

new Horizons

Vol 20 No 4

July/August 2016

addressing the important issues for today and tomorrow



inside...

Church Governance

Tabernacles

CGOM...a review

Our Amazing Potential

When You Die

God's Choice

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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new Horizons

Issue No 118

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The Christian centuries have spawned a multitude of forms of “governance”. Do the Scriptures provide guidance?

Generally, governance is described as congregational, presbyterian and hierarchical forms - divided by degrees of independence and centralization. And we see all in action today, even within the Churches of God of our own tradition. They all are in some degree effective.

However, it's pertinent to ask, *Is there a format handed on by the primitive church, from the apostles?* It is sometimes claimed that the answer is *No*, that we are free to devise our own form.

Clearly there have to be differences between the first century and any time subsequent to

the apostles. For example, there is simply no-one today with inspired apostolic authority who can give a “thus says the Lord”. I suggest that the authority in the Church of God today lies in the Scriptures. The challenge - and the danger - comes in the matter of interpretation.

It is from the Scriptures that we derive true doctrine, and it is surely sensible to assume that the form of governance left by the apostles is for our learning. Deviate from the apostolic form (in the fundamentals) and we become less effective. Indeed if we ignore the apostolic pattern we are guaranteed that glitches will develop along the way. Like most Biblical doctrines, of course, the complete picture is not spelled out for us in any one text.

Our Tradition

The eighty-year history of our tradition witnessed the evolution of the concept of church government. Our

early approach changed from a somewhat democratic form to a hierarchical. It is not unreasonable to ask if all the changes were positive.

Indeed they were based on faulty assumptions relating the practice of the Old Testament to that of the Church. An example is equating the church leadership with the Old Testament Aaronic priesthood. Another is falsely assuming a “pyramid” style of governance under Moses. (Note that the essence of Moses’ form was that all judgments were made at the lowest level - a practice Jesus promoted (Matthew 18:15ff)! And now we see the adoption of a ‘business model’ of governance.

A lesson from history on...

Church Governance

We need to learn from our experiences, but also to constantly measure our “experiments” against the rule of the Scriptures. This test was abandoned along the way.

Certainly the fruits were both good and destructively bad. A great work was done. But the seeds of division were sown in fertile soil. This is not to ignore the fact that heresy and division will occur anyway, even were we to implement the “perfect” form of governance. Recall the New Testament divisions and heresies! The modern descent into heresy was in part an effect of the form of governance we imposed. Indeed it mirrors the progress of the church in the first century.

Pattern of Growth

Examine the development of the primitive church. An apostle or evangelist would go to an area, preach the Gospel, form an assembly - and go away, perhaps never to return. The same process was repeated - twenty

miles away, a hundred, perhaps five hundred. The apostle might return - as at Lystra, Iconium and Antioch - to appoint a foundation leadership. Or he would send an “apostolic delegate” for that purpose, as Titus in Crete.

This held true during the era of inspired apostles. But they gave guidance for future generations by outlining leadership qualifications (I Timothy 3, Titus 1) and procedures (II Timothy 2:2, 5:22).

Also, an individual Christian would through personal testimony gather around himself or herself a growing band of new Christians.

Time passes. The local assembly puts out “runners”, forming new local assemblies and each of these appointing elders. The new “church plants” would have emotional and perhaps leadership ties to the “mother” church. Those nearby will naturally co-operate in joint worship and other activities. Distant church plants (as a result of evangelism) will develop in a similar manner. Each assembly included members of the one Body of Christ, but it was not externally governed - from Jerusalem or elsewhere. Not theory, this for it is exactly how the primitive church developed.

As might be expected, however, carnal human nature entered the scene.

Growth of Centralization

Naturally the empire’s first city would have the prestige and the wealth to dominate - not only its own church plants but also the world. Thus was born the Church of Rome, over four centuries becoming the Roman Catholic (Universal) Church. So, too, the Eastern Orthodox Church (Constantinople), the Ethiopian Coptic Church (probably from one humanly unsupervised man - Acts 8:26 - 40!) etc. All grew out of a single

self-governing assembly. Each of these centralized bodies developed separately and, on their borders, in competition. Each developed its own theology, its own traditions, its own government - and its own heresies.

As the "empire" of each expanded and the true Biblical faith became diluted ambitious men developed a hierarchy of power and wealth. Students of church history are aware of the insidious development, during the first century, of the episcopacy from the original two offices, designated by the apostles, of *overseers* and *deacons* (Phil 1:1). The consequences mirror human nature in the raw, whether in secular government or ecclesiastical!

All this was a far cry from the purity of the apostolic foundations. As Joseph Priestley notes: "There did not remain, at the conclusion of the fourth century, so much as a shadow of the ancient constitution of the Christian Church" (*The Corruptions of Christianity*, p.229).

That constitution is summed up by Edward Gibbon in his *Decline and Fall*...: "The societies [local assemblies] which were instituted in the cities of the Roman empire were united only by the ties of faith and charity. Independence and equality formed the basis of their internal constitution" (*abridged ed* p.170). And again (p.172): "Every society formed within itself a separate and independent republic, and although the most distant of these little states maintained a mutual as well as friendly intercourse of letters and deputations, the Christian world was not yet connected by supreme authority of legislative assembly". *That came later!*

Writes W D Davies: "The birth of what seems...an almost "military" hierarchical organization... is connected with the Church's failure to understand itself as the "People of God", as had the old Israel. By relinquishing the humble Synagogue, the Church organism more easily developed into an organization, a community stratified like the surrounding

society and organized in terms of a ministry separated from, though maintained by, a subservient laity" (*The Gospel and the Land*, p.387).

The accounts of these writers match history on the ground.

All this radical change was motivated simply by the tendency of human nature, condemned so roundly by Jesus (Luke 22:25-27), to institute structures which make it easier to lord it over folk! The spirit of pride and ambition supplanted the servant mentality exemplified by Jesus and the apostles.

Inter-dependence

The concept of the church as the People of God, God's heritage (I Peter 5:3) is enhanced, and the desire to dominate is limited, when the Church is viewed as an association of independent but co-operating assemblies.

Before long, however, the heritage (Gk *kleros*), the brethren, were sidelined and the term *clergy* applied solely to the leadership. Others became "mere laity". It is of note that the "principles of governance" in the New Testament are all *directed to local assemblies* with no implication that they refer to a universal "one and only true church organization".

Into All The World

Note that the initial half-century of the church of God was the most productive in history! Local assemblies were diligent to carry out "the great commission". They went into all the world (Colossians 1:6) compelled by a love for mankind and a burning desire to do a work for God. All this despite huge obstacles imposed by geography and communications and transport. And with no centralized organization.

In each assembly men and women equipped by God with necessary gifts and carried by a faith that God would provide went out from their local assemblies with the precious good news. No-one forbade them!

I'm not here advocating we all buy a

donkey each! The apostolic principles include local autonomy, diligent application of spiritual gifts by *all* the brethren, fiery zeal, faith, vision, exploitation of available tools and voluntary inter-assembly co-operation.

Examples of the latter are in Philippians 4:16 (evangelism), Romans 15:26 (alms). It is folly to replace these principles by centralized organization. This leads only, in time, to gross abuse - as we have seen anciently and in this century. *And are sure to see again*, given enough time, and given there will always be those who secretly desire a following - and temporal power.

In a world of burgeoning populations God has provided the tools, and the talented and gifted brethren able to skillfully use those tools. All the brethren in each local assembly must appropriately use to the full there diversity of gifts Jesus Christ has placed within their assembly. That will include evangelism. It will include the encouragement and financial support of those gifted for evangelism. It will include open co-operation with other independent local assemblies to achieve this and other activities.

We should not, of course, assume the world will be at our feet even if we had perfect government! We sow where we can, but it is God who calls, God who gives the increase. *When* His harvest will be complete is known to Him. In the meantime we are - all of us - to labour zealously till the end, even if there are but "gleanings" that remain to be reaped.

Local Government

It is a fallacy, however, to assume that local assembly autonomy means God does not require a form of government in His church gathered in local independent assemblies. The Scriptures on this are writ large.

For a local independent assembly to be effective it is vital that each be Scripturally ordered. Within each assembly there is a God-given pattern which includes all the brethren.

The Festival of Tabernacles is an age-old divinely inspired festival that has relevance to all mankind throughout history

Tabernacles...mankind in the flesh

Many Christians share the understanding that the Biblical *Festival of Tabernacles* is a 'type' of the millennial reign on Earth of Jesus Christ. The festival has, however, layers of meaning that shed light on the entire history, past, present and future, of mankind.

The Festival was outlined by the LORD to ancient Israel as they departed Egypt, but existed long before. The 'ten tribes' lived in tents for their forty years spent in the wilderness, and the Festival, in one of its aspects, commemorates this. But it does have wider relevance for all of mankind.

To state the obvious, we humans are totally dependent for our life on the nourishment derived from our food. We are physical beings. It's not surprising, then, that mankind celebrates this. It's in the religious calendar of ancient faiths—and in the form of our autumnal 'harvest festivals' is firmly planted to this day in Christianity.

The ancient Canaanites of Biblical notoriety, for example, observed spring, summer and autumn festivals dedicated to the ingathered harvests. It's a time of thanksgiving to the Deity for earth's bounty. Not surprising, then, that the nation of Israel also observed 'harvest festivals' - *Unleavened Bread*, *Pentecost* and the *Feast of Tabernacles*.

A Divine Plan

When our first parents rejected God's guidance they lost the right to live in Paradise—and direct access to their and our Creator. The LORD had literally walked and talked with them in the Garden. Having through their awesome sin rejected the divine way they had to leave 'the Garden'. They still had to till the soil, but there are indications in the record that it was no easy task. All of nature was topsy-turvy. Some commentators have suggested that for some seventeen centuries earth yielded its harvest reluc-

tantly, and there may have been no defined seasons. Only after the terrible world-shaking trauma of the Flood did 'mother nature' settle to the regular seasonal pattern on which we still depend.

The merciful LORD did not abandon mankind but instituted access to Himself through sacrifices. All nations developed a sacrificial system. We have a detailed record of the system inspired by God in the record of the nation of Israel and described in the book of Leviticus. Their significance was for all mankind—Adam's progeny down the centuries and to this day.

Sacrifice was, of course, a mere substitute for reality. They pointed forward to the One through whom sin could be conquered. Each sacrifice appointed by God had significance in the future life, death and work of Jesus. The sacrifices made by other nations obscured their true significance and were often corrupted, as among the Canaanites, to human sacrifice—a practice forbidden by God. Before the time of Moses, Israel had observed both sacrifices (Exodus 5:3) and festivals (v. 1).

Festival Reality

God's annual festivals similarly look forward to Jesus the Messiah and His divine plan for all mankind. They have as much significance in today's world as anciently. Probably more, as the end of the age approaches when they will have their final fulfilment.

There are hints in the Biblical record that they were observed in some form by the people of God long before Moses. As with sacrifices the nations corrupted the festivals and obscured their significance. This is true with the modern form of Christianity,

which ignores the divine festivals and substitutes pre-Christian ones, as Easter, Christmas, All Hallows, the various saints' days.

At 'the Exodus' from Egypt the nation of Israel had the chance to put sacrifice behind them and experience the reality. They agreed to what was a spiritual 'marriage covenant' with the LORD, and to become a 'kingdom of priests' (Exodus 19:6). By this Covenant God did not require sacrifice (Jeremiah 7:22-24). But Israel soon embraced idolatry and, in consequence, were 'divorced'. A sacrificial system, administered by a Priesthood, was re-instated until the birth of Christ made them unnecessary. [Check out the article **The Law of Life**]

Providence

Within Judaism to this day the Festival of Tabernacles is observed in part as a remembrance of the forty years they wandered in the wilderness. During those years they lived in tents—temporary dwellings, booths or 'tabernacles' - and experienced direct divine provision for every material and spiritual need. The LORD was with them daily, visible in a pillar of smoke by day and of fire by night. Their food and drink was miraculously supplied, and their clothing didn't wear out. To this day within Judaism there is annually an observance representative of their long period of wandering.

The festivals, then, are an expression of thanks for 'harvest home', for divine provision of every need: food, shelter, God's presence. They are no less significant for Christians of every race, and an appropriate observance amid the secularism of the world today. All outside the Christian faith can experience the same benefits by entering into the same Covenant.

As did the early church of God, it is appropriate to annually observe this 'pilgrimage' festival. It honours the

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

Creator and is a reminder of His great plan.

Humanity in a Nutshell

Death is a guaranteed exit for all of us. Life is brief, temporary, a puff of vapour. The *Festival of Tabernacles* is, for all mankind, a picture of our brief existence. Not only for individuals or for nations but also for mankind in the flesh. A time will come when there will be no more flesh with all its trials and tribulations and when Earth will be peopled by a race of spirit beings. But not yet. That—Eternity—is represented by another festival.

Tabernacles is a snapshot of all of this. It is a *seven-day* festival picturing the whole of our physical existence as the human race—from man's beginnings separated from God till Eternity begins. It encompasses every age of man right through what is known within Christianity as 'the Millennium' - the thousand-year reign on Earth of Jesus Christ as King of all kings, and LORD of all religious 'lords'. During that time the physical survivors of man's destructive activities in these last days, and their off-spring, will re-build a peaceful and prosperous world under the guiding hand of Jesus Christ at the head of a supervisory army of the Spirit-born saints from all ages of man.

The prophet Zechariah was inspired (ch 14) to record that the entirety of mankind, from every nation, every faith, will be required—under duress if necessary—to observe the *Feast of Tabernacles*: '*And it shall come to pass that everyone that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts and to keep the feast of Tabernacles*' (ch 14:16).

The Devil Bound

Satan will be 'locked up' during the Millennial period, and released only *after* the thousand years are complete. It will be a test for this evil spirit as to how its long years of confinement will have changed it. John again: '*And he [an angel] laid hold*

on the dragon, that old serpent which is the Devil and Satan and bound him a thousand years...that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years should be fulfilled' (Revelation 20:2, 3).

This evil spirit will then seek to once again—as now—deceive mankind. It will be a 'cut-off point' for the final generation of the thousand year reign of Messiah: *will they worship Jesus—or this evil being?*

Fate of the 'Unsaved'

Many ponder the fate of all those who, down the centuries before and after the lifetime of Jesus, have never 'accepted Christ', or had opportunity to do so. 'Tabernacles' also includes, represented by its last day, the seventh day, the resurrection from their graves to *physical* life of all those who have died without a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

In their flesh they will be given opportunity to live a godly life, to be transformed by the divine Spirit, to experience life without the malign influence of Satan. Recorded the apostle John: '*The rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished*' (Revelation 20:5).

Prophetic Week

In parallel to the seven annual Bible festivals, there is also a 'prophetic week'. The seven-day week is a strangeling as far as the calendar is concerned. It doesn't accurately tie in with movements of either sun or moon. It was, of course, the time assigned to the material Creation. The LORD 'worked' for six days—and rested on the seventh. The latter He humanely set aside as a day for man to rest from his daily toil and to fellowship with Him, to recharge our physical and spiritual 'batteries'.

To further His plan He chose a godly man, Abraham and his progeny through his son Isaac, to raise up a godly nation, Israel. The sign (like a wedding ring!) of His Covenant with Israel—and it remains to this day for all His people—was the seventh-day *Sabbath*.

The apostle Peter gives an interesting insight. He tells us: '*a day represents a thousand years*' (II Peter 3:8). Each day of the literal week, that is, has prophetic meaning with each day representing 'a thousand years'. Mankind, having rejected divine guidance, has six 'days' to work—a notional six thousand years—to do his own thing: form governments, educate, devise religions *etc.* All without reference to his Creator. Then there would be a 'seventh day' lasting a thousand years for us to 'rest' and to allow Messiah to clear up the mess we have made.

This seventh 'day' represents the Millennium. During this time of God's direct rule the physical layer is mankind 'at rest' with Christ as King of kings, while the spiritual layer is the reign of Messiah with the resurrected saints as spirit beings.

Mankind in the Flesh

Tabernacles, in sum, covers the whole time man *in his flesh* has existed and will exist on Planet Earth. It encompasses the 'six thousand years' of human civilisation during which we have ruined earth and pillaged its resources, time and again killed our fellow man in needless war.

It includes, too, that 'thousand years' of the direct hands-on rule of Jesus Christ as symbolized by the seventh day of the prophetic week, the *Sabbath*. And it embraces the period during which the dead will be resurrected, the veil of deception lifted from their eyes and have opportunity, for the first time, to become part of the divine Family.

There are, then, various layers of significance to this divinely-inspired annual festival that are important for all of mankind through all generations.

Tabernacles...

- is a festival representing the temporary presence on Earth through the centuries of all humanity in the flesh as we are born, live and return to dust
- is a remembrance by Israel's descendants of the time of their pilgrimage

CGOM ...a review

The *Churches of God Outreach Ministries*, founded in 1996, is an association of inter-dependent local assemblies and individuals who voluntarily co-operate in our mission. We are not a denomination' but share common foundation truths. Unusually among the Churches of God we are not hierarchical, and there is no 'corporate headquarters' or salaried ministry.

Our outreach with the Gospel message is focussed locally, though each assembly voluntarily contributes to the financing of our website (www.cgom.org) and our bi-monthly magazine **New Horizons** for a wider outreach.

Over a hundred Bible-based booklet titles and articles are mailed on request—all handled by volunteers who, with your prayers and support and with God's blessing, have been able to make this effort possible over the past 20 years.

In 2010 we had 888 requests *via* our website and 1080 requests *via* regular postal mail. In 2014 we had 2,551 requests *via* our website and 1,148 requests *via* postal mail! A substantial increase! In 2015 we had 2,550 requests *via* our website and 1,429 *via* postal mail.

On average each year we mail out fifteen thousand issues of *New Horizons*.

zons magazine and close to sixteen thousand pieces of literature to 122 countries around the world. Others will have read or downloaded articles and back issues from the website.

In the last five years we have more than equalled the number added to our mailing list over the previous *ten years*. In 2015 we had a total contribution of \$40,980. Our expenses came to \$42,177. This covers printing, postage, *etc.* Postage over the past few years has increased, which has impacted us. We are blessed to have a very fine printer who provides us with the *New Horizons* at his printing costs, but it is still expensive and that has also increased over the past years.

Your contributions, whether great or small, along with God's blessing, enables us to spread the gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ around the world. We are not a huge organization, but God has blessed us to be able to do what we are doing! Financially, it is best said that God provides us with the funds as we need them.

We value your prayers on our behalf asking God to open the hearts of those who are receiving these materials, both to His Word and to maybe be inspired to help us so that we might continue to help others who are also seeking the truth and knowledge about the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the Word of God.

Richard Gawith

One in Christ

The apostle Paul dedicated his life to the proclamation of the Gospel message but at times was opposed by his 'own side'—other Christians, as he notes in writing to the Philippian brethren (*ch* 1:16, Acts 15:1-2). His response was to 'be happy' that Christ was also being preached by these folk despite their personal antagonism. It's an attitude, sadly, that survives into our century!

Elsewhere, however, we find the various assemblies (they were each independently organized) co-operating with one another and being supportive of the apostle. They may not have all seen eye-to-eye on doctrine (*see* Revelation 2 and 3 *etc.*), and each had its own doctrinal and behavioural challenges—but they were in touch with one another. All, despite their flaws, were part of the Church of God, the Body of Christ. And primarily each was answerable to, and received guidance from, their one Lord Jesus Christ.

Here are just a couple of the most recent examples of the letters and notes received:

Thank You! No words can express the blessing these small, but powerful, booklets have been to me. It's not only been a blessing to me but also to those I've shared with. God continue blessing your ministry and that through these resources you can change many lives. Thank you from the bottom of my heart. Sincerely with God's blessing,

Florida

*Dear CGOM,
Many, many thanks for sending me these wonderful articles: Three Days and Three Nights in the Grave, Why?, 6,000 Years of Christianity, A Framework for Prophecy and A message of Hope for The World of Tomorrow! I am beginning to realize some new truth that I had never known, i.e. the glimpse that there is a world of tomorrow. I thought that we are going to heaven when Jesus comes the second time. Another shocking truth is that of [the] three days and three nights. I have been a pastor in Seventh Day Adventist Church but have not known some of these truths the Lord God is opening for me to know through your articles. Now I am beginning to see how we have been deceived that Jesus died on a Friday - before the sabbath and resurrected on a Sunday. May the Almighty God bless you more abundantly and my prayer is that I should be meek enough to learn the truth and serve God Almighty in truth. Please, I am longing to know more from this wonderful and blessed Ministry! May God bless you abundantly. Sincere regards,*

Kenya

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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

Our Amazing Potential

We are born. We live. We die.
Is there a point to it all?

On the grand scale, life is little more than a brief spark. Like a fire-fly it appears, glows to one degree or another—and disappears. In human terms it can last from a few minutes to little beyond a century. And the shorter it is the less likely out title question is asked. But in the excitement of youth or when you reach middle age or a comfortable 'three score years and ten' then you might ask *Why on earth am I here?* Is there a point to it all? Is that all there is to these moments of sorrow, these moments of happiness?

Few philosophers can give a satisfying answer. After all, if you are simply the end result of an entirely physical process then you may as well, as King Solomon noted, enjoy—or endure—whatever health you have, whatever life throws at you.

If we crawled from some primordial swamp on flippers the result of some purely random process then our seventy years are the sum of our existence. (This scenario, however, will before long be pictured only in the comics—as ridiculous and fictional as Superman or money for nothing or little green men and women from Venus.) Eat, drink and be merry—for tomorrow you die! And that's it. Your legacy lives on only through your children and your actions.

Always Tomorrow

But most of us don't think that way, do we? There is, we feel in our bones, always tomorrow - *even after death*. From the recorded beginnings of human civilisation man has prepared for the journey through the valley of death and into the unknown vistas of the next world. All religions—except perhaps the religion of professed humanism or atheism—are a process of explanation for that world beyond the grave. If there's a 'religious gene' then we all have it, even though we may do our best to

suppress it!

Varieties of Belief

The universality of religion is good evidence that we have an eternal destiny. And if so, why, on earth, were you born? [Our free **Bible Basics** home study course discusses the spiritual nature of mankind. You are invited to enrol]

So, whatever your faith, why do you think *you* were born? Most Christians would reply that they are to 'follow Jesus' and when they die go to Heaven. After that it gets a bit fuzzy. You may enjoy painting or singing - but can you imagine doing that for a year, a million years, for ever? Certainly we can enjoy praising God for ever. But is that all your dreams?

Young Muslim men strap semtex around their waists in the hope that the explosion will send them to 'Paradise'. Wine, women and song - and water - for ever and ever. Or, to return in an inferior role, our 'soul' transmigrating. And atheists? Well, that's sad.

Of all religions the 'Holy Scriptures'—the Christian Bible—explain the divine purpose as does no other religious writing or tradition. That purpose is mind-blowing! Yet most professing Christians are blind to the incredible destiny in store for the people of God.

Human Destiny

Mankind is a direct - and purposeful - act of the great ever-living Creator God. We are not just a divine whim but designed as the 'clay model' that can be transformed as a vessel of worth and beauty, alone, on the planet, able to contemplate a destiny beyond the grave. Writes the prophet Isaiah: '*...you are our father, LORD. We are like clay, and you are like the potter. You created us*' (ch 64:8).

Given the opportunity of living forever, our first parents 'blew it'. They chose the path of human reason to the exclusion of divine guidance. The result (the awesome mess that is today's world, marred by our wilful rejection of the fundamental rules of success) is the result of *sin*. We have

- collectively and individually - lost sight of the purpose of life.

God respects our choices. He permits mankind to pursue his own path, intervening only to keep His global plan on track. But He also works with individuals. Any who respond to His open invitation are given every resource to fulfil the divine purpose.

That purpose is that we become part of His divine Family - truly children of God. Throughout this life, God actively moulds His children into His divine image - through our unique ups and downs, all carefully monitored by Him. Hear the apostle Paul: '*...The Spirit Himself witnesses with our spirit that we are children of God. And if children, also heirs; truly heirs of God, and joint-heirs of Christ, if indeed we suffer together, that we may also be glorified together. For I calculate that the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to compare to the coming glory to be revealed in us*' (Romans 8:16-18).

That image, that way of life, was exemplified for us in the life of God's only-begotten Son, Jesus. Jesus himself, through his life of perfect submission, qualified to become '*...the heir of the universe*'. Raised from the dead he is lifted above the physical to a position of unbelievable authority. No longer subject to death, he wields all the power that sustains our universe.

You Can Share It

All who come to him, believe him, obey him - and who stay with him till life's end - are destined to share with him in his inheritance: to live forever as spirit-born sons and daughters of our heavenly Father.

God's plan for His creation doesn't end with our physical existence. It extends into an eternity of, to us, inconceivable projects! No longer limited by our flesh, we will endlessly enjoy the work of our hands. Only those who will to step out on the narrow and difficult path beaten by our Saviour will fulfil the awesome purpose for which each of us was born.

Ω

The apostle Paul gives the lie to the nebulous concept held by most Christians concerning life after death

Devout believers at their funeral service are laid to rest and their 'soul' is believed to pass on to Heaven where they will spend eternity. What transpires there, however, isn't clearly defined beyond a vague picture of 'bliss' in the presence of God.

But not so good for the wicked of any ilk, any faith. Many—especially 'fundamentalists'—have a clear view of *those folk's* destiny: 'hell', where they will experience excruciating suffering and fiery torment in the presence of the Devil and his angels, also for eternity.

Then there are the 'in-betweeners', those who appear to live decent lives—just a little bit naughty from time to time. Or infants who die all too soon? Or the 'heathen' who never heard of Jesus Christ as the one and only Saviour? What happens to them? Do they all deserve a fiery hell? And who decides their fate? How 'bad' do they have to be? Is there a line to cross?

Rest in Peace

Paul is quite clear—the dead, *all* the dead, truly do 'rest in peace'. The 'good' and the 'bad'. He, in accord with all the Christian Scriptures, teaches that the dead are 'asleep', unconscious: '*...I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep [ie, die], but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump[et call]*' (I Corinthians 11:30, 15:51 *etc*).

As said the Psalmist, who inspired Paul '*...The dead are silent and cannot praise the LORD*' (Psalm

115:17), and, '*... in death there is no remembrance of you: in the grave who shall give you thanks?*' (Psalm 6:5).

The question then arises: *what of our 'immortal soul'?* Paul, steeped as he was in the Hebrew Scriptures (Philippians 3:5-6), understood that at death there is a cessation of consciousness: '*...that which befalls the sons of men befalls beasts; even one thing befalls them: as the one dies, so dies the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that a man has no preeminence above a beast*' (Ecclesiastes 3:19).

Or, as wise King Solomon also wrote: '*...the living know that they shall die, but the dead know not any thing*' (ch 9:5). It is an echo of the original creation account—both man and animals are '*living souls*' (Heb *nephesh*), subject to death. And destined for oblivion—unless restored to life.

The Return

For the apostle, the Christian hope lies in a return from death, a *resurrection* to a life on a higher plane. This, he says, occurs, '*...Whenever Christ our life is revealed, then also you will be revealed with Him in glory*' (Colossians 3:4). That momentous event is the return of Jesus Christ: '*...we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not precede them which are asleep [dead].... and the dead in Christ shall rise first*' (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17).

And Next...

Then Christ returns from his place at

When You Die

God's right hand: '*...In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump[et]: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality*' (I Corinthians 15:52-53).

Notice that we *put on* immortality—it's not an in-born state! As said Jesus, believers don't 'perish' [be destroyed] but have 'everlasting life' [*ie*, immortality] (John 3:16).

What Body?

Paul asserts that there is a resurrection 'body'—not just an ephemeral wraith. It is spiritual but has substance, '*...flesh and bones*'—witness the action of the disciples to Jesus after he was raised (Luke 24:39). Tangible, but with spirit qualities.

When we die, the heart stops, the body decays—and over time it disappears. The physical life force (the 'soul') ceases. Every 'living creature' is motivated by a life force imparted through our inherited living reproductive cells—each '*...after its kind*'.

Yet something does remain in mankind—the human spirit. Hear Paul again: '*...the Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God*' (Romans 8:16). As noted Elihu: '*...there is a spirit in man*' (Job 32:8).

Upon death that 'spirit' remains, inert and intact, in God's care until it is resurrected: '*...The spirit of man that ascends, it belongs to on high; but the spirit of the beast that descends, it belongs to below, even to the earth*' (Ecclesiastes 3:21 Weiss). By means of the spirit in us—life returns. Ω

request, no charge:

**The Feast of the Nativity
God's Holy Days**

Tabernacles...from p.8

spirit body each fit to accompany God through the coming aeons (see I Corinthians 15:42-44).

The *Closing Day*—the eighth day of the festival—represents that time, *Eternity*. It marks the fulfilment of

the present stage of God's age-long plan for His creation. It truly marks '*...the end of the world [age]*', man's incompetent destructive rule over God's Earth. Ω

Tabernacles ...cont'd from p.4

through the wilderness following their miraculous deliverance from slavery in Egypt

- reminds them of 'tabernacling' - living in temporary dwellings in booths or tents—during that time
- is an annual reminder to Christians that we, too, are 'strangers and pilgrims' on earth, surrounded by a world that rejects God's way of life and 'enslaves' mankind
- and that Christians, through Jesus, have been freed from bondage to that world system
- is an autumnal 'harvest festival' of thanksgiving for God's bounty and provision of our material needs
- is a time for 'holy convocations' - assembling to hear God's Word proclaimed, and for fellowship with those of like mind
- incorporates the reign of Jesus Christ (represented by the seventh day of the prophetic week) over physical humanity as He restores Earth to its pristine beauty
- and teaches all who survive the coming time of awesome trial on Earth the true way to peace and prosperity - and how to become a part of the Family of God
- includes those who experience, after the 'thousand years', Satan's final attempt to deceive and to usurp the authority of Jesus Christ
- encompasses the time of resurrection from death to physical life of all who have never understood the good news of God's plans for us
- It includes the 'second death'

Closing Day

But that's not all there is to God's interest in mankind. The seven day *Festival of Tabernacles* is immediately followed by a final 'closing day'. It is an annual gathering of the people of God. *Tabernacles* encompasses mankind's earthly sojourn *in the flesh*. That journey will end, and an endless future beckons.

The plan of God is for all who will to join Him in His spirit-born family. After events symbolized by *Tabernacles* all who remain on earth—those in whom dwells the Spirit of God—will inhabit an immortal *cont'd p.7*

Governance...cont'd from p.2

But this does not mean "the congregation rules"! The inspired writings tell us God's way to handle disputes among brethren, to maintain order, to determine doctrine, to appoint the leadership. This is a topic for future discussion!

The recorded history of the first half century of the Christian Church depicts many independent but co-operating local assemblies. It is flawed reasoning to assume a pattern of church government foreign to that promoted by the apostles will

be a more effective way.

Probably any form of church polity will work - for a time. But anything other than the apostolic model is like a bicycle with a buckled wheel. It will give us a rough ride, and—our history shows—eventually it will shake our bicycle to pieces.

Many brethren have experienced it—and continue to do so as denominations divide in a seemingly endless re-cycling from church to church. **Ω**

OBSERVE MY FEAST!

One of the joys of the Biblical festival calendar is the annual *Feast of Tabernacles* held in the autumn. Brethren, where possible, assemble at an agreed venue for a week of fellowship, relaxation and Biblical instruction and at a time appointed (in the Scriptures) by the LORD (Leviticus 23). It's a time to re-encounter old friends not seen since the previous festival.

The location is decided by the various assemblies—in a pleasing environment, with numbers varying from a handful to perhaps

many hundreds. It's a time of spiritual refreshment relished by the brethren.

The festival is unmissable unless, of course, hindered by illness or infirmity or for financial reasons—when it is then observed at home. The experience is enhanced by the knowledge that this is God's festival held at the time appointed by God—and not a humanly-devised date such as 'Christmas'. *Tabernacles*, indeed, falls at the true time of the birth of our Saviour, in the autumn.

As described in our article (p.3) it has multi-faceted meaning applicable throughout our life. Contact us if you would like to learn more! **Ω**

You are never weak when you stand on the principles of the Word of God. *Internet*

Autumn Festivals 2016

Trumpets	October 3
Atonement	October 12
Tabernacles	October 17—23
Eighth Day	October 24

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MiniStudy

God's Choice

'...No one is able to come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him' (John 6:44)

Mankind is universally driven by some form of belief system—whether it is a religious impulse or claimed to be a deeply-held philosophy as Marxism or Darwinism or a host of other life choices. Indeed our brains are 'hot-wired' to have what has been termed 'the God impulse', the brain in its many parts conspiring towards belief. There is, too, a yearning to believe in a life beyond life. Yet Christianity claims there is but one way to inherit that life.

- The concept of a life beyond the grave is variously reflected in the different faiths and involves rewards—positive (heaven) or negative (hell)—in general underpinned by the (false) notion that our 'soul' passes from this life to the next upon our death. As our first parents were (also falsely) advised '*...you certainly won't die*' (Genesis 3:4)
- The Christian Scriptures, however, clearly state that the soul (Gk *psuche*, Heb *nephesh*)—our physical life force, carried in the bloodstream (Leviticus 17:11)—does indeed die (Matthew 10:28), but will in due course be restored to life as the body is resurrected '*...an hour is coming in which all those in the tombs will hear His voice. And they will come out, the ones having done good into a resurrection of life; and the ones having practiced evil into a resurrection of judgment*' (John 5:28-29). The 'good' will have a spirit body: '*...It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body*' (I Corinthians 15:44)
- The continuity of our life—our physical form, our personality, our character, our DNA—is indelibly inscribed on what the Bible calls '*...the spirit in man*' (Job 32:8). This non-physical entity is itself subject to destruction, for '*...[God] only has immortality*' (I Timothy 6:16). No created being is immortal, and those whom God selects for His majestic Kingdom, His Family, become so only because they have in this life received God's immortal Spirit: '*...if the Spirit of the One having raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, the One having raised the Christ from the dead will also make your mortal bodies live through the indwelling of His Spirit in you*' (Romans 8:11)
- Salvation—union with the Family of God—is *by invitation* to *all* mankind (John 3:16), as, through the work of the Church of God and the widespread dispersal of the Scriptures, the good news is proclaimed to all. Not all respond, as Jesus indicates in his 'parable of the sower' (Matthew 13). Indeed it is the few who fully commit (I Corinthians 1:26). Too busy. Just curious. Foolishness. Too stubborn. No staying power. Blinded by false beliefs, or, as states the apostle Paul: '*...the god of this age has blinded the thoughts of the unbelieving, so that the brightness of the gospel of the glory of Christ who is the image of God, should not dawn on them*' (II Corinthians 4:4)
- Sincerely respond, however, and the Father takes a special interest in you: '*...No one is able to come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him*' (John 6:44). Said Jesus, addressing the Father: '*...I have revealed your name to the men whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours, and you have given them to me, and they have kept your word*' (ch 17:6, 11). They face a life-time of training (Hebrews 12:5f)
- *But what of everyone else*—are they forever 'lost'? Written into the divine design is the presence on earth of an Adversary who opposes all God's plans yet acts as a catalyst for spiritual change in those who truly believe—as we resist his devices (James 4:7). As noted, This '*god of this age*' blinds mankind to the Gospel message. After the thousand-year reign on earth of Jesus all such will have that vail of deception lifted (Isaiah 25:7), as the Adversary is removed (Revelation 20:10). Writes the apostle John: '*...the rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were over*' (Revelation 20:5). They will then be raised to a period of physical life during which they will be judged by their response to that same Word (v.12): '*...the time is coming when all the dead will hear his voice and come out of their graves: those who have done good will rise and live, and those who have done evil will rise and be [judged]*' (John 5:28-29). God is even-handed, fair, choosing *when* and not *if* we have our opportunity to share His Kingdom

Ω

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