

new **Horizons**

Vol 20 No 1

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addressing the important issues for today and tomorrow



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CGOM

Churches Of God Outreach Ministries

With around two thousand Christian denominations vying for your attention, it's easy to miss the important issues of life and religion. It's our hope that through *New Horizons* our readers will come to understand the true meaning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Gospel was proclaimed by Jesus and by His apostles in the clearest of terms - and recorded for us in the Scriptures. Over the centuries that truth has been buried, dug up, buried again. Our desire is to restore the simple apostolic message. We hope you will be excited by what the Scriptures reveal about life, and the horizons beyond

Who We Are

The *Churches of God Outreach Ministries* is an international association of independent local assemblies - Christians who meet together for worship, instruction in the faith and fellowship. Each assembly is self-governing according to Bible principles, but co-operates through our Conference with other like-minded assemblies to work towards agreed evangelistic goals

These goals are within the framework of the commission set for his church by Jesus: "...going, therefore, disciple all nations, baptising them...and teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19-20). He further commanded that we "...Shepherd...[and] feed my sheep".

To these ends we publish Bible-based literature - eg our bi-monthly 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 2016

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new Horizons

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A living stream connects all eras of human existence. There's a hidden continuity that makes history make sense

The course of history seems haphazard. Yet from a divine perspective man exists in five distinct - and connected - eras. We pass from *innocence* to *reason* to *Law* to *Christian liberty* - and, yet future, the earthly *reign of the Kingdom of God*. Underlying all is the same fundamental 'law of life'.

The Earliest Age

Human life began as a direct divine creation by the ever-living God. Mankind in all his complexity was created fully prepared and capable of controlling his environment. It was a time of innocence. The man and his wife were in perfect harmony with the Creator God, the Word - who had a close personal relationship with them. Along with the rest of creation '*God saw that all He had made was excellent indeed*'. Everything was in perfect harmony and environmentally balanced. Mankind, the pinnacle - and the purpose - of creation was 'perfect' and lived in harmony with the divine will.

Implicit in the divine instruction was the promise of unending life for our first parents. They had unfettered access to 'the Tree of Life'. Only by deliberate rejection - 'perfection' included freedom to choose - of God's revealed *Law of Life* would they taste death. There's no record of how long this 'innocence' lasted - some say a few hours, more likely a period of years - seven, says some Jewish tradition. But innocence came to an end.

Paradise Lost

By choosing to reject the *Law of Life* Adam and Eve, goaded by Satan, lost

their paradise and condemned themselves to a life of unnecessary toil - over and beyond what God had assigned to them. Because they chose to discard divine guidance in favour of human reason God predicted the consequences: earning a living would be unnecessarily difficult; children, despite the joy they bring, would cause sorrow in their rearing; Satan would continually try to make them stumble; no longer did they have direct access to the LORD - only through blood sacrifice. They had entered the era of *Reason*. Almost all mankind is there, still.

God, while retaining His Sovereign right to oversee His creation, left mankind to the consequence of his choices, while leaving on open door to Himself. As time rolled on the *Law of Life* was increasingly ne-

The Law of Life

glected. A few '*walked with God*', but after a mere sixteen centuries there was but one family - that of the patriarch Noah. Only Noah and his wife, sons and their wives walked in the divine pathway. But the pattern repeated. Over the next thousand years God had to intervene repeatedly to prevent human depravity leading to self-destruction - at Babel and at Sodom, the Amorites, the Egyptians, the Canaanites. And still does on occasion.

Neglect of the *Law of Life* inevitably leads to destruction. - personally, nationally, globally. It's a lesson the modern world has yet to learn, for most of humanity still lives in that Age of Reason. Since Adam's choice of this way, the human race has a mind-set hostile to God. We can devise means to avoid the effects of gravity (*eg* the aeroplane) - but the *Law of Life* is a solid wall that cannot

be breached without serious long and short-term damage. But it doesn't have to be that way.

A Beacon of Hope

In His mercy and compassion the Creator has throughout history provided for us a beacon of hope. Most of the race sank more deeply into the mire. But the light of divine truth was passed from generation to generation by men and women who resisted the pressures of society. They '*called on the name of the LORD*'. Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Gideon, David, the Prophets, numerous nameless men and women - all carried the torch of the true faith in their generation.

It's a matter of record that Abraham by faith '*...minded My voice, kept My charge, My orders, My rules and My laws*' (Genesis 26:5). Through the godly line of Abraham's firstborn, Isaac, God promised to raise up a model nation. Virtually overwhelmed by the heathen culture of their slave masters, his descendants - the children of Jacob-Israel - were spectacularly rescued (around 1500BC) in 'the exodus' from Egypt under the guidance of Moses.

The rest of the world continued their downward trek while Israel - the 'Twelve Tribes' - embraced a national Constitution which had the same *Law of Life* at its heart. Moses told the people: '*What great nation is there that possesses such righteous statutes and ordinances as this whole Law that I am setting before you?*' (Deuteronomy 4:8). Never since has any legal system surpassed it. As a model of good governance it ought, to be written into every national Constitution!

Fatal Flaw

Israel gladly embraced it. In a spectacular and emotional acceptance of the Covenant they called out: '*All*

that the LORD says we will do'. Fine words - but God knew their hearts: 'O that there were such a heart in them' He said to Moses, 'that they would fear [reverence] Me and keep all My commandments always that it might be well with them and their children for ever' (Deuteronomy 5:29). Their adherence to the covenant - and its *Law of Life* - waxed and waned for a millennium. They had barely left Egypt when they slipped back into idolatry. It was a pattern to be repeated time and again. On the heels of idolatry came conflict - invasion by surrounding hostile nations. They then cried out to God for deliverance, and He heard.

But that wasn't God's fault. There was nothing wrong - and everything right - with His Law and Covenant. But: '*...finding fault with them [ie the people]*' (Hebrews 8:8). A covenant has two sides : 'I do this and you do that'. The people dropped the ball and brought on themselves invasion and ultimately exile.

Israel had become - and continues to be - indistinguishable from the surrounding nations who were '*without God*'. Only the Tribe of Judah retains its Israelite identity.

So, *innocence* died. Mankind in general set about devising its own way of life derived from human *reason* contrary to the divine *Law of Life*. God's model nation, Israel, incorporated that *Law* into its national Constitution but all too often set it aside with dire consequences. The stage was set for a new era.

Christian Liberty

The divine plan moved on, unchanged. Satan persuaded Eve - and Adam followed - that to ignore God's guidance would be without consequence: '*you shall not surely die*', he told her. Disobey, but you can still live for ever. It's the ultimate lie that even now tangles mankind in its web. But God promised a champion who would '*bruise Satan's head*'. It's a blood-red thread that permeates all of history.

At the appropriate historical moment God stepped into our world in the

person of Jesus. He lived as a man but without sin, being sacrificed for our sin at the hand of the religious and secular authorities.

The disciples were commissioned by Jesus to take his message to all the world - a task renewed generation by generation. But it is a tough message and few are ready to fully embrace it. Those who do and who remain faithful until death will be associated with Jesus in the next phase of his plan.

In the age of *Law*, in the nation of Israel, the *Law of Life* was imposed as a legal system with just penalties administered with mercy by the Judiciary. Given human nature the 'Justice Department' of Israel's Government failed. As with all the faithful since Creation the *Law of Life* would now be imprinted in the human heart. Submission to it is not imposed by authority - secular or religious. On our willing change of spiritual direction and our baptism God implants His mind in us - the '*gift of the Holy Spirit*'. The Spirit prompts and energizes us - with our active co-operation - to submit to the divine will - to live by the same *Law of Life*.

Jesus, in the *Sermon on the Mount* (eg Matthew 5-7), made it clear that God's Law was not abolished but now pierces even to the human thoughts - no longer mere external obedience enforced by penalties. As long as that Spirit dwells in us we are assured of eternal life. The degree to which we each voluntarily submit to the terms of the *Law of Life* determines our role in the Kingdom of God.

The Law of Life

Since mankind's beginning, then, this *Law of Life* has flowed through every age - a cleansing stream that can refresh every nation, every individual that drinks of it. God's Law - His instruction, His Manual for the conduct of life - is as vital to human well-being today as it has been since man first walked the Earth. Failure to heed it, failure to write it into national law, failure to voluntarily submit to its provisions will exclude us from God's richest temporal material

and spiritual blessings.

At the heart of this Law lie the much maligned 'Ten Commandments'. All of its provisions may be traced scattered throughout the Bible - *before* Moses was handed them by God engraved in stone as the foundation document of Israel's Constitution. As wrote the apostle Paul: '*the law is holy, just and good...[and] spiritual*'

The story, however, doesn't end there. The God who instructed Adam, who taught and guided Abraham, who talked face-to-face with Moses, who became man to die for our sin and continues to walk in the midst of His church - this same will return to establish this Law for all mankind.

And yes - that same *Law of Life* will continue to be applied. How could it not when Jesus himself gave it such an accolade!

A New Beginning: God Reigns

A period of 'shock and awe' is predicted for modern Israel - both Houses. The survivors, however, will have a new beginning initially in what is today known as 'Palestine' - but a territory enlarged to extend from the Nile to the Euphrates.

The Prophets give further insight. Ezekiel, for example. He passes on God's message that the LORD will one day re-unite both Houses of Israel - separated since the time of Solomon's successor, Rehoboam:

'Observe. I am taking the children of Israel from among the nations whither they are gone, and will gather them from every quarter and bring them into their own land. One king shall be king over them all. They shall no longer be two nations, and no longer divided into two kingdoms. Neither shall they defile themselves with their idols, their foul practices and all their other transgressions; for I will save them from all their sinful apostasies' (ch 37:21-23)

But *change* is vital. There will, at long last, be perfect incorruptible Government, as the resurrected *[over*

The Unchanging God

God says 'I don't change'. Is that always true?

Casual readers of the Bible could be a bit confused by a couple of statements about the nature of God. The prophet Malachi records this: '*...I, Jehovah, change not*' (ch 3:6). And in the New Testament: '*...Jesus Christ, the same yesterday and today and forever*' (Hebrews 13:8).

God will never change His plan and purpose for mankind—He is preparing a Family to join Him for eternity. And could we trust God if His very nature were fluid, if we couldn't depend on His Word, His integrity?

Yet God clearly *has* 'changed'. He no longer, for example, asks for animal sacrifice. We are no longer required to worship only at the Temple in Jerusalem (John 4:21). Nor are external symbols of our relationship with Him required—we are to worship 'in spirit'. So we don't wear special garments, nor inscribe the Law on our door-posts, nor use phylacteries *etc.* We can't take part in the various rituals to which the Israelites were subjected under Israel's national Constitution, as there is now no Temple.

There has, too, been a further change in that God doesn't expect Christians, as 'strangers' among earth's billions, to have direct influence on the civil or criminal law of our respective nations. That has been delegated—for better or worse!—to the civil authorities (Romans 13).

Historic Change

When we browse the annals of history we note other changes. Not long after Creation, for exam-

ple, man's relationship with God hit the barriers. No longer did man daily have 'sweet communion' with the Creator but had to approach Him through laborious blood sacrifice.

Then, after fifteen hundred years of mankind's long moral decline the point was reached where God says: '*...And Jehovah repented that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved to His heart*' - Genesis 6:6.

Another example, from the time of Moses, is relevant. Following the return of the spies (sent to prospect Canaan) the Israelites rebelled and threatened to stone Moses and Aaron. God made clear He was again ready for change, that He would replace Israel with a new nation: '*...I will smite them with the pestilence, and disinherit them, and will make of thee a greater nation and mightier than they*' (Numbers 14:12).

Prophetic Change

God also 'changes His mind' in the outcome of events He has prophesied. Ancient Nineveh is an example. Jonah was sent to announce to the city that they were doomed because of their violence. But they changed—repented—on hearing the prediction. God changed, sparing them.

What Doesn't Change

Look again at that statement to Malachi: '*...I, Jehovah, change not*'. Then God continues: '*...Because of this, you sons of Jacob are not destroyed*'. The implication is that despite deserving of being wiped out (again!) God expresses His mercy towards Israel.

God's perfect character doesn't change. Jesus, at one with the Father, is a true representation of the Father. Compassionate (Psalm

Law of Life...cont'd from p.2
'saints' reign alongside the Messiah.

And the people, too, will be changed. Hear Jeremiah: '*See. The days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the House of Israel and the House of Judah; not like the covenant I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, which covenant of Mine they broke, although I was a husband to them*' (ch 30:31-32).

God 'married' Israel but, because of their infidelity, 'divorced' them. But He will re-marry! The first marriage covenant (Exodus 19-23) clearly demonstrated that man's - and not just Israel's - innate hostility to his Creator hindered sustained submission to the terms of the covenant, and cut them off from its blessings.

In the 'new covenant': 'I will put My Law in their inward parts and upon their hearts will I write it' (v.33). The Law of Life - just as with true Christians today and as with all God's faithful throughout the ages - will then be imprinted on the minds of all Israel and of all mankind. Ω

78:38). Merciful (Psalm 103:8). Lovingkindness (Psalm 36:7). Just (Psalm 19:9). True. He is: '*...merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and great in goodness and truth*' (Exodus 34:6).

That's what is unchanging about our God. When Solomon writes '*...Trust in Jehovah with all your heart, and lean not to your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths*' (Proverbs 3:5-6), then we have the full surety of His support in all our needs and throughout our lifetime. Ω

Living With Stress?

It's the new buzz word. But how do we cope?

Virtually every ill to which man is heir sooner or later gets labelled as 'stress-induced'. Failure to deal with it adequately is known to be a major factor in the genesis of heart attacks, of gastro-intestinal problems, of 'nerve' conditions.

The popular press abounds with tips on how to cope—so is it worth the paper this article is written on to address it again? Is there more to say?

Start with a definition. It is '*the state which is seen in response to internal or external stressors*'. Note—stress is a *response*, the response within your body adversely affecting you.

'Stress... the state which is seen in response to internal and external stressors'
The Psychology Dictionary

Flight Mode

We are, of course, designed by the Creator to have a stress response. When we perceive danger our body instantly rushes into 'flight mode', and various physiological changes occur to enable a helpful response, for example—*flight* or *fight*. (The mind decides which!) The body supplies the necessary ingredients.

A degree of stress is necessary for our well-being, as the body must respond to calls on its resources. Quick action may be needed to 'catch a bus', or to deal with an emergency (the chip pan ignites!), or to deal with a caller, and our internal hormonal mechanisms react immediately in support. It's our built-in biological system that maintains our physical body in equilibrium.

Self-image

We are, however, much more than physical, for there are other elements to what makes me 'me'—the emotional side, and the spiritual.

As we mature we become subject to

myriad influences—influences that shape what we are: our family, our environment, our education, our religion, our experiences. They combine to build in us a unique (to each) image of self. That image can become set in concrete, and is the key to how we react to an external stimulus, the source of our distress (job, spouse, child, money, illness, computer *etc*).

A work colleague may plague your life and you go home upset, head-achy, grumpy—yet apparently others are unaffected. Why? Because they have a self-image that can accommodate the 'enemy's' foibles. Their *perception* of the individual is different, and they do not have your painful stress reaction.

Self Assessment

Stress—the natural response of the body—is always within *you* and not directly caused by the external source. (Which usually can't

be changed!) 'Stress' is loosely viewed today as a cause. *It isn't*. Stress is not a cause, but the effect of the disturbance of our equilibrium, our internal balance. It is the result of our faulty response to our perception of the causal source. It is a cluster of discomforts such as headache, 'nerves', depression, irritability, sleeplessness, anxiety, upset digestion.

How, then, do we avoid a faulty stress response? Can we change that unique self-image? All those lifetime influences have contributed to what we now are. They have instilled

in us a set of beliefs, principles by which we live. If they are inflexible ('That's just me!', 'I'm right') we will assuredly encounter internal conflict. Result—stress and its unpleasant consequences.

Something has to give—and it won't be that external event perceived as a 'stressor'. Your colleague goes on her merry way, oblivious to your reaction! The computer is still an inanimate machine that has probably been mishandled. The missed deadline is perhaps because you didn't deal with it earlier enough.

Clearly, *you* have to make an adjustment in who you think you are, and self-examination is needed. Uncontrolled emotions—jealousy, anger, shame, fear *etc*—can make our self-image unstable, and generate that unpleasant stress response and even lead to various debilitating illnesses.

Are you, for example, deep-down jealous of your colleague or angry at his or her success? If so, why? Do you lack the necessary self-confidence or skills? What steps can you take to develop them?

A Matter of Faith

Christians (and all of us!) have a ready role model, a living example of the perfectly balanced mature personality—Jesus Christ our Saviour. He was the full expression of God our Father who is perfect love, and he has hewn a pathway for us to follow. The apostle Paul expressed it this way: '*...Be imitators of me, as I am also of Christ*' (I Corinthians 11:1).

Jesus had 'all his ducks in a row'. Nailed to a stake he had the inner grace to seek forgiveness for his torturers. In a storm he stayed in control. In face of religious persecution he reacted calmly and appropriately. His walk matched his talk.

Christians—those in whom dwells the Spirit of God (Romans 8:9)—have an advantage. As the children of God, '*...if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new!*' (II Corinthians 5:17).

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

As spiritual ‘embryos’ we have implanted in us the seeds of perfection—seeds which we must each cultivate.

The ‘S’ Word

Underlying much of our illness and our so-called stress is that now old-fashioned concept ‘sin’. All of mankind is out of kilter with what makes for abundant health, and it has repercussions within our body.

Our equilibrium is based on God’s revelation for how we should behave for optimum health of body and mind—His ‘Law’, His guidance, our ‘operating system’: ‘...forget not my law [Heb. torah—precepts] but let your heart keep my commandments: For length of days, and long life, and peace [Heb. shalom - favour, prosperity, health], shall they add to you (Proverbs 3:1-2).

[Note: We experience the effects of going contrary to these precepts even if we are unaware of the Law (Romans 2:15). We are ‘coded’ from conception to live in accordance with it.]

Israel’s King David well understood the link between sin (which originates in the mind) and its effect on health:

‘...My awful worries keep growing. Rescue me from sadness. See my troubles and misery and forgive my sins (Psalm 25:17-18)

My whole body is diseased because of my sins. I am drowning in the flood of my sins; they are a burden too heavy to bear. I have been foolish, my sores stink and rot. I am bent over, I am crushed; I mourn all day long. I am burning with fever and I am near death. I am worn out and utterly crushed; my heart is troubled, and I groan with pain (Psalm 38:3-8).

When we fail to properly deal with sin or with what we perceive as ‘an enemy’ (a colleague, a deadline, a house move, money, the weather, a missed bus, divorce etc) then the body responds with those familiar reactions we call ‘stress’.

What steps can we take towards

Mind and Body

If you are wicked, you will be destroyed by your own sin (Proverbs 11:5)

Kindness is rewarded-- but if you are cruel, you hurt yourself (v.17)

Worry is a heavy burden, but a kind word always brings cheer (12:25)

A cheerful heart makes good healing, but a stricken spirit dries the bone (17:22)

It's healthy to be content, but envy can eat you up (14:30)

A kind answer soothes angry feelings, but harsh words stir them up (15:1)

Happiness makes you smile; sorrow can crush you (v.13)

Do not be anxious, saying, What may we eat? Or, what may we drink? Or, what may clothe us? For after all these things the nations seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you have need of all these things (Matthew 3:31-32)

It is God who clothes the wild grass---grass that is here today and gone tomorrow, burned up in the oven. Won't he be all the more sure to clothe you? What little faith you have! (v.30)

Don't worry about tomorrow. It will take care of itself. You have enough to worry about today (v.34)

Christ-like equilibrium?

Spiritual Armoury

As Christians we inherit an extensive armoury of spiritual weapons:

- *Faith* certainly—belief, trust in a loving Father in face of every challenge we encounter, confidence that we are individually created in God’s image, and personally known to Him, and that He cares
- *God’s Word*, the Bible, as an encyclopaedia of guidance on principles for daily living

- *Prayer and supplication* and *fasting* for divine intervention and support, knowing ‘...all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose’ (Romans 8:28)
- *Truth* concerning the nature of God and man and His plan for us, thus removing destructive and confusing—and stress-inducing—traditions such as a false notion of the after-life
- *Confession* of sin to God and to those against whom we have transgressed, and the certainty of God’s full forgiveness (Psalm 103:10-12)
- Take *personal responsibility* for our short-comings. We alone can transform our attitude
- And above all, *God’s Spirit* implanted in us upon our repentance and baptism, the fruits of which, as we actively co-operate, mature in us during our lifetime in Christ (Galatians 5:22-23).

When experiencing stress—that is, all those ugly reactions in your body—examine the external source on which you are pinning blame. *It’s not the cause!* The bus is gone (you were late), the chip pan is still blazing (you forgot about it), the computer has crashed (you didn’t ‘save’).

Because we are imperfect beings, because of our ill-formed and inflexible mental structures, because of our mal-formed emotions (anger, envy etc), because of unconfessed sin, because we are deficient in our trust in our heavenly Father (faith)—because of such factors we will continue to have a faulty response to what we perceive as a threat.

The apostle Paul had this to say: ‘...Don’t worry about anything, but in all your prayers ask God for what you need, always asking him with a thankful heart. And God’s peace, which is far beyond human understanding, will keep your hearts and minds safe in union with Christ Jesus’ (Philippians 4:6-7). **Ω**

Roots of Corruption

When the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do? (Psalm 11:3)

The Western Anglo-Saxon democracies cannot lay historical claim to any form of Utopian perfection. Yet as we emerged from the mediaeval darkness, and largely fueled by Biblical principles, we have truly been a blessing to the world—despite the immature rantings of 1960's student protest and continued in their now grown-up egos.

So what has happened? Why is the United States now widely despised by nations large and small, and fast losing global influence? Why has Britain lost its world-girdling empire, is head-over-heels in debt and sinking in a sea of immorality, ruled by self-serving and usually clueless politicians?

The Foundation

There have, of course, been periods when raw human nature was in the ascendancy. But since the ninth century, English life has been underpinned by law—and law based on that given by God to Israel through Moses—notably the legal code drawn up by King Alfred, a code that reflected that of his Anglo-Saxon ancestors.

In their centuries-long trek from the Middle East through Europe they retained many elements of the culture and the laws instilled over centuries in Palestine.

The Book

In mid sixteenth century, Erasmus provided a complete New Testament in Greek and Latin—a text (*textus receptus*) used by William Tyndale in his English translation. Tyndale was convicted of heresy and strangled for his efforts.

'His dying prayer that the King of England's eyes would be opened seemed to find its fulfilment just two years later with Henry's authorization of the Great Bible for the Church of England—which was largely Tyndale's own work. Hence, the [Tyndale Bible](#), as it was known, continued to play a key role in spreading [Reformation](#) ideas across the English-speaking world and, eventually, to the [British Empire](#)' (Wikipedia).

The population sank into what was described as 'in religious and moral apathy'. But Reformation ideas had begun to permeate, and a few preachers (notably the Wesleys, who founded the Methodist Church in mid 1700's) called on the populace to 'repent'. Their message was firmly grounded in the Scriptures, though the established church remained immune and opposed.

Sunday Schools were set up by the publisher Robert Raikes (d.1811) to educate children and to teach the Bible, and by 1900 three out of four children in England were attending. Missionary and Bible societies spread the Scriptures around the world.

A 'new morality' set in, alcohol use and Dickensian squalor was curbed. Christian activists such as Wilberforce and William Booth, worked to outlaw slavery and improve the state of the poor and needy. World War II even saw a nation, at the behest of King George VI, at prayer for deliverance during the Battle of Britain. There were similar movements in the United States.

The Bible teaching impacted society, and for all its imperfections the populace was in general law-abiding, courteous, patriotic, content and secure within our borders. Neighbour trusted neighbour, business was honest, crimi-

In the United States there are eleven churches per ten thousand population compared to twenty-seven in 1900. There's now a net loss of three thousand churches a year—only one thousand new starts. Over five million quit church attendance each year.

A UK survey in 2007 found that only 7 per cent of the population considered themselves as practising Christians, and two-thirds have no connection with church..

Regular church attendance in the United Kingdom stands at 6 per cent of the population with the average age of the attendee being 51, a decline in church attendance since 1980, when regular attendance stood at 11 per cent with an average age of 37. It is predicted that by 2020, attendance will be around 4 per cent with an average age of 56.

nality curbed.

Changed Times

Not any more! Since the 60's religious fervor and morality have steeply declined in Britain and the United States. In one short period in the UK our leaders, in what one author described as 'an orgy of social emancipation', unleashed legalized abortion and homosexuality, relaxed laws governing marriage and divorce leading to wholesale family breakdown.

The trend continues. Music has become tortured protest. The arts defiled, crass. Censorship all but abolished. Marriage for all its challenges besmirched by re-definition. Abortion kills two hundred thousand annually in the UK. In the USA there have been over fifty million such deaths since 1973. Once-trusted bankers have become corrupt pariahs, and respected businesses corrupted. Obsequious subservience to foreign powers in pursuit of economic growth. *p.8*

Jesus asserted that his church—alive and well to this day—would never die out. Yet over the two millennia since then its size and influence waxed and waned—almost at times to near extinction. Why?

There's widespread misunderstanding of the purpose of the church of God. Most Christians believe or assume that Jesus' purpose is to save the world. That 'evangelism' would ultimately conquer the world for Jesus.

The Scriptures, however, present a different scenario: '*...will the Son of Man find faith on earth when he comes?*' (Luke 18:8). Sounds like a 'No'! Indeed, according to the record the true Christian faith will again be close to extinction in the dark days before his coming.

Notice the words of Jesus in his prophecy of those days: '*...false christs and false prophets will rise up. And they will give great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect*' (Matthew 24:24). And, '*...many false prophets will be raised and will cause many to err [ie from the true gospel]. And because lawlessness shall have been multiplied, the love of the many will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end, that one will be kept safe*' (vv.12-13).

A long way from a world converted to Christianity—of any kind!

Why Evangelize?

The evangelical fervor of the apostle Paul puts to shame our current outreach attempts. He took to heart the commission of Jesus to '*...disciple all nations, teaching them to observe all things, whatever I commanded you*' (Matthew 28:19-20). Even to the point of being 'taken up for

Why the Church Ebbs and Flows

dead' as a result of his preaching. No doubt that we are expected, whatever the opposition, to energetically proclaim that same message.

Why, then, don't we see 'results'?

God's Purpose

If not 'saving the world' what is God's purpose for His church? He certainly '*...is not willing that any should perish*' (II Peter 3:9). But like any sensible businessman He is selective in His personnel, those He wants to work with Him throughout eternity as true Family members.

The church is the vehicle through which He carries forward that plan. Wherever the Gospel is proclaimed, wherever His Word becomes available in an understandable way—from those the Father selects individuals to draw to Jesus Christ (John 6:44).

Choose

God, however, is not coercive. He doesn't impose His will on anyone—we must individually choose. As Peter pointed out, He is patient with us, awaiting our response: '*...God is patient, because he wants everyone to turn from sin and no one to be lost*'.

Much can impede a positive choice—spiritual blindness (Ephesians 2:2), entrenched beliefs, opposition (eg from family, colleagues), family affairs or just waning interest. Only those who stick with it will in the end be 'chosen'.

[Elsewhere we have shown that God's plan of salvation includes a future opportunity, following a resurrection from the dead, for all who in this life were not chosen.]

Given the divine attention to detail (*cf* creation!) we can assume God has reason for all His works—and especially His invitation to join His spirit Family. As noted, He doesn't *force* anyone to become Christian. But He also assigned His Church a great commission.

Lost Values

Sadly, the fervour for acting on that commission has indeed ebbed and flowed. Self-serving church leaders lined their own nests, sought secular authority, abandoned God's Word and substituted a false Gospel, a false Jesus. Wrote the apostle Paul: '*...I am astonished that you are turning away so quickly from the one who called you by the grace of Christ to a different gospel*' (Galatians 1:6). And, '*...another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or if you receive another spirit, which you have not received, or another gospel, which you have not accepted*' (II Corinthians 11:4).

No surprise that the true gospel no longer was heard—on the streets and even less in the church!

The rising tide of immoral public opinion swamped the sound of the Gospel for many centuries, engulfing the church leadership and leading to the excesses of the Inquisition by the established 'church', and to the martyrdom of those who opposed it. Few responded to the muted sound of God's call.

Trumpet Call

God, however, remained in control. He influenced geo-politics to place the nations in accordance with His master-plan for the end times. *[over*

CHURCH...cont'd

Over the centuries God perfectly positioned His nation of Israel to wield worldwide influence, provided the means—and through them the fading light of the Gospel was fanned to a bright flame.

The sixteenth century Reformation prepared the way for religious freedom, and men were stirred to translate the Scriptures (long suppressed by the 'church') for the masses—and authorised by the highest in the land. The means of propagation were enhanced by the printing press and the dark days of papal supremacy were enlightened.

God's Spirit stirred some to in-depth study of His Word and the original Gospel was gradually restored. On time. Minds were opened to the apostolic teaching and truth is being restored.

As the Word spread (missions, Bible societies, modern transportation, the media—and now the internet) many more heard God's call and His Church began to revive as more heard the invitation.

A Lesson from History

Jesus made clear that the way he taught isn't easy, that few would find it, fewer still persist in it: '*... the gate to life is narrow and the way that leads to it is hard, and there are few people who find it*'.

He warned that false teachers would abound—as came to pass even during the lifetime of the apostles: '*... Be on your guard against false prophets; they come to you looking like sheep on the outside, but on the inside they are really like wild wolves*' (Matthew 7: 14-15).

Basic human instincts don't change. We can expect our behaviour patterns to be repeated,

personally and as part of the human family. No surprise, then, that the wise Bible writers foresaw a decline in moral values, the abandonment of the restraints of faith and the casting off of belief in the Creator.

Wrote Peter '*...during the last days scoffers will come walking according to their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of His coming? For from which time the fathers fell asleep, all things remain so from the beginning of creation*' (II Peter 3:3-4). Respect for God—and man—declines by the day.

No surprise, then, that '*...the love of many grows cold*'. The rising tide of immorality engulfs even those committed to Jesus Christ. Little wonder the church, the dedicated minority, fails to numerically grow.

God remains in control, still calling and still selecting His children. And as in ancient Israel (I Kings 19:18) He has in these days reserved the perfect number for Himself. Ω

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Roots...cont'd from p.6

Roots of Corruption

Church attendance down [see sidebar]. Sunday Schools barely attended with little but religious pap taught. Atheism popularized by scientists and touted through the media. The authority and relevance of God's Word in the Christian Scriptures downgraded even by church leaders. Add in the influx and toleration of alien faiths coupled with a failure by the church to powerfully preach a message of true muscular Christianity—is it any wonder we are now swimming in a moral sewer?

Government has long abandoned any semblance of Biblical morality. Christianity is despised, foreign faiths protected. The economy is mortgaged to foreign creditors. National sovereignty is subject to foreign dictate. Work ethic is undermined by bloated welfare. The elderly are neglected—not just by Government but also by 'loving' families. Immorality is encouraged by turning a blind eye to immoral behaviour. Criminality goes largely unaddressed.

Time for Change

There can be change. It has been said that the national change induced by the preaching of the Wesleys averted a French-style revolution. A century later Victorian England saw a moral reversal. Perhaps a rising generation will be repulsed by the detritus of the hedonism and the new immorality that now engulfs us, and also have a heart change.

If there is no such sea-change, no 'repentance', no turning to the one and only true God, then the Bible prophecies of the deadly destruction of our nations will inevitably roll in on us.

If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land
(II Chronicles 7:14)

Ω

MiniStudy**Church Foundations**

***‘I will build my church, and death itself will not have any power over it’ (Matthew 16:18)
 ‘...being built up on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ
 Himself being the cornerstone’ (Ephesians 2:20)***

The faith that bears the name of its founder, Jesus Christ, has a mixed and sometimes tragic history. It soon forsook the simple foundation pattern of belief taught by Jesus and his chosen apostles and sank into the depravity of the mediaeval church. Only a tiny remnant of faithful believers remained throughout the centuries to carry the torch lit by them. But as Jesus predicted, his true church would remain till he returns. The term ‘church’, however, has been greatly abused.

- ‘Church’ (Gk. *ecclesia*) derives from two words *called* and *out*, used in Greek for any gathering of citizens summoned to discuss matters of State. The Greek Old Testament uses it for an assembly of the people of Israel. It can refer to any gathering, good or bad (Acts 19:32). The word appears as *church* (*churches, assembly*) over one hundred times in the New Testament, and refers to the assembly of those committed to Jesus. As the years rolled by the word came, wrongly, to be applied to the building in which the church assembled
- ‘Membership’ is more than a roll-call. Simply entering the building, no matter how frequently, doesn’t make an individual part of the church of God, for being part of the church results from a conscious decision to commit to Jesus as the one and only Saviour of mankind—having responded to the Father’s invitation, His calling (John 6:44), issued through His church. After heart-felt change they receive the indwelling Spirit of God: ‘...if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his’ (Romans 8:9)
- Confusion reigns in modern Christendom to so great an extent that one church differs so much from another it could appear to be a different religion. Different doctrine. Different ministry. Different structure. And for the most part far removed from the simplicity of the New Testament church—that church, as noted by the apostle Paul, was built on the foundation of Jesus Christ and accurately passed on by his chosen apostles (Ephesians 2:20). After Jesus’ resurrection from the dead He appeared to them over forty days, explaining all they needed to know in establishing the church (Acts 1:3). It is to this teaching—expounded in the New Testament—that God’s church refers in all ages for its teaching, its structure and its administration. The brother of Jesus, Jude, has this to say: ‘...[I] encourage you to contend for the faith delivered once and for all to the saints’ (Jude 3). Jesus is the foundation, the chief cornerstone (Ephesians 2:20)—‘all other stones will be set in reference to this stone, thus determining the position of the entire *structure*’
- From its beginning, even while the apostles lived, the church was under siege. The apostle Paul to the elders in Ephesus: ‘...I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. And from among you yourselves men will arise, speaking [perversions of the truth] in order to draw away the disciples after them’ (Acts 20:29-30). Succeeding generations ‘believed’, just as in the time of Jesus, but a spirit of blindness descended and few truly progressed to full commitment. Such ‘perversions of the truth’ as noted by Paul remain to this day in Christendom. The New Testament records the foundation principles for the ethics, the teaching and the organization of the church—a pattern for the church to observe throughout the ages. That ‘...faith once for all ‘delivered to the saints [the church]’ has been all but abandoned in Christendom
- At the heart of the first century church—in contrast to the gross immorality around it—was the transformation of each Christian towards the perfect ethical character exemplified by Jesus, their lives changed from sexual promiscuity, from idolatry and from being thieves and drunkards (I Corinthians 6:9-11). Within the bosom of each local assembly the ‘babe in Christ’ was nourished towards Christian maturity (*ch* 3:1-2)
- In the beginning (but not for long!) there was harmony of doctrine solely reflecting the teaching of Jesus and the apostles (I Corinthians 4:17). The church continued to observe the seventh-day Sabbath and the Bible holy days until all but swamped by idolatry, substituting pagan practices and festivals, and abandoning the Sabbath
- In contrast to later Christendom’s embracing of a ‘denominational structure’ (Roman Catholic, Baptist, Methodist *etc*), the apostles set a pattern of inter-dependent local assemblies, each holding firmly to apostolic teaching, practice and tradition (*eg* I Corinthians 11:1, II Thessalonians 2:15). They were city-based (Jerusalem, Antioch, Corinth *etc*), often assembling in several locations within each city, and were each overseen by a qualified elder (*see* Acts 20:17ff). The collective church leadership of a city worked together and were responsible for the protection and health of the assembly, and for church-planting (Acts 11:19-22)

Christendom, though it has incorporated many of Jesus’s ethical principles, is no longer recognizable as the church he set about building. Every professing Christian must actively review the Scriptures—and what they hear from the pulpit—to emulate the Bereans ‘...[receive] the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so’ (Acts 17:11). You are in for a shock! Ω

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