

new **Horizons**

Vol 25 No 6

November/December 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.

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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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Jesus alerts us to the sad possibility that we would lose our enthusiasm for the Kingdom, that our love may grow cold.

It need not be so

There's no doubt that the early church was enthused and excited about 'so great salvation'. And initially most of us today are 'over the moon' following our baptism. How can we retain our initial excitement, our enthusiasm for the things of God?

Many factors can indeed dull that realization that we are free, that the deadly burden of our sin, our fallen nature, has been forgiven, that the Lamb of God has borne away our sin '*...as far as the east is removed from the west*'. But we grow complacent. We forget. As Peter notes: '*...he that lacks these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and has forgotten that he was purged from his old sins*' (II Peter 1:9).

Promises

He reminds us: '*...his divine power has given to us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that has called us to glory and virtue: Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust*' (vv.3-4). What could be a more glorious promise, underwritten by the Creator, than that we can become '*...partakers of the divine nature*'!

Recall the words of Jesus as he faced the ire of the religious authorities: '*...these things have I spoken unto you [the Twelve], that my joy [Gk chara] might remain in you, and that your joy might be full*' (John 15:11).

There is, however, a flip side, a warning. Jesus, through John, reminds the Ephesian brethren, then on the cusp of a sterile faith: '*...remember therefore from whence you are fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto you quickly, and will remove your candlestick out of his place, except you repent*' (Revelation 2:5).

Clearly we must labour to retain that initial spark of enthusiasm for our Saviour and all he has provided, retain love

The Kingdom Comes ...be excited!

Just think. Before our baptism and whatever our life-style we were each, however fulfilling, simply passing time until we reaped the inevitable reward of being human: *death*: '*...the wages of sin is death*' (Romans 6:23). We were just so much flotsam and jetsam on the sea of life with no hope beyond our allotted span, beyond 'ashes to ashes'.

But now? Christ is risen from the dead and become—wait for it—the *firstfruit* of all in his care. First among many, for all who are 'in Christ' are '*...a kind of firstfruit*': '*...Of his own will be-*

gat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures' (James 1:18).

The apostle John reminds us: '*... Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it does not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is*' (I John 3:2).

A Glorious Body

The human body is described by Paul as subject to decay ('corruption') - and don't we know it. To '*inherit the Kingdom of God*', to fully participate in His Family, our corruptible body must experience a transformation (I Corinthians 15:50), a transformation no human manipulation of genes or cryogenics or artificial intelligence can achieve.

Recounts Paul: '*...flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but 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. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality* (1Corinthians 15:51-53}.

Our Saviour is all-powerful. He has '*...all power [authority] in heaven and earth*' (Matthew 28:18), and will use that power to transform us into his image: '*...Who shall change our vile*

Hebrew marriage as portrayed in the Scriptures is replete with symbolic significance for the Israel of God, His church. Paul again: *'...a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church'* (Ephesians 5:31-32).

The parents vetted and chose the bride for their son. They became betrothed, a form of marriage, but stayed apart intimately for a year. The wedding was a time of great joy and celebration.

body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things to himself' (Philippians 3:21).

We catch an awe-inspiring glimpse of that 'glorious body' in Matthew ch 17, when Jesus *'...: was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light'*.

Rejoice!

Through these dark winter days, then, and the darkening winter of our corrupt civilisation, it is time for us to rejoice in the incredible eternal future our Father has in store for His Family. He has in His Word given us mere tantalising glimpses, for even though *'...eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for them that love him. But God has revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searches all things, yea, the deep things of God'* (ch 2:9-10).

Born to be King

We will not, however, be born into an ordinary Family! We join

a royal family, for Jesus has won the right to be King of all the Earth, and he is coming to reclaim his Kingdom, inherited from our Father. He has *'...on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS'* (Revelation 19:16).

Our 'marriage' to Jesus Christ has been 'arranged' by the Father: *'...All that the Father gives me shall come to me; and him that comes to me I will in no wise cast out'* (John 6:37). He chose each of us to become the 'bride' of His only beloved son, Jesus: *'...that He might present the Church to Himself a glorious [bride], without spot or wrinkle or any other defect, but to be holy and unblemished'* (Ephesians 5:27).

Writing of 'Zion' [the 'Israel of God', the church] the prophet Isaiah says: *'...For as a young man marries a virgin, so shall your sons marry you: and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you'* (ch 62:5). The prophet adds: *'...the Gentiles shall see your righteousness, and all kings your glory: and you shall be called by a new name, which the mouth of the LORD shall name. You shall also be a crown of glory in the hand of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God'* (vv.2,3).

Through the apostle John Jesus tells us that the Father *'...has made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth'* (Revelation 5:10).

Prepare for the Wedding

Excitement, joy, exuberance—such is surely elicited by our anticipation of such a stupendous event—the *'...marriage supper of the Lamb'*. And not

only so but to be united with our Saviour for ever as he—we!—brings order to a chaotic and lost world. And into an unseen future in the timeless world of eternity.

As with every bride our 'year' of betrothal, our current life in his service, is given us to *'...make ourselves ready'*. Ω

Then, and Now...from p.3

(II Chronicles 9:22-23). He impacted the culture of surrounding nations. But his success—and that of his predecessors—was wholly dependent on his conformity with the principles set by God principle—principles he abandoned, embracing false faiths each with its own debauched culture. He thus snapped the vital link between submission to God's Laws and successful state-craft.

That lesson has yet to be learned by the contemporary world politic. The Creator of all mankind seeks only our good and has shown the way—which we ignore at our peril. Ancient Israel time and again experienced traumatic distress including, ultimately, ethnic cleansing. They were afflicted by increasingly severe disease epidemics, by drought, by crop failures, by foreign interference, by loss of national pride, by mental illness.

And not just Israel, for it is given as a template for success and for failure. The entire world—and especially the nations that have inherited the culture and the God of ancient Israel—must give heed.

Our world has indeed changed and is approaching the edge of self-destruction. Perilous times loom. Powerful religio-political forces are conspiring to enslave all of us and there is but one refuge: that we cast aside our foul ways and our false faiths—and turn to that one and only God of ancient Israel as portrayed by the Messiah, Jesus. Ω

Then... and Now

Societies change over time. But not always for the better

Growing up in the 40's and 50's life for me was reasonably comfortable—perhaps cocooned by my environment from a less-developed world. War? Yes. Hunger? No. Violence? Not a lot; just one murder in twenty-five years in my neck of the woods. And yes, people got sick. And it was far from perfect.

Modern Britain has, however, changed. Almost beyond recognition. It's very much generational. My street is now crowded with over-seventies. But it is neighbourly with frequent mixing (at least pre-covid) and co-operation, violence free, never a need to 'call the police'. (Though who knows what goes on behind closed doors! Why are they busy on their laptops!)

What Is 'Normal'?

Cultural norms have now radically changed, and, sadly, what that generation would class as 'normal' is today trodden underfoot. *Our* 'normal' was a mix, more private, more law-abiding. In some ways less tolerant of deviation from the norm.

We acquired that from our parents (probably born in the early nineteen hundreds). Their norm was often shaped by the church, by Sunday School, by Sunday preaching, by Bible reading, temperance societies *etc*—all nourished within close-knit families. (Into my late twenties I never heard of a divorce.) These 'influencers' predominated, though chunks of society did indeed miss out on this.)

Then came the 'swinging sixties'. The universities were spewing out new influencers largely with

Marxist principles and dedicated to overturning these family values as espoused by that older generation. That generation had many shortcomings crying out for radical reform—but the moral landscape has been transformed.

The so-called 'millennials' (born in this twenty-first century) have absorbed a whole new outlook from their teachers who had in turn been 'trained' in the 'new' way.—an outlook that pays little attention to the former Bible based norms.

In Contrast

Strong moral—Bible—values had been the norm for over a century. They are today derided by the internet influencers. Young women—and some not so young—have little self-respect, goaded to extremes by 'celebrities', by (fallen) 'stars', by trendy columnists. Self-restraint by boy gangs abandoned, replaced by a knife culture.

The 'stiff upper lip' gives way to puerile 'woke' language, to 'cancelling', to the destruction of private and public property. Abundance of weak legislation replaces self-restraint and is mirrored by incompetent law enforcement and slap-on-the-wrist 'justice'—surely the basis for a lawless society.

The moral majority is over-ridden by an aberrant and vocal, often fou-mouthed, minority who cer-

tainly have little regard for God's foundation principles and lacking pride actively impose their deviant culture on the majority. The sewage that flows through the internet corrupts man, woman and child and goes unchecked by compliant legislators.

The financial world is little more than a house of cards ready to implode as the next wave of greed sweeps through. Fortunes vanish, the weak are further impoverished, the elderly neglected.

So—*change indeed!*

Inevitable Consequence

When we build on sand, when foundations crumble, the edifice tumbles. When nations ignore and despise and cast out the Creator and His clear guidance for a prosperous and successful society—then as night follows day there follows trouble.

Cocooned by earth's abundant resources, by money, by technology we neglect the human spirit, we nourish the superficial. Isolated from sound spiritual teaching we in the West are unaware that such has adverse consequences.

Learn from History

Throughout human history mighty empires have arisen—and collapsed: Egypt, Babylon, Alexandrian, Rome. A key to their downfall was widespread moral corruption. One neglected empire is ancient *Israel*—which once dominated the Middle East: *'... king Solomon passed all the kings of the earth in riches and wisdom. And all the kings of the earth sought the presence of Solomon, to hear his wisdom, that God had put in his heart'* *cont'd p.2*

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unsigned articles are by the Editor

Welcome, Stranger

Immigration...a lesson from history

It's a fact of life—has been throughout history—that there is an on-going clash of cultures: Jew and Arab, Sunni and Shia, between and as highlighted by the BLM movement, black and white.

We needn't be surprised when an invasion of a sovereign nation stirs a patriotic response—even if we don't like that response. We should recall Solomon's words: *'...It's better to take hold of a mad dog by the ears than to take part in someone else's argument'* (Proverbs 26:17).

Yet we applaud any reasonable response that reflects 'our' values. Take the Polish or French underground movements in the 'forties', for example, supported by the UK. Back home, though, how would *we* react to a foreign invasion (always a possibility)? Much the same as did the Taliban! Clearly, in our turbulent and uncertain world we must be prepared, must have our 'house' in order. *And we must expect immigrants.*

Housekeeping

When you build a house you ensure sound foundations, you ensure the fabric of the build is strong and secure. But there's more, for it isn't just a building but a *home*, a home to be filled, your 'castle'. And there are rules.

The family has shared values. They, you expect, will abide by those values. (You try to instil them!) And any guest you invite will surely respect them: *'when in Rome...'*

Nation-building mirrors this—or *should* do. The 'house' is built, the family is settled and happy in

the established culture. You welcome 'guests'—and you expect them to respect your norms and not to impose their alien culture. You guard against hostile intruders.

Example

Ancient Israel was established as a model nation—though they failed miserably. Their constitution wasn't cobbled together from varied sources but was divinely inspired: *'...this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people'* (Deuteronomy 4:6). Coming from the Creator of mankind surely worth attention, even in the twenty-first century!

Death of a Nation

Ancient Israel's difficulties—and ultimate demise—resulted from neglect of the principles underlying that God-given constitution. Yet they had wholeheartedly agreed to it: *'...All that the LORD has spoken we will do'* (Exodus 19:8). But as the centuries passed they lacked both sound leadership and the self-restraint of the people to abide by them.

Nations teem with millions of citizens—China and India each over a billion, the United States over 300 million and others over 100 million. But each has its roots, however long ago, in a single family. They joined with kindred families (their offspring) eventually becoming a 'nation'.

Ancient Israel models this pattern, and the Anglo-Saxon nations of today have their roots in them. And don't we, as do other nations, share and fiercely guard a common culture distinct from

other nations. When this is expressed it is often branded 'racist'. No surprise that when significant numbers from other cultures are introduced clashes become likely. But they are not inevitable, for Israel's mentor (God!) provided a solution.

Citizenship

Essentially, every immigrant was not just welcomed but was to be classed as a full citizen. *'...the stranger that dwells with you shall be unto you as one born among you, and you shalt love him as yourself'* (Leviticus 19:34). More: *'... You shall neither vex a stranger, nor oppress him'* (Exodus 22:21). Ancient Israelites were inculcated from a child's earliest years with the guiding principle: *'...You shall love your neighbour as yourself'* (Leviticus 19:18).

There were, of course, T's and C's—*Terms and Conditions*—applicable to immigrants. Every natural-born Israelite (*ie* descended from Isaac) *and every immigrant* was obligated to obey the 'law of the land' as defined by Israel's God-given constitution—as summarized by all Ten Commandments and the various dependant laws and statutes. Much of their law was drafted to combat idolatry and the obscene associated foul practices. Leviticus chapter eighteen defines some of these, summing up as *'...Defile not yourselves in any of these things: for in all these the nations are defiled which I cast out before you: And the land is defiled: therefore I do visit the iniquity thereof upon it, and the land itself vomits out her inhabitants. You shall therefore keep my statutes and my judgments, and shall not commit any of these abominations; neither any of your own nation, nor any stranger that sojourns among you'* (vv24-26)

It is a guide—and a warning—for modern race relations. **Ω**

The Great Day of Judgment

We are born. We live. We die. Then what? Each faith has its own answer—but most agree on one aspect: we will all face ‘judgment’.

The Christian scriptures put it like this: ‘...it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment’ (Hebrews 9:27). *There’s no escape!*

Judgment is a process. You are alleged to have broken a law, you are arraigned to appear before judge and jury, and you are subject to cross-examination before the jury assesses the evidence. In heaven’s court the jury is superfluous, for the Judge already knows. But you will have your day in court.

For those ‘in Christ’ judgment is on-going in this life: ‘...the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and ‘ (I Peter 4:17) - how we react to life’s challenges or to persecution, for example. Our on-going assessment determines our role in the Kingdom—not whether or not we will be there, for our sin is covered by Christ’s shed blood.

The Great Day

But as Peter notes: ‘...if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?’ . The apostle Paul addresses this in writing to the Thessalonian brethren: ‘... 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 :8-9). John, in Revelation, describes this

terrible time.

As the end times is drawing to a close God will permit awesome natural and political chaos to engulf mankind as the inevitable consequence of our increasing sinfulness. Many, however, will in rebellion to Him, continue to ‘worship the beast’, (Revelation 14:6ff). Despite frequent clear warnings they ‘...repented not’ (ch 16:8-11) and will experience the judgment of immediate destruction ‘...in the presence of the Lamb’ (ch 14:10).

The ‘day of judgment’ continues throughout the thousand year benign reign of Jesus as the survivors of the destructive end-times chaos live on into that new world’. It’s a time when ‘...he [Jesus] shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off’ (Micah 4:3). When the thousand years of Christ’s reign ends mankind will once again be tested as to their loyalty to God as the Devil is again unleashed and again deceives many (Revelation 20:7-10).

The Last Day

That ‘great day’ of judgment then extends to the ‘general resurrection’ when ‘the rest of the dead’ are raised to face their time of judgment (vv.11-15). All of mankind, all who have lived since Adam who have died outside a filial relationship with the Father—all will at that time be restored, in proper order, to physical life for a time of testing (I Corinthians 15:21-28).

It’s a time pictured by the ‘last day, the great day’—the 7th—of the Biblical feast of *Tabernacles* (John 7:37), the era (of unstated length) when the dead will rise from their graves and their lives examined by the standard of ‘the books’, the Christian scriptures.

They then receive their sentence—either eternal life or death.

The Last Enemy

For those in Christ death has no fears, but most of us live ‘in fear of death’. It is our enemy, putting an end to our plans. But it is the ‘last enemy’, for after the final judgment it will be no more: ‘... he [Jesus, the Messiah] must reign, till he has put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death’ (I Corinthians 15:25-26).

The apostle John conveys Christ’s message, his last warning to a fallen world: ‘...the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire’ (Revelation 20:13-15)

The imagery is taken from the discipline of agriculture. Unproductive trees and plants are cut down (*ie*, killed) and then the diseased branches are cast into the fire.

‘...the day comes, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and 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... And you shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, says the LORD of hosts’ (Malachi 4:1-3).

Judgment Day will then be complete, and the Father will reign supreme. He will be ‘all in all’. Ω

EARTH—a short history

First there was nothing, just empty space. Then the material universe. What next?

How the ‘things that are’ come to be is a controversial matter among not only Christians but within the ranks of scientists. Was there an initial ‘big bang’? Or was there instant creation by divine fiat? For both, or indeed all views are presented. Science adopts theories of origin (steady state, cold dark matter, Big Bang *etc*) that are much in debate, unsettled, often abandoned. And Creationists squabble, often over interpretation of data but often with the same outcome.

Curiosity, rightly, drives us to figure *how* (if not *why*), but we are here by whatever means—and organic life arrived. You are here, and controversy, while driving enquiry, is too often counter productive.

In essence—are all those very convincing media documentaries just fake in ‘proving’ the material universe is billions of years old? Or, is it conceivable that God hovered all that time over the chaos of a slowly developing universe before implementing His plan for mankind? What about those fossil remains—a problem for science and for creationists. And when will that ‘missing link’ show up? Has the speed of light fluctuated over time?

As I say—we are here, so where do we go now? As noted Dr Billy Graham ‘...*whichever way God did it makes no difference to what man is and his relationship with God*’. Belief in a Creator God and belief in evolution are matters of faith. In Hebrews we read:

‘...*he that comes to God must believe that he is*’ (Hebrews 11:6), while science in blind faith believes that initially ‘something gradually developed from nothing’. But for us—and for most Christians—existence is impossible without divine intervention.

In the Beginning

When the earth, by whatever means, eventually became habitable it teemed with life, life created in stages.

God revealed these to Adam He set the planet in motion and inaugurated the electro-magnetic spectrum, manifest as ‘light’ (Genesis 5:1-2). . Then in sequence came plant life (*ch* 1:3-10) followed by sea creatures, birds, amphibians and, separately, mammalian life (the ‘6th day’). It’s the same pattern followed by evolutionary theory.

All In One

Whatever may be our perception of the ‘how’ it is universally accepted that mankind is the pinnacle of creation.

For evolutionists man results from endless years of bit-by-bit cumulative development. They struggle to ignite that initial spark of life from the amino-acid soup they have formulated. For creationists mankind exists by divine fiat—the ‘irreducible complexity’, all or nothing, every system, if to fulfil its purpose, instantly and fully functional and the result of God’s ‘in-breathing’.

Death by Sin

The almost universal concept of an ‘immortal soul’ is alien to the Bible. Man is *mortal*, but created

No Timepiece

We can’t impose our obsession with time on God. He exists outside of time (*‘I am’*), He is *‘the same today, forever’*. He is the *‘alpha and the omega’*.

Irreducible complexity

To function, *all* parts must be in place together *cp the eye*

morally perfect. By choice he broke the bond with his Creator—he ‘sinned’ and ‘...*the wages of sin is death*’, thus bequeathing that legacy to all of us, necessitating our redemption: ‘...*as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned*’ (Romans 5:12).

The lower creation from amoeba to dinosaurs, in contrast, is morally neutral. They do not sin but are purposed to live and die, an integral part of the great eco-sphere that is the *kosmos*. They don’t, as does man, have the potential to become ‘...*my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty*’ (II Corinthians 6:18).

Understanding this can allay concerns about ultra-ancient fossils. If there were indeed an earlier creation (extending over millions of years) that was overwhelmed by the God-directed flood of Genesis chapter one, verse one, the varied life-forms of organic fossils (plant and animal) are testimony to God preparing the planet for mankind’s tenure.

In due time God in ‘six days’ refurbished Earth and created the pinnacle of His plan—mankind. Into Adam God breathed the human spirit (the ‘*spirit in man*’) which for the first time created a unique being ‘*in the image of God*’ (Genesis 1:27) and destined for His Family.

God’s grand design unfolded over the next millennia as He prepared the faithful and Israel as ‘...*a people for himself*’ (Deuteronomy 7:6). Jesus the Messiah, two millennia ago, opened the way for multitudes to become part of that design. After a further millennium all judgment will be complete and God Himself will be ‘*all in all*’ (I Corinthians 15:28). **Ω**

Love Your Neighbour!

It is common humanity for each of us to be aware of the needs of all those we encounter—and to ‘do something’

Countless acts of compassion are, daily, part and parcel of all civilised life. The accident victim. The lost child. The neighbour's illness. Complete strangers experiencing the milk of human kindness. The sacrificial support after disasters.

It's also a theme that resonates throughout the Scriptures of the Old and the New Testament, and is summed up by ‘...love your neighbour as yourself’ (Leviticus 19:18).

Indeed the instruction included in the Law (Heb. *torah*) overflows with guidance on how to apply this maxim in daily life. Such principles are not backed up by legislation but stem from the foundation of ‘love your neighbour’: don't bear grudges; don't be a tale-bearer; help your neighbour when he's in difficulty; care for the safety of your property and animals *etc.*

Such humanity pervades all faiths and isn't simply a ‘Christian virtue’. But we have also seen—and in all faiths—the breakdown of a society under pressure of disaster, of conflict, of disease.: violence, theft, looting, neglect.

The social history of the world before the ministry of Jesus isn't pretty. For all the claim to Greek civility, society in general merited the term ‘barbarian’. The state of society in Rome, in Corinth and elsewhere, as the eye-witness Paul relates (Romans 1:26-31, I Corinthians 6:8-11), opens a window on that world.

Those lofty principles embedded in Judaism had become corrupted and were brought to the surface by the Messiah, Jesus, and gradually spread through the brethren of the infant church.

Sadly, over ensuing centuries the witness and influence of that church faded into the barbarism of the Middle Ages, surviving in individuals dedicated to the Saviour no matter what the adverse external pressures.

The revival of the Biblical faith in the sixteenth century led to the rekindling of those foundation principles and unshackling from the chains of Biblical illiteracy across those societies exposed to the Scriptures.

That moderating influence is fading. A generation arises in ignorance of the divine mandate: ‘... you shall teach them [His principles of living] diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise up. And you shall bind

them for a sign upon your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. And you shall write them upon the posts of your house, and on your gates’ (Deuteronomy 6:7-9).

How many—even in Christian homes—are prepared to invest such effort. How many people, how many in financial or political or social or religious leadership, are guided by God's instructions for a settled society. Indeed, how many trust in a loving, active God who interacts with His creation in accord with how they comply with His guidance (*cp* Leviticus *ch* 26).

Morality in Decline

No surprise, then, that the apostle Paul predicts: ‘...in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: (II Timothy 3:1-5).

Note Paul's summary: ‘...from such turn away’. Most of us do indeed ‘love our neighbour’. It is, however, a truism that it is exceptional for us to care for others when we face deprivation—starvation, personal safety, fear for example. It is in the face of such extremes that God empowers His children to ‘good works’, to follow His guidance in His ‘Law’, through His in-dwelling Spirit.

When life flows along smoothly it is relatively easy to ‘be my brother's keeper’. As Christians, when tough times envelop us we must be prepared to serve our fellowman as we serve ourselves. **Ω**

CALLING ALL INTERNET USERS!

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Be sure to take a look at www.cgom.org

'... What Shall I Do?

Most of us don't think to ask this question!

That despairing question resounded around a first century Jerusalem street as the apostle Peter addressed a crowd disturbed by the supernatural events they had just witnessed. Most had experienced the eerie darkness that had enveloped the city just six weeks previously, had perhaps encountered one of those who had risen from their grave or seen the vast curtain in the temple ripped apart. Or perhaps had witnessed the crucifixion of that so-called 'criminal', Jesus.

Now here was Peter explaining that he, Jesus, is their long-awaited Messiah, their King, their Saviour (Acts 2:36)—whom *'...you have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: Whom God has raised up'* (ch 2:23f). What a shocker. Convinced by these facts they sought an answer: *'...what shall we do?'* (v.37). It's a question posed time and again during the two millennia since that address by Peter. And it lies at the heart of the Gospel.

Whatever our background—religious (even Christian!), cultural, humanist, atheist, pagan—to attain salvation we each must come to the point where we find it necessary to ask that question, and faced with the inevitability of judgment to come there can be none more vital. We need an answer—and Peter provides it: *'...Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ [ie Messiah] for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit'* (v.38).

Remember that Peter's hearers were observant Jews whose lives revolved around obedience to God as outlined in the 'Law of Moses'. Yet they still needed to turn their lives around, to *'repent'*. Their wrong-doing ('sin') must have a judicial pardon and the penalty—in this case, *death* (Romans 6:23)—paid for. The Jews, steeped as they were in the law, well understood *sin* as a breach of law (cp I John 3:4). And *all* have sinned.

However, as the apostle writes: *'...it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judg-*

ment' (Hebrews 9:27). That's what we *all* face—to stand before the heavenly court to give account to God (Romans 14:12). And the sentence is capital, *death*. *Unless*—unless in this life that debt has been paid.

Clearly, the debt can be paid only if someone not under the penalty—*ie* sinless—is willing to die in your place, willing to pay the price. But you won't find such a one. And anyway, his death would atone for but one other, for you. To save more—all—sinners requires someone who is worth more than all. *Someone divine*. Only in Christianity is such a scenario—a divine Saviour—presented as the one way to salvation, for us to become a part of the family of God, His true children (Acts 4:12).

To be saved, then, that Saviour must be embraced, our lives committed to him, our lives transformed by God's inward-working Spirit. Jesus Christ is the answer to our question—the *only* answer. As spoke Joshua to Israel: *'...choose you this day whom you will serve'*. Will it be God (*ie* life), or the world (*ie* death) Ω

'...but it's not for me'

You are *young* and there's a lifetime ahead: career, family, interests, retirement. Or, you have survived into that retirement era with a few bumps in the road. And you are comfortable with your faith (or lack of it). Born Muslim, or Catholic, or Hindu or Methodist—there's plenty of choice.

Jesus, born a Jew in ancient Palestine, claims *'I am the way, the truth, the life'*. His messenger Peter states there is no other way. As evidence, having never sinned and having been put to death on false charges, he returned from death.

Unique—no one else can claim that! So—it's worth paying attention. We also learn that when we die we face a time of examination ('judgment'), for we are each accountable for how we respond to the gift of life.

As an adult it won't have escaped your notice that all is far from right with our world. Jesus was sent from God to put that right, and he is recruiting and training a cohort among mankind—from all faiths, all races, all era—to work with him on implementing that awesome project. Everyone is invited. Respond to this call and you will be chosen to participate.

Your response includes your com-

mitment to *change*—to change your life direction, to submit to God's will as revealed in the Christian Scriptures, and to remain faithful until the end. The reward is beyond human comprehension.

The Gospel, the message brought by Jesus, *is* for *you*. Embrace it and—though the path is challenging, the way difficult—and you will reign with him eternally in his Kingdom. Ω

Read: Should You Be Baptized?
cgom.org/Publications/Articles/ShouldYouBeBaptized.pdf

MiniStudy

At One With God

‘...stand firm in the freedom with which Christ made us free and do not be held again with a yoke of slavery’ (Galatians 5:1)

‘...All things are lawful to me, but not all things profit. All things are lawful to me, but I will not be ruled by any’ (I Corinthians 6:12)

Faced with the absolute perfection manifest in the life of Jesus it can be discouraging to look in the mirror and view our own imperfections. We are each faced with what the scriptures describe as our ‘besetting sins’. They are unique for each of us and can be an on-going battle for years on end.

- When you think about it there’s no doubt that we have all ‘...*fallen short of the glory of God*’. Indeed that ‘...*all have sinned*’ (Romans 6:23). The apostle John, writing to his flock, warns: ‘...*If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us*’ (I John 1:8)
- Although not unknown in the wider Christian community, no true Christian is likely to have any part in those sins reflected in the decalogue, the ten commandments. Paul had cause to alert the Corinthian brethren to this truism: ‘... *do you not know that unjust ones will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be led astray, neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor male prostitutes, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor covetous ones, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor plunderers shall inherit the kingdom of God*’ (I Corinthians 6:9-10). He acknowledges ‘...*such were some of you: but you are washed, you are sanctified, but you are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God*’. They were, in Christ, being transformed (v.11)
- Jesus, however, issued a cautionary note, warning against complacency: ‘... *you know that our ancestors were told, "Do not murder" and "A murderer must be brought to trial." But I promise you that if you are angry with someone, you will have to stand trial*’ (Matthew 5:21-22). So not just the overt action but also the *thought* is sin. (see also vv.27ff). Can we live very long, then, without sin?
- Here we stand, made perfectly righteous before God through our repentance and baptism and solely by His grace. Having thus had His Spirit unite with our spirit we *are now* His children—just as much as the embryo in the womb is truly our child. What the Father sees is Christ’s righteousness cloaking us
- Look in the ‘mirror’, however, and that’s *not* what we see. Just look at the Corinthian brethren! To the Twelve Jesus said, ‘...*You are already clean because of what I have said to you*’ (John 15:3). As are we if ‘in Christ’. It is a reality echoed by John: ‘...*Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it does not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him*’ (I John 3:2)
- Why, then, does the apostle urge us ‘...*if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*’ (ch 1:9)? Jesus told Peter, ‘...*People who have bathed and are clean all over need to wash just their feet*’ (John 13:10). Applying it here we see that once we have repented and been baptized [‘*bathed*’] we need only seek forgiveness for our on-going acknowledged sins [our ‘*soiled feet*’]
- Paul notes: ‘...*if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him*’ (Romans 6:8). In Christ we have become a new person; but we are still in the flesh (‘*carnal*’ - Romans 8:7) and must say with him, ‘...*I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwells no good thing*’ (ch 7:18). Jesus never sinned, but, as an example for us, in resisting it he ‘...*offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death*’ (Hebrews 5:7). Sin is a deadly matter, but: ‘...*he [Jesus] is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever lives to make intercession for them*’
- As our ‘advocate’ (I John 2:1) he stands before the Father showing that he has paid the penalty for the sin we have confessed. While we remain faithful and in union with Christ we are already heirs of the Kingdom and each sin confessed and forsaken edges us closer to the perfection that is inherent in Christ—and worthy of greater responsibility in the Kingdom: ‘...*he that overcomes, and keeps my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations*’ (Revelation 2:26). Jesus used the analogy of ‘the pounds’ to illustrate this principle (Luke 19:12-26). It is vital for our future role that we ‘...*stand firm in the freedom with which Christ made us free*’, and that we use that freedom wisely Ω

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Should You Be Baptized?

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