

# **NEW** *Horizons*

*Vol 24 No 1*

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*addressing the important issues for today and tomorrow*

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**CGOM**

Churches Of God Outreach Ministries

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

**The Gospel was proclaimed by Jesus and by his apostles in terms clear to those who have 'ears to hear' - 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**

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## **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 Newsletter **OUTREACH, NEW HORIZONS** magazine, the **BIBLE BASICS** on-line home study course, and a 32-lesson **STUDY COURSE**.

The *Outreach Ministries* also supports a network of Independent fellowships and scattered brethren.

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# new Horizons

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## None of us can fully imagine the magnificence of what God has in store for His own off-spring

A divided United Kingdom has been struggling for years to free itself from the Babylonian stranglehold of the European Union. (As I write, it still struggles!) It is driven by the possibility of a better future, the ‘sunny uplands’ of lasting prosperity.

It may be a pipe-dream—for prosperity is ephemeral, and while not so recognized yet it dangles by a thread. For material prosperity rests on the foundation of compliance with underlying universal laws—laws long neglected in our materialistic world.

Contrast this with the future for Christians, with that of believers in the God of the Christian Scriptures, those daily seeking to model their lives on Jesus and his teachings. Unless we are in that relationship there is nowhere to go but up. For we all begin life ‘lost’. For, ‘...*Our desires fight against God, because they do not and cannot obey God's laws*’ (Romans 8:7).

Without divine intervention we crumble to dust, to the elements from which we were formed—and are gone forever. As wrote wise King Solomon: ‘...*the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten*’ (Ecclesiastes 9:5). That’s

everyone’s fate—*without God’s intervention.*

## A New Creation

Radical change takes place, however, in those who align with the God-head. Having examined their life and come to understand they were ‘sinners’ and thus forever alienated from the Creator, they sought—and received—forgiveness through Jesus Christ. God then imparts His all-important gift—His holy Spirit—essential for transforming us into a ‘new creature’.

## A Future to Die For!

The Spirit combines with the repentant human spirit begetting us as His sons and daughters and beginning the process whereby we are transformed into His image. Wrote the apostle Paul to the brethren in Corinth: ‘...*if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new*’ (II Corinthians 5:17). We are learning to align ourselves with His will, to daily reflect the life of Christ, to walk in his steps.

## Our Walk

The path to attain any worthwhile goal in any field of endeavor isn’t strewn with rose petals. It requires effort. It requires persistence. There are ‘bumps in the road’, even failures. The Christian path is no less rugged, as Jesus warned: ‘...*Go in through the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and*

*broad is the way that leads to destruction, and many are the ones entering in through it. For narrow is the gate, and constricted is the way that leads away into life, and few are the ones finding it*’ (Matthew 7:13-14).

Paul, in Derbe and citing his own recent experience (he was stoned and left for dead) said: ‘...*we must through much tribulation [Gk.thlipsis: trouble] enter into the kingdom of God*’ (Acts 14:22). Why then would you dare to commit to Jesus Christ?

## Transformed

Christianity is not merely turning to God for help with our daily challenges—though that is ‘part of the deal’, a vital aspect of our covenant made with Him at our baptism. The change of heart implants in us, in embryo, His very nature: ‘...*He has given to us the very great and precious promises, so that through these you might be partakers of the divine nature, escaping from the corruption in the world by lust [strong desire]*’ (II Peter 1:4).

That nature is expressed by His indwelling Spirit. That’s *real*—not some ephemeral notion but the literal implanting in our minds of the divine nature. Without that we are a mere concoction of physical particles organized by biological laws. (Even the most innocent newborn doesn’t have the Spirit.) Paul again: ‘...*you are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not*

*the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his* (Romans 8:9).

Our charitable activities won't ease us into the Kingdom of God. Nor will a spotless church attendance record. Nor our sermons or miracle-working, but only a mind being transformed by the Spirit of God. This alone is what transforms human love (Gk. *agape*) to divine love (I John 4:8)—a love that is expressed in us by its nine-fold fruit (Galatians 5:22-23).

### **Beyond the Grave**

When we crumble to dust our human spirit (Job 32:8) retains all there is to know about us. But it is the indwelling holy Spirit, bound with that human spirit and with Spirit-led love, that guarantees we will experience the fullness of God's purpose for us. As wrote Paul: *'...Eye has not seen, and ear has not heard, nor has it risen up into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for those that love Him'* (I Corinthians 2:9).

The fullness of that eternal destiny is veiled from us by our humanity. But freed from that humanity and through a resurrection from the dead we become integrated in the divine Family: *'...[God] will be a Father to you, and you shall be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty'* (II Corinthians 6:18).

The apostle adds, to the Christians community in Rome *'...If children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together'* (Romans 8:17).

That statement takes the breath away. *'...joint-heirs with Christ'*! Heirs of God —of the

creation, that is. In reference to those in whom is the Spirit Paul says: *'...whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren'*. Jesus is the firstfruit from among the dead, and Christians are *'...a kind of firstfruit'*. destined to be united with him.

We cannot, of course, ever be his equal, for *'...all things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life'* (John 1:3-4). He was with God in the beginning, he created everything, he is the source of all life—he made us. Jesus,

*'...being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name'* (Philippians 2:5-9)

### **CALLING ALL INTERNET USERS!**

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

***Be sure to take a look at***

We, by contrast, are to *put on* immortality (I Corinthians 15:53-54) whereas God alone is truly immortal (I Timothy 6:16). Yet we are destined to share Christ's inheritance—each in accordance with our spiritual growth in this life.

### **Resurrection Life**

John tells us *'...now are we the sons of God, and it doesn't yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him'* (I John 3:2), and the apostle Paul shares insight as to what that state will be: *'...we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed'* (I Corinthians 15:52).

He adds: *'...It is sown [by our death] a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body'* (v.44). Not an ephemeral spirit but in a body like the resurrection body of Jesus with all its new dimensions (Luke 24:39).

### **Eternity**

After that 'first resurrection' (at Christ's return) the people of God will be assigned to reign with him on earth throughout the next thousand years: *'...Blessed and holy is he that has part in the first resurrection: on such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand ears'* (Revelation 20:6, 5:10).

It is then that there is formed *'a new heaven and a new earth'* and the Father chooses to come to Earth as His base for eternity: *'...Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death'* (ch 21:3-3). But that's just the beginning.

Surely a project to die for. **Ω**

## Which Day?

Everyone loves a day off—a day to cast aside the pressures of the job, to spend time on cherished leisure activities, to be with the family. For most folk it matters little which day of the week that may be, though it is often dictated by ‘our boss’—whatever our faith.

But for vast numbers there is little choice. In Judaism, for example, it is a religious duty to observe the *seventh* day of the week—Saturday. Those of the Islamic faith observe Friday for prayers and religious instruction (though it isn’t a ‘Sabbath’ - they may also work). In Christianity the rest day is, for the most part, Sunday, the *sixth* day.

Although a Christian festival, Sunday is widely observed around the globe by people of other faiths—and of no faith. . It is now commercially driven; worldwide financial markets close on Sundays, as do most businesses.

### Tradition

Sunday has a long history, long pre-dating Christianity—it isn’t a specifically Christian institution [see side bar]. But within three centuries of the life and death of Jesus Christ Christianity embraced Sunday as the day of rest, and it was thereafter imposed throughout Europe where Catholicism dominated, spreading wherever that church put down roots.

And Sunday was not just a harmless commemorative weekly observance but enforced, often, on pain of death, at the hands of the Catholic Inquisition. Multiple thousands perished on the rack or at the stake for being faithful to the Scriptures.

“Show me one [denomination] that claims, or possesses the power to make laws binding on the conscience. There’s but one on the face of the earth—the Catholic Church—that has the power to make laws binding upon the conscience, binding before God, binding under pain of hell fire.... What right have the Protestant churches to observe that, day? None whatever. You say it is to obey the commandment, ‘Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.’ But Sunday is not the Sabbath according to the Bible and the record of time. Every one knows that Sunday is the first day of the week, while Saturday is the seventh day and the Sabbath.... It was the holy Catholic Church that changed the day of rest from Saturday to Sunday, the first day of the week. And it not only compelled all to keep Sunday, but at the Council of Laodicea, A. D. 364, anathematized those who kept the Sabbath and urged all persons to labor on the seventh day under the penalty of anathema...yet by their solemn act of keeping Sunday they acknowledge the power of the Catholic Church” *Father Enright, quoted in The American Sentinel 1880*

The popular worship of Mithra [the “Invincible Sun-god”] became so pre-eminent in the Roman Empire in the days of Constantine, that he decreed “The Venerable Day of the Sun” to be the weekly rest day of the Empire . “It [Mithraism] had so much acceptance that it was able to impose on the Christian world its own Sun-day in place of the Sabbath, its Sun’s birthday, 25th December, as the birthday of Jesus.” --G. Murray, *Christianity in the Light of Modern Knowledge*, pp. 73, 74

But surely that is all in the past? The Roman church lost its subservient states and its political dominance at the end of the eighteenth century, having ruled since the end of the old Roman Empire. In a sense the Church’s political power died. But not for long.

### Revival

The *Lateran Treaty* (1929) recognized Vatican City as an independent state under the sovereignty of the Holy See. As such it has embassies in nearly every nation, and now exerts substan-

tial influence globally. Indeed world leaders pay homage to the Pope as the moral standard for our cultural norms.

### A Simple Choice?

This, of course would be welcomed by many employees, but not by business! Who doesn’t want a ‘day off’! But consider what it means in matters of faith.

Most Christians would take it on the chin—they *already* worship on Sunday. But would Jewish believers welcome it? It’s an affront to a fundamental belief. Indeed most faiths—Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism could live with it. If opposition were to be punished—what then? What about those Christians who believe that the *seventh* day of the week is *holy*? Isn’t that the day God set aside since creation (Genesis 2:3: ‘*sanctified*’, *same word*)?

There is, however, more to it. For as we have seen Sunday has historically been much more than simply a day to ‘go to church’. During the Middle Ages the life of Christians depended on it. And if you were Jewish you had to convert, have a ‘false conversion’—or die.

Sunday under Catholicism had become a ‘mark’ of that church, a sign of its authority not only religiously but also politically. It claimed domination over all nations.

### Century Twenty-one

But is that of relevance in our modern age? Isn’t the Pope hailed as a saviour of the world, lauded almost universally for his humanity, his moral authority? Well, there are clouds on the horizon.

The Papacy has long urged for Sunday legislation. For example, Pope Leo XIII (19c) in his Encyc

**Which Day?... cont'd**

lical *Rerum Novarum* spoke of Sunday rest as a worker's right which the State must guarantee. And the revered John-Paul II *Dies Domini 1998*: 'Therefore, also in the particular circumstances of our own time, Christians will naturally strive to ensure that civil legislation respects their duty to keep Sunday holy'.

In his encyclical *Laudato Si* (2015), Pope Francis set out his—now the world's—agenda for tackling climate change. It is significant that he linked it with the universal observance of Sunday as a day of rest, recreation, religious observance which could reduce world emissions by 20%. (The *Paris Agreement* of 2016 also set this as a target). Crucially, this—which requires the agreement of all nations—would be enforced by legislation.

**The End Time**

The Christian Scriptures—always so prescient—predict for us what will happen in the 'end time' if mankind doesn't have a change of heart. It is not comfortable reading. Indeed its portrayal of that 'end' is a remarkable fit for our own era. The prime mover in that scenario is the Papacy.

The prophet Daniel conveys God's interpretation of a dream He gave the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar. It predicted the course of history until the coming of Christ to establish *his* Kingdom as consisting of four empires: Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome. Exactly as it has unfolded down the centuries.

The final human kingdom, Rome, as predicted, has had a succession of revivals and is now, *via* the evolving European Union, in its tenth (and final) revival. Its 'emperor' in the end-time represents a deadly amalgamation of church and state. **Ω**

request the free article:

**Get Ready for Sunday**

**Why Prophecy?**

Unless you live on an isolated desert island without internet you will have a fair idea of how our world is faring. *Not good*, despite the home comforts most of us have grown to expect.

The current preoccupation with 'climate change' is simply an added concern on top of our daily personal experiences. Add in the all-too-frequent reports of hurricanes, earthquakes, myriad conflicts, civil strife, international tensions—and so many of us turn to a variety of prophecies for enlightenment and perhaps solace.

But there's a problem. Put the prophetic *interpretations* to the test and they invariably don't add up. Different pundits have differing insights. So who do you trust?

Take the Bible, the Christian Scriptures. *I* wouldn't go anywhere else to find prophecy. Listen to Peter the apostle '...*We have also a more sure word of prophecy.... Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit*' (II Peter 1:19-21).

What do they mean? Who has always got it right? For that is important: '...*if you say in your heart, How shall we know the word which the LORD has not spoken? When a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken, but the prophet has spoken it presumptuously: you shall not be afraid of [listen to] him*' - Deuteronomy 18:2.

**A Dilemma**

How many failed interpretations have you encountered in your Christian life! Given, then, the emphasis many give to prophecy—how should we

view it? Is it worth studying?

Prophecy is often viewed as how God will manipulate events to achieve His purpose. If only we can unlock it then we—*what?* Be more prepared? Be one up on other brethren? Be safer? Be more content?

**Why Prophecy?**

Nations, empires even, have as much weight with God as the dust on a balance. He 'stirs up' one to chasten another for its iniquity, and He does know what will be the outcome. Some elements He has had recorded in the Scriptures—prophecy. It is for our learning, so that *when we see it happen* we know it is *His* doing.

Isaiah, for example, relays God's message to Assyria: '*...O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indignation. I will send him against an hypocritical nation, and against the people of my wrath [Israel]*' (ch 10:5-6). It happened as predicted. Its purpose? The oft-repeated, '*...They shall know that I am the LORD*'.

**Vigilance**

Repeatedly, Jesus urged his believing followers to be vigilant: '*...Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watches [Gr.gregorio], and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame*' (Revelation 16:15).

Even if we were totally clued-up on the interpretation of the end-time prophecies—*it matters* that you may not have been vigilant, that you have not '*kept your garments*', that you have *walked naked*'.

To be a Christian is to be in a full-time, twenty-four/seven relationship with God. It is to seek Him daily. It is to match our daily walk—our behaviour—to the pattern set by Jesus. It is to '*overcome to the end*'.

The future will ultimately unfold precisely as God has planned. His Word stands sure for ever, and we can but look on in awe as we observe *how* they unfold. **Ω**

## King of the World

Much has been penned down the centuries as to the identity of a leading figure of end-time prophecy: the ‘antichrist’. He is considered to be a powerful political despot who will lead the world in opposition to Jesus Christ at his return.

This individual is, alternatively, viewed by others as arising from the Middle East, a successor of Antiochus the Great and likely of the Muslim faith. We don’t need to guess, however, for the Scriptures provide us with a clear identikit ‘photo-fit’.

First note what the apostle John tells us about the antichrist: ‘...it is the last time: and as you have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time [the ‘week-end’ of God’s prophetic week]’ (I John 2:18). Whoever he may be, then, the antichrist symbolizes multiple individuals directly opposed to the teachings of Jesus. But undoubtedly the end-time focus is on the archetype, *the* antichrist. He dominates the world stage through much of Christian history.

The apostle Paul brands him as ‘*the man of sin*’ (II Thessalonians 2:3), adding, ‘...He will oppose every so-called god or object of worship and will put himself above them all. He will even go in and sit down in God’s Temple and claim to be God’ (v.4). Quite an indictment.

We are not left without identifying detail, supplied by God’s vision to Daniel (*ch* 7). From his era until Christ returns, we are told, there would be four empires

impacting God’s nation of

Israel: Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome. Rome would evolve in ten phases, and it is in the last of these that the final antichrist would be globally empowered.

Writes the prophet: ‘...I wanted to know about the ten horns on its head and the horn that had come up afterward and had made three of the horns fall. It had eyes and a mouth and was boasting proudly. It was more terrifying than any of the others. While I was looking, that horn made war on God’s people and conquered them’ (vv.20-21).

The ‘horns’ are kingdoms and their leaders, and after the Roman Empire fell (554AD) ten nations were in occupation of Europe (*see side-bar*). Three of them had embraced the Arian belief (that Christ was created) which was anathema to the Roman Catholic nations. They were embroiled in thirty years of war resulting in three nations being overthrown, all but erased from history. It was genocide, millions perishing. Emperor Justinian then endowed the Catholic church with nationhood, a union of church and state—the ‘little horn’ of Daniel’s prophecy, which then began to increasingly

Ten Kingdoms
Alemanni
Anglo-Saxons
Franks
Burgundians
Visigoths
Suevi
Ostrogoths
Heruli
Lombards
Vandals

exercise authority over Europe and beyond

### Characteristics

Daniel, in vision, was given a preview of the chief characteristics of this ‘little horn’. In sum, they are:

- He ‘uproots’ three existing kingdoms: *historically*—Heruli, Vandals, Ostrogoths
- This ‘horn’ is a human head: ‘eyes like the eyes of man’
- He spoke ‘great things against the Most High’, and was listened to widely
- He was a persecuting power: ‘made war with the saints, and prevailed against them’
- He is a reformer: ‘thinks to change times and laws’
- Continues to harass Christians for three and a half years\*
- He still exists when Christ returns: ‘Until the Ancient of days came’

\* *time, times and half a time*. Literally 3½yrs, prophetically 1260yrs

Given Paul’s assertion that the ‘man of sin’/antichrist existed in his day, we must view his tenure as being on the world stage and exercising religious and political authority since then. We must also add in John’s prophecy that there would be an interruption to its tenure when this entity received ‘a mortal blow’ but would later revive.

Given that this interpretation is correct, there can be little doubt as to whom it refers—*viz* to the Papacy and to its head. It’s a perfect photo-fit. **Ω**

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unsigned articles are by the Editor

There are alternative interpretations of this prophetic scenario. It is important that we each be observant, watchful, and as events unfold on the world stage we must judge them accordingly through the prism of the unchanging Word.

## Reap a Destiny

**Where is your life going? The path you are now treading will determine it**

From our first rising until bedtime much of our day is bound by routines. They make life easier. Each morning we don't have to struggle with figuring how to wash and groom, or how to dress, or how to make breakfast.. Such activities simply become 'habit'.

Habits are '*a settled tendency or practice*', and we can't comfortably get through the day without them. In general they are positive and helpful. They are occasionally acquired slowly, undercover, un-noticed. Other desirable habitual behaviour is acquired painfully, with much persistent effort. For Christians it may be the habit of daily prayer or study of the Word or regular fellowship.

But there's a dark side to habitual behaviour - as would be agreed by the alcoholic, or the chronic worrier, or the TV addict. Wrote Dr Samuel Johnson: '*The chains of habit are too weak to be felt until they are too strong to be broken*'.

Those chains can bind us for life - and for eternity: '*Sow an act and reap a habit. Sow a habit and reap a character. Sow a character and reap a destiny*'.

However, for the Christian the chains can - with effort and with divine empowerment - be snapped.

It's unlikely *you* are not bound

by some practice that you would prefer to finish with! And undesirable habits can be forsaken, put behind you. As with helpful habits, so too with the negative - effort must be applied. Wrote the apostle Paul: "*...who on earth can set me free from the clutches of my own sinful nature?*"(Romans 7:24).

The good news is that the Scriptures provide the tools needed to break those chains.

### Examine Yourself

A first step in conquering a wrong habit is an awareness that you are in its grip. Habits become 'second nature' - so much a part of us that we don't recognize their presence. The Psalmist knew this and prayed: "*Search me, O God, and know my heart...and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting*"(Psalm 139:23-24).

Self-examination, Word of God in hand, can uncover buried unsavoury character traits that are hidden from us because now habitual. You could, too, ask someone you trust - though your spouse has probably already told you, and often!

God's Word is the mirror that reflects our wrong habits. It 'hits us between the eyes' with right practices and thus condemns our sin (for that is what it is). Study it. Allow the Bible to shine a light into those dark corners of life.

### What Are the Consequences?

What hidden habits lurk in your life? Anger, perhaps? Do you often 'fly off the handle' - and not realize it has become a habitual reaction to your circumstances? Anger may have its beginnings in the example your parents set you.

Or, it may be that you 'got away

with' responding in anger to life's challenges. It became habit.

Wrote King Solomon: "*He that is soon angry deals foolishly*"(Proverbs 14: 17). And Job understood the consequences: "*Wrath kills the foolish man*"(Job 5:2). It's general knowledge that anger and wrath and resentment can cause illness - and even may literally kill!

And that's a further step in getting rid of a habit: *understand the consequences*. Look at the alcoholic retching in the gutter and note the effect it has on family and work and life. And on your church brethren - for Christians are far from being immune. See the iron grip that imprisons the paedophile - the consequence of habitual pornographic input. Or, watch the perspiring grossly overweight man or woman as they gasp for breath on an incline. *Consequences!* Such habits don't just happen. They result from a chosen life-style - whatever the cause of that choice.

There are, too, *long-term* consequences to ingrained habit. The apostle Paul: "*Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the Kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the Kingdom of God*"(I Corinthians 6: 9-10). They are '*works of the flesh*' Paul told the Galatians (*ch* 5:19-21). Allow any of these practices to become habitual - part of your total life-style - *then you are barred from God's eternal Kingdom*. If that concerns you then it should be incentive enough to deal - *now* - with your habit!

Some of the Corinthian brethren



had been ensnared by these practices. Paul adds, however (v.11): "Such *were* some of you". They had come to grips - and beaten - their poisonous life-styles, their destructive habits.

### **Nip in the Bud**

So you are now aware of your problem. But that doesn't stop it spilling out! A sudden burst of anger. Simmering resentment. More gossip. Another backstabbing. Another drink, another cream cake, another furtive paging of a top-shelf magazine. Bang goes your resolution!

You must move on. Writing to the Christians in Ephesus, Paul says: "...*you must no longer behave like the Gentiles [ie the unconverted], whose lives are spent in the uselessness of their ways of thinking*"(ch 4:17). He is pointing out that our behaviour results from our thought patterns. Or, as Solomon wrote: "*As a man thinks in his heart so is he*"(Proverbs 23:7). To conquer a habit, then, we must work on our habitual mode of thinking, be '*transformed by a complete renewal of mind*' wrote Paul (Romans 12:2).

### **Divine Help**

*How?* By first looking in the mirror of God's Word to identify what's right and what's wrong, to focus the spotlight of truth on your personal sinful habit. Many men and women have successfully identified and beaten undesirable habits through sheer unaided gritty will-power.

Christians, who have God's Spirit - His mind - indwelling them, must in like manner exercise the same power of their mind. It's the Spirit of a sound mind implanting in us the seed of spiritual fruit - including *patience* and *self-control* (Galatians 5:22-23). Soul-destroying habits don't happen in

isolation. They affect - and are affected by - the whole of life.

A man who is habitually resentful or angry - or has other life-dominating problems - harms his family, friends, social activity, finances, work, church, his relationship with God. He is deficient in the all-encompassing *divine love* that is another vital 'fruit of the Spirit'.

As we nourish the growth of the Holy Spirit's influence - through 'the means of grace' - we can win battles beyond our normal strength. The Christian way of life is more than just 'pie in the sky when you die!' The man or woman converted to Jesus Christ links to the power-house of the universe.

In working with the alcohol-dependent, AA appoint a 'buddy' to help - someone to contact when the going gets tough. Christians have also the support and encouragement of their church fellowship. God's Spirit guides us, but the Spirit works, too, through human instruments - those brethren in whom He dwells.

Such support is an important key to successfully overcoming any habit. Wrote James: "...*Is any of you suffering trouble?... Confess your sins [ie offences, problems] to each other, and pray for one another that you may be cured. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great effect*"(ch 5:13-16). We can call on the brethren - as well, often, as family and friends - for support when faced with our destructive habits.

### **Avoidance**

Another key to conquering habitual life-style patterns is to identi-

fy those 'triggers' that initiate a bout of anger or gambling or alcohol abuse *etc* - and avoid them. The apostle Paul gives us the principle: "*Flee fornication*" (I Corinthians 6:18), and "*Steer clear of the activities of darkness*"(Ephesians 5:11).

Is 'demon drink' a problem? Don't linger around bars - take another way home! Where appropriate avoid the bakery or the betting shop or the race track or the TV or top-shelf magazines. And don't carry cigarettes around with you.

Tough - but decisions you must make in the light of your eternal destiny.

### **Use and Disuse**

Now link with this a further principle. You could call it 'put off-put on'.

Writes Paul, again: "*You are to rid yourself of the old nature with your previous habits, ruined as it is by deceitful lusts [rotted through and through with lust's illusions]; that you be renewed in your mental attitude and that you put on the new nature which is created in God's likeness in genuine righteousness and holiness*"(Ephesians 4:20-24)

So - become aware of your wrong habits. Consider their consequences - for this life - and for the next. Discipline your mind - that is, use sustained daily effort aided and strengthened by God's indwelling Spirit - to develop a new healthy and positive thought process encompassing every aspect of life.

The chains of habit *can* be broken. The ultimate prize of becoming a member of the spirit-Family of God is worth every drop of energy we expend Ω

## The Common Good

**Most will agree that there's something wrong with our world. Whether its the environment, or our social institutions, or the world of commerce, or even religion—everywhere there is chaos. And our leaders are agreed: 'something must be done about it'.**

Perhaps unsurprisingly the Pope is assuming a leadership role in proposing solutions. Indeed every Pope since John Paul II has spoken on the matter. The current Pope—Francis—issued the Encyclical *Laudati Si* (2015) to address this global challenge. World leaders have embraced his diagnosis—and his solutions.

Pope Francis highlights 'extreme individualism' as standing in the way of an equitable world. It leads to the vast gap between rich and poor, not just in the 'third world' but even in the prosperous West. Corporate and personal greed undermines morality. Our desire for wealth has raped the planet leading to universal concerns about global warming. His analysis is comprehensive, and who can disagree?

### Global Solutions

The Pope's recurring theme is 'the common good'. We must all – United Nations, sovereign nations, local communities, individuals—act together in the common good. We all share the effects of climate change. We share the experience of plastic pollution, of air and water pollution, of population growth. We share the threat of water shortage, human trafficking, of nuclear destruction.

The Pope states: '*It is possible that we do not grasp the gravity of the challenge now before us*'. He adds: '*The common good has become global and nations must associate for their own good*'. The solution, that is, must be global.

### Religious Liberty

The secular media highlights that perhaps 70% of mankind exists under a regime that prohibits religious liberty. It is this that papal sources claim is a major cause—and solution—of the world's problems. We ought each to be free to worship and work freely—but only as long as it serves 'the common good'.

This is defined, in sum, as 'good works', to care for the environment, to 'love your neighbor'. Francis states that the reason for the failure of international negotiations lies with nations that '*place their national interest above this common good*'. A global authority, in effect, is required to enforce compliance.

*So true!* For that is the scenario that follows the return of Messiah. He will establish *his way, his Laws, his administration*. His rule will eventually include all earth's inhabitants who live in his thousand year Kingdom: '*... the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea*' (Habakkuk 2:14). And many will say: '*...let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people*' (Isaiah 2:3-4).

*There is, however, a fundamental difference.*

In contrast to the papal utopia, Christ's rule will be freely embraced by men and women who have been transformed by the holy Spirit. They will have repented of sin. They will all, whatever their previous faith, now willingly follow the one true faith that is the divine way since Creation. They will all become grafted into the 'Israel of God'. All will have the hope of eternal life. Law will be applied equitably, humanely and

mercifully.

### Cessation from Work

Implicit in the papal plan is the use of external pressure, of enforcement of 'the common good' by the civil authorities. Compliance will reflect mediæval practice as prevailed wherever Rome dominated. The return and reign of Jesus doesn't figure in the papal equation.

Confusing Sunday with the Biblical Sabbath the Pope praises universal 'Sunday rest' as a major step in solving global warming as industry (impractically) ceases to pollute. He has consistently proposed that the civil authorities must legislate for Sunday closure and dedicate the day to rest, to entertainment, to sporting activities, to religious duty—which, he believes, reflect his theme 'for the common good'.

### The End

This papal plan, I must say, closely reflects the end-time scenario Jesus depicted through the apostle John in the book of Revelation. He describes a world-dominating regime that enforces ancient heathen religious practice, marked by enforced Sunday observance.

Historically, the Roman church claims the right to have changed what is this fundamental law of God, seventh-day Sabbath observance. This is the true symbol for our care of the environment, being the God-given memorial of creation (Exodus 20:11). The appropriation of Sunday is a mark of Rome's desire to stamp her authority on the world, by whatever means.

Every Christian should be alert to this plan as it inexorably unfolds on the world stage. Our response will determine our readiness for God's Kingdom. Ω

'the most complete realization [of the common good] occurs in the political community where the state's role is 'to defend and promote the common good of civil society, its citizens and intermediate bodies'  
*Jesuit Research Institute*

MiniStudy**THE WILL OF GOD**

***‘The world is passing away, and the lust thereof: but he that does the will of God abides for ever’ (I John 2:17)***  
***‘...as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart’ (Ephesians 6:6)***

Christian, Muslim, Hindu—indeed believers of any faith—would surely accept that whatever God’s will may be it is the right way, the perfect way. He created us. He made us in His image. So why would He not act only to benefit us. It behoves us, then, to seek to unlock what that will truly is—for each of us, for our nation, for the world.

- How we perceive ‘the will of God’ is tailored by our view of Him. Is He just? Is He loving and merciful? Is He wrathful? Is He a remote God or is He hands-on? How does our faith portray Him: our religious books, our ministers, our Imams, our gurus? And then there’s our personal understanding of how these factors interact
- Christians, of course, ought to be guided by God’s revelation of Himself through the Scriptures, the Bible. His will is there written large. And above all He has provided in Jesus a living example, a template, of what that divine will entails. He on becoming human says: ‘...I come to do your will, O God’ (Hebrews 10:5). John records his words: ‘...I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me’ (John 6:38). And he did—perfectly and throughout his life
- His perfect will is exemplified in his confrontation in the wilderness with Satan. The devil faced Jesus when at his weakest physically—but strongest spiritually. The test was apt ‘...If you are the Son of God, command this stone that it be made bread’ (Luke 4:3). As God’s Son, in other words, it wouldn’t prove difficult—so, prove your claim. It wasn’t sin to turn water to wine, so what’s the problem with stone to bread? No—Satan knew that for Jesus to agree would mean betrayal. Betrayal of his commitment to never do anything unless the Father wanted it: ‘...I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me’ (John 5:30). The Saviour confirmed this in his response to Satan: ‘... And Jesus answered him, saying, It is written, That man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God (Luke4:4). God’s revealed Word is the source, the key
- To learn God’s will Jesus was constantly ‘...instant in prayer’, as Paul urges us to be. He spent all night in prayer before decisions (Luke 6:12). He frequently went away alone to pray (eg Matthew 14:23). He encouraged his hearers to ‘pray always’. And, as is seen from his confrontation with Satan Jesus had committed the Scriptures to memory—as said the Psalmist: ‘...Your word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against you’ (Psalm 119:11)
- Pretty well all of us have experienced that vague feeling of guilt about an activity we are about to engage in. It may be our in-built sense of right and wrong, our conscience; but if we have the indwelling Spirit it is, likely, a prompt from the Word of God. Sadly, too often we ignore that prompt—*Jesus never did!* As Paul told the church in Rome: ‘...be not conformed to this world: but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God’ (Romans 12:2). Elsewhere he remarks ‘...we have the mind of Christ’ (I Corinthians 2:16)
- In Christ we are ‘new creatures’ with a new spiritual dimension. The degree to which we cast off the world and its ways, its philosophies, it’s ‘wisdom’ and instead discipline our mind to conform to God’s revelation through His Word—that’s what lifts the fog that obscures God’s will for us **Ω**

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