

new Horizons

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September/October 2014

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 e-mail Newsletter OUTREACH, the 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

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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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The most solemn of Bible holy days is the annual Day of Atonement. It is of immense significance within Judaism—but is no less important for Christians

As Christians we have been reconciled with God our Father through Jesus our Saviour. It is a relationship we annually remember at the spring holy day observance of the *Lord's Supper*—often termed the 'Christian Passover'—as we renew our covenant with God entered into at our baptism. The terms of that covenant are enacted in the Passover—Jesus is '*...our Passover, sacrificed for us*' (I Corinthians 5:)—and in the subsequent seven *Days of Unleavened Bread*. This latter festival (also known in the Scriptures as 'the Passover' Ezekiel 45:21) focuses on the need for our whole life to be dedicated to becoming

Christ-like, towards our becoming 'unleavened'—sinless.

All have sinned

It's not much talked about—even in church!—but 'sin' is part of all our lives. It is any action, any thought, that is contrary to the awesome holiness of God. So the apostle John can say: '*...If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.... If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His Word is not in us*' (I John 1:8,10). Writes the apostle Paul: '*...for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God*' (Romans 3:23). Sin is universal. Sin cuts us off from that relationship with the Father. And sin earns eternal death (*ch* 6:23).

God is tolerant, patient, compassionate, but He does not compromise His holiness: There is no entrance to His Kingdom unless our sin is gone—covered fully by the shed blood of

Jesus Christ: '*...there is salvation in no other One; for there is no other name under Heaven given among men by which we must be saved*' (Acts 4:32). Not by any of the myriad Hindu gods. Not by Buddha nor by Allah. Not by Zeus or Zoroaster or Marxism or humanism or animism. *Only* through Jesus. All other faiths are humanly-devised, aided and abetted by the one whose humiliation and defeat is recognized by this Day of Days—the *Day of Atonement*. We cannot approach God except in the manner and time He has prescribed, for '*...Our God is a consuming fire*'.

The Day of Days

To model the process of salvation, God called out Abraham, a man willing to stand up for Him in face of the surrounding idolatry. Through His son Isaac and grandson Jacob (his name changed to

Israel) God established the nation of Israel, assigning to them a permanent home in Canaan. To them He revealed a pattern of worship designed to illustrate His plan for salvation.

Central to the worship of the one and only God is the 'Ark of the Covenant' housed in a tabernacle—the 'Holy of Holies' (Hebrews 9:3). It was constructed exactly as the LORD Himself described—testimony to the diligence we must apply to how we worship '*...see that you make them after their pattern, which was shown you in the mountain*' (Exodus 25:40, Hebrews 8:5). The Ark contained '*...the*

golden pot that had manna, and Aaron's rod that budded, and the tablets of the covenant'. These 'tablets' are the two stone tables on which were written the Ten Commandments—the 'beating heart' of true worship.

Such is the holiness of God that the High Priest—chosen and appointed by God—could enter it but once a year, on the *Day of Atonement*. It was only by an elaborate ritual that he could symbolically purify himself to approach this holy place—the very dwelling of God at that time. So holy, indeed, that on one occasion a man died for involuntarily touching the ark.

On this most solemn of days all of Israel ceased their daily labours, fasted and gathered at the Tabernacle for worship and national reconciliation. Through the prescribed ritual '*...on that day an atonement shall be made for you, to cleanse you, so that you may be clean from all your sins before Jehovah*' (Leviticus

16:30). The details are described in Leviticus chapter sixteen.

Blood Sacrifice

Throughout human history sacrifice and the shedding of blood has been essential to our relationship with God. It is our sin that separates us from Him, and as notes Paul: '*...without shedding of blood there is no remission*' (Hebrew 9:22).

When our first parents sinned the LORD Himself slew an animal to literally and symbolically 'cover' them. Abel's sacrifice of a lamb was accepted by Him: '*...Abel also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat of it. And Jehovah had respect to Abel and to his offer-*

Lessons from Atonement

Atonement (Heb *kaphar* = a covering) is an annual observance held on the 10th day of the seventh Hebrew calendar month, Tishri (our September /October). It is a day to '*...afflict your souls*' - a day of fasting, self-examination and abstention from all work, including cooking. Its purpose is stated as '*...on that day an atonement shall be made for you, to cleanse you, so that you may be clean from all your sins*

ing' (Genesis 4:4).

In the ritual of *Atonement*, then, the High Priest—acting as representative of the nation—first, having donned special garments, ('...for glory and beauty'—they were magnificent, colourful, symbolic—Exodus 28) sacrificed for his own sin, and then on behalf of the accumulated sins of the entire people during the year then ending.

Two goats had been set aside, and one selected by lot to sacrifice for the sins of the people. The blood of the sacrifice he then sprinkled over the cover (Heb *kaphar*) of the Ark of the Covenant. These actions were within the Tabernacle and out of sight of the gathered congregation. The sin was publicly laid on the head of the second goat and taken away bearing the sin and released in the wilderness.. It was thus witnessed by the gathered congregation to assure them that their sin was covered, their relationship and covenant with the LORD renewed for another year.

All of these elaborate actions, however, were not enough, for: '*...in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins*' (Hebrews 10:4). All those sacrifices were but an annual 'remembrance'.

Our High Priest

The ritual, the washings, the impressive garments worn by the High Priest, the sacrifices, the sprinkling, the cleansing from sin—all are but symbolic representations and reminders of the One to come, the One who

Two Goats

The two goats represent Jesus Christ—aspects of the one sacrifice (Leviticus 16:5). One is sacrificed as a sin offering in the Tabernacle, and the second—released into the wild—represented visibly to the witnessing Israelites that their sin had indeed been removed '*...as far as the east is from the west*' (Psalm 103:12). The second goat is portrayed as being

need to be forgiven, because he is sinless, innocent and perfect: Jesus of Nazareth who is '*...the Lamb of God who takes away [Gk *airo*: bears away] the sin of the world*' (John 1:29, I John 3:5).

Israel's High Priest, however—though human, prone to sin, national—is a model for the One '*... who has passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God*' (Hebrews 4:14). The elaborate rituals surrounding the *Day of Atonement* highlight human inability to have our sin forgiven by our own efforts, and our need for reconciliation with Almighty God through the sacrifice of one who is sinless, of perfect character: '*...holy, harmless [innocent], undefiled, and separate from sinners*' (Hebrews 7:26).

The Lord of glory left the heavenly realm (John 17:5) and fulfilled what the ritual of *Atonement* was intended to convey in symbol. Now '*...at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens*', He '*...continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood. Therefore He is able also to save to the uttermost those who come unto God by Him, since He ever lives to make intercession for them*' (Hebrews 7:24-25). Just as did Israel's High Priest for the people on the *Day of Atonement*, as he confessed their sins. Writes John: '*...If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*' (I John 1:9).

An End to Sin

The observance of the *Day of Atonement* falls between two other divinely-appointed autumn festivals—the *Day of Trumpets* and the seven day *Festival of Tabernacles*. *Trumpets* heralds the return of Jesus as King of kings and Lord of lords, while *Tabernacles* celebrates His millennial reign over mankind.

During the interval between these festivals is a seismic event—described in the book of Revelation: '*...And I saw an angel come down from Heaven, having the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him a thousand*

Observing Atonement

Atonement is an annual Sabbath and is observed by resting from our daily labours, and by fasting—no food or drink for the entire day, beginning at sundown on the ninth day of the seventh Bible month (this year, 2014, beginning Friday evening, October 3rd).

It is advised that young children do not fast, and that the frail elderly are cautious—perhaps a token fast (*eg* omit one meal, or do not fast at all); but take adequate fluids. Current measures to do with your health should not be changed (*eg* medication).

All, however, can fulfil the purpose of the Day through self-examination, confession to our Father in heaven, and special attention to His Word in the Scriptures.

years. And he cast him into the abyss and shut him up and set a seal on him, that he should deceive the nations no more until the thousand years should be fulfilled' (ch.20:1-3).

The Deceiver

In the *Atonement* ritual, sin is carried away into the wilderness—forever gone by means of the sacrifice of Christ, as represented by the second goat. It may be that this may portray mankind's sin (now forgiven) being taken to be laid on Satan—represented as *Azazel*.

Satan, originally a covering cherub, was the first sentient being to sin—he was '*... perfect in your ways from the day that you were created, until iniquity was found in you*' (Ezekiel 28:15). He bears responsibility for the death of humanity through his deception, his lies and his influence (Genesis 3). He had '*...the power of death*' (Hebrews 2:14), until deposed by the resurrection of Christ. (Satan, however, can't *make* anyone sin!)

[As a created being, though a spirit, Satan is not immortal and will in due time be banished forever: '*...the Devil who deceived them was cast into the Lake of Fire and Brimstone*' (Revelation 20:10).] **cont'd p.8**

Many Bible believers express concerns as to how to interpret the end-time prophecies or doctrinal issues. If I get it wrong, they may ask—*will that condemn me to 'the great tribulation'?* Even, *will I lose out on salvation?*

What if, for example, they misplace the time of the resurrection? Will it coincide with the *Day of Trumpets* in the autumn? Or, will it take place on the early summer *Day of Pentecost*? Both scenarios have been proposed.

Then there's the important issue of the nature of the Godhead—is God, as is generally believed within the Christian faith, a 'trinity', a 'triune God'? Or have the Unitarians got it right—one God. Or, is God a Family?

Then there's the interpretation of the prophecies. Who is 'the Beast' or the 'False Prophet' or the 'man of sin'? Or, is the 'King of the South' an Islamic force, or a secular power? Or other? What if I'm not sure this truly is 'the end time', and it turns out it is? Will I be left behind? And what about Daniel's much-discussed prophecies?

All genuine concerns! And *yes*—we should strive for a right understanding of the Scriptures.

Take that 'trinity' question. No Christian, however they may understand 'God', means any disrespect. It's how they understand the text—or, more likely, they have thoughtlessly accepted the word from the pulpit rather than God's revelation in the Scriptures. God remains, whatever we may think or believe, exactly what He is, always was and always will be. No matter what I may think or been taught.

And prophecy? The interpretations are endless! Given enough time most human interpretations—that's what they are—fall by the wayside. I don't need to know *when* Jesus will return; but I must just stay in a state of preparedness. I needn't know who may become the 'two witnesses'; God will manifest them for all to see in His good time. I need not be overly concerned about world chaos—just be personally ready for when the end comes.

Do This...

There is, however, a clear instruction direct from the lips of Jesus: '*...Go to the people of all nations and make them my disciples. Baptize them ... and teach them to do everything I have told you. I will be with you always, even until the end of the world*' (Matthew 28:19-20). Those

It Will Happen...

who are privileged to be part of His divine Family are expected to share the good news of salvation, the Kingdom news, personally and through support of the work of our church affiliation. And by our daily Christ-like example.

And, in tandem with this directive, we are each to shape our life to that of the image of Jesus Christ, his character, as revealed through the Scriptures and informed by God's Spirit indwelling us.

It Will Happen!

Nothing we believe or do will change God's nature. We can't change when Jesus will return. We can't change God's choice of the two witnesses. We can't change the outcome of the prophecies. And, except in my small corner of influence by my example, I can't help the world's chaos.

God is compassionate, knows our frailties. He understands our limitations and doesn't lay anything on us beyond those limitations. We do our best to understand His revelation—but failures of understanding do not affect our living relationship with Him and with our Saviour, Jesus His Messiah. Ω

Leadership in the Church

July (2014) witnessed the Church of England Synod giving the green light to the appointment of female bishops. The outcome was the result of intense lobbying over several decades—there was much rejoicing, but in the face of opposition from many Anglican evangelicals and Anglo-Catholics.

Does the church now 'have it right'? Can fifty percent of humanity be excluded? Is female leadership sanctioned by the Christian Scriptures? It is certainly a contentious issue.

A good place to launch any discus-

sion is the Bible—more particularly the 'book of origins', Genesis! And the first statement on the matter is in chapter one: '*...God created man in His image; in the image of God He created him. He created them male and female*' (ch 1:27). Both man *and* woman share the image of God—both equally precious in his sight, both with full access to Him, both equal before Him. Indeed it is to Genesis that the New Testament writers turn when addressing their relative roles within the Christian community.

The Scriptural underpinning to human sexual roles is thus established: men and women are equal before

God. But should women in God's church have leadership roles?

Headship was not an issue throughout the four thousand years of Old Testament history. Life was patriarchal. But has that now been superseded? Did Jesus change this pattern? In our day it is an emotional issue. So what are the *facts*?

- Jesus interacted with men and women even-handedly, unlike his Jewish contemporaries
- He healed women as well as men
- He taught women in public and privately *cont'd p.8*

Who Was Jesus? cestry to Jacob's son, Judah.

What did Jesus look like? Was he literate? Where did he come from? Was he Arab or Israelite? What did he teach?

Over the centuries the true nature of Jesus has been misunderstood. Despite the artists' impressions we simply don't even know what he looked like—the Bible is silent. Depictions on canvas often reflect the appearance of the 'man in the street' in mediaeval Italy. Or the artist's favourite mistress!

Then there is his ancestry. Some Islamic scholars claim Jesus was of Palestinian origin, though there was no such racial grouping so-named until the early twentieth century AD. The non-Jewish contemporaries of Jesus in Canaan were the Samaritans—imported in the 8th century BC from the east along with their idolatrous customs. Today's Palestinians are simply part of the Arabic-speaking group of nations.

Genealogy

Surprisingly, for many Christians Jesus is not recognized for his true racial origins. And within Judaism those origins have often been rejected—though many within that faith now embrace his true origins.

The physical descent of Jesus is clear. Indeed his detailed parentage and descent is recorded in the Scriptures, and—uniquely—generation by generation back down the ages to man's creation. And he was of royal descent.

He was born of a woman, but like the first man, his father was the Creator: '*...when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law*' (Galatians 4:4). The 'woman'—Mary—traces her an-

cestry to Jacob's son, Judah. In other words, Jesus was racially of the *House of Judah*, Jewish, and as such reflected contemporary Jewish culture. His faith was that of the Jewish Scriptures. His idiom was Jewish—which can, out of context, give rise to misunderstanding of his sayings.

Deception

Such mistaken characteristics of Jesus, however, are less significant than the deception in regard to the widespread distortion by Bible teachers and Bible students of what he taught. It is these that hide the real Jesus.

Not that we haven't been warned. For Jesus himself tells us: '*...many will come in My name, saying, I am Christ, and will deceive many*' (Matthew 24:5). And Paul explains: '*...the god of this world has blinded*

the minds of the unbelievers, so the light of the glorious gospel of Christ (who is the image of God) should not dawn on them' (II Corinthians 4:4). And Jesus' brother Jude adds: '*...contend for the faith delivered once and for all to the saints*' (v.3).

Clear warning, here, that the body of teaching preserved by the apostles is a precious treasure to be guarded at all costs. Yet even a cursory examination of most 'catechisms' should, when compared with the Scriptures, deliver a shock!

What is purveyed as the 'teachings of Jesus' is too often exposed as the notions of 'blind' teachers that have become embedded as tradition and bear little resemblance (except in terminology) to the teaching of the Master. Paul adds '*...seducing spirits and doctrines of demons*' to the mix.

A key example is the use of the word *Sabbath*. For over four thousand years this denoted the last, the seventh, day of the week, having been so designated by the LORD Himself, at creation: '*...God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He had rested from all His work which God created to make*' (Genesis 2:3). It was the day designated for man (from before and after his 'fall') to meet with and to worship his Creator. It was a time for fellowship and instruction—a 'holy convocation'. But within a century or so the fledgling church—surrounded as it was by pagan idolatry—had begun insidiously to observe Sunday, falsely re-naming it '*Sabbath*'. Just one of many such changes.

We encourage all our readers to explore, from your Bible, the *real* Jesus! Ω

Origins

'Arab' derives from the Greek name for the Arabian peninsula. It is not an ethnic term and includes a variety of racial origins - both Cushite and Semitic. Over the centuries since the seventh century AD Islamic conquests, the 'Arabic' language has been culturally imposed on the various ethnic groups by the conquerors.

The various states in the Middle East—Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Qatar *etc* were formed by the early twentieth century division of the area by the 'Great Powers'. Each has its own mix of racial origins. The entire area was at that time known as 'Syria'.

'Palestine' experienced numerous changes of population over the centuries and in the early twentieth century had a relatively sparse population of Jews (ethnic and other) and those now termed 'Arabs'—mainly Islamic.

Like everyone else, Christians are subject to illness, suffering, death. For healing - is *faith* all that's needed?

For most of mankind, there's one way to deal with illness. You go to the 'medicine man'. In most nations today that means a medical doctor who can call upon a range of medical and surgical specialists, impressive technology and an endless range of pharmaceutical products. Or you may choose from a variety of alternative treatments: herbal medicines, acupuncture, homeopathy *etc.* And indeed the line between them all is increasingly blurred as doctors refer patients for these alternatives.

Medical practice, however, has its limitations. If you don't have an adequate health service or it simply is non-existent - where do you turn? Or what if the medical profession runs out of solutions? Religion often promises relief. The answer for many may lie in the local voodoo practice or the 'witch-doctor' - in fact often an expert in herbal medicine though embedded in a confusion of religious ceremony and hocus-pocus. In the West it may be the use of mystical crystals or healing pyramids.

Most Christians, too, will first turn to modern medicine when physical ailments strike. But many 'turn to God alone' for healing. They see in the Christian Scriptures that God is revealed as *Jahveh-Ropheka* - God the Healer. They read that '*...by [Jesus'] stripes we are healed*'. Healing crusades attended by, in some nations, literally millions hold the promise of the restoration of sight, a cure for cancer, the ability to walk again - even restoration to life. Famous names like Benny Hinn or Reinhard Bonnke minister in this way to enthusiastic multitudes around the world.

Biblical Healing

The ministry of the first Christian apostles was marked by such miraculous healings. The blind saw, the lame walked, the dead were raised. God did heal, and mightily. When a man lame from birth walked into the presence of the religious leadership

there was no doubt it was authentic (Acts 3, 4:14). Unlike the efforts of modern Christian healers! (A recent examination of one such 'crusade' found not one of seventy-eight officially claimed healings was proven.)

And God does heal today. Many Christians can testify to His healing power over physical and psychological illness. James, the brother of Jesus, instructed the church on how to set about this, and many Christians today follow that practice. [Request the free article *What Do You Do When You Are Ill*] But should Christians solely 'rely on God' for healing? Should they, as advocated by some church leaders, steer clear of all medical practice?

Between Black and White

Some Christians whose desire is to trust God for healing face a dilemma. In what circumstances is it acceptable to have medical attention and when should we 'rely on God alone'?

On the one hand they understand the concept of personal responsibility in health matters. The Scriptures clearly give us some practical guidance: rules of physical and mental hygiene, dietary laws *etc.* Ignore them - as did most of the mediaeval world - and you suffer. But there are also examples of 'direct action': the use of anti-septic, anaesthesia, ointments, first aid, undisclosed methods of 'causing to be healed' *etc.* Medicines 'did good' (Proverbs 17:22). And Ezekiel speaks well of them in a millennial setting (Ezekiel 47:12). A range of remedies was widely used in ancient Israel.

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unsigned articles are by the Editor

Will God Heal You?

On the other hand the Scriptures teach that God is our Healer and we are to have faith. So 'where do we draw the line?' is a question often posed. They perceive 'grey areas' and confusion arises. Yet, logically, *any* human intervention - whether 'herbal' or 'normal' - negates the notion that we should rely solely on God for healing. No dentist, no headache remedies, no bone-setting, no alternative medicine!

Is there a difference between medical intervention for a tooth abscess and for an appendix abscess? Or between an aspirin and an antibiotic? Between major surgery to reconstruct a shattered pelvis and surgery for a blocked colon or heart by-pass or a cancer?

The first option is considered acceptable by most who desire to 'trust God alone' while the latter alternative has to be 'in God's hands'. Then there's the artificial distinction between 'natural' remedies and 'drugs'. In fact, most drugs are derived from 'natural remedies' and are concentrations of the active healing principle in plants *etc.* - and therefore generally more effective, potent and controlled.

A Touch of History

Archaeology unearths evidence of a range of ancient surgical procedures - even brain surgery! I imagine it was pretty risky. As were the various 'healing potions' gathered from nature. Because the 'cures' were dodgy they became linked with religious ritual to empower them. And the priests - they were pagan - became involved. The healing arts became associated with magic.

And that's the source of much Christian superstition about healing. Some few Christians believe medicine - even modern medicine - is somehow associated with the demonic, with Baal'Zebub, the 'god of Ekron' (II Kings 2:1ff). Yet in this incident King Azariah's sin was in seeking guidance about the outcome of his

injury - *not* healing - from that 'no god' (I Corinthians 8:5-6, 10:20).

Today, medicine has grown up - though given the complexity of the human body it's still more art than science! But modern medicine is no longer associated with religion. Medical practice today is knowledge based. It is increasingly technological - and dedicated, skilled doctors and surgeons and researchers devote themselves to improved techniques of healing broken and sick bodies.

Modern Western medicine isn't 'of the devil!' 'Health', however, is worshiped as a god - we all want to be vibrantly healthy, and as the 'people of God' Christians often feel they have a right to it. But *sin* has entered the world. The human body decays into deafness, poor sight, arthritis and all the ills to which mankind is - through Adam - heir (Ecclesiastes 12).

Who wouldn't avail themselves of a modern burn or spinal injury unit? Yet such treatments may be just as invasive as the removal of a tumour. Suffer a compound fracture and 'leave it to God' to heal and you may well experience gangrene or an incurable infection and certainly deformity. Not that God can't or won't heal but that He would expect you to get attention! And there's no logical - or spiritual - reason why that principle should not apply in every form of illness, major or minor.

Balance of Risk

Our choice of treatment is a balance of risk. Doctors will discuss that with you. There are competent surgeons and physicians and herbalists and acupuncturists - and there are incompetent practitioners and charlatans in both camps. A drug or herbal remedy may be effective in the hands of one prescriber and not with the next. I can but glean whatever knowledge I can (Google it!) perhaps obtain 'a second opinion' - and then *I* must make the decision: get treatment, or suffer without treatment and 'let nature take its course' (it usually does). And recover or die.

Using honey or olive leaves and not an antibiotic may seem to be more 'natural' (though less effective) - but both are a human intervention whether or not we call on God to heal! Herbs won't set a compound fracture or repair an aneurysm or cure a cardiac arrest. In any illness we simply and wisely ask: which treatment poses less risk (and all drugs carry risk) and what will be most effective to restore health?

And underlying all is the matter of *faith*.

The Nature of Faith

No Christian will quarrel with the need for 'faith!' But the nature of faith is often misunderstood. Faith is *a way of life*: '*...The just shall live by faith*'. It's not a one-off injection of spiritual energy focused on a specific disease you have acquired. Faith is the principle that undergirds every aspect of our life in Christ. It is *trust* - trust, belief, in the existence of the all powerful God (Hebrews 11:6). None of the spiritual giants in the 'faith chapter' are praised for having faith to be healed! They all died '*...not having received the promises*' (v.13).

Our faith becomes visible only through our submission to the will and word of God. It results in action: '*...I show you my faith by what I do*', says James. Should we become seriously ill we express our faith by calling for the church elders (James 5:14), *and* by taking advantage of the best treatment at our disposal. In calling for the elders we publicly place the outcome of our illness in the hands of God.

In seeking medical attention, and by taking sensible health precautions we are doing our part - showing our faith by our works. We could, for example, stop smoking, improve our diet, exercise, control resentment or other negative spiritual traits *etc.* Indeed God has given us sound advice on health, ranging from basic hygiene (Deuteronomy 23:13—ignored in the Middle Ages—to what we put in our mouths (*ch* 14—*see* side-bar).. Even were the treatment to fail then our

faith, our trust in God, remains undiminished.

False Hope

All too many Christians have a false expectation of divine healing. We all die! And none of us knows when that time may come. It may be through creeping old age or by accident or by sudden or prolonged illness. Perfect health for all awaits our resurrection!

Yet we all fight the decay. We eat sensibly, avoid noxious substances, bind up wounds, extract rotten teeth, surgically set broken bones, maybe even permit a paramedic to resuscitate us. So where is the line between faith and works? Christians can't have one without the other.

Healing is an act of undeserved divine mercy. It is a sovereign act of a merciful God. In our day great miracles of healing have taken place. But very few. Most Christians with serious illness recover with or without medical treatment - or they die. Whatever the outcome, faith knows that God is with them, that He knows their every pain and every need, that in their suffering there is purpose. Indeed in our 'instant' age one of our greatest needs is to develop - *patience*. *cont'd p.8*

Unclean!

An estimated 10 to 15 million people in the United States have been infected with *trichinosis*, a worm that infects pork.. Effects range from mild to fatal. The worm can lodge in various organs—muscle, heart, eye, brain. An estimated 1.5 million Americans carry the parasite, and between 150,000 and 300,000 new infections occur each year.

Domestic pork carries a significant risk. Although only about 0.125% of all slaughter pigs are infected, this still represents about 40 million potential meal exposures each year because of the huge production of domestic pork in the USA.

All major faiths have their 'clergy' - mullahs, priests, vicars, bishops, elders etc. In Christianity, it would seem that you can't have religion without them. But are they Biblical?

National events are often decorated by a splendid array of clergy in multi-coloured attire - each specific to part of the many-layered hierarchy. Perhaps surprisingly, all these religious offices - from Pope or Archbishop to Lay Reader - are *unknown* in the foundation document of Christianity, the New Testament.

The only 'offices' described there are 'overseers/elders and deacons' (Philippians 1:1). The inspired writers considered this as all that was necessary for the functions of the orderly assembly. There was, in other words, no such office as 'bishop' as presently portrayed.

But such simplicity of structure is alien to most, especially episcopal, denominations. The vast array of church offices has multiplied over the centuries, and much of the dispute within Christianity stems from it.

God's Heritage

The notion of 'Christian priesthood' - the 'clergy' - was foreign to the New Testament church. All Christians were 'brethren' - the term includes men and women. As '*...sons and daughters of the Almighty*' (II Corinthians 6:18) we are, before God, all on the same level. The power and pomp of church office obscures that reality.

The apostle Peter addresses the issue. Writing to the church generally he states: "*You are God's heritage*". The Greek word he uses is *kleros* - from which 'clergy' is derived. To the elders

he says: "*Feed the flock of God which is among you, exercising oversight not by constraint but willingly, not for base gain but readily; neither as being lords over God's heritage [Gk kleros] but being examples to the flock*" (I Peter 5:3).

Elders

The apostles recognized the need for structure in the assemblies of God's people. Those men who were gifted by Jesus Christ with his prescribed qualities (eg II Timothy 3, Titus 1) were recognized by the brethren and appointed to shepherd that local flock. No great ceremonial - just a simple public recognition (by laying-on of hands) of their spiritual gifts and suitability for the office.

Their function was to oversee the spiritual growth of all the brethren and to nourish and use the brethren's spiritual gifts for the benefit of the entire assembly. They were (are) to be trained for '*...works of service*'. (Ephesians 4: 7-16).

It didn't take long, however, for elders in some assemblies to exalt themselves over the brethren (Acts 20). Trappings of office were added, authority usurped, practices from the pagan religions adopted, the 'ordinary member' excluded. Hence the twenty-first century hodge-podge of church offices and hierarchies.

Indeed in some denominations decision-making is confined to the elders, who are deemed to be the sole 'members' of that church.

Local Assemblies

Inevitably, given human nature,

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Who Are the 'Clergy'?

the apostolic pattern for the structure of the church of God was abandoned. Charismatic leaders arose - as foretold by the apostle Paul on a visit to the Ephesian assemblies: "*I know that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock [tearing it apart]. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them*" (Acts 20:29-30).

That's a sombre warning to every Christian and especially to every Christian who aspires to leadership of an assembly - or already has that function.

Hence arose the unbiblical notion of 'denominations' - which replaced the autonomy of each local assembly. The New Testament letters were addressed to these local groups of Christians, instructing them in Christian principles and in how to forward the work Jesus had assigned them.

Of course, these principles applied to *all* God's assemblies. But it is a misinterpretation to assume that the church of God was one tightly-knit organization, 'ruled from the top down', with one man - pope, apostle, evangelist or board - directing every move.

Such an approach to church structure encourages the growth of committees, rules, corporate headquarters, inappropriate business practices, unnecessary bureaucracy. It imposes a rigid doctrinal formula - which may inflict heresy on an entire denomination. And has often done so. All such absorb the energies of the church and hinder the work of proclaiming the Gospel of God to all people, all nations. Ω

Atonement ...cont'd from p.2

With Satan and his angels destroyed, the Creation will be for evermore free of all sin: '*...there shall in no way enter into it anything that defiles, or any making an abomination or a lie; but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life*' (ch 21:27).

Christian Festival

Committed Christians are united in the need to mark key events in the Christian year—hence Easter, Christmas and the various 'saints' days'. Yet these are not enjoined in the Scriptures, but rather the series of observances (outlined in Leviticus 23) which God introduced ('*...My feasts*' v.2) through Moses.

It is *these* days that were marked by first century Christians and by countless others down through the centuries since. They will, too, be observed universally when Messiah returns.

The Bible festivals, for Christians, are spiritual in essence, but have links with the physical (eg the Lord's Supper, Unleavened Bread). The physical aspects are much-needed reminders of the underlying spiritual principles.

The prophet Isaiah highlights this in regard to the *Day of Atonement* (ch 58): '*...Is not this the fast that I have chosen? To loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed ones go free, and that you break every yoke? Is it not to break your bread to the hungry, and that you should bring home the wandering poor? When will you see the naked and cover him; and you will not hide yourself from your own flesh?*'. A practical faith, to be applied both spiritually and physically!

Observing the festivals is a timely reminder, year by year, as to the deeper spiritual principles of divine Law. Indeed the concept of *atonement* is rooted in the **next column** divine will from mankind's begin-

Leadership... cont'd from p.3

- Women ministered to him '*...of their possessions*' Luke 8:2-3)
- His resurrection was first witnessed by a woman

However...

- The Twelve apostles were all male
- Jesus did not negate the 'Law and the Prophets' (Matthew 5)
- The Twelve (all men) were tasked to protect his mission and to receive further revelation (Jude 3)

And in the church...

- Practical service was overseen by men (Acts 6)
- Both Peter and Paul write highly of women in the church (eg Romans 16)
- Both consider the role of women in relation to Genesis ch 3
- Peter confirms male leadership in the Christian home (I Peter 3:1-7)

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ning (Genesis 3:15,21).

It is worth recalling that failure to observe the *Day of Atonement* excluded the people of Israel from their relationship with the LORD. **Ω**

- Paul confirms it in the church setting (I Timothy 2:11-15, I Corinthians 11). Here he outlines the boundaries of a woman's public ministry based on Genesis 3 and on 'nature' (*ie* culture). In other words he argues from the Scriptures and not from the prevailing culture

In sum, male and female are equal before God, but each is created by Him for separate roles reflecting our created characteristics. The New Testament in no way underrates female intelligence or ability. They are to inform decision-making (Genesis 2:18)

Female Christians are actively encouraged to teach younger women (Titus 2:3-4), and children (II Timothy 1:5, 3:15). Also to do what they are emotionally best fitted for—practical service to the brethren.

Male Christians are divinely assigned the role of leadership in the church. But this must be a *service* role—not male domination, as made clear by Jesus (Luke 22:24-27). Many men, however, tend to shrink from the leadership role because of the widespread influence of militant feminism (Isaiah 3:12).

Men and women in the church are to contribute their talents equally, but leadership is male. **Ω**

God heal?... cont'd from p.6

That's a quality that is hewn from suffering!

Our faith sees us through every human situation. It is maintained and strengthened by paying careful attention to - and doing - the Word of God (Romans 10:17).

When illness strikes we do what God says: call for the elders, and be anointed. That's placing the matter in God's hands - a public expression that we trust Him whatever befalls.

Then we do our part, confident that the outcome is in His hands—whatever the outcome! **Ω**

MiniStudy**Sabbath—a day to remember**

Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shall you labour, and do all your work; but the seventh day is a sabbath unto the LORD thy God, in it you shall not do any manner of work, you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your man-servant, nor your maid-servant, nor your cattle, nor the stranger that is within your gates; for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested on the seventh day; wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it (Exodus 20:8-11)

Any Bible scholar worth his salt knows that the weekly Sabbath of the Christian Scriptures is not Sunday but Saturday. Even Roman Catholic scholars will agree, though claiming that the Roman Church had, contrary to Scripture, divine authority to change it. So how should we observe the day?

- The ‘day’ itself is observed from sundown on Friday to sundown Saturday. This is, in Bible terms, the seventh day of the week. It is a day that has remained in unbroken sequence since the beginning of time: ‘...from evening to evening, you shall keep your Sabbath’ (Leviticus 23:32, Genesis 1:5)
- Sabbath is a time designated by the Creator as ‘holy’. That is, it is a day to be carefully distinguished from the other six days: ‘...God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He had rested from all His work’ (Genesis 2:2-3)
- It is a day for physical joy and refreshment—not an imposition!. We ‘rest from our labours’, our regular day-to-day business activity. It is well-known that mankind needs this regular recurring pause in our busy schedule. The Sabbath puts our acquisitive lives in perspective
- But Sabbath is especially a time for refreshment of the human spirit. It is a time to burnish our relationship with our heavenly Father and our Saviour through prayer and meditation on His Word. And a time to cement our relationships with our families and our brothers and sisters in Christ. It is also a time to assemble for instruction from competent teachers: ‘...let us consider one another to provoke to love and to good works, 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)
- The seventh-day Sabbath is a sign of our covenant, made at our baptism, with our God. It is a perpetual sign given by the LORD at creation to identify the people of God—a sign that has defined, and on occasion cost the lives of, obedient saints down the ages. It identifies the Creator: ‘...in six days Jehovah made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore Jehovah blessed the Sabbath day, and sanctified it’ (Exodus 20:11, 31:13-17)
- The *weekly Sabbath* and the *Day of Atonement* were, at their inception, the only holy days designated in Scripture as full ‘Sabbaths’. That is, no secular work not of a humanitarian nature should be done, and chores minimized. The other holy days are also set apart for worship, fellowship, instruction and physical and spiritual enjoyment—days when we desist from our normal business activities (Leviticus 23:7), and rejoice in feasting (Exodus 12:16, Nehemiah 8:12)

In sum, the seventh-day Sabbath, for Christians, is not a burdensome chore but a welcome break from the daily grind, a pause in our daily lives that brings rich reward. It is not a complex system of ‘dos and don’ts’ but a willing permission to our Creator God liberty in Christ. Each of us principles laid down in the

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