

NEW **Horizons**

Vol 25 No 5

September/October 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.

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* 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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September/October 2021

Is it arrogance? Or hubris? Ignorance, perhaps? Why does Christianity claim that solely through Jesus Christ is there access to salvation?

Myriad faiths assume that their set of beliefs earns them a place in the world to come—whatever that may mean to them. For *Islam* it's perfect physical bliss in heaven. *Buddhists* are absorbed into the universe, The *Hindu* returns in a different body with a higher or lower status till they attain to perfection. And for the vast majority of *Christians* it's instant transformation upon death to heaven, or perhaps somewhere between heaven and 'hell'.

Christianity, of course, is manifestly hugely divided. But all have Jesus Christ at the centre. With varying degrees of nuance he is recognized as co-eternal with the Father and the sole route to reconciliation with Him. Can we prove that?

Evidence

That Jesus was a real flesh and blood person is amply attested by history and *Foundations* indeed he has more testimony to his authenticity than any of his contemporaries, But that he had come from heaven? That God become human?

Well, his birth (we have his maternal genealogy) and his death are well-attested, as witnessed by his twelve intimate disciples to whom he proved, after he was resurrected, that he was '*...flesh and bones*' (Luke 24:39) And never contested is the apostle Paul's record that Jesus, restored to life '*...was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep [ie are dead]. After*

that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles. And last of all he was seen of me also' (I Corinthians 5:6-8). That message was transmitted unchallenged in hundreds of documents and spread throughout the known world within decades of his resurrection. Jesus is referenced by both Jew and gentile in historical records. So—

read our article:
The Empty Tomb

Predicted

The life, death and resurrection of Jesus was predicted in Eden, and the precise timing of his ministry was revealed (to Daniel) in the 6th century BC. As the promise of a coming Redeemer was well-known to the sages down the ages the details were inevitably ascribed to various pseudo-gods (eg Osiris, Krishna, Mithra). None of these so-called gods presumed to provide, as does Jesus, reconciliation with God, nor salvation through forgiveness of our sin, nor do they

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provide a pathway to becoming part of the Kingdom, the spirit Family, of God.

Spoiled Goods

Look around and you can't but be convinced that mankind is far from perfection—no matter how much he may aspire to that. Our first progenitor was created perfect and with freedom of choice (not a robot!), only to succumb to the delights of the flesh, believing he could achieve god-like understanding and material pleasure by means of his own inner resources (humanism).

The divine wisdom that harmonized life with the in-built laws of nature was rejected. Adam spurned the divinely-designed 'programme' that energized the 'hard disk' of his human spirit with the inevitable effect that the programme 'crashed'.

That 'hard disk', that failed operating programme, was inherited by all his off-spring—*us!* Hence our inability throughout many millennia to sustain a stable and universally prosperous and peaceful society. We are alienated from the Source of life, and only the 'Master IT consultant' can re-write and restore the original programme, byte by byte.

The Law of Love

Each time we each act contrary to the original programme—in Bible terms that is called *sin*—we alienate ourselves further from the Creator and are subject to the consequences of our actions.

But in our beginning mankind was internally motivated by the various elements of the programme as implemented by God. It was '*the law of love*' and defined as loving service to God and to our fellow man, our 'neighbour', and built into our conscience. We catch glimpses of this through the many expressions of 'human kindness' in our daily encounters.

After that initial 'crash' the law of love' was codified in a series of instructions (Heb. *torah*) easily comprehensible to mankind and essential to govern mankind, now at war with his Creator. This was adopted as the heart of most national legislation worldwide (eg the Code of Hammurabi) ever since ('don't kill', 'don't steal' etc), and became the core of the

constitution of the infant nation of Israel c. 1500BC) and other budding nations.

Created With Purpose

Because of our 'fall' we are cut off from fellowship with God. And that should bother us! For we are not some random blip of nature but created with purpose and made '*...in the image of God*' (Genesis 1:26-27). Unlike the animal creation we are destined for eternity, and as such have been endowed with potential superhuman powers—powers only to be unleashed when we are reconciled to Him in a spirit body through a resurrection from the dead.

No Other Name

The apostle Paul—he had a glimpse of these powers (II Corinthians 12:2)—states that: '*...flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither does corruption inherit incorruption*' (I Corinthians 15:50). A transformation, the renewing of the human rebellious mind, is essential. And that comes only through supernatural intervention by the Father, who draws us to Jesus.

It is only through Jesus, the long-awaited Messiah, that we thus become part of the divine Family—'*...you shall be my sons and daughters says the Lord Almighty*' (II Corinthians 6:18). That is unique in world faiths. In Islam Jesus is just a human prophet and not the Son of God. In Hinduism he is a guru who studied in India and took their faith to the Jews.

In sum, Luke records: '*...he [Jesus] shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God*' (Acts 1:3. And the apostle

Peter notes: '*...neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved*' (Acts 4:12).

Born Dead

The universe in all its parts is subject to inter-locking principles which scientists discover and formulate as 'laws'. We depend on their immutability. So, when we sin we are breaking those laws—and will pay the just and equal penalty. We will all be held to account for our transgressions. This is divine justice. Writes the apostle: '*... as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment*' (Hebrews 9:27).

The inevitable consequence of sin is our extinction—'*...The wages of sin is death*' (Romans 6:23). No one is exempt for '*...all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God*' (Romans 3:23).

Every court in the land has its tariff for broken law and this is based largely on the basis—at least in principle—of '*...an eye for an eye*'. Equal justice. Blind justice. Love your neighbour. In the Court of Heaven, however, *all* sin merits the death penalty. Every transgression is but a spoke in the wheel of death.

That's me and that's you. For in a sense we are all 'born dead'. We are paying the penalty for mankind's rejection, in our beginning, of the Creator and His instruction for how we live. That's what killed the human race: '*...of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not*

Copy-cat Faiths

Many religions have absorbed elements of the primitive revealed faith. Themes of *death and resurrection*, of the symbolism of *bread and wine*, of *sacrifice*.

Vedic sacrifices, for example, coincide with the Bible set feasts. The *seventh-day Sabbath* concept was almost universally known.

Buddha and Confucius (6th c. BC) are known to be deeply influenced by the Hebrew Scriptures.

Not least, the concept of a coming Messiah permeates most non-Bible faiths, including Islam.

eat of it: for in the day that you eat thereof you shall surely die' (Genesis 2:17).

We have continued ever since in our rejection of the Creator: '*...the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be*' (Romans 8:7).

The Perfect Redeemer

On the basis of equal justice some human had to be born who lived and died never having transgressed that law, someone who never 'sinned'. But a mere human would thus only save himself—Jesus's case, he never having sinned, would never have even come to court. More was needed: '*...n the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.... the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace* cont'd p.8

Built on Sand

We've 'never had it so good'. But don't become complacent!

Our ancestors would be amazed at the facilities and comforts available to us in the twenty-first century. Aside from some remote jungle tribe the nations have exploited earth's resources to 'line our nests'. Century upon century, discovery upon discovery, the sum of knowledge has increased and been largely channelled into improving the human condition.

All the raw materials, of course, were handed to us on a plate. As God's son, Adam was given stewardship of His planet—a planet super-abundant in resources: '*... God blessed [our first parents] and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moves upon the earth*' (Genesis 1:24-31). Quite a commission!

We are not told how long he toiled in such a perfect environment, but he was equipped to '*dress and keep*' the estate (Gk *paradisos*; ch 2:15). The pair were clearly expected to procreate and to reach out beyond the walls of paradise (ch 1:28) while living in harmony with godly principles—the solid foundation for a golden age of peace and prosperity. It didn't last.

Our first parents had full access to the life-sustaining fruit of the *Tree of Life*, and in their innocence had no concept, in such a state of perfection, of right and wrong (cp 1 Corinthians 6:12).

Deceived by the deceptive argument of the Adversary, Eve accompanied by the willing Adam chose the 'forbidden fruit'. Whatever poisonous element it contained it symbolized the acquisition of forbidden knowledge, knowledge pleasurable to human tastes.

Mankind chose to wallow in the sinking sands of rebellion against the Creator—and ultimate self-destruction. We have, as a race, become God's enemy: '*...the carnal [ie, natural, unchanged] mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be*' (Romans 8:7).

Devolved Government

Mankind was given dominion of the earth, and the sovereign God gave him authority to govern it. As writes the apostle Paul: '*...Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resists the power, resists the ordinance of God*' (Romans 13:1-2).

Ancient Israel presents us with a model for the effects of the chosen forms of governance. Initially as a family (seventy members) they followed in the steps of their ancestor, Abraham, who willingly '*...obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws*' (Genesis 26:5). Even while exiled in Egypt they maintained this pattern among the enlarging tribes.

Rescued from Egyptian bondage they covenanted to be led by the same God (JHVH) through His appointed judges. The entire populace was schooled in the divine way of life as taught by the priests and Levite—leading to a generally peaceable society that endured for some centuries.

This self-discipline slowly eroded. They slid into idolatrous practices and became envious of surrounding nations, rejected God's economy for that of foreign ideologies (which came to dominate society) and demanded that a King be appointed to rule them—eventually to their chagrin, as all God's warnings as to the likely outcome went unheeded (Deuteronomy 17).

King Saul rejected God's guidance and chose the way he thought right

(as did Adam) and his dynasty was rejected. Following brief periods of national repentance often in response to defeat in battle and to recurring natural calamities.

Unstable Foundations

When the God-appointed ordinances for sound governance are abandoned the foundations of a nation crumble. As wrote the Psalmist: '*...If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?*' (Psalm 11:3).

The modern Anglo-Saxon nations especially are a reflection of ancient Israel. As predicted, foreign ideologies have infected the national soul and undermined our national institutions. Moral standards are all but abandoned as the family is systematically destroyed and the sacred concept of marriage between man and woman corrupted by perverse practices.

God, as defined by the Christian Scriptures, no longer underpins our national institutions. *Government* fails to take into account His guiding principles and indeed legislates to overturn them. The all-pervasive world of *entertainment* deliberately flaunts fundamental morality. The world of *finance* is fuelled by greed. *Technology* has become an engine for self-destruction.

Of all things, Biblical *Christianity*—to which our national institutions once looked (if dimly) for guidance—has utterly failed to make itself heard, and the Bible no longer widely taught. Thus Bible-ignorant children matured into the leaders who impose their deviant ways on the nation, legislating for practices that undermine the foundations of a stable society.

Our nations teeter on the edge of a moral precipice. The foundations have been undermined and are crumbling. The new edifice is built on quicksands and, like ancient Israel, has uprooted the protective hedge of God's laws. Without radical change hostile human and natural forces will plunge us into an abyss. **Ω**

...keep the feast

Despite the present restrictions the church of God observes God's festivals in some form

Brethren of the church of God commit to the observance of those festivals appointed by the Creator and outlined in the Scriptures (eg Leviticus 23). Besides the weekly (seventh-day) Sabbath there are seven annual festivals on which we assemble for worship, joyful fellowship and instruction from the Scriptures.

These assemblies are 'harvest' festivals—spring, summer, autumn. That was the sum of their significance for the Israelites, but continuing revelation has provided insight of a more spiritual and prophetic nature.

The LORD had revealed to Israel a system of rituals and sacrifices which they carefully followed at preset times. In the light of the New Testament teachings we can see beyond these to their true spiritual significance as amplified by Jesus. While continuing to observe the festivals we, of course, no longer sacrifice animal, their symbolism having been abundantly fulfilled in the life and mission of Christ.

The autumn festival ('Tabernacles') was in Israel observed as a 'feast of ingathering' of the autumn harvest. During this seven day festival the Israelites left the comfort of their homes to live in temporary dwellings as a memorial of their forty-year wilderness wanderings and of God's provision during that epic time. This they observed, following God's guidance, *only* in the environs of Jerusalem and at the Temple.

Tabernacles has a range of important meanings for the Christian but the main focus of the festival is *Tabernacles* as a picture of the Kingdom of God on earth—a time when Messiah will reign over all mankind bringing stability, peace and prosperity. It is the 'golden age' that mankind has dreamed of—and has incorporated in mythologies—throughout the ages since God promised a Deliverer.

Divine Symbolism

The weekly seventh-day rest—God's Sabbath—gifted by the Crea-

Trumpets...cont'd from p.5

ime, return from Heaven as King of kings and LORD of lords—the supreme political and religious power. The Psalmist notes '*...God is the King of all the earth*' and adds, '*...God is gone up with a shout, the LORD with the sound of a trumpet*' (Psalm 47).

As with Israel's kings His coming will be announced by the blowing of trumpets: '*...Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet anoint[ed] him there king over Israel: and blow with the trumpet, and say, God save king Solomon*' (I Kings 1:34).

Writes Isaiah: '*...it shall come to pass in that day, that the great trumpet shall be blown, and they shall come which were ready to perish in the land of Assyria, and the outcasts in the land of Egypt, and shall worship the LORD in the holy mount at Jerusalem*' (Isaiah 27:13).

The awesome experience of Israel is relevant for the days *ahead of us!* For Jesus Christ will return—this time to the Mount of Olives (Zechariah 14:4-5). And not only so, for, '*...He [God] will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet*' (Matthew 24:31).

The apostle Paul tells us: '*...the Lord Himself shall come down from Heaven with a commanding shout of an archangel's voice, and*

with God's trumpet. And the dead in Christ will rise again first' (I Thessalonians 4: 16). He adds: '*...the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power*' (II Thessalonians 1:7-9).

But for those who have committed their life to Jesus a different fate: '*...For you [Christians] are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest, And the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which voice they that heard intreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more....But you are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect...Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: For our God is a consuming fire*' (Hebrews 12).

The *Day of Trumpets* is certainly a memorial, an awesome reminder of the power and majesty and glory of God, and also sheds a blinding light on the days to come. **Ω**

tor to mankind at our creation is a joyful representation of this festival. After our six days of labour we rest, we fellowship, we rejoice, we learn the true way of life God desires for us. Such, too, is the festival of *Tabernacles*.

Further, the seventh day week is the representative outline of God's grand design for us—each day standing for a period of a thousand years. As the *seventh* 'day', *Tabernacles* is also a one thousand year period—a *millennium* (Revelation 20:5).

Many churches of God around the world continue to annually observe this festival—though at present under health restrictions. You are invited to explore this important week on the divine calendar. **Ω**

2021 Festivals

Trumpets	September 7
Atonement	September 16
Tabernacles	September 21-27
Eighth Day	September 28
<i>We are happy to respond to any questions you may have</i>	

Trumpets...a memorial

The Day of Trumpets highlights the most dramatic—and traumatic—period of end-time events.

Trumpets is one of the ‘holy days’ God set before His people to observe annually: ‘...*In the seventh month [our September/October], in the first day of the month, shall you have a sabbath, a memorial of blowing of trumpets, an holy convocation*’ (Leviticus 23:24). It is here billed, without explanation, as a ‘memorial’, a commemoration of an earlier event.

Prophetic Times

For most Bible students, of course, *Trumpets* primarily conjures up images of the resurrection of the people of God, gathered from all ages, at the yet future return of Jesus: Wrote the apostle Paul ‘... *the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump[et] of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first*’ (I Thessalonians 4:16).

Paul’s words reflect the message Jesus himself gave: ‘...*He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather His elect from the four winds, from the ends of the heavens to their ends*’ (Matthew 24:31). Dramatic indeed—and yet future.

The apostle adds a further detail: ‘... *we shall all be changed. In a moment, in a glance of an eye, at the last trumpet; for a trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible*’ (I Corinthians 15:51-52). The apostle notes that this is the ‘last’ trumpet—implying there are others preceding it. The final trumpet or ‘woe’ is again sub-divided as the ‘seven last plagues’ (Revelation 15).

The *Day of Trumpets* provides us with a glimpse of what to expect, though much remains obscure, coming clear only as it happens! We must each remain vigilant, daily putting on

God’s armour which alone will see us through the bad times (‘...*the evil day*’) ahead.

Part of that armour is the observance of God’s annual holy days including this *Day of Trumpets*. It enables us to focus on the unfolding of the prophecies. It is also a *memorial* of one of the most significant events in all of mankind’s history.

Seven Seals

Predicted in the Scriptures for the end time is a globalized world—a world overtly at rest but a world in gross spiritual darkness, all opposition, especially of Christians, having been brutally eliminated, and dominated by a universal religious-political power.

It is pictured as a scroll with seven seals, and as each is broken open it reveals an aspect of mankind’s self-inflicted festering wounds (Revelation 6), culminating in worldwide devastating political, economic and physical disruption (vv.12ff).

Paul, clearly, was privy to the detail spelled out by Jesus through the apostle John in the book of Revelation. John relates that the seventh seal has seven phases, called ‘trumpets’ each symbolic of an unfolding of horrendous end-time events. Jesus related this prophetic insight to John who records the detail for us. It amplifies the end-time scenario he revealed to his apostles just before his death—see Matthew chapter twenty-four.

Seven Trumpets

Attempts have been made—notably by nineteenth century Bible commentators—to link these with his-

torical events. This may well be so, but these *Trumpet* judgments, clearly, are also closely linked with the coming return of the Messiah to reign as King of kings. They will be features of the end-time.

The unfolding of mankind’s history has been since the beginning in the hand of God, our Creator. He has chosen responsive individuals to further His plans for all of mankind, and around 1500BC He freed the descendants of faithful Abraham and Isaac from Egyptian domination.

The LORD by His miraculous interventions led them to Sinai to establish them as a nation and to recall to them the laws followed by Abraham (Genesis 26:5). It was a momentous and awesome and impressive moment for Israel, a day to be remembered annually by this festival. For the Israelites saw the Creator descend on the mountain, and experienced His awesome power and majesty.

A Memorial

So awesome was this moment that God gave them three days to prepare themselves for it. Moses adds this eye-witness account: ‘...*Mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire: and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly. And when the voice of the trumpet sounded long, and waxed louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him by a voice. And the LORD came down upon mount Sinai*’. Certainly an event to remember!

And an appropriate reminder was the sound of the trumpet: ‘...*On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, a thick cloud appeared on the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast was heard. All the people in the camp trembled with fear*’ (v.16).

Still To Come

This same Jesus the Messiah who appeared to Israel on Sinai will in the Father’s good *cont’d p.4*

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

Our Golden Heritage

Christians, as God's family, are chosen to receive a priceless inheritance

As the elect of the Father, Christians have been selected to live eternally in a family relationship with Him. It's a position of privilege obtained solely through the merits of His firstborn son, Jesus.

As noted the apostle Peter: '*...Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given*

among men, whereby we must be saved' (Acts 4:12). That 'name' embodies all the power and majesty and character and glory of our Saviour '*...in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*' (Colossians 2:3).

Consider Jesus

The more we come to know of the character of Jesus the more entrenched becomes our relationship with him, the more we can appreciate him.

It's a truism that we are all in a continuous battle with our 'besetting sins'. Yet Jesus, with our very same nature, never for a moment yielded to temptation, remaining without sin even in the face of all that life threw at him. When he was reviled he never retaliated in kind but responded from a loving heart. His words were always perfect truth with never a hint of deceit. His life was dedicated to acts of compassion as he '*...went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed of the devil*'.

The entire life and ministry of Jesus was a hard-won battle, '*... who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and*

supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared' (Hebrews 5:7).

As in every contest Jesus had with the devil, he relied solely on the Father (*cp* Matthew *ch* 4), on the '*...sword of the Spirit*', the written Word of God. It's the

Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.

Revelation 5:12

same source and the same spiritual weapon we too must constantly deploy.

Purpose

We cannot but bow in awe as we meditate on our infinite debt to the Saviour. He is constantly by the side of those who love him, who follow his guidance. To our dying day Jesus supports us and through him alone we have free access to our heavenly Father. As wrote Paul to the Philippian brethren: '*...I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me*' (*ch* 4:12-13). And until that day of our demise comes we are secure in his care until he calls us from the grave to live with him forever.

While in the heavenly realm he chose to take on human nature to satisfy the just demands of universal law. Adam breached the great 'law of love' which God had in his beginning breathed into his lifeless form. The result (as he had been forewarned) was death—and, as God advised Noah: '*...Whoso sheds man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man*' (Genesis 9:6). That consequence, that penalty, had to be

paid '*...a life for a life*'.

No Other Name

As every human has sinned none could redeem another sinner. To have the potential to redeem, to pay the penalty for all mankind requires someone whose life is more valuable than all—*ie*, a divine being, and one who has experienced human life in a fallen world.

Only through our commitment to Jesus Christ can we begin to appreciate the depths of his love for us, and have access to those boundless spiritual treasures.

New Creatures

The apostle Peter urges us to '*...grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever*' (II Peter 3:18). As in Christ we become a new person—a '*...babe in Christ*'—it is our individual growth in our comprehension of the fulness of the nature of Jesus that enables us to stand firm against '*...the wiles of the devil*', and to walk with him on whatever path he may lead us.

As new-born in God's family we need the spiritual nourishment—and nurture—that is found only in our deepening understanding of our Saviour, in the treasures that are in him (I Peter *ch* 2). And through him we strengthen our bond with our heavenly Father.

He, Jesus, is the ever-living cornerstone of the new spiritual temple of which we are '*...living stones*'—and each of us an integral part of it, selected and shaped by the Father for our role in His Family (I Peter *ch* 3)

Worthy indeed is the Lamb! **Ω**.

Jesus advises us never to give up when we pray

Prayer is the oil that smooths our way through our daily lives. It is an admission that we are insufficient of ourselves—our ‘inner resources’ are flawed—and we must tap into those treasure house of resources afforded us by our God through prayer. It is how we sustain our filial relationship with Him.

It has ever been so, for even in Eden our first parents communicated—though face-to-face—with the Creator of all. It has sustained the people of God through time and trials, and is an integral part of all worship: ‘...*By him [Jesus] therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name*’ (Hebrews 11:15). As adds the apostle Paul: ‘...*pray without ceasing*’ (I Thessalonians 5:17). We need to stay in constant communication with our Father, through Jesus.

Indeed Jesus is the perfect example, for he first referred every proposed action to the Father: ‘...*Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but yours, be done*’ (Luke 22:42). He is frequently recorded as spending time in prayer, and before selecting the Twelve for apostleship he, ‘...*went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God*’ (Luke 6:12).

As in any relationship—marriage, business, church—prayer must be sustained and nourished by frequent contact and inter-action. We pray and, more often than not, He speaks to us through His written Word. Let’s not neglect that!

A Long Wait

It’s a modern trait for us to want

instant answers (Google it!). That, however, doesn’t always happen in prayer, and many give up—a characteristic noted by Jesus referencing the time of his return: ‘...*when the Son of man comes, shall he find faith on the earth?*’ (Luke 18:8).

Jesus made this statement in summing up a parable concerning prayer, driving home the necessity for perseverance and patience: ‘...*he spoke a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint [never give up]*’. There follows the parable of ‘the importunate widow’.

[He isn’t here saying there will be a dearth of Christians at the end time, but gives one reason for our prayer life being sterile, our petitions unanswered. See Matthew 24 \:31 etc.]

It’s a matter of trust, He tells the disciples—our confidence that He will always carry out His promises, that He answers ‘...*effectual, fervent prayer*’. ‘...*Let him ask in faith*’, says James And why should we not have such confidence, for He is, ‘...*the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords; Who only has immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto [except through Jesus]*’ (I Timothy 6:15-16).

James (*ch* 5:16), citing the example of Elijah, asserts: ‘...*pray one for another, that you may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much*’. And while we wait for Him to intervene our faith sustains us in sure hope that our Father hears our prayer.: ‘...*your will be done as it is in heaven*’.

Pray...always!

The Lord’s brother, echoing those words of Jesus, adds a caveat: ‘...*even when you do pray, your prayers are not answered, because you pray just for selfish reasons*’ (James 4:3 CEV).

In course of instructing the disciples and in response to a request that he teach them to pray Jesus gave them a template, a guide (the ‘Lord’s prayer’). One lesson, as we have seen, is *persistence* (Luke 11:6-10). Another is that He will never give us what’s not good for us: ‘...*If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If you then, being evil, [with our sinfulness] know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?*’ (vv.11-13).

God’s response is through His Spirit, which is the reflection of His perfect character. That is, we are assured of answered prayer when we pray in harmony with His will. But we may still have to wait, with the certainty that the time for a response will be just right! *Faith*, again!

Healing doesn’t always happen instantly. Or not at all (cf the apostle Paul, II Corinthians 12:9). And how our prayer is answered may be quite unexpected.

God’s guidance is that we seek always what is His perfect will, that we are persistent, that we truly desire what we pray for—and that we be prepared to be surprised. Let Christ find faith in us at his coming! Ω

The New Gods

The New Testament church of God is set in the matrix of a pagan world. Suffocated by four millennia of enmity against the one true—and only—Creator God, false gods proliferated. As wrote the apostle Paul to the Corinthian brethren: ‘...we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one. For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be gods many, and lords many,) But to us there is but one God, the Father’ (I Corinthians 8:4-6).

Trinity of Gods

But is our modern world any better? All those pagan gods are still out there, though often shrouded under new guises. [The 500 page *World Religions* (Ninian Smart) is a comprehensive survey.] And we needn’t look far from home for a modern take!

On any typical day in its season it seems the whole nation wildly bows low before a spherical idol. Together with a range of other similar activities the god of *soccer*—and entertainment in general—consumes the country’s wealth and energy and time. It has its weekly and annual ‘festivals’ [matches], its ‘cathedrals’ [stadia], its ‘denominations’ [clubs], its worshippers [fan(atic)s], its ‘tithes’ [tickets, memorabilia]. This ‘god’ isn’t alone but is one of an entwined trio of gods worshipped almost universally.

Also vying for our attention and worshipped with similar religious fervour is the god of *health* with its thousands of altars, its high priests and its blood-soaked sacrifices of the unborn. Both of

these gods are linked with the all-pervasive malign god of *finance* before which all bow, a god fuelled and sustained by human greed.

The True God

Underlying the worship of these synthetic, deceptive all-pervasive superficial gods is the almost universal rejection of the one true God—who, by setting aside a specified weekly memorial, the seventh day and annual festivals, identifies Himself for us as the God of all creation. Ignore Him and this dangerous pathway to idolatry opens wide.

It is prudent, of course, that we ‘lighten up’ with entertaining diversions. And that we pay attention to our health and to our finances. As Christians it is our duty to nourish body, soul and spirit as guided by the Word of God which encourages us to ‘...let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand’.

As Christians we are urged to dedicate our lives to and to worship the one true God our Creator in the manner and times He prescribes. We follow His prescription for health of body and health of mind. We are to curb our exuberant desires for ‘more’—more things, more space, more prestige. As wrote the apostle Paul to the young evangelist, Timothy ‘...godliness with contentment is great gain’.

Let’s each examine our own life to ensure we are not drawn by these subtle distracting worldly ‘gods’ that increasingly pre-occupy rebellious mankind. Ω

Foundation...cont’d from p.2 and truth’ (John 1:114).

Bar of Justice

All of us, then, must appear before the court of heaven, as wrote the author of Hebrews: ‘...it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment’.

The apostle adds: ‘...we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he has done, whether it be good or bad’ (II Corinthians 5:10). And because ‘...all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God’ we face the ultimate just penalty—*death*.

The penalty for our sin is paid. The apostle continues. ‘...Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation’ (Hebrews 9:27-28).

When we turn our backs on sin and seek forgiveness through the shed blood of Jesus Christ who alone has paid the full penalty then we stand free—not through our own righteousness but being clothed by his perfect righteousness.

Through him alone is there salvation. *Hear him!* Ω

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MiniStudy

A Key to Growth

‘...let us 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)

The natural world holds a university of learning which we can apply to the spiritual realm, with lessons for Christians from the birth process, from cosmology and from the interaction between plants in the soil.

- Scientific investigation and discovery is wholly dependent on the consistency that governs our universe in all its aspects. Experimental results depend on the object of research reacting to fixed laws. The heavenly bodies, too, perform according to law so we can predict their position in the universe centuries ahead. On earth every plant traces its origin to a divine act of creation which packed its seed with unique DNA and intervened and gave it life—a life that could extract nourishment from the inorganic soil and rock. Each is interdependent with the soil organisms and all grow by immutable law’. Animate life, too, thrives on interdependence; animals and man on organic plants for nourishment and each species for reproduction and for social interaction
- Mankind in our origin lived in harmony as a unit, as ‘...*one flesh*’ (Genesis 2:24). Or, as God told Adam: ‘...*the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him*’ (v.18). It has ever been so, as witnessed by the universality of marriage (or partnering), the countless societies and clubs that stimulate and oil human relationships, and where the likeminded congregate for support and to nourish a shared interest
- Thus the call by the apostle that we ought not to be ‘...*forsaking the assembling of ourselves together*’ makes sense. The world has different priorities from the believer and follower of Jesus, and where it is possible we meet, as says the text, to ‘...*provoke to love and good works*’ and to ‘...*exhort one another*’. Such face-t-face contact is certainly the optimum way to achieve these goals (though other means, but not so effective can be helpful). The ‘...*one another*’ phrase in scripture is worth study. Corporate worship reflects the heavenly
- The origin of the synagogue may be lost in time but it surely has roots in the Sabbath commandment: ‘...*Six days shall work be done: but the seventh day is the sabbath of rest, an holy convocation; you shall do no work therein: it is the sabbath of the LORD in all your dwellings*’ (Leviticus 23:3). Note that God calls here for a ‘holy convocation’, an assembly of Israel for purposes of worship each Sabbath. Given that the Temple was the place for formal worship and the challenge of travel, local schools for teaching by the priests and Levites were established, developing as ‘synagogues’. It was the custom of Jesus to attend there: ‘...*[Jesus] came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day*’ (Luke 4:16). The synagogue was the default option every Sabbath for observant Jews—and it became something of a pattern for the assemblies of the young church. Under Paul’s ministry, ‘...*when the Jews were gone out of the synagogue, the Gentiles besought that these words might be preached to them the next sabbat*’ (Acts 13:42-44). He addressed the Corinthians ‘...*when you are gathered together*’ (I Corinthians 5:4), and elsewhere requested that his letter be read to other churches (Colossians 4:16)
- Of course, the annual holy days are also occasions for such gatherings. On them recourse was—is—given to instruction from the Scriptures: ‘...*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 [ie the Day of Trumpets]*’ (Nehemiah 8:1-8)
- When we ‘put on Christ’ we become a ‘new creature’ (II Corinthians 5:17)—described by Peter as ‘*new-born babes*’ (I Peter 2:2), and, as such we must be carefully nurtured in the arms of a compassionate and caring local church. The guidance through inter-action with the brethren and from competent teachers of the Word is essential to ease our growth into mature Christian men and women Ω

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