

new **Horizons**

Vol 21 No 5

September/October 2017

addressing the important issues for today and tomorrow



inside...

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from Alpha to Omega
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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 a 32-lesson Bible Correspondence 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

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

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new Horizons

Issue No 125

September/October 2017

Soon you may have no choice but to cease work on Sundays.
Are you ready?

Friday. Saturday. Sunday. Each is considered special by large segments of the world's populace. Those who observe in some degree the Christian Sunday are most numerous – over two billion. All Protestant denominations write Sunday observance into their catechisms – a practice shared by the various sects of Roman Catholicism. [Request our free article *The Day To Remember*]

How Sunday is observed varies from a 'nod and a wink' through to the dedicated Sabbatarian who treats the day as if it were a divinely-appointed Sabbath. For serious Christians Sunday observance is considered a vital part of their religious practice. It is—for now— a voluntary choice, freely observed.
But not for long!

Blue Laws

The twentieth century witnessed a sharp decline in the veneration of Sunday as a day for worship. The century ended with a catastrophic fall in church going. Yet when the century began we had not long emerged from the influence of the 'blue laws'. These were prohibitions against various activities on Sunday – often with attached penalties. Indeed America's first state Sunday law, in Virginia in 1610, included the death penalty for failing to show up for church for the third time. Serious breaches, in the 1656 Connecticut law, also included a death penalty.

As late as 1898 a New Hampshire Senator proposed to Congress a national blue law. It was a Bill "...to secure to the people the enjoyment of the first day of the week, commonly known as the Lord's Day, as a day of rest, and to promote its observance as a day of religious worship." The

Bill was opposed by seventh-day Sabbath observers, and eventually failed.

In England the established Church exercised widespread coercive authority on religious matters. There were 'Sunday laws' in some form since the 7th century, and especially since Edward VI's *Act of Uniformity* (of religion) in 1551. Ecclesiastical censure and fines were imposed by statute in 1558 – the penalties repealed only in 1846. Only in recent years has Sunday trading been permitted by Law.

Such laws arose from the sincerely-held view – however misapplied - that a godly nation ought to venerate a weekly day of rest and worship, dedicated to the Creator. Indeed Sunday is held in high esteem to this day by two billion Christians whatever

the law of the land may be.

The current lax legal approach to Sunday observance, however, may soon come to a grinding halt!

Unholy Alliance?

Whatever the profound differences and historical antagonism between Romanism and Protestantism, they are certainly agreed on which day of the week to set aside for worship. Since the fourth century the majority in Christendom, willingly or by force, have observed Sunday. Perhaps surprisingly, as the Roman Church claims to be the 'mother of Sunday', having changed it from the apostolic (and divinely-appointed) seventh day Sabbath. Even Protestant scholars agree that Rome made the change contrary to the Scripture teaching.

Sunday, however, is fast becoming a

bridge of reconciliation for Protestants and Catholics. The seed-bed for this is the United States. Roman Catholics now represent 25% of the population – some 77 million, up from well under 2% in 1776. They are increasingly influential in private and public life. And this can be seen as a positive influence, given the papal stand on such matters as abortion, personal responsibility, family values - and morality in general. It contrasts sharply with the general immorality of government and the populace at large.

Indeed the two issues of abortion ('pro-life') and Sunday observance are the key to the new alliance between the Roman Church, and evangelical Protestantism represented by the *Christian Coalition of America*, founded by Pat Robertson. Together they are a powerful political force, representing perhaps half of all Americans.

What, though, does this new alliance bode for religious liberty?

Free To Obey

The moral pressure exerted by Pope John-Paul was almost irresistible. Seen as an icon of moral stability he was all but worshipped by the general populace wherever he went, and feted by governments. He was seen as a major architect of the downfall of communism, courted by politicians and religious leaders and his influence continues.

But, for Pope John-Paul, the observance of Sunday as a day of worship was of high priority. Concerned at the increasingly low attendance at Sunday mass, he published (May, 1998) his pastoral letter *Dies Domini* – the *Day of the Lord*. Equating (wrongly!) Sunday with the Biblical Sabbath, the Pope called for Catholics to use their influence in legaliz-

Get Ready for Sunday

ing Sunday observance. In Catholic *Canon Law*, attendance at Sunday mass is a 'grave obligation' – non-attendance sinful. *Dies Domini*, however, goes further. In it the Pope urges Christians to. "*strive to ensure that civil legislation respects their duty to keep Sunday holy*" (Incidentally, only God can 'make something holy'!)

Legislation, of course, is written by the *civil* authorities. Addressing some 15,000 public officials from around the world in November 2000, Pope John Paul said that political leaders must conform civil laws and policies to God's objective moral law – meaning, of course, as understood by Rome.

[The same theme continued—but less obviously—under the 'retired' Pope Benedict XVI. As Cardinal Ratzinger he was largely responsible for the theological position (and the writings) of John-Paul II—especially on Sunday laws. They worked together for twenty years. Benedict also mentors the new Jesuit Pope Francis I.]

In support, former Soviet Union president Mikhail Gorbachev told the assembly that the task of civil leaders in the twenty-first century would be to unite morality to politics. In the latest Roman *Catechism* (also crafted by Ratzinger) it is stated "...*Christians should seek recognition of Sunday and the Church's holy days as legal holidays*".

This theme has been taken up by the *Christian Coalition of America*, which also wants to see Sunday protected. Ratzinger also masterminded the Global Christian Forum as a way to 'co-operate' with Protestantism.

Indeed an increasing number of Roman Catholics are members of the *Coalition*, and in key posts within it. Given the propensity for politicians to 'roll over' to protect their position, a grass-roots opinion swell for Sunday ('blue') laws is likely to succeed in the United States. And it's now thought that Catholics, 26% of the population, command the 'swing vote'. They are expected to vote according to conscience – the con-

science of the Pope.

In Washington in 2008 ex-Pope Benedict met with the leaders of the United States and Great Britain. Ways to halt the moral decline of the US were discussed.

Is It Important?

So, doesn't that just mean an extra day off? It's an attractive idea in our frenetic western world. And to slide past the *Constitution* and the *First Amendment*, the health and family aspects of such legislation are highlighted by Catholic spokesmen - not the 'promotion of religion'. What, however, does it mean for you – for Judaism, for Adventists, for Muslims and for the multitude of seventh-day observers—and also non-observers of Sunday? It's the freedom of such religious minorities that is at stake.

Commerce and the entertainment industry have been the driving force behind the abolition of restrictions on Sunday work, coupled with the decline in religious observance in general. Business is not likely to take kindly to such legislation. Especially if you request off Saturday – or Friday – to fulfill religious obligations! Should Sunday blue laws be introduced or revived (they still quietly grace the legislation of some States) then minorities would be excluded from the economy: "Work on Saturday, or else".

Prophetic Insight

Such a scenario was predicted by Jesus in his message to the world for the end-time – for *now*.

We are to expect the rise of a short-lived, humanistic anti-God [*ie* opposing the God of Scripture] confederation of nations in Europe described as a 'wild beast' (Revelation 13:1-10). It will attain world dominion and be widely acclaimed – but will, however, be a persecuting power, hell-bent on destroying true believers, those '*...written in the Book of Life*' (v.7, 8). Behind the beast is the shadowy figure of man's arch enemy, Satan (v. 2).

Perhaps surprisingly, this secular

power gains its vast worldwide authority through the influence of religion. Another 'wild beast' – also motivated by Satan (v.11) – is personalized as an individual practicing deceptive miraculous acts, even calling down fire from the sky. In an echo of the great image erected by King Nebuchadnezzar of ancient Babylon, he will order the fabrication of an 'image to the beast' which he will miraculously cause to speak—probably by the wizardry of computer technology? (vv.14, 15).

Indeed the first beast's persecutions are instigated by the influence of the second, religious, beast. It's a reflection of the medieval practice of committing heretics to the secular power of Catholic Princes to administer punishment - including the death penalty, martyrdom. (That's the Roman Church's penalty for 'heresy'.)

The initial trigger is economic: "*And he causes all...to receive a mark on their right hand or on the forehead [indicating submission and obedience], and that no-one may buy or sell except one who has the name or the mark of the beast, or the number of his name*"(vv.16-17).

It's all a bit mysterious!

Prepare For Sunday

We get a clue to the mystery in the next chapter. Jesus—not so 'meek and mild'—tells us that those who submit to and obey the beast power will suffer 'the wrath of God' (the seven last plagues). By contrast those who will suffer under the hand of the beast "*...keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus*" (ch 14:12).

That's interesting! They 'keep the commandments of God'. *And* this co-exists with '*...keeping the faith of Jesus*'. No religion and no secular power advocates that its people kill or perjure or steal or dishonour the elderly—though they may encourage it by defective laws. That is, they would in general support obedience to the last six of the Ten

Commandments. But this despotic humanistic authority, the amalgamation of Church and State, egged on by the religious power turns against those who '...keep the commandments'. In other words, the focus is on the *first four* of the Commandments, which teach us how to 'love God'. (The churches have no problem with the last six of the Commandments—which summarize how we 'love our neighbour'.)

Pivotal to these four is "...Remember the sabbath day to keep it holy"(Exodus 20:8-11). The only day God made holy was the seventh, basically our Saturday (Genesis 2:3). *That's why many of those Christians who observe the seventh-day Sabbath will at that time be martyred!* As the apostle Peter said to the secular/religious authorities: "...We ought to obey God rather than men"(Acts 5:29).

Mass Extinction

Before the first Christian century expired, most of the church had departed from the faith of Jesus. Over time true teachings were ditched, new practices added. Echoing the departure from the faith of the northern House of Israel's King Jeroboam (I Kings 12), the age-old faith of the Bible was abandoned and the trappings of sun (Baal) worship were grafted

on to the church.

Prominent was the transfer of worship to Sunday and the abandonment of the seventh day Sabbath and the annual holy days, all of which were the apostolic practice. Biblical Christianity—the religion of Jesus—became all but extinct.

Prophecy indicates this 'lawless' form of Christianity will be widespread in the end-time. It will lead to the unholy alliance of a false form of religion co-operating with the secular authorities. Those who 'worship the beast' will bask - briefly - in a time of peace and prosperity. *It won't last.*

A Warning Unheeded

During the preceding time of 'stress upon nations' the signs of the times and the warnings of the church of God will have gone unheeded. The publishers of *New Horizons*, for example, have been part of a work which for over eighty years has been calling for our nations to change their ways, to turn to God.

The vast majority of those who have heard the warning, however, have refused to respond. By the time Jesus Christ returns all the world will have heard, will have been confronted by their idolatry. Here's what Jesus told John: "*But the rest of mankind who were not killed by these plagues [largely the effects of our*

misuse of the planet] did not repent of the works of their hands that they should not worship demons [any religion that isn't based on the Scriptures], and idols...and they did not repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts (Revelation 9:20-21). We're back to those Ten Commandments!

Clearly, our 'choice of religion' is limited: God's way, the *Biblical* way. Or *any* other way—leading to death.

Many of those who become, and remain, patiently faithful to the Word of God, however, will be martyred. Their lot is to be resurrected shortly thereafter at the return of Christ and to reign with him perpetually in the Family of God.

We each have a stark choice. Anciently God gave the seventh-day Sabbath as an identity sign for His people (Exodus 31:12-17). But hear what a prominent cardinal mistakenly says: "Sunday...is one of the most patent *signs* that we are a Christian people". And Pope John -Paul in *Dies Domini*: "More than a replacement of the Sabbath, therefore, Sunday is its fulfilment".

You are urged to *believe God* and not men – and live for eternity. **Ω**

from alpha...cont'd from p.4

that ignores tough fundamental Bible teaching, as does the *Alpha* course. It is not a devalued 'all for nothing' faith.

Embark on an *Alpha* course and you may perhaps - hear a basic introduction to Christianity. But the end - the "*Alpha and the Omega*"- requires the total dedication to God of every aspect of your life—and for the remainder of your life.

If you have 'graduated' from an *Alpha* course, it's time to take stock. Open your Bible. *Check out* with the Scriptures what you were

taught there.

You may now claim Jesus as your Lord - *but that is not enough*. He said: "*Not everyone who says to me 'Lord, Lord' shall enter the kingdom of Heaven!*" And to your religious teachers: "*In vain [uselessly] do you worship, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.*" Have you just learned *'the commandments of men'* - human tradition? Or what *Jesus* said?

Tradition

Another Bible author, Jude, urged his readers to '*...contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints*'. Any subse-

quent teaching that conflicts with Scripture - which defines and records that faith for us - is mere human tradition. Like *Sunday* worship. Or *Christmas* and *Easter* and *All Saints Day*. Or the universal but pagan '*immortal soul*' concept. Or going to *heaven* when you die - or to *hell*.

If an encounter with Jesus through the Scriptures in an *Alpha* course has '*changed your life*' - *that's great!* That's what Christianity is about. Now you need to move on.

Study the Scriptures with an open mind. And *do* what the *Scriptures* teach. **Ω**

**Twenty million or more enquirers
world wide have 'done Alpha'.
Will it stick?**

from *alpha*...to *omega*

A good supper, a talk, a group discussion and a 'Holy Spirit week-end'- that's the popular format for the Christian outreach craze that is swept Britain and spread worldwide. It is a '*relaxed and non-threatening*' introduction to the Christian faith and, according to a British TV series, was a success in '*changing lives*'. The Alpha course has been fulsomely praised by such luminaries as the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, the former Roman Catholic Archbishop Basil Hume and church leaders from across the Christian spectrum.

The course is running in some 7000 United Kingdom locations and in thousands more worldwide. There has been a million pound bill-board campaign to advertise Alpha in the United Kingdom, and wide media exposure. In its London-based 'home church' (the Anglican Holy Trinity Brompton - HTB) up to one thousand young - the average age of participants is twenty-five - and old and from every walk of life enroll for each eleven-week course. Many have little past exposure to Christianity. In view of the decline of religion in Britain (fewer than ten percent visit church), its undoubted success is a surprise.

Participants are exposed to the basics of the Christian faith, with such topics as *Who Is Jesus?*, *Prayer*, *Healing*, *the Church*. Each talk is followed by opportunity for small groups of a dozen or so - one-third of whom are 'veterans' of the course - to discuss the current topic, individuals openly expressing opinions and doubts.

The format, developed over twenty plus years, has proven to be a huge success. The *Alpha News* features accounts of individuals who have 'found God' or had their dying faith invigorated.

Critics

Understandably, Alpha has its critics.

Some evangelicals are concerned about the 'loose theology'. In contrast it has been castigated for 'too high a view of the Bible'. Others are worried that Roman Catholicism is broadly accepted as a legitimate expression of the Gospel. Indeed the course has been sponsored in Catholic churches and run by the local priest - often in co-operation with Protestants and to the chagrin of some evangelicals.

Also criticized is the strong charismatic flavour of the course, especially in its 'Holy Spirit week-end'. The HTB has long been associated with the 'Toronto Blessing' and was the focus of media attention when congregants were falling down, quaking, barking like dogs, tongue-speaking, laughing uncontrollably in the aisles *etc* - supposedly manifestations of the Holy Spirit.

'Converts' from each Alpha course are directed to 'the church of their choice'. Of concern to many is that no distinction is made as to that church's theology.

Undoubtedly, Alpha is raising the religious consciousness of many who never gave much thought to religion. Jesus Christ is being talked about without embarrassment in offices and banks and building sites - and in churches! Legitimate questions, however, must be asked.

No Easy Road

A gentle easing into faith may be one acceptable approach to proclaiming the Gospel message. Yet the Christian faith is extremely demanding. Jesus requires total allegiance to himself and to the revealed will of God - even unto death. He said his message would *divide*!

It can, too, be legitimately asked if

the person and message of Jesus is, in Alpha, accurately presented. We ought to ask with the crowd on the first Christian Pentecost *What must we do to be saved?* The answer of the truly Spirit-filled apostle Peter: *'Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit'*.

Repentance - *change* - isn't an easy option. It certainly involves acceptance of the sacrifice of Jesus for our sin. *Sin* - that's not often defined. According to John, the 'apostle of love', it is '*transgression of the Law [of God]*' (I John 3:4). He adds, *'This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments'*.

Now that's hard. For any who would be a disciple of Jesus it means, for example, marriage - and not co-habitation or 'free' sex or a same-sex relationship. It means faithfulness within marriage. It means an end to the idolatry of consumerism and to tax dodging. It means that there is one God who has revealed one weekly day to worship Him - and that's *not* Sunday. It means that a Christian abandons the pagan holidays of Christmas and Easter and saints days and the mass - and observes God's festivals (Leviticus 23).

This is the message the first enquirers about Jesus heard and were expected to embrace.

Salvation, of course, can't be earned by any degree of commandment keeping. We are reconciled to a holy God only through His love and mercy and grace. But, as the apostle Paul wrote: *'Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid!'* The 'Holy Spirit' - the focus of Alpha - will be given you only if you are in submission to God and His commandments (Acts 5:32).

Alpha To Omega

True Christianity is not a soft option
cont'd p.3

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

The apostle Paul praises the Christians in Berea for their diligence in testing his teachings—against ‘the Scriptures’: ‘...they received the Word with all readiness, daily examining the Scriptures if these things are so’ (Acts 17:11). It’s a recurring theme of Paul (as it is in all the apostolic writings). In the Scriptures, he says, is ‘truth’, and God’s desire is that all of mankind attains to it (I Timothy 2:4). Indeed in his letters he refers to *truth* over fifty times. It is an echo of the words of Jesus: ‘...your word is truth’ (John 17:17).

Often, however, it is overlooked that the ‘Scriptures’ to which the apostle refers are the so-called ‘Old Testament’. They are the foundation for a proper understanding of the Christian faith. (There are, it has been said, some 350 quotations from these Scriptures in the ‘New’ Testament—all but for one hundred by Paul.) At no time does the apostle deviate from the spirit, the innermost significance, of the divine revelation.

Encounter with God

We do not find the apostle giving credence to much of what passes for ‘Christian truth’ today. He does not, for example, in any way endorse the change from the weekly seventh-day Sabbath to the current almost universal observance of Sunday—the widespread practice of the non-Christian faiths in the first century world he encountered. Indeed he is recorded as continuing to observe Sabbath and to work the remainder of the week (as ‘tentmaker’ KJV; Acts 18:3).

The apostle elsewhere denounces idolatry—in the Scriptures epitomized by rejection of the creation Sabbath. It identifies the one and only God: ‘...I gave them my sabbaths, to be a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am the LORD that sanctify them’ (Ezekiel 20:12). It was revealed to all of mankind at our origin: ‘...God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made’ (Genesis 2:2-3).

The apostle repeatedly refers us to

the writings we call ‘the Old Testament’. He warns us

(Colossians 2:8) to reject the ‘traditions of men’, or—as wrote Jude—‘...contend for the faith delivered once and for all to the saints’ (v.3).

Human Origins

Christians today appear to be losing the battle between ‘creationism’ and ‘evolution’. Can we, in other words, take the Scriptures at face value? The New Testament has no such doubts.

Take, for example, the much argued over topic within Christianity of human sexuality. The church is accused in the media of being obsessed by it—whether on homosexuality, or the role of women in leadership roles.

The apostles take their cue from—you guessed it—the Scriptures of the Old Testament. As, of course, did Jesus’. He firmly believes in the Genesis account of human origins. (Indeed, he inspired the words and was responsible for creation: Colossians 1:16!)

Famously he informs us: ‘...Don’t suppose that I came to do away with the Law and the Prophets. I did not come to do away with them, but to give them their full meaning. Heaven and earth may disappear. But I promise you that not even a period or comma will ever disappear from the Law. Everything written in it must happen’ (Matthew 5:17-18). The written *torah*—not the ‘traditions of the elders’—is his source.

We thus find that Jesus turns to the Scriptures as the foundation of his

Where Do You Get Your Doctrine?

teachings. Take his stance on human relationships—it is firmly rooted in the book of Genesis: ‘...Haven’t you read the scripture that says that in the beginning the Creator made people male and female? And God said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and unite with his wife, and the two will become one’ (Matthew 19:4-5). No wriggling worms struggling from primordial slime but creation by the direct hand of God—mankind, male and female, in His image and at a precise moment in time. The *Scriptures* so said!

Human Relationships

When we examine the relationship between humans the same principle applies—New Testament teaching derives from those principles laid ‘in the beginning’ - *in the Scriptures*.

So male and female are both ‘in the image of God’. Jointly they are to care for the environment. They are a team charged with populating the planet with ‘godly seed’ (Malachi 2:15). They are created to fulfill specific roles, and the New Testament writers base their understanding on the *Scriptures*.

Thus Paul directs us to the Scriptures for all our ‘theology’. **Ω**

That’s Life!... cont’d from p.6

response to external factors is proportionate.

Divine Image

We are ‘made in the image of God’—and are in His eyes of inestimable worth. To embrace this is at the heart of our self-image. In Christ we are in process of becoming ‘...a new creature’ (II Corinthians 5:17). As we become increasingly in his image we are more able to deal with the adverse factors that we daily encounter.

‘The Lord is my Helper; I will not be afraid. What can anyone do to me?’ (Hebrews 13:5-6) **Ω**

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free 32-lesson Study
Course. It’s a key to what
is for many a

unsigned articles are by the Editor

That's Life!

Why do some folk seem to sail through adversity without batting an eyelid?

We may wonder if such are privy to some secret formula, a recipe for calm! Others—most of us, probably—struggle to cope with our day-to-day experiences, for ‘life sucks’. Millions of prescriptions for anti-depressants are issued yearly. Or, the coping strategy, too often, is poured from a bottle.

Why, we might ask, do some—and it's not gender-related!—take fright at the sight of a spider or a mouse, while others quite happily allow them to roam over them? The mere sight can evoke the ‘fight or flight’ reaction. Usually the latter!

Mr Calm will probably tell you something like ‘*catch yourself on—it's just a spider*’. Not very helpful to the terror stricken. Yet isn't that a bit like what Jesus tells us?

Choice Offered

In several texts in the Gospels Jesus says ‘...*take no thought*’. He said, in other words: ‘...*do not be anxious about tomorrow; for tomorrow shall be anxious for its own things. Sufficient to the day is the evil [ie, adversity, bad experiences] of it*’ (Matthew 6:34).

He gives us a choice. We *can* choose not to worry! It's our personal responsibility to deal with our anxious thoughts, he says. But that, surely, is easier said than done.

Reality of Stress

It's very much a matter of self-discipline—and a proper understanding of ‘stress’—a much *misunderstood* concept. And *faith*. And our self-image.

The body's response to perceived danger (physical or psychological) is to produce an appropriate response in the form of blood sugar, adrenaline *etc*. If these are not ‘used up’—*ie* if there is an over-reaction—they have

an adverse physical effect.

Character

You see, our bodies are designed to be in equilibrium, a balance of the physical, emotional and spiritual elements. This is in effect Christ-like character, ‘perfection’. (Said Jesus: ‘...*be you therefore perfect (Gk teleios = complete)*’.)

When these elements are out of kilter, however, there's a reaction. This is what is called stress, experienced as some degree of discomfort (headaches, indigestion, sleeplessness, irritability *etc*) and often leading to quite serious illness if prolonged.

But the ‘event’ to which we often attribute the source of our stress is *not* the cause. Not an external threat, not a person no matter how obnoxious or irritating. The stress response is *within* us, physical—and something we can work at to put right. We change *ourselves* and not, usually, the perceived cause.

Jesus is the perfect example. We're told: ‘...*when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not*’ (1 Peter 2:23). Perfectly in balance—and completely unstressed.

The How

So the short solution to our life's challenges is—‘be perfect’! To the degree we incorporate the principles taught by Jesus to that extent we learn to reduce our inner stress response. Every adverse factor—anger, inordinate desire, dishonesty, greed *etc*—provokes a reaction in our bodies. Even an inadequate or poor diet, or medication, or recreational drugs have their adverse stressful effect on our body.

The apostle Paul details some of these in his ‘*put off, put on*’ comments (*eg* Ephesians, 4). And the book of Proverbs is a university course in adjusting our lifestyle. The Scriptures spell out for us the real causes of our stress reactions. By them we can identify our personal stressors.

The apostle equates the putting on of these actions as ‘... *put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness*’. And in Colossians 3 he adds ‘...*put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him*’ (v.10). Elsewhere he says to the brethren: ‘...*of whom I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you*’ (Galatians 4:19).

Surely that is the purpose of our Christian living.

To move towards this ‘image’—the image the Father has for each and every person, no matter how far astray we may have wandered—our mind-set has to mirror that of Jesus.

Power to Change

We can, of course, eliminate such adverse factors through our personal determination and willpower (*eg* anger management courses can be effective, or we can determine to be truthful, or we can choose to eat healthily). But as Christians we have deep resources to draw on in overcoming our defects. (Remember, such defects are the true stressors!)

When we have the perfectly balanced psyche we *forgive*, we *return good for evil*, we *trust God* (faith), we *love*, we are *compassionate* and *merciful*. It's a package that few can achieve from our own resources.

Paul again: ‘...*The Spirit also helps our infirmities. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And He searching the hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God*’ (Romans 8:26-27).

Stress is essential for healthy living. But only to the extent that our physical stress **cont'd p.5**

We could learn a lesson in proper governance by paying attention to our history

Despite the British Prime Minister's attempt, in the election run-up, to focus the minds of the British public on the vital issue of our coming departure from the European Union, other elements were determined to highlight the economy.

The doors are flung open by the Labour leadership to a free 'sweet shop' of unearned benefits: *Freedom from university fees*. Billions funnelled into the NHS. Two-fifty billion poured into infra-structure and public services. A welfare utopia. Unsurprisingly this package of goodies was embraced by millions, notably youthful voters, and responsible government was shelved.

Choice

This election offered a stark life-style choice—*personal responsibility*, or *state control*. Pay for your choices, or pass on a massive overdraft to the next generation(s). (In the UK we are approaching two trillion pounds in debt—£1,700,000,000,000, on which we annually pay fifty billions of interest to our lenders!).

But that enormous debt *isn't* the cause of our national challenges. It is *one effect of our choices*. On offer was fiscal responsibility or state handouts, and blinded by the offer of 'pie in the sky' millions, unsurprisingly, opted for the latter, for at heart we all look after 'number one'.

As a nation we have long overspent on countless follies, forgetting that what we spend—both nationally and personally—we must earn or have future generations ultimately face the consequences.

The Source

Forgotten, too, is the source of our collective wealth. All we consume derives from the eco-system of earth's bounty. Our strength to earn is sustained by what we get from the soil and the planet's eco-system. It is useful to remember that all of this infra-structure was there before we were born! As was the intelligence we all inherit to develop it—whatever our race or colour. Some peoples do, some don't. So some individuals and some nations thrive, others don't.

What the Creator said to His chosen nation, ancient Israel, has resonance for all people, all nations, throughout time: *'...you must never think that you have made yourselves wealthy by your own power and strength. Remember that it is the LORD your God who gives you the power to become rich'* (Deuteronomy 8:17-18). Or, as records King Solomon, expressing the wisdom of the ages: *'...When the king is concerned with justice, the nation will be strong, but when he is only concerned with money, he will ruin his country'* (Proverbs 29:4).

Change and Decay

It's not unusual to hear talk of 'the good old days'. There was less crime. Money went further. Children playing in the street. Jobs galore. Free education. Peace on our streets. And such a view has merit—if perhaps somewhat overdrawn, nostalgic.

Our present chaotic age is, despite our lavish material benefits, a marked contrast—frenetic, loud, terror on the streets, disparity, corruption in high places of business and politics. The King again: *'...When a nation sins, it will have one ruler after another. But a nation will be strong and endure when it has*

No— it's NOT the economy!

intelligent, sensible leaders' (Proverbs 28:2).

Reasons Considered

Our politicians and business and charity leaders emerge from among the general populace. They have experienced years of their own segment of national culture—and reflect that attitude in their behaviour and in their policies. Given that the public in general has over the past few decades all but abandoned its moral compass it is unsurprising that leadership quality has largely plummeted, with *self-serving*ousting national pride and service, and our Christian culture despised.

Whatever we think of the past, society has radically changed—for better and for worse. But how do we judge either state? What suits one person is poison to another. Average man will, unsurprisingly, think first of *self*—we protect ourselves and our own 'estate'. It's the 'natural man'. But we are shaped by a range of factors, besides our genes:

- **Education**
It has lurched in a 'liberal', anti-God, in tolerance; Christian values are suppressed
- **Surfeit of goods**
Fueled by debt we spend, spend, spend, focusing on the material, neglect the spirit
- **Welfare dependency**
'Bread and circuses' has sapped the will of millions; too many 'vote for more'
- **Political correctness**
We are force-fed from childhood with concepts contrary to our nature and to sound Christian values
- **Decline of Religion**
Relatively few now experience early exposure to the principles of religion—especially to the Christian Bible

Such factors mould us into a herd mind-set, and shape the nation's reactions and aspirations. No surprise

that as leaders emerge they too lack a sound standard on which to base their decisions. Those who stand up for their beliefs are vilified by the media and by politicians (who all emerge from the same swamp).

Gold Standard

Socialism, Conservatism, Marxism—each (and other guiding philosophies) attracts its dedicated adherents, many willing to sacrifice all to promote it. All have their faults!

Marxism—the ugly face of socialism—surfaced on the world scene a century ago, leaving millions dead in its wake. Benign socialism and conservatism has flourished, alternatively, in the United Kingdom at the whim of the voting public—but each with its serious challenges and each deeply flawed. Socialism is presently in process of morphing into Marxism.

Lesson from the Past

Great minds embrace each *-ism*—yet all have failed us. For the various manifestos have sidelined the one and only God and indulged all other ‘gods’. Ignore His guidance, forget Him, and we spiral to oblivion—as did ancient Israel. Sceptics discount the history of that nation as legend—mere stories. The record was, however, ‘...*written for our learning*’ and for these times—and we must pay attention!

Blessed with abundant natural resources they ascended (at their peak around 1000BC) to the top table of contemporary nations: ‘... *Solomon exceeded all the kings of the earth in riches and in wisdom. And all the earth sought the presence of Solomon, to hear his wisdom, which God had put in his heart*’ (I Kings 10:23-24). Israel became a great international trade, military and maritime nation with links to surrounding nations.

Conditioned as this was on following God’s revealed pathway—a Covenant to which they had wholeheartedly agreed (Exodus 24:7)—it didn’t last, for they abandoned that way and embraced the degrading culture of

surrounding nations. Within three centuries the northern tribes were invaded, their kingdom overthrown—and then dispersed from their own land, never yet to return. A solemn warning indeed.

British ‘Values’

The anglo-saxon nations have also inherited divine material blessing coupled with an in-born respect, *via* the Bible, for the principles of Israel’s law and culture. Based on these principles our nation has profited from great religious paradigm shifts—the Reformation, the Wesleyan revivals, Victorian philanthropy (eg Sunday schools).

But the last half-century has witnessed widespread moral decline, a falling away from Christianity, with Christian faith and practice jettisoned at all levels of society. We are even shamed by the alien cultures in our midst.

Our much-vaunted ‘values’ are a national disgrace. Almost 200,000 *annually* slain, by ‘maternal’ choice, in the womb—and over eight million since our Abortion Act, 1967. Families shattered. Children undisciplined and dictating policy. Adultery and std’s endemic. Shameless public behaviour. Corruption in business

and politics.

All this in a nation for centuries exposed to Christian principles! A nation that inherited the divine promises of prosperity. Those days are past, as they were dependent on our fulfilling *our* part to the covenant. As said Moses to Israel: ‘...*You forgot the Rock that brought you into being and ceased to care for God who formed you*’ (Deuteronomy 32:18).

Israel—and her modern descendants—are likened to a protected vineyard. We have for long been surrounded by the ‘hedge’ of submission to divine Law. But change is coming: ‘... *I will take away its hedge, and it will be burned. I will breach its wall, and it will become a trampling ground [for foreign nations]*’ (Isaiah 5:5).

No—it’s *not* the economy! Our prosperity, our national existence, hinges on our willing submission to God’s perfect Laws, now largely neglected.

Are we as a nation so besotted by materialism that we have ‘cloth ears’ when it comes to listening to the only source of our prosperity, our Creator? Can’t we learn from our history, from the recorded history of ancient Israel—a nation to which we have physical and spiritual ties?

To repeat: ‘...*When the king is concerned with justice, the nation will be strong, but when he is only concerned with money, he will ruin his country*’ (Proverbs 29:4).

Ω

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read:

**Religious Holidays
...or God’s Holy Days?**

which you observe is important

MiniStudy

Why the Holy Days?

'Don't suppose that I came to do away with the Law and the Prophets. I did not come to do away with them, but to give them their full meaning' (Matthew 5:17 CEV)

Whether Christian, Jew, Muslim or Hindu, believers love their annual holy days. Christmas, Passover, Ramadan/Eid, Divali - all are joyfully celebrated by the faithful. They mark special events and are believed to have been decreed by their respective God. But why do many *Christians* observe what are viewed by most Christians as '*Jewish* days'?

- The Bible holy days are listed in Leviticus 23, and are observed annually by thousands of Christian believers. Indeed they are the only days recorded in the Scriptures - Old Testament or New - to have been decreed by the God of the Bible, JHVH, the LORD, and observed by the first Christians
- Although considered (often disparagingly) as 'Jewish' these annual holy days were introduced to the new nation of Israel (c. 1500 BC) as '*...appointed seasons of Jehovah, holy gatherings which you shall proclaim in their appointed seasons*' (Leviticus 23:4). *God's* days, note - not 'Jewish', not traditions concocted by mankind!
- Perhaps surprisingly, only one of the days observed by most Christians today - *Pentecost* (also called *Whitsunday*) - is mentioned in the New Testament. Others (Christmas, Easter, saints' days *etc*) were imported from dubious sources into Christianity long after the time of Jesus and the apostles. They obscure the Creator's plan for mankind—a plan initiated before the creation of the universe, and man
- Each of these '*appointed seasons*' has direct reference to and clarifies some aspect of the life and mission of Jesus Christ. They are 'shadows' cast by the real events they portray. *Passover*, for example, is a reminder of the LORD's deliverance of His people - anciently from Egypt and, now, from the slavery of our sin. The *Unleavened Bread* festival emphasises our continuing need to live a holy life free from hypocrisy, malice and error. *Pentecost* is the on-going mission of the holy Spirit through the church. The *Day of Trumpets* has direct reference to the tumultuous times just prior to the return of Messiah, while *Atonement* looks forward to the reconciliation of mankind with the Father. The seven-day autumn *Festival of Tabernacles* depicts man's temporal nature - an ever-present reminder of our frailty, that we are 'clay' being shaped for perfection by a loving God, while the *eighth day* (which immediately follows on *Tabernacles*) looks forward to eternity
- As with the weekly seventh-day Sabbath, in observing these divinely-appointed days '*...there is great reward*' (Psalm 19:8-11), and our annual observance reinforces God's Word to us. They provide spiritual '*food in due season*'
- The holy days were appointed by God. So - *must* we observe them? In ancient Israel they were indeed required observances - though so often neglected. Certainly important, for King Jeroboam set up an idolatrous festival (1 Kings 12:32) and was ever after branded as perhaps their most sinful king: '*...he caused Israel to sin*'. God expected their observance - so long as all else was in order, and done from the right motives
- Most professing Christians joyfully and happily—and *without coercion*—observe festive days that are *not* authorised by God—indeed condemned by Him. They know that as Christians no amount of law-keeping will save - only the sacrifice of Jesus, freely embraced, can do that. But as Christians we should '*...live by every word of God*' as magnified by the teachings of Jesus. We '*...worship in spirit and in truth*' (John 4:22-24)
- It is said of Abraham '*...the father of us all*' that he '*...kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws*' (Genesis 26:5). This was some four centuries *before* Moses and 'the Law'. He obeyed - as should Christians - because of his faith, not because the Law demanded it. The festivals are '*statutes*' - eg Leviticus 23:21 (*Pentecost*). (There are indications that the three harvest festival seasons were observed since creation) **Ω**

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