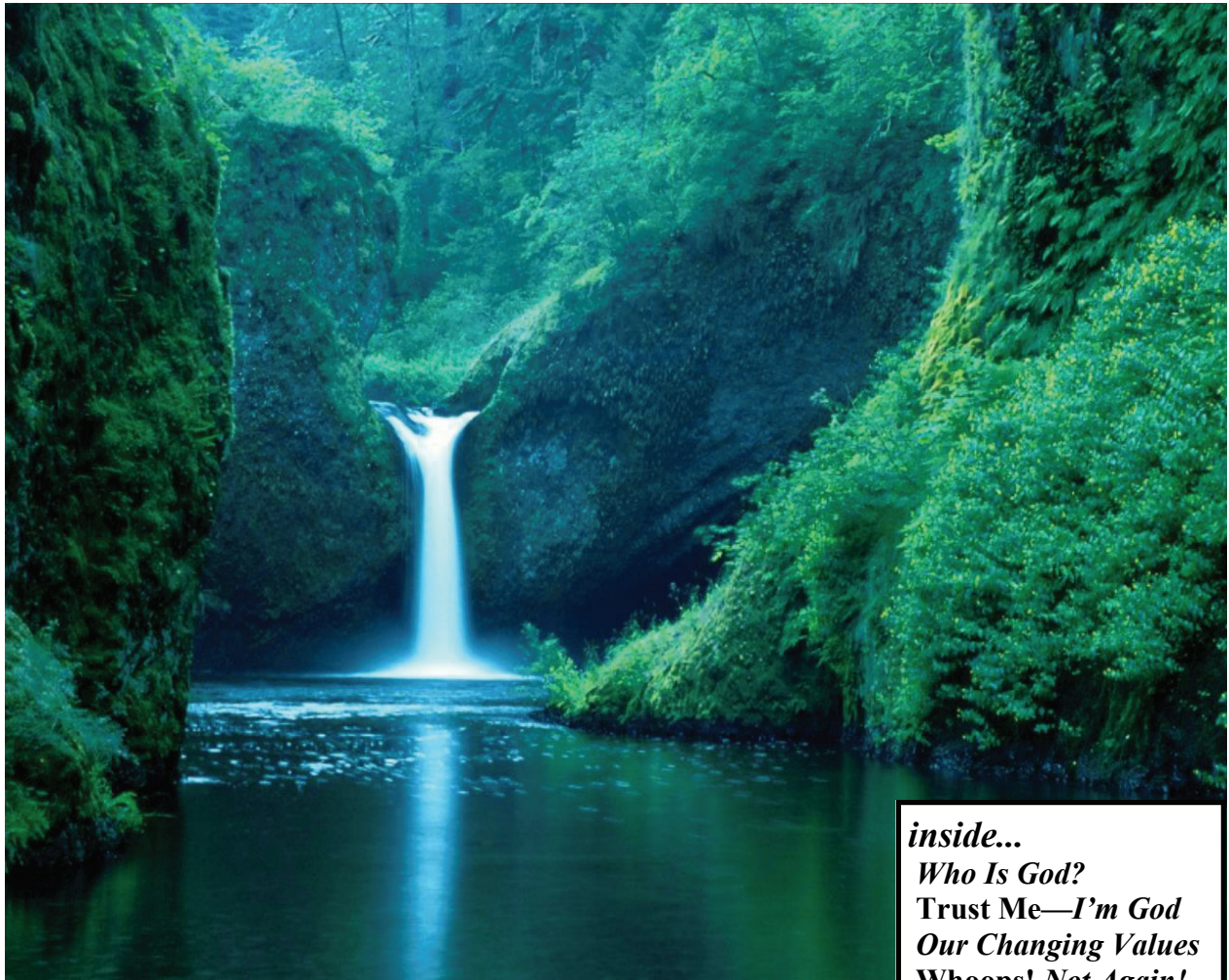


new **Horizons**

Vol 19 No 2

March/April 2015

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

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

It is distributed free on request, being a co-operative voluntary effort financed by the members and friends of the *Churches of God*. We also welcome the financial support of all who benefit from our publications and who wish to labour with us.

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

Churches of God Outreach Ministries
P O Box 54621
Tulsa, OK 74155-0621
USA
e-mail: information@cgom.org
1-800-611-8080
Editor: James McBride
e-mail: coguk@aol.com

England:

The Churches of God, UK
PO Box 25250
6 Slington House
Rankine Road
BASINGSTOKE RG24 8PH
United Kingdom
Regd Charity No 283358

Canada:

Churches of God Outreach Ministries
PO Box 476
Don Mills Station
Don Mills Ontario M3C 2T4
Canada

or from:

Tulsa, OK 2015

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new Horizons

Issue No 110

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Mankind, illogically, worships many 'gods'. How can we recognize the one and only Creator God?

Guided by his contact with Jesus (Galatians 1:11-12), the apostle Paul focused on the *written* Word of God, strongly condemning the added traditions that marred the theology of the Pharisees and other Jewish sects—as condemned by Jesus. Modern Christianity, too, has its traditions—many in open conflict with those same Scriptures.

Have those Christian traditions served to obscure who is the one true God? Is it important to get it right?

Different Faiths

Christianity is hot-wired to the observation of a weekly rest day and to a series of annual 'holy days'. They serve to draw clear distinction between it and the other mainstream faiths: *Sunday* and not the Islamic Friday, *Christmas* and not the Hindu Diwali or the Islamic Ramadan, for example. Isn't it curious, though, that Paul endorses none of these? Not a word from him nor from the other New Testament writers.

To come to grips with his doctrinal stance we need to understand Paul's background. He was uncompromisingly of the House of Judah. That is, he was deeply immersed in the writings of what we call the Old Testament and in all that implied for life and theology, and he was diligent in its application. And recall that the early church had only those same Scriptures—no New Testament

(II Timothy 3:15). Yet in Paul's writings we find no conflict with those Hebrew Scriptures.

Sabbath Sign

Thus in *Acts* and in his *letters* we find Paul ardently promoting the 'Jewish' Sabbath and the Biblical holy days. Not surprising, for every Jew would in those days have given his or her life in defence of these days!

The reason? It is found back in the book of Exodus: '*...Truly you shall keep My sabbaths. For it is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, to know that I am Jehovah who sanctifies you. You shall keep the Sabbath therefore, for it is holy to you. Everyone that defiles it shall surely be put death*' (ch 31:13-14. Ezekiel 20:12). The death penalty! No wonder that the Jews, now returned from a seventy-year exile because of their Sabbath desecration, diligently observed it.

Who Is God?

Note that the Sabbath is *a sign* - a sign that *Jehovah* is God. It sets Him apart from every other so-called god. It identifies the one true God who created all things: '*...It is a sign between Me and the sons of Israel forever. For in six days Jehovah made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day He rested, and was refreshed* (Exodus 31:17). And Ezekiel: '*I gave them My sabbaths to be a sign between Me and them, that they might know that I am Jehovah who sets them apart* (Ezekiel 20:12).

Universal Holy Day

But—only for Israel? Consider this.

The seventh day Sabbath was inaugurated at man's creation. Moses cites from an old record: '*...on the seventh day God ended His work which He had made. And He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made. And God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He had rested from all His work which God created to make. These are the generations [historical records] of the heavens and of the earth when they were created*' Genesis 2:2-4).

The Creator set the seventh day aside for all mankind—a day of rest and reflection and joy, a day to honour and worship the Creator, a holy day. A day that came direct from the hand of God for man's benefit. And note that it was so appointed before Adam did a stroke of work—so not just for physical rest!

There's no reason to believe that the faithful didn't continue to observe the Sabbath in those pre-Mosaic days—two thousand five hundred years! - until God formed His own nation, Israel.

Christian Observance

No surprise, then, that Paul and his contemporaries diligently observed this seventh day. And when the Gospel was first proclaimed it went first to Jews and proselytes (Gentiles who associated with Israel). No way did they relinquish the observance of the Sabbath! More, when the Gospel was embraced by non-Jews they, too, observed the weekly seventh

day rest. Like ancient Israel, this set apart the first Christians—Jew and Gentile—to the one true God.

The apostle Paul, then ‘... *according to [his] custom*’ observed the seventh-day Sabbath. And before the Roman authorities he testified that he ‘...*neither against the Law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar have I offended in anything*’ (Acts 25:8), and that he ‘...[believed] *all things that are written in the Law and in the Prophets*’ (24:14). Surely a ringing endorsement of the seventh-day Sabbath! In preaching to the Gentiles Paul never wavered from this position.

Holy Days

God has throughout history jealously guarded the days on which we offer Him formal worship, and when we can meet together in joyous fellowship and for instruction. A summary of these days is in Leviticus 23. The LORD chose these specific dates on the existing calendar. They form a pattern of ‘sevens’.

There are intimations that the feasts were celebrated in some form prior to the time of Moses. God’s message to Pharaoh was to let Israel leave to ‘...*hold a feast to Me*’ (Exodus 5:1)

What was Paul’s attitude to these annual observances? No surprise that he, as a Jew, continued their observance. But the apostle also taught God’s festivals to Gentiles as part of his proclamation of the Gospel. An example is his instruction to the Corinthian church—mostly Gentile.

Writing of the Spring festival, *Unleavened Bread*, he says: ‘...*let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth*’ (I Corinthians 5:8).

In other words, observe the *Unleavened Bread* festival in both its physical *and* its spiritual aspects.

The apostle, together with other Christians, is later recorded—in a Gentile area—as postponing a journey until ‘...*after the Days of Unleavened Bread*’ (Acts 20:6). He also uses the *Day of Atonement* (‘the fast’) as a calendar marker (Acts 27:9).

Writing to the Colossian Christians—also non-Jews, largely (v.13)—he urged them not to heed those who condemned their festival observance: ‘...*Let no one, then, judge you in eating or in drinking, or in respect of a feast, or of a new moon, or of sabbaths, which are a shadow of the coming things, and the body is of the Christ*’ (Colossians 2:16-17).

The festivals, now just mere ‘shadows’, types, portray in vivid symbol the realities of the divine plan, now, at a time when ‘...*all we can see of God is like a cloudy picture in a mirror*’ (I Corinthians 13:12 CEV).

God’s Challenge

The challenge for every professing Christian is to ensure they are in harmony with this identifying sign of the one true God—the weekly seventh-day Sabbath.

Those ‘shadows’—the annual holy days—serve, as we observe them, to remind us of the divine plan for all of mankind. In them we see Jesus Christ in varied aspects of his person and his mission.

In our modern universally paganized world those Christians who faithfully observe God’s Sabbath and holy days ‘...*in spirit and in truth*’ face opposition and derision from man who profess to be

Christian, and from a world wrapped in commercialism and blindness to the true Gospel. **Ω**

A Touch of History

The seventh-day Sabbath has been the cornerstone of true worship since creation.

Having completed the material creation, God set aside the following day, the seventh, as a memorial of His work. It is unreasonable to assume that the faithful throughout the ages did not continue its observance.

(There are historical traces of nations—pre-Israel—observing a seven day week. There is nothing in the natural order to account for this. (see our article on the **Calendar**)

In Abraham’s day, God’s King-priest, in blessing him, is noted as emphasising God as ‘...*possessor [owner] of heaven and earth*’ (Genesis 14:19). It would be remarkable if he didn’t mark the Sabbath day, its memorial (Exodus 20:8-11).

The LORD (Exodus 20:8) told Israel to ‘...*remember*’ the Sabbath—that is, it had prior existence. In Hebrews (*ch* 4) we find that the seventh-day Sabbath is a *type* of eternal rest, and as such it remains in force, since creation, until it will be fulfilled in the resurrection. No other day can substitute. **Ω**

The following booklets are available, on request. There is no charge:

Why Observe Sunday God’s Holy Days

We live in uncertain times. How can we be secure?

How are you coping with the ongoing global crises? The Eurozone on the brink of collapse. Islamic State causing mayhem around the globe. Anti-Semitism again on the rise. 'Rich' countries buried in unimaginable debt.

Our financial system has all but broken down, with fortunes—and indeed meagre nest-eggs—lost. The global economy, too, is creaking. Perhaps the West may now get a taste of what most of our world has been experiencing,

Solutions are daily marketed for individuals (governments don't have a clue); the newspapers are full of

them, from financial advice to money-saving tips, for fuel, for fun and for food. And, of course, we should pay attention to those ideas that are appropriate to our own circumstances.

The Neglected Dimension

Governments think '*it's the economy*' that accounts for national prosperity. Rather, national success results from the *spiritual* dimension.

There is a sad lack of advice on this major aspect of life—our *spiritual* resources. For if you profess true faith then you have a secret weapon!

The Creator gives a cast-iron promise that He cares for those who are committed to Him. That commitment, however, is two-way: *our* part is to follow the life guidance He has revealed to us in His Word, the Scriptures.

The divine 'laws for living' are not restrictive but liberating. Act contrary to them, break our covenant, and there are inevitable built-in negative consequences.

The laws of *physics* are a 'concrete' example. Fall from a height and injury is the natural consequence. Imbibe poison and you may die. Eat the wrong foods and illness results.

So, too, with God's *spiritual* laws. Human well-being is predicated on our compliance with these laws—transgress them and there are unpleasant but just consequences. But follow them and there is liberty. By so doing we reap the benefits of divine protection, we tap into His endless beneficence.

God Cares

Nature cries out that the Creator of all abundantly supplies our needs (Psalm 50:9-15). The Creator of all has provided for the needs of all mankind. He has ordered the seasons to supply the fruits of the earth, and stocked the planet with needed resources.

But for the children of God, Jesus

Trust Me—I'm God

makes it clear that our heavenly Father is concerned for our welfare. In response to faith He will supply our needs. Hear him:

I tell you not to worry about your life. Don't worry about having something to eat, drink, or wear. Isn't life more than food or clothing? Look at the birds in the sky! They don't plant or harvest. They don't even store grain in barns. Yet your Father in heaven feeds them. Aren't you worth more than birds? Can worry make you live longer? Why worry about clothes? Look how the wild flowers grow. They don't work hard to make their clothes. But I tell you that Solomon with all his wealth wasn't as well clothed as one of them. God gives such beauty to everything that grows in the fields, even though it is here today and thrown into a fire tomorrow. He will surely do even more for you! Why do you have such little faith? Don't worry and ask yourselves, "Will we have anything to eat? Will we have anything to drink? Will we have any clothes to wear?" Only people who don't know God are always worrying about such things. Your Father in heaven knows that you need all of these.

Matthew 6:25-32

Trust Me

Our heavenly Father is totally aware

of the needs of all those who have placed their trust in Him. Wrote wise King Solomon: '*...Trust in the LORD with all your heart; and lean not unto your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct your paths*' (Proverbs 3:5-6).

Uncertain Times

In uncertain times when war threatens, when economies verge on collapse or family finances are strained, when illness strikes—at such times those who are spiritual children of our heavenly Father can rest assured of His constant presence.

For the people of God, not everything goes smoothly! We often face testing times from within and without—as did those faithful listed in Hebrews 11: '*...These all died by way of faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off. And they were persuaded of them and embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth*' (v.13).

They remained, through thick and thin, faithful to the one true God. **Ω**

End of the World?

The 'prophets of doom' are on the prowl! To my knowledge none of them have a perfect predictive track record, so the LORD said '*don't fear them*'. (Deuteronomy 18:22). Consistent accuracy is what is required of a true prophet.

But that doesn't mean one or more won't at some time burst on the scene. God has set a time limit on human incompetence, and when it is expiring He will give plenty of warning—by the 'signs of the times' or by infallible prophets who exercise divine powers.

But is today's chaos 'it'? The short answer: '*...no-one knows*'. For we have throughout the last two millennia been through similar times of 'distress among nations'.

That awesome day *will* come—in God's time and when mankind reaches the end of its tether, and the planet can no longer sustain life.

Matthew 24:4-13

Our Changing Values

National cultures change as the years roll by. Good—or bad?

Abortion, homosexuality, female priests and bishops, co-habitation, sex before marriage, debt, crime and punishment, ‘political correctness’. How dramatically different are our current attitudes to these social practices from half a century ago!

(The focus on *sexuality* underpinning many of these illustrates how fundamental to a safe society it is!)

Values tend to change as generation succeeds generation. Who, then, determines what is ‘right and wrong’? Or, is there indeed such a thing as ‘right and wrong’? Who sets the standard?

Old Fashioned

To this day sizeable minorities cling to former attitudes, formed in by-gone times. Many avoid becoming indebted, are deeply concerned about lax justice, deplore the erosion of family values, worry about widespread promiscuity. Are they right to be concerned?

Increasingly such attitudes are confined to the dustbin, seen as archaic, old hat. Personal liberty is now king.

And in the meantime society crumbles.

Change and Decay

Thugs are released from prison or granted bail only to kill, rob and rape again. In the United Kingdom, one in nine violent deaths, a weekly average of two rapes and two child sex assault are by those given bail.

Sexually transmitted diseases are soaring and one third of pregnancies are aborted, accelerated by ‘the pill’ (while we import strangers to fill the labour market). And one in three children do not have two parents living together, with consequent adverse effect on health, education, social skills.

Good—or bad? And who shares the blame?

Responsibility

I, as an adult, can choose whether or not to overspend. I can choose to enter a sexual relationship—or not. I can choose to abort or to steal or to neglect elderly parents or to pervert the course of justice by perjury. It’s my choice.

But the general cultural climate affects me. Who says it’s okay to abort? Who says shop-lifting isn’t really criminal? Who says marriage is optional, no different from co-habitation or single parenting? Who says to teach sexual equality and sexual behaviour—even to five year olds.

As children we absorb our approach to life from our parents (as they did from their parents), perhaps from our religious affiliation. But we are also heavily influenced by our formal education. Which in turn is directed by...

Top Down

Who tells the teachers what principles to impart to the precious minds of those in their care? Who sets the ‘social norms’? Clearly, the ‘authorities’. Government ministers, judges, magistrates, Council and religious leaders bear much of the responsibility.

The edicts from on high, from our leaders, dictate the school curriculum, set the pattern for public behaviour and public attitudes. In no way, it is said, should they impart moral values, for nothing is ‘right’ or ‘wrong’—it’s all relative.

We must ask—*where, then, do our leaders get their ideas from?* Certainly not from God! They have imbibed a rag-bag of failed philosophies that over the millennia have resulted in the death of nations and empires. And are in process of unpicking the fabric of modern society.

Writes the psalmist: ‘*If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?*’ (Psalm 11:3).

The Hebrew prophets pinpoint the

Ancient Wisdom

Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil (Ecclesiastes 8:11)

[Authority] is the servant of God to you for good. For if you practice evil, be afraid, for it does not bear the sword in vain; for it is a servant of God, a revenger for wrath on him who does evil. (Romans 13:4)

Whoever sheds man’s blood, his blood shall be shed by man; for He made man in the image of God (Genesis 9:6)

Righteousness exalts a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people (Proverbs 14:34)

...keep the commandments of the LORD, and his statutes, which I command you this day for your good (Deuteronomy 10:13)

But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally (James 1:5)

cause: ‘*...I will destroy the wisdom of those who claim to know and understand*’ (Isaiah 29:14), and Jeremiah explains the reason: ‘*...Your wise men have rejected what I say, and so they have no wisdom. Now they will be trapped and put to shame; they won’t know what to do*’ (ch 8:9).

The world’s leaders have long ago abandoned the divinely revealed pattern for a successful society. It is summed up as ‘*...keep the commandments of the LORD, and his statutes, which I command you this day for your good*’ (Deuteronomy 10:13).

They are eternal, applicable to every nation, to every era of man’s occupation of the planet. They are the only firm foundation for a stable society. Ω

Request the related article:

The Terrible Ten

<http://www.cgom.org/Publications/Articles/TheTerribleTen.pdf>

Whoops! *Not again!!!*

We've all done it. Time and again we slip, and too often we—dedicated Christians—fall. Facing temptation dogs us throughout our Christian life, and all too often we are overcome.

The 'big' things such as adultery or idolatry or murder or perjury may no longer be a challenge. But that sudden angry outburst. Discontent (envy) over another's desirable situation. Petty pilfering. The 'white' lie. Inordinate desire. Rudeness and gutter speech. The unguarded comment. Holding a grudge. Finger-pointing. One drink, one pastry, too many. The apostle Paul even noted that some brethren lied one to another, defrauded one another.

We might try to pass such matters off as peccadillos—minor lapses—as did the Corinthian brethren. But, if we were to take one definition of sin, such activities are indeed *sin*: '*...for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God*' (Romans 3:23). That is, the character of God (as revealed to us in Christ's earthly walk), the nature of God to which every Christian aspires—and a standard from which we all fall short.

The apostle Paul faced the same battles. He confessed to the brethren in Rome that '*...I am carnal, sold under sin. For that which I do, I know not. For what I desire, that I do not do; but what I hate, that I do*' (Romans 7:14-16).

The apostle John reminds us: '*...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).

The writer of Hebrews challenges

us: '*...let us lay aside every weight and the sin which so easily besets us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us*' (Hebrews 12:1). How do we do that?

We are assured that Jesus has faced temptations similar to those we face: '*...we do not have a high priest who cannot be touched with the feelings of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted just as we are, yet without sin*' (Hebrews 4:15). And surely his example in resisting is a goal to which each Christian aspires.

So, we are to be '*...looking to Jesus the Author and Finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and sat down at the right of the throne of God*' (Hebrews 12:1-2). And we can be assured that '*...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).

Or, as writes the Psalmist: '*...As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. As a father pities his children, Jehovah pities those who fear Him. For He knows our form; He remembers that we are dust*' (103:12-14).

Gone!

Note the closing words of that passage from the Psalm. The Father, having suffered with His

Son during his earthly sojourn, fully understands the pressures we experience in the flesh. He understands the ravages that millennia of degeneration has inflicted on us.

And when we sin He fully accepts the awesome sacrifice of our Saviour by which our sin is forgiven. Our sin is gone—infinity. The guilt is gone. In His eyes we are cleansed, holy. [Note, though. That any consequence of our sin—eg a lost limb—remains.]

But what if the sin 'besets' us again? King Solomon remarks: '*...a just one falls seven times, and rises up again*' - Proverbs 24:16. Nobody gives up on a baby that falls at the first attempt at walking!

Let Battle Begin

Upon repentance and confession (to God), then, our sin has vanished. But—*we must tackle the sin that blights our lives.*

Writing to Timothy, Paul warns: '*...Even though they will make a show of being religious, their religion won't be real*' (II Timothy 3:5). Certainly we must be faithful to God's revealed *form* of our religion. That should go without saying. However, the Christian emphasis is on the 'inner man'—the fundamental elements of the very character of Jesus.

Piety needs to be constantly invigorated, or it withers and decays. Every Christian needs grace garnered daily from the Word of God to enable him to bear trials, to resist temptation, to discharge his duty, to live a life of faith.

Writes Paul to Timothy: '*...from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus*'

Ω

STUDY THE WORD

Be sure to enroll for our free 32-lesson Study Course. It's a key to what is for many a 'Book of Mystery'

unsigned articles are by the Editor

The Battle for Freedom

With the on-going worldwide attacks on human freedom—what should be the Christian's response?

'*What the world needs is love...*' goes the song—though that's a much abused term, and variously defined.

No-one would deny that in theory 'love' is at the heart of the Christian faith. Yet if we view the vista of history that particular faith doesn't come out looking squeaky clean.

It all went wrong when the early church began to cosy with the politicians. Compromise with the demands of officialdom in return for prestige squeezed out the remnants of the 'love' that lay at the heart of the faith. With the banner of Christ replaced in the church by the banner of state power it all went downhill.

Faith Wars

So we had 'Christian' wars to stem the tide of the influx to Europe of the 'barbarians'. We had the Christian Crusades to battle militant Islam. We had the mass mediaeval papal persecutions of dissidents—as with the Inquisition, and with the purge of the Huguenots as recently as the eighteenth century. 'Christianity' in both forms, too, sustained the recent inter-Irish wars and the on-going 'cold war' still brewing there.

Such barbarism, however, isn't confined to what passes for Christianity, for much unrest, much hot war, is rooted in some form of often sincerely-held religious belief. (We can be sincerely wrong!)

However loudly proponents of any belief system may scream that they are 'peaceable' and that their faith rejects violence—yet 'the proof is in the pudding'.

What you see is what you get. For their interpretation of their faith (Christian, Muslim, Hindu) — however misguided—is rooted in the soil of their religious sources, alliances and man-made traditions.

Freedom

In this 800th anniversary year of the signing of the *Magna Carta*—the 1215 charter that laid the foundation of our Western democratic freedoms—its message has yet to be universally learned.

In the 'Christian' world these freedoms, given that human nature needs to be curbed, are necessarily protected by benign law, while its foreign and domestic policy is not driven by religious zealotry as in so many Islamic states.

Personal Faith

While the Christian should indeed observe the established national laws, yet his or her behaviour is motivated not by law but by the inner driving force of God's indwelling Spirit—which is in perfect harmony with the

divine Law.

That's a lesson many Christian cults fail to learn! Righteousness is from within, from the heart, and not achieved by imposed compliance to a set of arbitrary rules. Wrote the apostle Paul to the Christians in Galatia: '*...stand fast therefore in the liberty with which Christ has made us free, and do not again be held with the yoke of bondage*' (Galatians 5:1).

Sharia law is Islam's legal system. It is derived from both the Koran, as the word of God, the example of the life of the prophet Muhammad, and *fatwas* - the rulings of Islamic scholars. *Sharia* differs in one very important and significant way to the legal traditions of the Western world: it governs, or at least informs, every aspect of the life of a Muslim. *Sharia* rulings have been developed to help Muslims understand how they should lead every aspect of their lives according to God's wishes. *Internet*

He adds '*...you were called to liberty*' (v.13).

In Christ we are liberated from all that oppresses us. But the apostle warns ;*...Only do not use the liberty for an opening to the flesh, but by love serve one another. For all the Law is fulfilled in one word, even in this, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself"*.

It's a sentiment also expressed by James the brother of Jesus: '*...whoever looks into the perfect Law of liberty and continues in it, he is not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work. This one shall be blessed in his doing*' (ch 1:25).

The holy Spirit reflects the divine character—which is 'love', the driving force of the true Christian. The true Christian faith, then, is not lived, nor is it advanced, by means of force or prowess or by wealth or by any human means. It is personal, individual, peaceable, from the heart and God-dependent.

Writes the apostle Paul: '*...the weapons of our warfare are not carnal [human], but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds*' (II Corinthians 10:4). Each body of believers, each individual, is empowered by God in fulfilling his or her God-assigned role in the Gospel economy—individually and in their local assembly: **cont'd p.8**

Law, in the Anglo-Saxon nations, derives ultimately from the New Testament understanding of the divine Law as it is revealed in the Hebrew Scriptures.

It has, however, now been largely overwritten (to our detriment) by various concepts alien to those Scriptures.

What Is It?

What day is the Sabbath? Obviously, assert most of the Christian faith—*Sunday*. Wrong, say Jews and other millions of the Christian persuasion. It is, *they* say, Saturday, the *seventh* day of our week. Who is right? A surprising clue is found in ‘bread’!

Well, not exactly bread as we know it, but in the ‘bread’ with which the Creator miraculously fed the people of Israel day in and day out for forty years in a barren and dry wilderness. It was called ‘*manna*’.

You probably know the story. As provisions ran out following their departure from Egypt the people had a moan—‘...*we’re starving*’. The miracle-working God had the answer. (He likes us to ask for our needs so we can understand the source of His loving care for us. And even if we moan He provides for us!) He sent them flesh in the form of an abundance of exhausted quails resting around their encampment, and ripe for gathering. And *manna*. He sent *manna*.

A Test

When they first saw it, the *manna*, the question was ‘...*what is it?*’ (‘*man na*’ is supposedly Egyptian for those words.) God used the miracle as ‘a test’ of their willingness to accept Him as their Captain and sole God, and do as He requires. (Exodus 16:4). Just as He had tested our first parents with the fruit of a tree.

So—the test? Will my people be willing to quit their Egyptian idolatrous practices and observe My Sabbath as I have appointed it? For this seventh-day Sabbath is My identifying sign (Exodus 31:13-14).

Down rained the manna for several days. Then Moses let it be known that on the sixth day of the

Manna

The *manna* was similar to a kind of grain, white, tiny, hard. To become edible it needed to be ‘... *ground in mills, or beat in a mortar, and baked in pans, and made into cakes*’ (Numbers 11:7-8). They had to daily gather a fixed quantity per person, and to cook only the amount they needed for each day.

The people were warned not to leave any of it overnight, but ‘...*some of them left of it until the morning. And it became rotten with maggots, and stank*’ (Exodus 16:20).

The uncooked left-over from the *sixth* day miraculously *didn’t* rot. (v.24).

week they were to gather twice the amount as there wouldn’t be any on the seventh day, His Sabbath. He told them that they should leave a portion *uncooked* without fear of the manna corrupting (v.23).

It *didn’t* rot, as predicted (v.24). Clearly the daily portions had been left aside uncooked.

Some of the people went out on Sabbath morning to gather manna. Tough—there was none. (Why don’t we believe what God has to say to us!) There was no doubt as to which day is Sabbath, and that He expects us to observe it.

So on Sabbath morning there would have been throughout the encampment the grinding of mills and rattling of pans as they busily prepared and cooked the manna into tasty sweet cakes! (They had already done their ‘shopping’ the previous day!) Ω

The Lord’ Supper 2015

After sundown on Thursday April 2

Days of Unleavened Bread

April 4—10

Pentecost

Sunday May 24

‘...the sense being plainly this, that they might take and boil what they would, and dress as much of the manna as they pleased, and eat what they would, but not that they were to bake and boil for the next day; for it is clear, by what follows, that the manna of the next day was not dressed either way, for then it would be no wonder that it did not stink’

Gill, on Exodus 16:23

Remember!

The Biblical spring festivals begin with a time of remembrance—the *Lord’s Supper*. On the night in which Jesus was betrayed he gathered the Twelve in a room he had set aside for them to observe the annual *Unleavened Bread* festival—a seven-day event held annually and due to begin the next evening.

[Note: The term *Passover* refers to the entire seven-day observance. See Ezekiel 45:21, Luke 22:1]

During their conversations Jesus introduced the solemn remembrance we know as Lord’s Supper, Communion *etc*—now universally observed in Christendom but at various times. Paul, though, pinpoints it to ‘...*the night in which he was betrayed*’ (1 Corinthians 11:23) - it is linked to the time of the Passover.

Jesus invited the disciples to continue the observance, commemorating his suffering and coming death through the symbols of bread and wine: ‘...*this do in remembrance of me*’ (v.24). It is to be observed ‘...*until he come*’ (v.26).

[As noted above by Ezekiel, however, *Passover* will be part of worship during the thousand year reign of Messiah.]

The Corinthian brethren were taken to task by the apostle Paul for turning the Lord’s Supper into a rowdy party. It is appropriate that we approach this service with solemnity and in an attitude of contrition and self-examination: ‘...*Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eats and drinks unworthily, eats and drinks damnation [judgment] to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body. for this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep*’ (1 Corinthians 11:27-30). Ω

Request a leaflet explaining this service

Prophecy Alert!

Scattered through the text of the Gospels—notably in Matthew chapter twenty-four—we find Jesus providing indicators as to what we should note concerning the approach of the ‘last days’. He advises us to ‘watch’: ‘...*Therefore watch; for you do not know what hour your Lord comes*’ (eg Matthew 24:42).

This has become embedded in the mind of many believers as ‘*watch world news, watch world events*’. So embedded, indeed, that many spend endless hours poring over the minutiae of broadcast and published news. ‘Prophecy buffs’ endlessly record every event as a fulfillment of one or other statement by Jesus or his apostles.

Yet years pass and the supposedly momentous events become but a footnote of history, superseded by, for example, the death of a ‘person of prophetic interest’, or the unexpected demise of a Pope, or the overthrow of a government that is seen as key to a particular prophetic interpretation. One church group had been diligently ‘watching world news’ since the early 1970s, only to be frustrated time and again!

Trying to discern if *this* is now the end time by reading the mass of interpretations of world events by self-styled ‘prophecy experts’ is a bit like trying to tell the time by watching the second hand!

Nations and empires rise and they fall. Battles are won and wars are lost. Tyrants come and go leaving a trail of destruction and chaos. Then life goes on.

But the end will come—in the perfect timing of the Father. Jesus did, however, say *watch*—‘be vigilant, keep awake’. It means, as said Jesus in parable: ‘... *know this, that if the steward of the*

house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched and would not have allowed his house to be dug through. Therefore you also be ready, for in that hour you think not, the Son of Man comes’ - vv.43-44. But, of course, we don’t know when!

How, then, can we ‘be ready’?

Be Prepared

We must heed the words of Jesus: ‘...*Be ready and keep your lamps burning just like those servants who wait up for their master to return from a wedding feast. As soon as he comes and knocks, they open the door for him. Servants are fortunate if their master finds them awake and ready when he comes!*’ (Luke 12:35-37 CEV).

The Christian life is a roller-coaster ride of successes and setbacks as we daily strive to shape our character to reflect that of Jesus our Saviour. But also knowing that the ‘support system’ for the ride is underpinned by our faithful Saviour and our loving heavenly Father.

Warning

Jesus was quick to add a warning—a message backed up by other writers: ‘...*Take heed that no man deceive you*’ (Matthew 24:4). The close of this age will be marked by a wholesale falling away from the divine way of life. Hence the urgent need for vigilance on the part of each one of us.

We must ‘keep our noses in the Bible’...*Open my eyes, so that I may behold wonderful things out of Your Law*’ (Psalm 119:18)

Let’s diligently look to the Scriptures and not to the portrayal by the ‘prophets of doom’ of ever-changing world events. Ω

Freedom ...cont’d from p.6

‘...*not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit*’ Zechariah 4:6).

We inhabit a world that embraces multitudes of intelligent minds, but minds that seem incapable of sustained commitment to the ‘ways of peace’. Indeed that ‘way of peace’ is unexplored territory for today’s world’s leaders.

Mankind long ago abandoned any pretence of being guided by the God who created all things (Romans 1:18-26). Other ‘gods’ were invented with their own autocratic and freedom-draining laws and practices.

It is remarkable that liberty and freedom of conscience is at the heart of those nations in which society is rooted in the Christian Scriptures. But by rejecting guidance—liberty is lost: ‘...*whoever looks into the perfect Law of liberty and continues in it, he is not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work. This one shall be blessed in his doing*’ (James 1:25).

God’s instructions [*torah*] are not burdensome but are beneficial for all of mankind—for individual and national freedom. Ω

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Be sure to take a look at www.cgom.org

MiniStudy**Who's in Charge?**

'Yield to those leading you, and be submissive, for they watch for your souls, as those who must give account, that they may do it with joy and not with grief; for that is unprofitable for you' (Hebrews 13:17)

The average church-goer doesn't give much thought as to who's in charge in their local church. But for others it amounts almost to an issue of salvation. The furore over female Anglican bishops is a case in point. And in the Roman Church there is a clear chain of authority up to the Pope. For many, though, the authority question is paramount. What guidance do the Scriptures provide?

- Few brethren would dispute the need for an orderly assembly, for *'...God is not the author of confusion'* (I Corinthians 14:33). Every club, every society, needs form and orderly structure with clear demarcation of functions (president, secretary, treasurer *etc*) to avoid anarchy! A local church is no different
- The complexity of the structure relates to the size. In large denominations a web of committees, bye-laws, accountants, lawyers *etc* is the norm, absorbing large proportions of income and personnel, and detracting from the prime functions of the church—evangelism and the nurture to maturity of the brethren—and is more open to abuse
- The pattern for the New Testament church, in contrast, was for individual congregations acting independently in subjection to the Head, Jesus, but co-operating with the other congregations in their area, and supporting out-reach (eg Acts 13:2-3). As they met in private homes the size of each assembly was limited. (see our article *The Small Church*: <http://www.cgom.org/Publications/Articles/TheSmallChurch.pdf>). As a result resources dedicated to administration were limited
- What of the structure in the local church? As noted, structure is important for an orderly assembly, and the apostle Paul, drawing on the form of the synagogue, ensured the churches were thus cared for. Writing to Titus (in Crete), he advises: *'...you should set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed you'* (ch 1:5)
- To further such an orderly assembly the apostle provided Timothy with an outline of necessary qualifications for the leadership: *'...that you may have rules to guide you in dealing with God's household. For this is what the Church of the ever-living God is, and it is the pillar and foundation-stone of the truth'*. They are listed in I Timothy 3:1-15 and in Titus: *'...I have left you behind in Crete in order that you may set right the things which still require attention, and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you to do'* (ch 1:5)
- The first Christians, while respectful of other assemblies (eg in Jerusalem) and to respected leaders (eg the apostles), were not administratively beholden to a distant 'headquarters'. Such independence, however, does not mean that they were chaotic (though Paul had to establish this principle with the somewhat rowdy Corinthian brethren!). Paul wrote: *'...For God is not a God of disorder, but of peace, as He is in all the Churches of His people'* (1 Corinthians 14:33). There was, in other words, no 'free for all' (II Thessalonians 3:11)
- Each congregation included not only established brethren but also those new to the faith—all levels of Christian maturity—and also *unbelievers* (I Corinthians 14:33). Clearly the 'elders' (and the *deacons* Philippians 1:1) were drawn from the mature, the experienced, brethren. The selected leaders were officially appointed to the office with the approval of the brethren: *'...in every Church, after prayer and fasting, they selected Elders by show of hands, and commended them to the Lord on whom their faith rested'* (Acts 14:23). The office is one of humble service: *'...Not that we have dominion over your faith, but we are helpers of your joy; for by faith you stand'* (II Corinthians 1:24)
- The Scriptures place on the leadership the responsibility to oversee the congregation. And the writer also urges the brethren to: *'...Obey: [Gk: by being persuaded] your leaders and be submissive to them. For they are keeping watch over your souls as those who will have to give account; that they may do this with joy and not with lamentation'* (Hebrews 13:17). The successful assembly has leadership that is both approved by the brethren and to whom they give willing co-operation

http://www.cgom.org/Publications/Leadership/Leadership_Guidelines_No_3.pdf

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