

# *new* **Horizons**

*Vol 25 No 4*

*July/August 2021*

*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 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 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.

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.

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If you would like a copy of our *Statement of Beliefs* or a *Publications List* please request it from any of the addresses listed or go to our website: **www.cgom.org**

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# new Horizons

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## **Weariness of the spirit must not tip us into apathy. There is a remedy**

It's a sad fact that all too many Christians drift from their first love after years of faithful service to our Saviour. It's an age-old challenge, even affecting the relatively young Ephesian church.

But they—and we—*were* forewarned, by Jesus: '*... because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold*' (Matthew 24:12). Doctrinal purity or efficient management or diligence—as in Ephesus—wouldn't prevent the snuffing out of their 'candle'. Their service to their Lord had become sterile (Revelation 2).as they revelled in their orthodoxy.

The lack of love for bonding with, our Saviour and with one another leads to a forensic focus on doctrinal correctness—which in turn stirs intolerance of opinions contrary to 'mine'. The Corinthian assembly, too, was riven by factions, provoking the apostle Paul to pen the famous 'love' chapter in his first letter to them (*ch* 13).

### **Diversity**

Ideally, of course, we would '*...all speak the same thing*' (1 Corinthians 1:10). But we have each been called by the Father from varied backgrounds, with different background knowledge, with diverse prior life-styles, our individual inherited character traits. And we all, following our baptism, began as '*...babes in*

*Christ*' (*ch* 3:1). As such we start our Christian life in kindergarten' with ahead perhaps years of growth into the mature life pattern exemplified by Jesus. No—the Scriptures acknowledge that the early church of God was far from perfect.

Take, for example, the state of the churches as recorded by the apostle John sixty years after Jesus's resurrection. In one area, now Turkey, six of the listed assemblies merited correction by Jesus for their unorthodoxy. They were, however, yet part of the church. The broad spectrum of belief in modern Christendom should not surprise us.

## **The Pursuit of Perfection**

### **The Israel of God**

The word 'church' transcends a mere building, no matter how spectacular it may appear or how richly endowed. There are around two billion adherents of thousands of 'churches' each with a personal perception of its teachings (perceived as 'truth'), or its role in the world. And each with a unique level of commitment to the Saviour.

Embedded within the universal 'church' is the '*Israel of God*' with its roots in the way the Creator instructed the first human family and as is reflected in the teachings of Jesus: '*...neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is of any importance; but only a renewed nature. And all who shall regulate their lives by this principle--may peace and mercy*

*be given to them--and to the true Israel of God*' (Galatians 6:16). It is to these that the admonitions of the Scriptures are addressed.

### **The End Time**

That warning from Jesus (Matthew 24:12) was set in the context of the time just prior to his return. It will be time of turbulence on the world scene, with on-going armed conflicts, famine and seismic upheavals (v.7). True believers will be the object of universal opprobrium—with persecution and martyrdom (v.9) as occurred under the cruel rule of the medieval church.

He foresees the prevalence of false teachings undermining the faith of the brethren: '*...Then will many stumble and fall and they will betray one another and hate one another [Christians!!]. Many false prophets will rise up and lead multitudes astray; and because of the prevalent disregard of God's law the love of the great majority will grow cold; (vv.10-12). Clearly a time for each of us to be prepared.*

### **Remedial Action**

Jesus adds (v.13): '*...but those who stand firm to the end shall be saved*'. What steps can we take?

When that time comes (and it is not dated in Scripture) we will be totally dependent on God to provide for us and to protect us. Now is the time to build that trust, to prepare for eternity.

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### The Remedy

To achieve a 'gold' an athlete embarks on unrelenting training, day in and day out, and for years. It instils increasing stamina and skill though he or she may experience pain, disappointment failure—but they press on. *No less so for the Israel of God.*

As writes the apostle Paul: *'...Know you not that they which run in a race run all, but one receives the prize? So run, that you may obtain. And every man that strives for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beats the air' (I Corinthians 9:24).*

In the Greek games to which the apostle refers there was *one* prize for each race. For those in whom God's Spirit now dwells all *already* possess the prize. They stand on the podium holding aloft their gold medal, their incorruptible crown—if, as Paul notes elsewhere, echoing Jesus, they stay fit for purpose: *'...But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway [ie rejected]' (v.27).*

### Not Just Us

So, stay faithful—as have multitudes before us. The Scriptures bear witness: *'...Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was*

*set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God' (Hebrews 11:1-2).*

These 'witnesses' through the ages have remained faithful despite horrendous persecution, torture, death: *'...They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise' (vv.37-39).* That promise awaits the resurrection from the dead at Christ's coming.

### Steps to Perfection

Everyone embarks on the Christian path with 'a cartload of baggage'.

Through inheritance, example or habit we bear a weight of harmful behaviour and thinking—the 'sins that so easily beset us'. The apostle encourages us to 'lay aside' such burdens. No easy task!

The more of these burdens we shed during our pilgrimage in

Is anger our burden? Is greed? Covetousness (jealousy)? Uncontrolled desire? Whatever it may be we must tackle it head-on. Acknowledge it, be detailed, pinpoint triggers and avoid them, get help.

Indeed we have a powerful source of help unavailable to mankind in general—God's holy Spirit, the on-going presence within of our Saviour: *'...All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.... and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.'* Matthew 28:18-20.

### CALLING ALL INTERNET USERS!

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

*Be sure to take a look at [www.cgom.org](http://www.cgom.org)*

Christ the brighter will shine our resurrection body (I Corinthians 15:41-44); the greater our reward.

That reward, our 'Kingdom gold', is now (John 14:2) being prepared for us as Jesus shapes us through our life's experiences to fit the role he envisages for each of his brothers and sisters in God's Family. Overcome our besetting sins and our resurrection body will shine more brightly. We will qualify for greater responsibility in 'the Family firm'.

Jesus confronts us with this challenge: *'...Be you therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect' (Matthew 5:48).* That's our goal—the pursuit of perfection. As wrote the apostle Paul to the Colossian brethren: *'...Christ in you, the hope of glory: whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus (Colossians 1:28 ).*

Ω

## Just a Building

Not at Jerusalem, said Jesus.  
Not in Samaria. So where  
should we worship the  
one true God?

On a journey through Samaria Jesus disabused a woman he encountered of the notion that God was forever anchored in one place where He may be worshipped (the account is in John ch 4). That era was over, he says, and not just for the Samaritans and Jews but for all of mankind.

To curb mankind's idolatrous inclinations God had limited His worship exclusively to where He had *'...placed His Name'*; to a designated altar or tabernacle or temple. And for four centuries the people of Judah worshipped in a magnificent Temple in Jerusalem, built by King Solomon around 1000BC.

Those places of worship were on 'holy ground'—holy because the glory of God inhabited them: *'...I will commune with you from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubims which are upon the ark of the testimony'* (Exodus 25:22). And in Solomon's Temple: *'...the priests could not enter into the house of the LORD, because the glory of the LORD had filled the LORD'S house.'* (II Chronicles 7:2).

[The divine presence - as in the ark—wasn't mere symbolism but 'packed a punch' as found out the Philistines (I Samuel 6:19), while mishandling it led to the death of Uzzah (II Samuel 6:7)]

### Temporary Residence

God's presence in those designated places of worship, however, was temporary and interacted with the spiritual tenor of His people. The Glory abandoned Solomon's Temple and in 539 BC

it was destroyed by the Babylonians. *It had become, just a building.*

Released from their exile in Babylon some Jews returned and another temple was constructed—a pale reflection of Solomon's. Wrote the prophet Haggai: *'...Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory? and how do you see it now? is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing?'* (ch 2:3).

It persisted until the time of Jesus, having been lavishly refurbished by King Herod. But the Glory? It wasn't there. As Josephus recorded, the Holy of Holies - where the ark rested—was *empty*. The Roman general who razed the Temple in 70AD was surprised there was nothing in it. As said Jesus: *'...is it not written, My house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer? but you have made it a den of thieves'* (Mark 11:17). *It had become just a building.*

### Rejected!

Jesus through his three plus years of ministry—signs, casting out demons, raising the dead, announcing the Kingdom of God—witnessed to his identity. The religious leaders were without excuse. Knowing he was their long-awaited Messiah they yet murdered him. He was rejected.

The apostles proclaimed the same message, but the Jews maintained the outward form of hollow worship for the next forty years. As writes Paul to the Roman church: *'...they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge'* (Romans 10:2). The Temple was razed to the ground by the rampaging Roman armies in 70AD. *It had*

*become just a building.*

For the following two millennia Judaism, apart from a few individuals, continued to reject their true Messiah, clinging to the false hope of a conquering King, and rejecting the true Messiah, Jesus—to this day.

And to welcome him preparations are advanced for the building of a 'third temple' with the various artefacts and furniture already constructed.

Yet Judaism as a unit continues to reject the true Messiah, Jesus, and are still in unbelief; Will it, as were its predecessors, be *'just another building'* devoid of the Glory of God?

*'...Israel has not obtained that which he seeks; but the election [the 'Israel of God'] has obtained it, and the rest were blinded. (According as it is written, God has given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear;) unto this day'*  
(Romans 11:17-18)

### A New Temple

The Messiah ('Christ'), as promised and in the Father's perfect time, will return. Since he returned to heaven two millennia ago he has been building a new Temple, a spiritual Temple. As notes the apostle Paul to the church: *'...you are the temple of the living God; as God has said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people'* (II Corinthians 6:16).

Holiness derives from the presence of God, and as the apostle says elsewhere: *'...you [the church] are the temple of God, and the Spirit of God dwells in you?'* (I Corinthians 3:16).

Whether or not a temple building is constructed in Jerusalem in anticipation of Messiah's return, the temple that will endure for ever is the 'body' of Christ, the *Israel of God*, the church. Ω

## Freedom... *the divine model*

**The pandemic the world has just experienced and the draconian measures imposed to quell it have highlighted the loss of the much-cherished liberty we all crave**

The restrictions—for as long as the populace tolerates them—have been generally embraced. Governments, however, whatever their protestations, are ever ready to crack down on their citizens, and hold on stubbornly to any new powers. It has been so since Nimrod dominated mankind.

The security and the success of any society is secured by boundaries—hence the ‘law of the land’ and the forces to implement it. Different administrations strive to achieve this by a variety of means, and with varying success, from a light touch through to violent dictatorship.

Given the recurring universal crises mankind experiences it’s clear that no nation has yet hit the jackpot of a perfect society. The United States with its *Constitution* and *Bill of Rights* is a valiant attempt to ensure the liberty of its citizens. There isn’t a written Constitution in the United Kingdom but it presided over a vast freedom-loving empire for centuries. There is more, or less, success elsewhere.

All such, however, have flaws. The lighter the touch of government the more dependent order is on co-operation and willing compliance by the populace. And that is not an instinctive characteristic of the average human being!

### Role Model

We can learn from history, and there is a perfect role model detailed within reach of most people

on the planet—the much ignored Christian Scriptures, the Bible.

Having delivered the people of Israel from Egyptian tyranny, God united their twelve clans as one nation with its own Constitution - or *Covenant*—(the ‘*Book of the Law*’ Deuteronomy 30:10) and its own legal system. Its laws were the practical application of the primeval ‘law of love’, the guidance built into Adam’s spirit at his creation, his conscience: ‘...*what nation is there so great, that has statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day?*’ (Deuteronomy 4:8).

It was a free society as long as they stayed within the boundaries of their Constitution.

### Heart Trouble

But ‘...*finding fault with them, he says, Behold, the days come, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant*’ (Hebrews 8:8). There simply wasn’t a willing heart in the bulk of the nation. A radical transformation of human nature was called for—a ‘*new covenant*’. A different constitution by which the same content was followed from the heart, voluntarily and joyfully. When we comply with the law we are not subjected to its penalties!

Given mankind’s innate hostility to the divine way *more* was needed. Their rejection of it, sin, separated them from the Creator and had to be removed—only possible if someone perfect, someone with an unblemished record, *someone sinless*, *someone divine*, would have the capacity to take on the burden of the sin and pain of all mankind and pay the penalty for all. And *if* there’s a radical change of heart.

Jesus—our Creator, co-equal in the Godhead—willingly chose to be born in human flesh as the first-born Son of God, to suffer at the hands of mankind and to die cruelly on a Roman stake. All for us. To pay the penalty—*death*—for our sin.

God thus made it possible for us to be reconciled to the Godhead and to escape eternal death. Not through anything we can do but out of His compassion, His mercy, His limitless grace.

When we finally recognize the utter horror of our personal sin with its awful consequences and in repentance turn to Jesus Christ for forgiveness, the Father then welcomes us into His Family.

### Consequences

Sin—the transgression of divine law—has marred and defiled all of us. It has separated us from our Creator thus negating the very purpose for which we were created. God’s design is to prepare each of us, with His Family, to cast aside our human limitations, to live endlessly with unlimited power, to be incorruptible, to reach the stars. To be truly free.

Such a stupendous future becomes available with a simple first step. Once aware of what severs us from such an outcome—our personal sin—we must determine to forsake it and to invite Jesus Christ to carry our burden, to henceforth govern our life—true freedom. We seal that commitment by being baptized—symbolic of the death of our former life. We have now become a child of God, perceived by the Father as clothed with the perfect righteousness of Jesus, the sinless Son of God.

### Commitment

Having taken that first step through

this 'narrow gate', ahead lies a rough track—and not knowing what obstructions it holds: '*...the gate to life is very narrow. The road that leads there is so hard to follow that only a few people find it.*' (Matthew 7:14). Or, as said Jesus: *...whosoever does not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, sits not down first, and counts the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him*' (Luke 14:27-29).

That foundation is the message Jesus brought—the 'Gospel' as elaborated by the Christian Scriptures; every Word of God. It is a message distorted by millennia of human manipulation, and each new believer has to sift the Scriptures for the original message of Jesus. We are urged to '*...consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as you see the day approaching*' (Hebrews 10:24-25).

Instruction by competent teachers of the Scriptures is essential for all newborn Christians. As the Scriptures say: '*...although, considering the long time you have been believers, you ought now to be teachers of others, you really need some one to teach you over again the very rudiments of the truths of God, and you have come to require milk instead of solid food. By people who live on milk I mean those who are imperfectly acquainted with the teaching concerning righteousness. Such persons are mere babes. But solid food is for adults—that is, for those who through constant practice have their spiritual faculties carefully trained to distinguish good from evil*' (Hebrews 5:12-14).

Only within an informed relationship with God through Jesus is there true freedom Ω

## The Second Death

**It's the one sure event of our brief sojourn on earth—death. Some may face it twice**

Few welcome it, though it does come as a relief to those experiencing extreme mental or physical pain. For most of mankind it is not welcome, and every effort is made to delay it.

Many turn to religion for solace—though the 'comfort' of their belief is confined to the living. But after our life ends? Well, it can get scary. Who wants to return post-death as a reptile or a bat? Who wants total annihilation and a lifetime wasted? Christians take refuge in a fictional 'heaven' as a reward—but hanging over them is the Damocles sword of judgment and the possibility of burning endlessly in 'hell fire'. In Islam 'Hell is a real place that is prepared for those who reject the truth after it became apparent to them and do evil deeds'. According to the Quran some will 'never leave the fires of hell'.

### The Human Spirit is Mortal

Underlying every major faith is the concept of an 'immortal soul' which upon death leaves the body for its eternal reward or its punishment. It is not a view supported by the Christian Scriptures. Each of us is activated by a 'spirit in man'—a temporary spiritual entity that is a record of all we are and all we do and think. It leaves us at our death and remains in God's care until called back to life for judgment in a spirit or a physical body

That spirit, however, is *not* immortal—a quality unique to God. From conception we are animated by physical processes (our 'soul'; Gk *psuche*) sustaining our physical life through our body organs, our life-sustaining blood: '*...the life of the flesh is in the blood*' (Leviticus 17:11).

The human *spirit* (Gk *pneuma*) imparts our intellectual and spiritual resources, inter-acting with the physical processes and when it leaves us life ends, the spirit remaining in

God's care awaiting judgment (but is inert, and without consciousness—'asleep').

When mankind's allotted 7000-yr existence ends (*ie* after the 'second resurrection') all who are 'in Christ' will no longer be subject to death. The rest, those having rejected the opportunity to become part of God's family, will die the 'second death' and their dead bodies consumed by fire. (the Bible term is 'hell' Gk *ge'henna*), and the spirit then disperses.

Jesus, with pictorial language, used the analogy of the unproductive branches of fruit trees or vines. Notice, they are first cut off the vine (*ie* 'killed') and then they are disposed of by being burned: '*...If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.*' (John 15:6). He elsewhere said: '*...The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; And shall cast them into a furnace of fire*' (Matthew 13:41-42).

The prophet Malachi, too, may reference this ultimate end of 'the wicked': '*...all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that comes shall burn them up, says the LORD of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch...you shall tread under the wicked, for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day which I am preparing, says Jehovah of Hosts*' (Malachi 1:4:2-3).

Another example may be that of Ananias and Sapphira—who, perhaps trying to buy their way into the church, (Acts 5) committed the grievous sin of attempting to deceive God—and died on the spot. It was the sin from which there can be no repentance (Matthew 12:31, I John 5:16).

We are all faced with a choice—life or death. *Choose life.* Ω

## Peace of Mind

**The Gospel message has power to transform humanity**

Worldwide—and fuelled by fear of disease coupled to induced fear designed to scare us to submit to draconian restrictions—we have this year witnessed an escalation in the numbers presenting with mental ill-health symptoms – depression, eating disorders, even suicides *etc.*

Such challenges to our equilibrium, of course, are endemic in our world, and as long as we refuse to align our selves with universal law there will be an avalanche of distressing conditions. That law is embodied in the healing message Jesus Christ gifts to mankind, the ‘Gospel’.

That ‘*gospel of the Kingdom of God*’ (Mark 1:14) is ‘heaven on earth’—the transformation of human nature into the divine nature through the indwelling of God’s Spirit to accepting minds.

God’s Kingdom is eternal—without beginning, without end. It is the God *Family*. It is the divine programme for abundant life. But it was rejected by the head of our race, Adam, and is now made available to all mankind only through Jesus Christ, God’s ‘only-begotten son’: ‘...*In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him*’ (1 John 4:9).

When man was created we were each endowed with a ‘spirit’ which was formed by the Creator to function in accord with a set of operating principles which ensured perfect physical and mental and spiritual harmony. As with the hard drive on your laptop, we

function optimally only when we abide by the installed operating principles. Psychologists have unearthed some of these ancient God-given principles, and thousands of self-help books are based on their discoveries—which can also be mined from the Christian Scriptures!

That, however, has failed to eradicate the tidal wave of distress that engulfs us, for the root cause is buried deep in the failing human heart. By our nature we don’t want to do what God says is the way to an abundant life: ‘... *the carnal mind [our desires] is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be*’ (Romans 8:7).

**My ‘neighbour’ is anyone I encounter who has a need that I can fill (Luke 10:36)**

God’s Law is the down-to-earth, practical expression of the fundamental law that governs our universe, *love*—love for God and love for our neighbour.

Any Christian (other than a nominal one) embraces—at least in name—the second table of God’s Law: *don’t kill, don’t steal etc.* Our ability to fully and willingly comply with this guidance is enhanced by our submission to all the elements of the first table: ‘*love God*’—expressed in the first four of the ‘commandments’.

### STUDY THE WORD

**Be sure to enroll for our free 32-lesson Study Course. It’s a key to what is for many a ‘Book of Mystery’**

*unsigned articles are by the Editor*

## Love God

It’s a term that readily flows off the tongue—for we like to think we do! Analyze it, however, and you may wish to re-assess your level of commitment, for we need to re-think Romans 8:7.

How about ‘*No other gods*’? The one God is sovereign and *He* determines how we approach Him, thus excluding practices—He calls them ‘idolatry’—that were part and parcel of heathen worship. To name a few in modern terms: *Christmas, Easter, Sunday*.

And how about the millions of Christians who bow before sculpted images and exalt and pray to the long dead? Or, God’s third point, ‘...*don’t put the holy Name on any vain practice*’ (Dean Stanley). For example, *Christmas*.

And do you dare to set aside as ‘holy’ any day of the week other than the *seventh*—the God-ordained weekly Sabbath? The fact that a practice is entrenched, ancient, doesn’t legitimize it!

‘Love for God’, then, is manifest in our willing submission to His revealed way.

## Love Your Neighbour

So, too, with love for our neighbour. The last six points of the Law of God are, in theory, possible for anyone to obey—as did God expect of Israel. But ‘*the flesh is weak*’. How many of us, apart from Jesus, has lived a perfect life!

But delve more deeply into the teaching of Jesus and all of us stand condemned. For *true love* is rooted in the heart—every thought brought into harmony with the divine will. And possible only through the indwelling Spirit of God; yet never *cont’d p8*

### Peace...cont'd from p.6

.attained, for, '...If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us' (I John 1:8).

Uniquely, for those 'in Christ' our sin is forgiven—carried away for ever by the sacrifice of the Lamb of God, and we are now clothed with the righteousness of Christ. Our ensuing time on earth is committed to His service.

In pursuit of that service the image of what we are now is to become transformed into the perfect image that is our Saviour—achieved through our daily choices.

### Peace of Mind

We can all too easily become trapped in a web of destructive habits. How much improved would our lives be if we experienced harmonious family relations. Or if we had emotional control and peace of mind. Or if we had no reason to dread an early morning knock at the door. Or if 'our truth' was always the real truth without need to cover up. What if our bank balance was always a healthy black because we controlled our desires.

That's what the Gospel teaches—not fuzzy feelings or new friendships at 'church' or a pass to 'heaven'. It is *good news* for our physical and mental well-being here and now *as we apply the 'laws of the Kingdom'*.

But that's not the half of it. For those who fully commit to Messiah and his way of life ahead—beyond the grave—lies an eternity of ever-expanding projects fuelled by spirit power. It is the fulfilment and culmination of the divine plan—the purpose for which we are all born. Ω

## Respect for Life

### What has happened to us? Why do we have so little respect for human life?

You don't have to be old (remember the 'good old days'?) to observe an increasing lack of respect for life blanketing society. Neglect of the vulnerable and the elderly. Unruly children. Managerial bullying. Puerile 'cancelling'.

Usually, disrespect is trivial—certainly in comparison to the horrendous death toll among the most vulnerable of all: *the babe in the womb*. On one estimate 42% of all human deaths are from *voluntary abortion*? Choice.

Life is precious, and survival in the womb is precarious! Natural miscarriages amount to a million in the USA, 180 thousand here in the UK, and one in four are estimated to occur—unnoticed—in the first six weeks or so from conception. Additionally, an estimated 2.6 million stillbirths occur annually (WHO).

Indeed a low estimate is that 136 million such abortions worldwide occur *annually*, with 860 thousand in the United States and 209 thousand in the United Kingdom alone. Governments, for the most part, encourage this practice in line with their agenda for reducing the burgeoning population—some say to half a billion (the current USA Biden administration has re-introduced overseas funding of abortions.)

### Life's Purpose

Whatever the reason for such a choice—promiscuity, age, inadequacy, economics *etc*—it displays ignorance of the purpose for which man is uniquely created. And disrespect not just for human life but also for the God who created us. We are each born not just to live out our 'three score years and ten' but to prepare us to live eternally as an integral part of the Family of God. Life is precious to God, and He

is '...not willing that any should perish [be destroyed], but that all should [live and] come to repentance' (II Peter 3:9). His desire is to complete His family with 'sons and daughters' - those who have committed to walk with Him in His way: '...[I] will be a Father unto you, and you shall be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty'.

God purposed the first pair to unite and produce offspring so they could become a 'godly seed': '...*did not he make one? Yet had he the residue of the spirit. And wherefore one? That he might seek a godly seed*' (Malachi 2:15).

Clearly there has been a catastrophic failure of our institutions—family, religion, government, law—to instil foundation principles in our children, and to provide adequate support.

Good government maintains law and order through its legal system. Ancient practice is seen as regressive and illiberal and rejected out of hand in the modern world. Because it was clearly God-given, that of the nation of ancient Israel is today denigrated, yet it is the key to curbing the abortion tsunami. (God's law makes provision for 'the fatherless' and widowed.)

### Remedial Action

At the core was a reverence for God and his way of life, encouraged through the national festivals. Then respect for parents, boundaries for sexual relationships, with a programme of instruction for children instilled daily through the parents and with the support of the authorities: '...*Memorize his laws and tell them to your children over and over again. Talk about them all the time, whether you're at home or walking along the road or going to bed at night, or getting up in the morning*' (Deuteronomy 6:6-7).

Disrespect for life undermines the nation, deprives it of prospective talent and resources, ruins the living and blinds us to life's eternal purpose. Ω

# The Perfect Man

**We seek him here, we seek him there—but the perfect man is as elusive as ever. Can we become ‘perfect’?**

Criminologists know that there’s a wafer thin veil separating ‘good’ and ‘bad’. Given the right circumstances ‘love’ quickly can turn to ‘hate’ and even violence.

Contrary to much modern thinking, man didn’t first appear as a blank sheet but as an intelligent being fully equipped with a conscience and the mental capacity for rational thought and decision-making. He was, straight from the hand of God, ‘perfect’. He was, then, motivated by an in-built ‘law of love’ and all such were held within the boundaries set by love.

We don’t know how long this state of perfection was maintained—days, months, maybe years. But it ended in a catastrophic ‘fall from grace’ when he slipped the bond with his Creator, and chose the slippery path of self-determination rather than that law of love, and harmony with thee divine will.

During ensuing centuries his descendants, for the most part, chose the same rock-strewn route establishing their own culture, their own belief systems, their own codes of ethics and establishing a confusion of conflicting civilisations.

## Remnant

An exceptional few—Shem, Enoch, Abraham *etc*—remained in tune with the foundation principles underlying perfection, and these the Creator invited to further His on-going plan to bring all mankind to perfection. In course

of time He chose Abraham’s offspring to form a model nation, Israel (c.1500BC). Being human they soon strayed into idolatry and lawlessness for which they experienced negative consequences. [Note side-bar]

Despite their failure as godly nations (*ie* Israel and Judah), there yet remained faithful men and women who walked the path to perfection (eg Luke 1:6). Such kept that flame burning in a dark world.

## The Promised Deliverer

Into such a world was born the Son of God, Jesus—the Deliverer promised upon Adam’s rebellion: ‘... *I [the LORD] will put enmity between you [Satan] and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; [he] shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel*’ (Genesis 3:15).

He is the sinless model of perfection and through him those who are willing can receive his perfection. For his perfect righteousness can, when we commit to him, clothe us as we in tandem strive to emulate him. The apostle Paul writes: ‘...*till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ*’ (Ephesians 4:13).

Paul sees his mission is to ‘...*preach, warning [counselling] every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus*’ (Colossians 1:28).

The Father sees those ‘in Christ’ as endowed with Christ’s righteousness and worthy to be called His own off-spring; ‘...*Beloved, now are we the sons of God*’ (1 John 3:2). In return we are obligat-

## Lesson from History

God installed a constitution for Israel that perfectly reflected, for fallen mankind, the application of the original law of love. Necessarily, the laws included penalties but were accompanied by encouragement for all parents to teach these precepts from birth to their children: ‘...*Memorise his laws and tell them to your children over and over again. Talk about them all the time, whether you’re at home or walking along the road or going to bed at night, or getting up in the morning*’ (Deuteronomy 6:6-7 CEV). The law of the land, thus taught, curbed wrong-doing—which was also firmly dealt with.

The reality of a single ever-living intervening God was instilled from earliest age. Also, everyone annually attended festivals where they heard the *torah* expounded in detail by the priests and where they renewed their relationship with the Creator:

‘... *Ezra the priest brought the law before the congregation both of men and women, and all that could hear with understanding, upon the first day of the seventh month [a festival]. And he read therein before... the men and the women, and those that could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law*’ (Nehemiah 8:2-3)

Little wonder our modern age is in such chaos!

ed to follow his guidance as set before us throughout the Word of God revealed in the Scriptures, to emulate his revealed way of life, to daily cultivate in ourselves the perfect ‘law of love’. Paul again:

**‘...All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works’ Ω**

## MiniStudy

### **AN END-TIME TEMPLATE**

Many throughout the ages have taken in hand the daunting task of predicting the future, whether through the dark arts or through the Scriptures. We can't, so far, tell who is right—for the future still lies ahead of us. Always has! But it does exist and surely the author of history and of the future has left us clues.

- In and out of Christianity there is a presumption that one day our world will see massive change. It will end and be succeeded by a 'golden age' of peace and prosperity. That notion has driven theologians and prognosticators to search diligently for clues as to when. For Christians, the search has been in the Scriptures—usually seeking the date of Christ's promised return. No predicted time has so far proven correct
- An ancient Christian tradition has in recent centuries given rise to a flurry of predicted dates—the concept of a seven thousand year divine plan for mankind, with Jesus returning after six thousand years. A computation of Scripture dates has led many to see that the time is expiring; indeed that it may already have expired, with Christ '*...delay(ing) his coming*'. [We don't know the starting point; was it when Adam was created, or when he sinned?]
- The number '*seven*' permeates Scripture, and is a God-given clue providing a template for events on the world stage. Indeed the first verse of Genesis contains 37 different combinations of seven. We also have the *seven-day week* - a construct that fits no astronomical scenario, but is based on the Bible record of creation: '*...in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it*' (Exodus 20:11). A prophecy given through Daniel pin-points the time of the appearance of Messiah: *seventy weeks (sevens)* (Daniel 9:24)
- By another Bible principle—'*a year for a day*'—the *week* is construed as each day representative of a thousand years: '*...after the number of the days in which you searched the land, even forty days, each day for a year, shall you bear your iniquities, even forty years.*' (Numbers 14:34, repeated Ezekiel 4:6). It was the a belief widely held in the early centuries of the church, until Augustine
- The apostle Paul, in the context of the first resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:52), refers to '*...the last trumpet*'—a theme fully expanded by Jesus to the apostle John in the book of *Revelation*. And Jesus, in the Olivet prophecy, references it (Matthew 24:31). There is a clear pattern of '*seven*'. The '*Trumpets*' announce the unfolding of specific events, with the '*last*' one, noted by Paul, being the resurrection of the faithful at the return of Jesus. There are indeed *seven* in total, recorded by John, beginning in chapter eight, verse six
- The *seventh* trumpet summarizes the final events wrapping up of human mismanagement of the planet, culminating in 'God's wrath' (ch 11:18). The '*trumpet*' subdivides into the '*seven last plagues*': '*...I heard a great voice out of the temple saying to the seven angels, Go your ways, and pour out the vials of the wrath of God upon the earth*' (ch 16:1). These are the '*seven last plagues*' (ch 15:1, 7)
- Every aspect of the natural world is controlled by God (cf Psalm 50:12, 24:1). He is a God of *law*, and every human transgression runs foul of that law, with inevitable negative consequences—for family, for finances, for health; *and for the nations*. Those consequences are described in the Scriptures as '*the wrath of God*'. When such transgressions reach a tipping point (God is tolerant!) the nations—and individuals—self-destruct. Hence the awesome destruction outlined in the symbolism of the *Seven Trumpets*
- As our sovereign Creator (Hebrew *el Shaddai*), God directs the course of history: '*...the king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turns it whithersoever he will*' (Proverbs 21:1). As Daniel informs the king of Babylon: '*...until you know that the most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomsoever he will.*' (Daniel 4:32). When the sovereign God removes a protective '*hedge*' (symbolic of our obedience to His Law) it is also an expression of His '*wrath*'; We may not yet fully understand the effect '*on the ground*' of each symbolic trumpet—but each is a combination of human behaviour and God's intervention to end human mismanagement. Such a template provides a structure for the end-time Ω

for a more detailed review of the Trumpets symbolism see  
**The Key to the Book of Revelation**  
[http://www.cgom.org/Publications/Booklets/Key\\_to\\_Revelation.htm](http://www.cgom.org/Publications/Booklets/Key_to_Revelation.htm)

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