practices, associated with Christianity as at 'Halloween' or on various Saints Days or the wearing of strange garb.

Such practices, of course, have no relationship with Biblical Christianity as practised by the first Christians. Certainly they are not found in the foundation documents of the faith, the Bible.

Yet, search the Scriptures for the names of these observances—Christmas, Easter, Halloween, Lent *etc*—and you will be disappointed. Not only so—for when you search the same Scriptures for the practices associated with these observances they are simply not there. Indeed they are condemned in the Scriptures as a reflection of primitive man-made religious beliefs.

God, however, has not left us without weekly and annual observances as way-marks for the Christian life. The Bible outlines a series of festivals [see side-bar] which are a blueprint of His plan for mankind. **Ω**

For an overview of these festivals request the booklets: *God's Holy Days* and the article *God's Grand Design*

THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH

Steven Kieler

Passover and Atonement are times of repentance and restoration.

Repentance is, literally, an after thought, a change of mind or attitude. Restoration is to reconstitute or bring back to it's former state. With that in mind, let's let David take you on an excursion - to the valley of death.

Lot's of people have been to the mountain and lived to tell about it. Most even glory in it but how many have been in the valley of death and lived to tell about it - and then go on to boast? Have you been to the shadow of the valley?

Now, a valley is a narrow gorge with lofty sides. It would be very difficult to climb out if you should fall into it. The valley is the deep and sin-filled way of the world but it's a fun world, an exciting, captivating and pleasurable world. And we gravitate to the pleasures of sin like a moth to a flame. let me just take a little taste, a little peek, a quick touch. We brush against the sin and don't even sense that we have been defiled. Yes, sometimes I am tempted, sometimes deceived; it is walking in the shadow - of death.

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me." (Psalm 23:4 KJV) I still walk perilously close to the edge of the path in this valley, sometimes experiencing vertigo as I lean over to peer down into the nether world from my safe path.

In fact, we do not walk in the valley of death, at least not on the floor, but in the shadow of the valley of death. We are on the edge, desperately clinging to that rod and staff. Our

eyes are pulled to that alluring valley of death; why do we not look up through that cloud of sin? James describes the process absolutely:

"But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed: Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." (James 1:14-15KJV)

"There but for the grace of God go I." This is not a self-exalting proclamation but an admission of the Lord's protecting and delivering power. It applies both to the past and to the present. Reflecting on my life, I considered the encounters I've had, or nearly had. There were people who could have entangled me in various evil ways: thieves, pornographers, sodomites, evolutionists, liars, brawlers, and a host of bad behaviors that can destroy the body and the mind.

Those things, once innocently encountered can easily produce corrupted character, the precipice of the valley of death. Peer pressure reigned and reigns.

"He restores my soul: he leads me in

the paths of righteousness for his name's sake." (Psalm 23:3KJV)

"He restores my soul." To restore means to bring back to the point of departure. Again, this is different from repentance. While man, himself, must do the repenting, God does the restoring; it is an act of protection and deliverance, an act of love and mercy. "There but for the grace of God, go I."

May I now boast that I am restored? Indeed:---

"My soul shall make her boast in the LORD: the humble shall hear thereof, and be glad" (Psalm 34:2)

Sabbath ... cont'd from p.6

sacred seasons [KJV 'change times and laws'] (Daniel 7:25). The early church authorities succumbed to the surrounding culture which was largely sun worship (Mithraism—*sol invictus*, the 'unconquerable sun'). Over a couple of centuries from the time of Jesus Sunday ousted the original Sabbath observance which had been the universal practice.

This twenty-four hour time slot in our busy week has, from the beginning of man's relationship with God, been the one Sign that sets Him apart, that identifies Him, from all other faiths. Millions of believers around the world continue to honour this unique Sign. Ω

The 'Bible' of the New Testament church was 'the Scriptures'. That is, what we call 'the Old Testament' - see II Timothy 3:15-17.

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MiniStudy

The 'Lord's Supper'/Passover

'...this do in remembrance of Me (I Corinthians 11:24)

Christians are united in the desire, in some manner, to remember the death of Jesus. Indeed he himself asked us to remember his death, and together with his resurrection such a remembrance is at the heart of the Christian faith. Yet there is much confusion surrounding this memorial.

- The remembrance is known by a variety of names: Lord's Supper, Communion, Passover, the Mass, Eucharist, Memorial. It is, too, varied in its timing. Some observe it 'anytime', others daily or weekly or quarterly
- The apostle Paul places his authoritative stamp on an *annual* observance. He states the time of the observance: *'...the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread* (I Corinthians 11:23). It is a perpetual observance for all Christians until he returns in person in glory
- For Christians, the Memorial is a solemn remembrance of the suffering and death of Jesus as the only sacrifice for our sin, and our example of holy living. *'This do in remembrance of Me'*, Jesus said when introducing the observance to his apostles. Paul adds: *'...as often as you may eat this bread, and drink this cup, you solemnly proclaim [announce publicly] the death of the Lord, until he shall come'* (v.26)
- The observance is an annual renewal and confirmation of the agreement (covenant, compact) we made at our baptism. As such it is observed only by those who have been 'born anew' through repentance and baptism, those in whom dwells the Spirit of God (*cp* Hebrews 10:29)
- As for any memorial service, the Lord's Supper is a solemn observance. The Corinthian brethren had turned it into a raucous drunken 'party' and Paul had to correct their behaviour (vv.20-22). It was not a meal - for they ought to satisfy their appetite at home. This should be a solemn occasion, he tells them (vv.27-29): *'whoever should eat this bread, or drink the cup of the Lord, unworthily, that one will be guilty of the body and of the blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread, and let him drink of the cup; for he eating and drinking unworthily eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the body of the Lord'*
- We may indeed be 'unworthy' to eat at the same table as Jesus. But this - 'unworthily' - refers to the manner in which we approach the service. With reverence, in other words, with due regard to its meaning. It's a personal responsibility to *'examine ourselves'*, to discern our attitude to the awesome sacrifice of our Saviour. A careless observance of this solemnity is reflected in our bodily health, for the Lord will chasten us in this life (Hebrews 12:6). In Corinth, the brethren were guilty of 'respect of persons', the affluent ignoring those who had little. They *'despised the assembly of God'* (v.22) - the Body of the Lord
- There are, then, the elements of bread (*Gk artos*) and 'the cup' (the content is not specified). As we partake of the material, by faith we absorb the endless spiritual benefits of his sacrifice (*see* John 6:33-40). To this Jesus himself had added a further element. He *'...put water into the basin and began to wash the feet of the disciples'* (John 13:5). It was an expression of the respect and duty of care all of us have to one another (Galatians 6:2, 10). Jesus added: *'...you also ought to wash the feet of one another. For I gave you an example, that as I did to you, you also should do'* (vv.14-15). It is still, today, an integral symbolic part of this annual service
- This 'last supper' of Jesus and the disciples took place on *'the night in which he was betrayed'* by Judas Iscariot, the evening prior to his death on the cross. John tells us it was *'...before the feast of the Passover'* (John 13:1). This refers to the seven-day *Feast of Unleavened Bread*, which began the next evening - a festival observed by even the Gentile Christians in the early church (I Corinthians 5:1-8), and by many in the church of God to this day
- Jesus is *'...the Lamb of God, taking away the sin of the world'* (John 1:29). He is *'...our Passover, sacrificed for us'* (I Corinthians 5:7). The night and day following the supper he was cruelly mistreated by the religious (Sanhedrin) and secular (Roman) authorities (Acts 2:23). They impaled Jesus on a wooden stake and he died - sacrificed by a Roman spear - at the time of the evening sacrifice, which, on that day (Nisan 14 on their calendar) was the sacrifice of the Passover lamb. In Jesus was fulfilled all the sacrificial types of the Old Covenant

This solemn observance is an annual remembrance of our essential need to be spiritually nourished by the 'flesh' of Jesus. That is, the absorption into our life of all those principles of Godly behaviour as exemplified by his life in the flesh. And our total dependence on his shed blood for the forgiveness of our sin

Ω

Lord's Supper 2011: evening of April 17 at sunset

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