

new **Horizons**

Vol 19 No 5

September/October 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

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The church has a divine commission—but it is much misunderstood

The message preached by Jesus has sounded around the world. Sadly, it is largely ignored and misunderstood. In the days of the apostles, Paul—echoing Psalm 19:4—could say ‘... *their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world*’ (Romans 10:18). Jesus’ commission had been completed. Mission accomplished?

Of course not. Generation succeeded generation and billions more must be ‘evangelised’. For God the Father has set a fixed period of time—symbolized by the seven day week—during which He selects those whom He wants for His growing Family.

But as Jesus and his apostles predicted, his message became distorted, and few respond to the true Gospel he taught, and fewer still commit long-term to the challenge.

Today, relatively few of earth’s six billion plus inhabitants are dedicated believers—often considered by ‘mainstream’ Christians as fanatics, and to be outside the Christian pale. Much missionary effort, however, fails to reflect the fullness of the Christian Scriptures.

Kingdom Message

That message is unique—though

some denominations claim to be ‘more unique’ than the others! Their distinctiveness focuses on the significance of ‘*the gospel of the kingdom*’ (Matthew 24:14). This is assumed to have the narrow meaning of a reference to the earthly kingdom that Jesus will return to rule for a thousand years—the ‘Millennium’.

On this presumption vast resources are dedicated to preaching this message, inducing a ‘ghetto-style’ view of the church—‘us and no other’. It’s worthwhile examining this presumption.

Proclaiming the Gospel of the Kingdom

The Millennium, it should be noted, is a mere blip on the timeline of eternity. God is King of His creation (Psalm 47:2 *etc*), and has existed ‘...*from everlasting to everlasting*’ (Psalm 90:2). Certainly the coming earthly reign of Jesus Christ must be part of the message proclaimed by the church. But the ‘Kingdom message’ is much more.

Jesus asserted ‘...*I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it*’ (Matthew 16:18). It is alive today—though perhaps not so well!—testimony to his insight and authority.

Only a blind church leader would claim that all who say they are Christian are true believers. It’s a label loosely worn. Yet there are millions of sincere believers who

heard the Gospel message. For the most part, however, they have boarded a Christian ‘train’—that is, committed their life to Christ—but the train has headed along a variety of different tracks. The message of salvation was distorted—not wrong. They began with *alpha* (the misnamed ‘new birth’) but didn’t move on to *omega* (the fullness of the Gospel message).

Gospel of the Kingdom

Central to the message of Jesus is Jesus *himself*. Without him, without his death and his resurrection from the dead (I Corinthians 15:13-14)—no Christianity. Indeed the message of the Scriptures, Old Testament and New, focuses on Jesus—his life, his death, his resurrection and his continued presence on earth in his church. That was the message of the ‘...*feasts of the LORD*’ (Leviticus 23). That was the message of the prophets. That was the message of the apostles as recorded in the New Testament.

A Spirit Kingdom

While on earth Jesus stated to questioning Pharisees who were expectant of an earthly kingdom ruled over by the Messiah: ‘...*the kingdom of God is within you*’ (Luke 17:21). That is, it is a ‘heart thing’, and represented by him standing before them in their presence.

The Kingdom with its eternal King, its Laws, its whole ethos is the realm of the transformed mind. As the LORD spoke through Jeremiah: ‘...*I will write*

my laws on their hearts and minds. I will be their God, and they will be my people' (ch 31:33).

Applied to all human life and politics that transformation will—at the return of Christ—usher in an earthly Kingdom overseen by the King of ages together with his people gathered from all ages—to prepare a people for eternity.

And Now?

The church of God must focus on proclaiming the true Gospel of salvation through Jesus—not just on a tunnel vision focus on a relatively brief earthly Kingdom ‘coming soon’.

Throughout the millennia few have embraced Christ’s message fully. But the Father continues to invite all who will to become part of His Kingdom to *re-pent*—to live a life transformed—through a new covenant with Him, His laws embedded in our thoughts and actions. Those who respond—of whatever nation, whatever faith—He draws towards Jesus Christ

The church is commissioned to proclaim this message ‘*in all the world*’ - as a witness.

Beyond that coming earthly Kingdom lies an eternity of the expansion of the Kingdom of God throughout the universe—an experience beyond our wildest imaginings ‘*...Eye has not seen, and ear has not heard, nor has it risen up into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for those that love Him*’ (I Corinthians 2:9). But with God’s Spirit as guide we snatch a glimpse (v.10).

Truly follow Jesus Christ and you may be part of it. **Ω**

Kingdom...cont’d from p.3

will begin to establish the rule of the Kingdom over the despondent remnant of mankind, emerging from the worst time of trouble ever.

These refugees from all earth’s nations will begin to experience the joy of the divine rule of the Kingdom of God, the Family of God.

The prayer of Jesus will at last be fulfilled: ‘*...Your Kingdom come [and] Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven*’. The everlasting Kingdom of God, the divine Royal Family—at present reigning in heaven over the angelic hosts, and on earth in the saints—will reign supreme over all mankind.

When that thousand years of peace and perfect benign Government has come to a conclusion, all who have died in ignorance of the true Gospel will return to physical life for their (first) opportunity to access membership of the Family, the Kingdom, of God.

Crumbling Foundations

To be truly Christian in these times—to be a dedicated follower of Jesus Christ—is no easy task. We are enveloped in a ‘heathen’ society and bombarded daily with life-styles far removed from that expected of a follower of Jesus Christ

When did you last hear of someone prosecuted for adultery? No—it’s endemic, considered normal. Have you viewed a ‘decent’ modern film? Unlikely, as they overflow with violent and sexual scenes once confined to the bedroom. All publicly ‘normal’ now. There’s widespread promiscuity and alcohol abuse and pornography and horrific child abuse. The internet, for all its value, pours out an unending torrent of filth.

Dare to open the Christian Scriptures and the stark contrast of the pure ‘faith once delivered’ by Jesus and his apostles with our engulfing foetid society cannot but shock the Bible believer.

Nor does Government meddling help. Law is weighted in favour of perpetrators of criminality and against Christian

And Beyond...

That earthly Kingdom, of course, is by no means the end. For beyond lies an eternity of which we know little—yet.

Through the centuries of human existence God has gradually unveiled His magnificent plans for His beloved creation. Wrote the apostle Paul: ‘*...Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for them that love him*’ (I Corinthians 2: 9). He continues: ‘*...For us, however, God has drawn aside the veil through the teaching of the Spirit*’ (v. 10 *Weymouth NT*).

We do know that, after the Millennium ‘*...the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God*’ Revelation 20:3). This planet will become the centre of all Creation, with God Himself, our Father, present with us. *Who knows what that future holds!* **Ω**

values. New legislation favours minority views, discarding ancient principles tested over thousands of years. Nations once steeped in Christian values are engulfed by a foul-smelling secularism imported from alien cultures. God-given sovereignty is sacrificed on the altar of material prosperity and secular ideology.

Can’t we see the clear parallel with what the Scriptures call, what Jesus describes as, ‘the days of Noah’? : ‘*...as they were in the days before the flood: eating, and drinking, marrying, and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah went into the ark. And they did not know until the flood came and took all away. So also will be the coming of the Son of Man*’

‘*Eating and drinking*’? There’s a worldwide obesity crisis. ‘*Marrying and giving in marriage*’? Governments increasingly legislate for promiscuous ‘pseudo-marriage’. Just about anyone can take a partner—with the easy option of opting out of what a stable civilization requires: a lifetime commitment.

As sang the Psalmist: ‘*When the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?*’ **Ω**

Just what is the ‘Kingdom of God’? Is it here, now? Or, is it a future event?

Many Christians consider the Kingdom of God to be ‘the Church’. Parables are adduced to indicate it will begin small (1st century) and gradually grow over the centuries, culminating at the return of Jesus. For others the ‘Kingdom of God’ is a limited earth-bound kingdom, ruled over by Jesus and the saints—the ‘Millennium’. Would it surprise to learn that both views have merit?

Consider the words of the Psalmist: ‘... *Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and Your dominion endures throughout all generations* (Psalm 145:13, Daniel 4:3). Here we have a definition of God’s Kingdom. It exists eternally. It has total authority over time and eternity. It is a spirit kingdom (otherwise it wouldn’t last for ever!). And, v.1, God is the King of the Kingdom (Jeremiah 10:10)—the everlasting Spirit (John 4:24). He is ‘...*from everlasting to everlasting*’ (Psalm 41:13). His ‘... *throne is established of old: you are from everlasting*’. (Psalm 93:2).

Here and Now

‘*Throughout all generations*’. So we need to ask in what manner the Kingdom is ‘here and now’. Jesus made a strange statement: ‘...*if I with the finger of God [ie His power] cast out devils, no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you* (Luke 11:20). And ‘... *when he was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, The kingdom of God comes not with observation: Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you [ie in your midst, here with you, now]*

(Luke 17:21).

Further: ‘...*if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom*

of God is come unto you [Gk, arrived]’ (Matthew 12:28). That is, the Kingdom was with them in the form of its King.

Is that any different from today, in this twenty-first century? Recall that Jesus told his disciples: ‘...*I am with you always, even to the end of the world*’ (Matthew 28:20). How? By his Spirit.

Soon to Inherit

Jesus is living in each Christian by his indwelling Spirit (*cp* II Corinthians 3:17). Not some ephemeral notion, but *reality*. Selected by the Father, each Christian is spiritually begotten by Him, enabling us to become His children, His sons and daughters.

Writes John: ‘...*now are we the sons of God*’ (I John 3:2). And Paul, to the Christians in Rome: ‘...*You are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his*’ (Romans 8:9).

It’s a real transition from *death to life*. It’s our entry into the very Kingdom of God. The Father ‘...*has delivered us from the power of darkness, and has translated [ie, transferred] us into the kingdom of his dear Son*’ (Colossians 1:13). That is, there has been a change of kingdoms, from the physical to the spiritual.

More: ‘...*if children, also heirs, heirs, indeed, of God, and heirs*

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

The Kingdom of Godhere and now

together of Christ’ (Romans 8:17). Christians are *heirs* of the Kingdom. As children of the King, as in any royal family, it is now ours (if we continue in the faith) to be fully realized at the resurrection. We are, now, ‘...*a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people [a people for God’s possession]’* (I Peter 2:9).

The Kingdom of God is wherever the indwelling Spirit of God dwells. It is the task of the Church of God to proclaim this message worldwide to all nations: ‘...*this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come*’ (Matthew 24:14).

The Gospel is the good news that God has a plan that delivers mankind into the Family of God. By turning from sin and embracing the divine way we embrace that destiny and—like children in the womb—are ‘begotten’ children.

New Birth

Jesus and Paul tell us exactly when we will thus inherit. Jesus calls it ‘...*the resurrection to life*’ (John 5:29), while Paul pinpoints the momentous event in time: ‘...*the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first*’ (I Thessalonians 4:16). Another stage of the Father’s plan will have been accomplished.

Earthly Rule

And next? Together with the resurrected saints, Jesus *cont’d p.2*

THE TALE OF THE FROG

Maxine Kappel

Many years ago I heard a sermon about a frog. He told of how if you put a frog into hot water he would leap out, but if you put it into cold water and slowly turned up the heat he would stay there and eventually die.

I believe we as a nation are like that frog. We have been slowly indoctrinated by the wiles of Satan. We have taken Christ out of schools: no more prayers in school or at the school games. We have removed God's Ten Commandments from many public places and are continuing to make it illegal for anything Christian to be in public places.

We have allowed other cultures to come in and bring in their idols, and their religions, and as we have done these things we have seen our blessings turn to cursings (Leviticus 26). We have seen the increase in crime: stealing, robbing, home invasions, murders. We are allowing babies to be aborted and their body parts sold.

We have now legalized single-sex marriage, our children being taught in our schools that having two parents of the same sex is acceptable and that if you feel good do it. It's okay to take what God has created and make it into something else, such as a man deciding to be a woman and a woman to be a man.

We have changed God's Sabbath from the seventh day to Sunday and abandoned His holy days (*see* Leviticus 23). Ancient pre-Christian observances have been substituted teaching our children lies about Santa Claus and the

tooth fairy and bunnies laying eggs.

God's Holy days, in contrast, outline His plan for mankind. The holidays such as Easter, Valentine's Day, Christmas are man-made, influenced by the god of this world, who has '*...blinded the minds of the unbelieving*' (II Corinthians 4:4). Satan is busy. He is at work deceiving as many as he possibly can. He knows his time is short (Revelation 12:12).

Descent to Chaos

We are seeing more and more flooding, mudslides, volcanoes, earthquakes, tornadoes, famines, diseases, civil unrest, pestilences. We are entering a time of war such as never been before. Massacres are even taking place inside churches during services. (Matthew 24). Calamities which will continue to increase because of our sinful ways.

What was once a nation blessed by God because it was based on godly principles is now turning away from Him. Our blessings are being removed and cursings are taking over—just as He warned.

Christians are becoming a minority due to our failure to stand up for what we believe. We know that our lives may be in jeopardy when we voice our opinions and stand up for what is right according to God's Word. But we also know that, though we may lose our physical lives, we will gain an endless spiritual life at Christ's return.

Request, no charge:

A Message of Hope...

...for the world of tomorrow

God's plan for mankind

Rethink the Message

This is not a time for the people of God to be self-absorbed, cosy in our beliefs. Instead it's a time to reach out with God's truth. Sometimes I think we want to have things bigger and better thinking that if we have them we will have more people to attend our church. However, if God wants them there He will bring them in and they will be there even if it's standing room only—or just a handful.

I think that our time for being able to meet peaceably in public places is shorter than we may think. The gospel must be preached to all nations while it can, because we will soon see that Christians will no longer be able to use the TV, radio, internet *etc* to preach God's Word. There will come a 'famine of the Word' as evil increases.

Thanks to all of those who are proclaiming the Truth by whatever means available to them. Most of us are not preachers, but we can bring the good news into our conversations with others. We can pray, and any time that we feel pressured from within us to write we can write.

Like that frog, our nation has become used to our decaying environment. We can escape the 'hot water'—but that demands that we heed God's message through the prophet Ezekiel: '*...as I live, declares the Lord Jehovah, I do not have delight in the death of the wicked, except in the wicked turning from his way, and so to live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! For why will you die, O house of Israel?*' **Ω**

**Maxine is a member of our
Tulsa, OK congregation**

When do we observe the Bible festivals?

Since man's beginning God has prescribed how He is to be approached in worship. As He is Creator of the vastness and complexity of the universe we, His creation, bow before Him in awe of His majesty and glory and power. As part of that worship we come before Him formally on the days He has prescribed. (They are listed in Leviticus 23). These 'holy days' are, too, an annual reminder of God's plan for mankind.

To the modern believer, however, we are faced with an alien calendar on which these days are placed. When, for example, is '...the first month' (v.5). Elsewhere in Scripture it is called *Abib* and also *Nisan* (In Babylon, *Nisanu*). It isn't January! In fact on the calendar then widely in use in the Middle East it begins in use in early Spring, usually March/April. How, then, can we know when to observe the holy days?

Divine Sovereignty

Jesus Christ, in his prior eternal role as Jehovah, had authority over all of creation. Within the Godhead '...He [the Father] also gave authority to Him to execute judgment' (John 5:27). As such he delegated various roles to his creation, mankind.

Thus we were given authority over our environment, to care for it, develop it (Genesis 1:28). Into our hands was given the system of justice (Romans 13). Failure to rule by His guidelines has inevitable consequences!

Relevant to our discussion on the holy days and their timing, is a further aspect of life on earth, for Jehovah delegated specific functions to His people Israel:

'...whose are the adoption and the glory, and the covenants, and the Lawgiving, and the service, and the promises; whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to flesh, He being God over all, blessed forever' (Romans 9:4-5).

Note that word *service* (Gk *latreia*). Matthew Henry's *Commentary* on this verse says it means '...[Gk. *latreia*] They had the ordinances of God's worship among them - the temple, the altars, the priests, the sacrifices, the feasts, and the institutions relating to them'. That includes responsibility for the calendar on which the holy days fall. See also Hebrews 9:1,6.

Ancient Calendar

Israel's calendar is radically different from the one we use daily almost everywhere in the modern world, and to pinpoint where we are on it requires an understanding of its complexity. This knowledge has been preserved within Judaism, and tables have been published linking the two calendars.

As noted, authority was given by God to the people of Israel over this 'latreia'. Most Churches of God use it, but objections have been raised to the use of these tables by some observers of the Bible's holy days—largely on the

Dates of Destiny

grounds that the Jewish authorities, because they rejected the Messiah, have lost the right to oversee the calendar.

Commenting on the state of Judaism in his day, the apostle Paul states on the Jews: '...having the form of knowledge and of the truth in the Law' (Romans 2:20). Although they had the externals, the form, of God's Law, yet he shows they were far from being in submission to it. Their behaviour, in other words, doesn't affect their responsibility as custodians of the Law—including the calendar. He adds (*ch* 3:2): '...unto them were committed the oracles [Gk. *logion*] of God'.

Jesus had the measure of the religious leaders and trend-setters of his day: '...The scribes and the Pharisees sit on the seat of Moses. Therefore do and observe everything that they tell you, but do not do as [they do]' (Matthew 23:2-3).

The apostle writes further: '... what if some did not believe? Will not their unbelief nullify the faith of God? Let it not be! But let God be true, and every man a liar' (vv.3-4). And, '...It cannot be said that God broke his promise' (CEV *ch* 9:6).

Change

In sum, the holy day-observing churches of God observe the LORD's festivals in accord with the calendar overseen within mainstream Judaism. In the event of the Jewish authorities in the future calculating the calendar differently the churches would conform—but probably not without challenge! *cont'd p.7*

STUDY THE WORD
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free 32-lesson Study
Course. It's a key to what
is for many a
'Book of Mystery'

unsigned articles are by the Editor

Preach the Word!

How did the early church proclaim the message of Jesus Christ?

No-one will deny that this was a command of Jesus to his church, implied in his final words before returning to ‘...the glory I had with the Father before the world began’. He told his apostles: ‘...disciple all nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things, whatever I commanded you’ (Matthew 28:19).

The apostle Paul urged the same on his young trainee evangelist, Timothy: ‘...preach the Word, be urgent in season, out of season’ (II Timothy 4:2). Proclaim like a herald! Be urgent, year in, year out!

The book of Acts bears testimony to the apostles’ diligence in forwarding this message [Gk.*logos*], despite intense opposition—and martyrdom—from mainly the established religious authorities. The New Testament provides us with a pattern for this essential activity—the beating heart of the Gospel.

Spirit Power

The prophet Zechariah sums up how God works: ‘...Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, says Jehovah of Hosts’ (ch 4:6). That’s how Jesus carried out his ministry: ‘... Jesus the Nazarene, a man from God, having been approved among you by works of power and wonders and miraculous signs, which God did through Him in your midst’ (Acts 2:22). When Jesus healed someone it was by the exercise of Spirit power. And when he raised the dead it was by that same Spirit power.

It is, too, how the apostles did a powerful work in their day: ‘...fear came to every soul, and many wonders and miraculous signs took place through the apostles’ (v.43). Peter speaks of them as ‘... those who, having been taught by the Holy Spirit which had been sent from Heaven, brought you the Good News’ (I Peter 1:12). Jesus

had told them ‘...the one who believes in me, the works that I am doing he will do also, and he will do greater works than these because I am going to the Father’ (John 14:12)

Principles

There are clear guidelines in the Scriptures as to the methodology of evangelism, of ‘preaching the Word’, in the early church.

Rely on God’s power

The apostles ministry depended on the working of God’s Spirit. As exemplified by Peter they didn’t give ‘handouts’ but exercised spiritual power in a healing ministry ‘...Silver and gold [I do not possess], but what I have, this I give to you—in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, walk’ (Acts 3:6).

It follows on Jesus’s instruction during the time he was training the Twelve, and the Seventy (Luke 10): ‘...preach, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near!’ Heal those who are sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, expel demons. Freely you have received; freely give. Do not procure gold or silver or copper for your [money] belts (Matthew 10:8,9).

It was a work of faith, and independent of a hefty bank balance. The message is presented appropriately—but it is God who draws men and women to Jesus (John 6:44).

Make the most of every opportunity

As did Jesus, the apostles focused on proclaiming the Gospel message: ‘...they preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the Word through the miraculous signs following after (Gk. *accompanying*)’ (Mark 16:20). The spiritual power they demonstrated in turn drew an audience to them—they didn’t ‘organize a rally’ or issue invitations.

In Athens Paul did just this; ‘...he was discussing in ...the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there’ (Acts 17:17). When arraigned before the Governor Felix he took the opportunity to present the

Gospel (ch 24:25). And when in Rome in house arrest he preached to those who came to hear him (ch 28:23ff).

Go where there is religious interest

Paul ‘...as was his custom’ (Acts 17:2) went into a synagogue where he ‘...reasoned with them from the Scriptures on three sabbaths, opening and setting forth that the Christ must have suffered, and to have risen from the dead, and that this is the Christ, Jesus, whom I announce to you’.

To the High Priest Jesus said: ‘... I publicly spoke to the world; I always taught in the synagogue and in the temple where the Jews always come together, and I spoke nothing in secret’ (John 18:20).

For example, each issue of *New Horizons* is mailed to Bible Colleges and other religious institutions. Though it could well be censored or even binned!

(Would we experience today the same response as did Paul—both a positive and also a violently negative—vv 5-6—response to Christ’s message? Should we—or would that be ‘a breach of the peace’, with ensuing prison sentence? Just like Paul experienced! cf Jeremiah 1:7-8)?

Preach the Word

Jesus and his apostles heralded the good news of the Kingdom of God—that through Jesus Christ, and through Him alone, mankind can become part of the spirit Family of God and reign eternally with Him.

That message was proclaimed ‘in all the world’—that God took on human flesh, lived without sin, and bore the inevitable consequence of sin (eternal death) that man may live forever.

It is a simple message—no gimmicks. No dilution of the truth to accommodate the world. Not a social gospel. Simply a powerful invitation to enter a relationship with the God of creation. Wrote the prophet Isaiah: ‘...so shall My Word be, which goes out of My mouth; it shall not return

to Me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in what I sent it to do!’ (ch 55:11).

The local assemblies sponsored evangelism

Jesus commissioned the apostles to spread the Word, giving guidance on method: ‘...you will be witnesses of me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and Samaria, and to the end of the earth’ (Acts 1:8). It was the pattern adopted by them and by their successors.

Each local assembly evangelized their area, and as qualified personnel became available they reached out to regions beyond. The assembly in Thessalonica is an example: ‘...the Word of the Lord sounded out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone out’ (I Thessalonians 1:8). And in Antioch: ‘...these indeed sent out by the Holy Spirit went down to Seleucia, and from there sailed away to Cyprus. And coming unto Salamis, they announced the Word of God in the synagogues of the Jews’ (Acts 13:4-5).

Such a work wasn’t confined to the apostles, for we find that all Christians were involved in evangelism. Following a wave of persecutions the brethren were dispersed away from Jerusalem, leaving the apostles in the city as a witness: ‘...those who had been scattered went about proclaiming the good news of the word’ (Acts 8:1-4).

Further, the local assemblies helped to support individuals in their evangelism. Paul commends the Philippian assembly: ‘...in Thessalonica you sent to my need, both once and twice’ (Philippians 4:16).

Then...and now

Such principles apply across the ages, and provide an interesting challenge to the twenty-first century church. Vast resources are today pumped into ‘evangelism’, requiring, all too often, a vast top-heavy bureaucracy to service it.

Be a Witness

Few of us are equipped with the spiritual gifts and skills to be full-time evangelists! That does not, however, remove the obligation to be a witness of the good news of the Kingdom of God.

- witness primarily by means of your exemplary Christian lifestyle
- witness by being prepared to respond to basic doctrinal questions
- witness by being open about your faith
- witness by engaging in conversation when you detect an interest—without being pushy!
- witness through the use of your other spiritual gifts and talents

Committees galore spend endless hours in decision-making and planning and on salary structures. Complicated bye-laws are drafted detailing often simple common sense behaviour. Skilled manpower is wasted on pointless administration and empire-building rather than on active evangelism. And all the while: ‘...The harvest is much, but the laborers are few. Therefore, pray to the Lord of the harvest, that He send out workers into His harvest’ (Luke 10:2).

Divine Call

God has never left Himself without a witness. Down the millennia He has raised up men and women to carry the torch of truth: Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Elijah, David—and all the prophets, the apostles and His church. See Hebrews 11.

Samuel, for example, received a divine call to service: ‘...Samuel grew up, and Jehovah was with him, and did not let any of his words fall to the earth. And all Israel knew, from Dan even to Beer-sheba, that Samuel was confirmed to be a prophet to Jehovah’ (I Samuel 3:19-20).

They responded, whether to a ‘still

Destiny ...cont’d from p.5

The first king over the Ten Tribes, Jeroboam, became notorious in Israel for changing the holy days. He thereby ‘...caused Israel to sin’. Using the same calendar as the legitimate Jerusalem authorities he inaugurated a new idolatrous festival on a different date (I Kings 12:32f): ‘...Jeroboam made a feast in the eighth month, on the fifteenth day of the month...in the month that he devised out of his own heart’. God’s Feast of Tabernacles was observed in the seventh month.

Judaism has acted similarly in that they changed the date of the movable Feast of Weeks (also known as Pentecost) to a fixed date (Sivan 6). This has not, of course, affected the underlying calendar, and the churches of God, with a few minor exceptions, now observe it always on a movable date as God has appointed. Ω

small voice’ or a vision from on high, as with Isaiah: ‘...I heard the voice of Jehovah, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us? Then I said, Behold me. Send me!’ (Isaiah 6:8). And to Jeremiah: Jehovah said to me, Do not say, I am a boy; for you shall go to all that I shall send you. And whatever I command you, you shall speak. Do not be afraid of their faces, for I am with you to deliver you, says Jehovah’ (Jeremiah 1:7-8).

The apostle Paul, too, experienced this call to action by Jesus on his way to persecute believers in Damascus: ‘...trembling and being astonished he said, Lord, what do You desire me to do?’ (Acts 9:6).

It is vital that today’s church unshackle the God-given skills, talents and spiritual gifts Jesus has given to his brethren in order to continue his mission. We must each ask that same question: ‘...Lord, what do you desire me to do?’ Ω

Insight from Paul

The apostle Paul's letters shed a bright light on our walk with God

As noted on this page (*Read the Book*) many Christians are all at sea when it comes to their understanding of the Christian Scriptures—because they remain unread. The apostle has some useful thoughts on this.

Paul is firmly anchored in the writings of the Old Testament. He is proud to acknowledge his roots: ‘...brought up in this city [Tarsus] at the feet of Gamaliel, having been trained according to the exactness of the ancestral law, being a zealous one of God, even as you all are today’ (Acts 22:3). He was later moved to re-state his zeal for the Scriptures before Governor Felix: ‘...believing all things according to that having been written in the Law and the Prophets’ (24:14).

Paul’s zeal for the written Scriptures wasn’t just theoretical, for it was the structure on which he based his life and his Gospel outreach. In Rome his preaching involved ‘...persuading them the things concerning Jesus, both from the Law of Moses and the Prophets’ (ch 28:23). When in Thessalonica he ‘...according to [his] custom, he went in to them and reasoned with them from the Scriptures on three Sabbaths’ (Acts 17:2),

Recall, of course, that at that time there was no other Scripture than the ‘Old’ Testament. In writing to the young Timothy he recounts: ‘...from a babe you know the Holy Scriptures, those being able to make you wise to salvation through belief in Christ Jesus (II Timothy 3:15). Indeed it has been estimated that he quotes the Old Testament some one hundred and eighty times, with many other references to people, places and events associated with Israel.

The apostle knew that ‘...All Scripture is God-breathed and

profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, so that the man of God may be perfected, being fully furnished for every good

Read the Book

The source of our belief as Christians is the Bible—yet fewer than half of those who attend church read it more than once a week. And a fifth of church-goers, according to one survey, *never* read it! Yet many Americans own three or more Bibles while nine out of ten have at least one.

In Britain a survey notes that thirty percent of adults don’t recognize famous stories as being in the Bible (eg David and Goliath, Adam and Eve, Jonah and the fish). While twenty-seven percent thought *Superman* and *Hunger Games* were in it. Among children it’s worse – not even Noah and the ark!

Given that the Bible contains God’s revelation as to how we relate to Him it is unsurprising that there exists such ignorance of what the Bible teaches! Even those who read regularly are, too often, ignorant of its teachings, blinded by tradition.

Getting prophecy wrong won’t negate your salvation—but correctly understood it could save you confusion when it turns out differently. Get God’s weekly and annual holy days wrong and you will be confused as to the divine plan. Heaven or hell? You could be in for a surprise. And without the Scriptures how will you know right from wrong (Romans 3:20)?

The *Outreach Ministries* have two study courses available (no charge). **Bible Basics** is a low-key introduction to foundation teachings, and there is a more comprehensive **thirty-two lesson** course. Both are available in print form from our addresses. *Bible Basics* may be viewed on-line at www.cgom.org. They may be ordered on-line.

We encourage you to study with these as an aid—but to compare carefully with the Scriptures themselves! (See 11 Timothy 3:16). Ω

work’ (vv.16-17). The Scriptures inspired his every action. He *lived* what was written in them. Citing historical events recorded in the Scriptures he says: ‘...All these things happened to those [in Israel] as examples, and it was written for our warning, on whom the ends of the ages have come’ (I Corinthians 10:11). That means recorded for *us*!

Israel sank into idolatry, abandoning the Sabbath and holy days. Have we? They absorbed the culture of the heathen in their midst. Have we, in our ‘Christian’ society, also succumbed? Only through the Scriptures can we come to understand both the form of true Christianity and what it means in our day-to-day life.

Paul’s diarist notes of the Bereans (recently evangelized by Paul): ‘... They gladly accepted the message. Day after day they studied the Scriptures to see if these things were true. Many of them put their faith in the Lord’ (Acts 17:11). To come to an understanding and acceptance of the Gospel, to learn what God expects of us, to truly grow in grace and knowledge of Christ—we need to *daily* immerse ourselves in His inspired Word. Ω

CALLING ALL INTERNET USERS!

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

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

MiniStudy**Feed My Sheep**

Scene: an early morning lakeside stroll along the beach. The glowing embers of a charcoal fire preparing freshly caught fish for breakfast, the aroma of new bread whetting appetites. Out on the calm waters of the lake, despondent fishermen—frustrated by a fruitless night of casting their nets, and confused by the momentous events just experienced. This was the background to one of the fundamental purposes of the church raised up by Jesus Christ on that morning stroll by Jesus and his disciples: ‘...*Feed my sheep*’ (John 21:16). Jesus turned to Peter and gave him that task, later taken up by all the apostles.

- The terms Jesus uses are drawn from the world of the shepherd. “The word here rendered “feed” (Gk.*boske*) means the care afforded by furnishing nutriment for the flock. In the next verse there is a change in the Greek, and the word rendered ‘feed’ (Gk.*poimano*) denotes rather the care, guidance, and protection which a shepherd extends to his flock” (Barnes)
- Jesus recounts the characteristics of ‘the good shepherd’:
 - he knows each of his flock ‘by name’; that is, thoroughly: their needs, their aspirations
 - he is not remote; the sheep also know him and respond to him
 - he doesn’t leech off the sheep (not a ‘thief or robber’)
 - he protects from predators, even with his life
- In the beginning of the church following the resurrection of Jesus from the dead the disciples sought to follow the directions of Jesus as to how they fulfill this instruction. He taught them: ‘...*You know that the rulers of the nations exercise lordship over them, and the great ones exercise authority over them. But it will not be so among you. But whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your servant*’ (Matthew 20:26)
- As in any gathering of people in business, in government—and not least in the church—there’s a need for order, and qualified men and women are selected to fulfill the role of leadership to maintain that order. It is these latter folk Jesus is addressing. But his church is not to be viewed as some kind of oppressive government or as a business enterprise—the analogy of leadership is drawn from a different source
- The apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthian brethren: ‘...*You must follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ*’. It’s the pattern the leaders of his church are to diligently and humbly follow—the characteristics of the faithful shepherd:
 - Jesus was their *servant*: ‘...*I am in your midst as the one who serves [Gk diakoneo]*’ (Luke 22:27)
 - Jesus was *courageous*, standing up against the opposing religious authorities (Matthew 23)
 - Jesus stood strong for *truth*, facing down error (John 14:6)
 - Jesus was *compassionate*, responding to need (Mark 6:34 *etc*)
 - Jesus was *merciful* and *forgiving*, understanding human nature (John 8:3ff)
 - Jesus challenged man-made *traditions* (Matthew 5-7)
 - Jesus’s lifestyle was *holy*; he wasn’t *hypocritical*— what you see is what you get (Hebrews 4:15)
 - Jesus was *humble*, without self-exaltation (Matthew 23:12, John 13)
- All who aspire to leadership in the church should engrave in their heart this leadership style of Jesus. It is how he deals with us. It is how church leaders must deal with those placed in their care. To the leaders (elders) the apostle writes: ‘...*shepherd [Gk.pomaino=tend] the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not by compulsion but willingly, in accordance with God, and not greedily but eagerly, and not as lording it over [those under your care], but being examples for the flock* (I Peter 5:2-3). And in return, brethren should ‘...*yield to those taking the lead of you, and submit, for they watch for your souls, giving an account*’ (Hebrews 13:17). When Jesus’s guidelines for leadership are followed, then ‘...*the sheep follow him because they know his voice*’ (John 10: 4) Ω

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