

new Horizons

Vol 26 No 6

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addressing the important issues for today and tomorrow



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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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Publisher:
Churches of God Outreach Ministries
P O Box 54621
Tulsa, OK 74155-0621
USA

e-mail: information@cgom.org
phone: 1-800-611-8080

Editor: James McBride
e-mail: coguk@aol.com
mobile: 07949942180

Copy Editor: Richard Gawith
Graphics: Richard Gawith

England:
The Churches of God, UK
Unit 14356, PO Box 4336
Manchester M61 0BW
England
e-mail: coguk@aol.com
mobile: 07949942180

Canada:
Canadian Church of God
PO Box 476
Don Mills Station
Don Mills Ontario M3C 2T4
Canada
www.canadianchurchofgod.com

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new Horizons

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Christmas...a time of celebration for Christians worldwide. But a time that is increasingly recognized within many other faiths, with many joining in its well-known traditions

The festival—the ‘mass of Christ’—was introduced into the Christian festive calendar centuries after the resurrection of Jesus replacing the previously observed Biblical ‘*feasts of the LORD*’, and reflecting the widespread ancient observation throughout the Roman Empire of the birth of the sun-god. Even in modern Christian nations its association with the birth of Jesus is being downgraded, being disparaged by such terms as the ‘*winter festival*’.

Previous generations paid more respect to

the religious emphasis of the birth of Jesus. The last half-century has witnessed the commercial and hedonistic face of the festival reflected, perhaps, in the words of the apostle Peter, reflecting his own times: ‘...*the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries: wherein they think it strange that you run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you*’ (1 Peter 4:4).

Faith-driven Christians today, as were their first century forebears, are ridiculed and ostracized for not participating in such festivities. They stay faithful to those ‘appointed times’ established by

God and recorded in the scriptures (eg Leviticus ch 23).

Universal Faith

Muslim, Hindu or Jewish folk, of course, hold to their own observances, their own festivals and little interest in the unique crucial spiritual role of Jesus in our world. But the secularization of the Christmas festival has strong attractions in our hedonistic era: a time for parties, for fun, for jollity, for excess and a time to brighten the northern dark winter gloom.

As Christmas fast becomes a ‘feast for all nations’ it slots cosily beside another Christian (but unbiblical) festival that is all but

serves as a platform on which to erect the ‘one universal church’, an edifice that incorporates church and a subservient state’. It is the long-standing goal of the papacy—and is now perilously close to fruition.

Insidiously, pollution and climate change are linked to the universal cessation of work on Sundays, as promoted in Pope Francis’s encyclical *Laudate si* (1915).

Inexorably a compliant world is being seduced to accept the syncretism of world religions, (exemplified by *Chrislam*, a blend of Christianity and Islam) and a powerful but subservient world government that will enforce the tenets of the new world faith—a blend of church and state.

A Feast for All Nations

universal; *halloween*, an observance with equally dark pagan roots introduced in the fourth century.

In the fourth century the universal church began to integrate with the secular state. The Emperor Constantine banned the Bible Sabbath (the *seventh* day) and imposed the observance of another pagan celebration: *Sunday*—in reality the *first* day of the week. It replaced the seventh-day Sabbath which the people of God (including Christians) had observed since creation some four thousand years earlier. Again, it is now an all but universal observance of ‘*the day of the sun*’.

This trio of religious activities

This is the long-held goal of the dark forces that control our world, guided by the malign spirit, the devil, who sees domination of mankind as his sole right. Hence his six thousand year conflict with the one true Lord of mankind, Jesus Christ.

Comprehensively defeated at the cross yet knowing his ultimate destiny and refusing to accept defeat he continues to attack the divine plan for mankind.

A Feast for All

God, however, will deliver on His own plan. Human survival is dependent on an adequate food supply—which in turn needs the God-given infrastructure that enables its production. Since earliest

times this has been celebrated annually by all peoples through harvest festivals, the form variously devised in different cultures.

God Himself has set out His festival plan for us—observed to this day in Judaism and by many Christians. It commemorates not just earth's bounty in due season but also is a microcosm of His grand design for mankind.

Following the coming return of Jesus the Messiah as King of kings, the Creator will establish these festivals for *all* mankind—then observant of one global King and one universal faith, church and state in perfect loving harmony under His divine leadership.

Christians today rejoice in the observance of these festivals (*Passover, Pentecost, Tabernacles*), but in the beginning years of Christ's coming rule many will cling to their idolatrous traditions (eg Christmas, Easter) and will require sanctions to instil compliance: *'...survivors from those nations that attacked Jerusalem will go there each year to worship the King, the LORD All-Powerful, and to celebrate the Festival of [Tabernacles]. No rain will fall on the land of anyone in any country who refuses to go to Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord all-powerful. (Zechariah 14 16-17).*

Festivals Today

Despite derision even from Christians, millions of believers in our time observe the Bible festivals annually as God prescribes, assembling with others of like-mind for fellowship, worship and instruction by competent Bible teachers.

Request the booklet ***God's Holy Days*** to explore this teaching. Ω

'Give us this day...'

Our world and all its institutions are fast sinking into a cesspit of anarchy. The restrictions imposed by self-seeking governments and their mentors worldwide under the pretext of climate change, protection from disease, diversity *etc* are stirring widespread opposition from farmers, from transport workers—and not least from the increasingly restless and hostile populace as they battle with the resulting consequences of rampant inflation and the soaring cost of living.

A cohort of relatively young trendy leaders (eg in Canada, France, New Zealand, The Netherlands) have bought into the grand plan, hatched behind closed doors, for 'saving the world'. They vigorously pursue the goals of so-called *Agenda 2030* and *zero carbon*, and are aided by the United Nations and subservient, compliant governments and councils worldwide.

Nor does religion escape. Driven by the papacy (powered by Jesuits) the global agenda is to blend the faiths under the banner of the 'common good'—as exemplified by 'Chrislam', the merging of Christianity and Islam—while claiming, contrary to Scripture (Acts 4:12), that all paths lead to the same 'god'. In this it is increasingly supported by leading Protestant evangelicals.

All true followers of Jesus Christ need to be aware of this global movement, which undermines our freedom of thought, our freedom to worship—and *prepare*. But guns won't stop it,

and stored food will eventually become exhausted (or be stolen). 'Prepping' is also a temporary fix,

Throughout history faithful believers have been persecuted and ostracised for remaining faithful to the true faith as heralded in the Christian scriptures. Martyrdom may be the price we pay for loyalty to our Saviour and to his Word—but the outcome is a role in God's eternal spirit Family.

Trust Him

It is vital in dark times that we each daily enhance and deepen our trust in Him for every need. The '*Lord's prayer*' is not just a prayer formula—'*...give us this day our daily bread*'—but a guidepost for our everyday life.

The record of God's supportive dealings with His people is writ large in Scripture. Jacob's family was delivered from severe famine (Genesis 41); through Moses God fed and watered Israel for forty years. In a time of prolonged drought He nourished Elijah through ravens (I Kings 17:4-6); He miraculously fed a widow in her need (vv.13-17).

The book of Psalms is a rich and profound witness to those believers who in extreme privation and danger have cast their total well-being to the care of our loving and faithful Father. A daily read is a beneficial backdrop to our daily Bible study'

Trust Him!

Ω

Trust in the LORD with all your heart; and lean not unto your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct your paths (Proverbs 3:6)

An Unseen World

Angels, created before mankind, have a mysterious origin

Widely believed by believers of all faiths to exist, these mysterious and powerful spirits have a vital role in the divine plan. They were created to serve both God, and mankind. They were present when humans were created, but their nature is often misunderstood (Hebrews 1:14).

Spirit Substance

Angels are 'spirit'—clearly of a different substance from mankind who are '*...of the earth, earthy*'. But they were also created with a different destiny—to become emissaries of the Creator, instrumental in expediting the will of God, but never destined to become (as is mankind) 'sons of God', members of God's Family (Hebrews 1:5, 2:7-8).

'Spirit' [Heb *ruach*, Gk *pneuma*] is a misunderstood

word, generally thought of as ethereal, invisible, lacking substance. The word can refer to 'holy spirit', to '*the spirit in man*', to angelic spirit, to the 'heart', to wind—all with their specific characteristics.

Angels (Gk *angelos*) are messengers, indicating their function. The word also applies to humans, including the apostles.

All animate creatures including humans have limited use of our senses—there's a range of wavelengths (eg between that of sound and light) that we cannot access. The angelic spirit body emanates a different wavelength and is hidden from us, but becomes visible when God 'opens our eyes'. An example is in II Kings 6:17.

Yet we find that after Jesus was resurrected in a spirit body he appeared to the disciples: '*...See my hands and my feet--it is my very self. Feel me and see, for a spirit has not flesh and bones as you see I have* (Luke 24:39)'. He could be touched and he ate food for he had a 'spirit' body. As the apostle Paul notes; '*...There is a natural [Gk *pseuchikos*] body, and there is a spiritual [Gk *pneumatikos*] body... the last Adam [Jesus] was made a quickening [life-giving] spirit*' (I Corinthians 15:44-45).

Everything created, will resolve into its elements when its purpose is fulfilled.

The Scriptures are replete with manifestations of angels in solid body form—visible, physical, touchable (cf Genesis 18:5, Hebrews 13:2 *etc*). Yet with spiritual powers far beyond human ability.

A Divided Creation

All that comes from the hand of God is 'good', including the creation called *angels*. They were present when God began to re-create the planet (Job 38:7) that had become '*...without form [Heb. *tohu*] and void*' (Genesis 1:2)—though the original creation was not designed that way: '*...he created it not in vain [Heb. *tohu*], he formed it to be inhabited* (Isaiah 45:18).

As God began the re-creation process, the earth was already covered by water:

'*...the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the [pre-existing] waters*' Genesis 1:2.

Water is a symbol and the means of exe-

When we are introduced to Earth's history it is already in chaos and covered in water (Genesis 1:2). As with the world of Noah's day it may have been 'waters of judgment' for their sin].

cuted judgement, Following the great flood of Noah God promised; '*...I will establish my covenant with you; neither shall all flesh be cut off any more [ie repeatedly] by the waters of a flood; neither shall there any more be a flood to destroy the earth*' (Genesis 9:11).

But who or what was being judged, and when? (Humans did not yet exist.)

What follows may be controversial but worth your consideration

Preparation

When God first created the entire angelic host in material bodies they were, like us, settled on earth as their appointed responsibility. Lucifer, Satan, was assigned by God to be sovereign ruler of the planet. Their sojourn here was a test of their mettle, and to provide evidence of their loyalty: As with Israel this was '*...to humble you, and to prove you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments, or no*' (Deuteronomy 8:2).

Those angels who qualified, an innumerable host (Revelation 5:11), fulfilled their assigned role and were reassigned to the 'heaven of heavens' for God's service, acquiring the powers to fulfil their new role as transformed angelic spirit. They are known as the '*angels of God*', the '*angels of God in heaven*' the '*angels of heaven*', 'holy angels'.

Not so Satan's cohort, for they

rebelled and yielded themselves to Satan as leader. They are known in Scripture as *'the devil and his angels'*, *'evil spirits'* and *'unclean spirits'*.

Fate of Angels

The Scriptures are remarkably opaque on the detail, but feeding on scraps it would appear that as a result of their sin, the 'fallen' angels lost their material body, as do humans when they die, and became the debauched disembodied spirits we know as *'demons, devils [Gk. *damonion*]*'. The universal principle for rational beings with the ability to choose applied: *'...the wages of sin is death'* (Romans 6:23).

John (Revelation 12:4) indicates that the 'dragon' [Satan] had persuaded (or coerced) one-third of the angels to follow him in his rebellion against God. His aspiration, as with all despots, was to *'...be like God'*. An unequal contest, and he was forced

tartaroo to back off from invading God's heaven as described by Peter. A place of darkness, of restraint, but not *hades*. Peter alone defines it. (II Peter 2:4). (Perhaps alluded to by Jude.)

As the apostle Peter explains, many of the angels, in submitting to the devil, sinned: *'...For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell [Gk. *tartaroo*], and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment'* (II Peter 2:4). Jude adds: *'...those who did not keep the position originally assigned to them [Gk. *arche*], but deserted [Gk. *'left behind'*] their own proper abode--He reserves in everlasting*

bonds, in darkness, in preparation for the judgement of the great day' (Jude 1:6).

War in Space

To achieve his aims, Satan (Lucifer) had to defeat God who dwelled in the heavenly realm: *'...I will ascend into heaven'*, he boasted—an indication that their original state, when created, was *on earth* and not in heaven. From his base on earth Satan and his angels set out on their mission, but were opposed—and defeated in a space war—by the 'angels of God' under Michael's command (Revelation 12:7).

Like early man the angelic creation may have lived many centuries, many becoming morally corrupt and laying waste to the planet, and inviting destruction for their profligacy.

Their (interim) judgment as noted by Peter, was to be stripped of their flesh and bones and their corrupted spirit to be restrained to earth and its atmosphere where they now act as 'useful idiots' in the divine plan—and to await their final judgment. Satan and his armies of spirits now roam our planet seeking ways to turn mankind aside from the real Jesus and the true Gospel: *'...the prince of the power of the air, the*

God's indictment of the King of Babylon (Isaiah 14) may have elements that are symbolic of Satan's experience. For example, he aspired to *'...ascend into heaven'* v.13)

spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience' (Ephesians 2:2).

Satan, their leader, consumed by envy, arrogance and pride mustered support among the angels to attack the Creator of all. When Adam was created and given dominion of earth the devil set out to destroy him and his progeny—and to reclaim the sovereignty he had lost.

Battle of Minds

Aware of the responsibility assigned to Adam and of God's promises of a future redeemer, Satan set about undermining Adam and all his progeny who remained faithful. When the Redeemer came he pulled out all the stops in his efforts to destroy him.

As in our day, from the beginning he instilled unbelief, stirred opposition to God's prophets, raised wars against the budding model nation of Israel and persecuted and deceived them century after century inciting them to idolatry. He tried to stir Herod to kill Jesus as a new-born, tested him in the wilderness and throughout his life. His final assault was at the cross where Jesus triumphantly and decisively defeated him.

Just as *'...the Lamb of God'...* *takes away the sins of the world'*—witnessed in plain sight by Israel on the Day of Atonement—so Jesus *'...having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it'* (Colossians 2:15).

At the return of Jesus this evil blot on the planet will be further restrained, and for a thousand years during Christ's reign. **Ω**

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unsigned articles are by the Editor

Will You Go to 'Hell'?

Life beyond the grave is for many shrouded in deep mystery—and is widely misunderstood

Christians sing of a time '*when we all get to heaven*'. Buddhists look to *nirvana*. For many of the Muslim faith *heaven* is a fount of material pleasures. The Hindu hopes to return in an improved state of being. And all assume their role in that future life begins at the moment of death

This diversity of belief stems from a universal neglect of God's fullest revelation of His will—the *Christian Bible*, and is rooted in the experiences of mankind's first family some six millennia ago.

Adam's Choice

The unveiling of events up to and surrounding the birth of our first parents is the 'apocalypse' of the Old Testament writings. The creation account was revealed to Adam just as the future was unveiled to the apostle John and are the incontrovertible revelation of the one and only creator God.

Adam relayed his story to future generations and it is recorded for us, especially, in chapters two and three of the book of *Genesis*. In disregarding this narrative lies the source of man's ignorance of the facts of life beyond the grave.

Perfect Man

Blinded by disbelief, the modern world with its infinite range of 'vain philosophies' views man's origin as a slow evolution from the primitive to the complex rather than the direct creative intervention of the all-powerful Creator.

Our first parents were created

body and in a perfect environment. As rational beings and equipped as they were with ability to reason they were free to choose

their path in life. Presented with a choice and the pros and cons of their choice they hearkened to the subtle argument of the devil: '*...I did it my way*'.

The outcome is summed in the words of Solomon: '*...There is a way that seems right to a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death*' (Proverbs 14:12), and this tendency, as Paul notes is '*...enmity against God*'. It sets unregenerate mankind firmly in the camp of '*your father, the devil*' (John 8:44) and not in covenant relationship with Him through repentance and baptism.

When You Die

Christians, especially, are certain that the outcome is immediate access to heaven. many wonder: *was he or she 'good enough'*? Just where is the dividing line?

All—both man and beast—will '*return to dust*'. But we are also driven by our motivating '*spirit in man*'—which leaves the body around the time of our death. That spirit, in fulfilment of the divine plan, remains in God's care until supernaturally restored to life.

fully formed in a perfect

Fossil remains may date from an earlier creation event. God reveals that before he restored earth some six thousand years ago the planet was covered by water—a symbol of judgment]

Since before creation, God planned to increase His spirit Family. and to this end He created a 'clay mage' of Himself (Adam and Eve) in which He set a motivating spirit' that interacts with us through our nervous system.

As the Bible teaches, the human spirit can return and animate the body *eg* following divine intervention and of course in the future at Jesus's return. And perhaps in so-called 'near-death experiences' (NDEs; Luke 8:55).

It is not, however, conscious but passive. Guided by God's word it is clear that '*...in death there is no remembrance of you: in the grave [Heb. sheol, Gk. hades] who shall give you thanks?*' (Psalm 6:5), and '*...The dead praise not the LORD, neither any that go down into silence*' (Psalm 115:17).

Upon death the human spirits of all mankind pass into the care of our Creator to await a future resurrection: '*...Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice*' (John 5:28).

.Open to All

God's invitation to become part of His Family is open to every human being, and : '*.. [God] is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance*' (II Peter 3:9). Some, now in this life, respond positively, remain faithful till their end and will be transformed to spirit at his coming.

The majority now spiritually blinded by the Devil, will rest in their graves until resurrected in material form after the millennium. The blindness will pass and they may *freely choose* their future pathway: either embrace *salvation* through the sacrifice of Christ—or choose *death* and the destruction of their entire being by fire (Matthew 10:28). Ω

Apocalyptic Parallels

The Christian Bible is structured on a repeated pattern of 'sevens'

The Bible is uniquely integrated from beginning to end, though compiled over a four thousand year time span. Its focus is the history of the family of a descendent of Abraham traced from its root in Adam, the father of mankind.

Remarkable insets are revealed at the story's beginning (Old Testament) and at its end (New Testament), where there are two direct revelations ('apocalypses') by our Creator—one looking historically, the other predictive of the future. And each is based on a mirror-like reflection of the other in a pattern of *sevens*.

The Future

The apostle John at the end of the first century received a divine unveiling ['apocalypse']—of mankind's future. It is based on a pattern of *sevens*: seven *seals*, seven *trumpets*, seven *plagues*—each symbolic of a new phase in the unfolding of end-time events.

Our History

Adam clearly would have had no idea of events before he became a sentient being—he had to learn by revelation, that knowledge to be passed to future generations orally or by written record: *'...their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world'* (Romans 10:18). [Recall that Adam lived for over nine centuries and saw many generations of his descendants who in turn maintained the record of creation. eg Genesis 5:1)]

God's revelation was patterned on an arbitrary *seven-day week*—for which there is no astronomical reason. The re-creation process required *seven* days, and the *seventh* day is assigned

to man for rest and spiritual recreation. It is God's signature that He alone is the Creator (Exodus 20:11).

Overview

Based on the seven day *week* we understand that God's plan for us is unveiled over seven thousand *years*—one day per year. The countdown is likely to have begun with Adam's *fall*—after an unrecorded period of compliance that may have spanned many weeks (or years!).

The first *six* thousand years are assigned to fallen man to test his suitability for his chosen way of self-rule. All who respond and remain faithful to God's way He adopts into His spirit family. Through the ages, however, man has consistently chosen to follow the Adamic path of self-determination.

Man's failed final reign will in the Father's perfect time be swept away by the glorious return of Jesus Christ as King

of all kings and LORD of all lords. Man's 'god'—Satan, the devil, the fountain-head of evil—will be banished, his malign influence eliminated for that final seventh millennium: *'...he [an angel] laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years'* (Revelation 20:2).

The Bible has *God's* imprimatur!!

God's **Feast of Tabernacles** (in the seventh calendar month) has seven days, the main application referring to this seventh millennium of Christ's reign.

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Freedom Under Law

A walk in the park. A trip to the shopping mall. A cheery smile from a friend. A hug. All valued—but for how much longer?

Or, is this our future: Cameras on lamp-posts, mounted on trees, in shops, in every open public space. Microphones (and cameras?) in your smart TV, in Alexa or Siri, in your fridge. Your iPhone and computer constantly monitored officially or by big business. Your finances at risk *via* hackers or being plundered by Inland Revenue. And all linked to an array of screens in a government or Council or superstore or bunker or in 'the cloud'.

Basic Right

Fundamental to life is our God-given right of freedom of choice. It's part of our psyche as beings created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). But faced with a choice—God's way of *freedom* or 'self-realization' and *serfdom*—Adam chose the latter, enslaved by the destructive way planned for him by the Devil.

Given the level of surveillance we now experience that basic right is being fast eroded. Every imposition of a restriction tears a hole in the fabric of freedom: social distancing, wearing of masks, lockdowns, enforced vaccination, the 'woke' culture, the move to impose a cashless society.

The technological age that is enveloping us may indeed be misguided attempts by world leadership to improve the lot of mankind, to erase inequality and all for the common good. But it does imply a degree of coercion and loss of our freedom.

As part of the Family of God it is our responsibility to be guided by His word. To that end we are subject to the laws imposed by our appointed government—but only as it complies with *His* law. Where there is conflict we must choose wisely. **Ω**

Foundations

In Christianity, baptism is widely viewed as a 'rite of passage'.

How important is it?

Most of those who are *born* into the Christian faith are 'christened', usually within six weeks of their birth, as a mark of their entrance into the Christian family.

This practice gives rise to some questions: *what value is it? Does christening—whether by pouring or sprinkling with water—have an effect? Does it reflect the example of the apostolic teaching? Is a new-born competent to make decisions affecting their eternal destiny? Can the faith of the parents transfer to the child?*

Christian Roots

Christianity isn't just another belief system that in any way parallels Buddhism or Islam or Hinduism. All major faiths in some degree reflect elements of the original faith handed down from Adam and from his faithful descendants.

But filtered through the minds of a variety of men and women of philosophical inclination, and deceived by *the prince of this world*' the original truth became distorted. And, as Jesus relays through the apostle John: '*...the old serpent, who is called 'Devil,' and 'the Adversary,' who is leading astray the whole world*' (Revelation 12:9).

Christianity, then, is the one true faith and isn't simply an alternative. It addresses man's purpose and his destiny and demands total commitment to God and to His Word: '*...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).

Mature Choice

The apostle Paul tells us (Romans

Baptism ...does it have a role?

8:7-8): '*...the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God*'. That is our state from our conception, and it means we do not have a filial relationship with God—and that applies to the new-born. That relationship is *spiritual*.

When it comes to the restoration of that relationship a radical change is essential. As wrote Peter: '*...repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit*' (Acts 2:38).

God imparts His Spirit to us—but on conditions, as noted Peter: *repentance*. Indeed, Paul adds: '*...you are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his*' (Romans 8:9)

Repentance is a 'turning around' from our past life and total commitment to Jesus Christ. Paul again: '*...godly sorrow works repentance to salvation not to be repented of*' (II Corinthians 7:10). It requires a mature personal decision—not within the scope of an infant. (If, however, parents have their child christened we can surely assume a degree of their faith and the child will have a moral platform. But in effect it is little more than a naming ceremony.)

Symbolic

Baptism, of course, is a practice enjoined for us by Jesus himself: '*...Jesus arrives from Galilee to the Jordan, to John, to be bap-*

tized by him. But John restrained Him, saying, I have need to be baptized

by You, and do You come to me? But answering, Jesus said to him, Allow it now, for it is becoming to us this way to fulfil all righteousness' (Matthew 3:13-15).

The apostles and the early church, as we have seen, continued this symbolic practice. In a similar way Jesus said of the *Lord's Supper*: '*...Do this in remembrance of me*'.

Such activities are not 'required for salvation' but are part of the rich tapestry of beliefs—as God's festival days (Leviticus 23)—that glorify and magnify and explain our Saviour and the awesome wonders of all his works.

A Watery Grave

Jesus explains (John *ch* 3) that to attain to the 'image of God' (*ie* salvation) then '*...you must be born again*'. We are destined by our fleshly nature to die. In due time those in whom resides God's Spirit will rise from the dead in a new spirit body equipped with new powers.

As notes the apostle Paul: '*...Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature [creation]: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new*' (II Corinthians 5:17).

It is this death and a new creation that is symbolized in the Bible form of baptism (Gk.*baptizo*)—immersion. Submerging is a form of burial, and that brief moment under water pictures our descent after death into 'hell' (*hades cf* Acts 2:31), followed by our restoration to life.

He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved (Mark 16:16)

Why Do We Sin?

Some folk harbour the notion that if you are a 'Christian' you will never sin—a position countered by the apostle John: '...*If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us*' (I John 1:8). The misconception may stem from the fact that when we do sin—and confess it to God, with repentance (v.9)—that sin is covered, obliterated, '...*as far as the east is from the west*'—and only by the shed blood of Jesus Christ. But how does sin arise?

'The devil made me do it' cry some. But what do the Scriptures tell us?: '...*out of the heart come forth reasonings, evil things, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, lies, blasphemies. These things are the things defiling the man*' (Matthew 15:20). (Note: Jesus lists these sins in the order of the ten commandments! cf I John 3:4)) As wrote Jeremiah (ch 17:9): '...*The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?*'.

On the other hand the righteous person has laid up in his memory store the wholesome teachings of the Creator: '...*The good man out of the good treasure of the heart puts forth good things. And the evil man out of the evil treasure puts forth evil things. The things which come out of the mouth come forth from the heart, and these defile the man*' (ch 12:34-35). We must choose wisely what we 'feed' on: 'garbage in, garbage out'.

Polluted Inheritance

Every human being has inherited from Adam a moral down-

ward tendency: '...*the carnal [normal] mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be*' (Romans 8:7). It is the universal law of entropy: ...lack of order or predictability; a gradual decline into disorder.

Our first parents were created as perfect beings, mature and with freedom of choice—for the consequences of which they were responsible. By our inherited nature we choose our own path—with consequences: '...*there is a way which seems right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death*' (Proverbs 12). As wrote the apostle Paul: '...*the wages of sin is death*' (Romans 6:23). We have a choice: if we truly love [*ie serve*] God we will hate evil [all unrighteousness] (Psalm 97:10).

Deadly Influences

As Ezekiel (ch 18) points out we each have personal responsibility for our own behaviour no matter what our background. We throughout our life face differing

challenges, summed up by the apostle John as 'the world': '...*the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.*' (I John 2:15-56). We don't face judgment for our backstory but for what we do with what we have and are.

That 'world' (*ie* all its inhabitants) is one that has been deceived by the Devil (Revelation 12:9). Throughout history he has manipulated mankind through 'influencers' who in every field of human thought have dreamed up philosophies contrary to the will of God—in education, entertainment, business, economics, psychology, human health and in religion. Such people are sure to be far removed from righteousness, from the perfect will of our Creator as He reveals Himself.

The devil and his cohort of sinful spirits have over the millennia honed their skill to manipulate, to deceive, to bamboozle the human race. Not content with their God-appointed role of serving mankind they continue to covet the forbidden role of Sonship with the Father (Hebrews 1:5). But by actively applying God's guidance in the Scriptures we can avert these '*fiery darts of the wicked one*' fired through the world and its godless influencers and institutions.

Our sin stems from 'the world, the flesh, and the devil'. How we respond is our choice, our individual responsibility.

It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment
(Hebrews 9:27)

Ω

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

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MiniStudy

A New Heart

‘...Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me’ (Psalm 51:10)

The ‘great and the good’ who seek to influence and guide our world have demonstrably failed to establish a permanent universal utopian society. The ‘golden age’ of the ancient Greek sages has melted before the unstoppable force of human nature.

- Whether Christian or Muslim or Hindu or indeed a humanist or atheist we all harbour a desire to ‘be better’, to *do* better with our lives. All too often, though, our attempts to ‘*love my neighbour*’ are submergled by overwhelming personal needs—and by our (often impure) desires
- In the context of a brush with the Pharisees who accused him of deploying Satanic powers to heal, Jesus said: ‘*...the tree is known by his fruit...how can you, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks*’ (Matthew 12:34). [Anything not in harmony with God’s will is ‘evil’ (Gk. *poneros*)]. The word covers a wide range of behaviour]
- The human spirit, the ‘heart’, is the driving force of our behaviour, even our thoughts. We like to think of it as inherently good—and apart from a few very ‘evil’ people, just the occasional aberration. God’s view is different. His prophet Jeremiah, for example, has this to say: ‘*...The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?*’ (ch 17:9). The apostle Paul, too: ‘*...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 *last six* of those laws are in one form or another written into the legal code of most nations. A healthy society doesn’t (or shouldn’t!) tolerate murder or theft or sexual aberration of any kind. And most of us applaud them, do our best to conform. But ‘breaking the law’ is endemic in our world—hence the vast volume of legal rulings seeking to suppress it. Paul again: ‘*...the way of peace have they not known: There is no fear of God before their eyes*’ (Romans 3:17-18). And not just ‘peace’ but *shalom*—in harmony with the divine law of love
- So how come—since the spirit of our original blood relative, Adam, was created perfect and in the very *image of God* (Genesis 1:27)? He was driven by that *law of love* and was assigned the role of mentor to his progeny. [We don’t know for how long he pursued this goal.] We have inherited his *physical* characteristics, so why not the *spiritual*?
- Adam was *not* a robot! He had free choice—to walk God’s way, or to walk his own way (which was influenced—again, his choice—by the Devil). He chose that ‘forbidden fruit’ and His perfect world caved in and he was banished from his paradise, no longer able to have a face-to-face relationship with his Creator but only through a mediator (by a sacrificial system) *See* Genesis 3:23-24, *ch* 4. The eco-system he was meant to nourish became a wilderness in which he sought his own solutions
- We, all his progeny, now exist with that same wilderness experience, with the same outcome—ultimately, *death*. Our relationship with God is only through blood sacrifice—sacrifice as prescribed by Him. The nations have devised their own systems—all idolatrous and often including human sacrifice, a practice abhorrent to our Creator who has provided the one true sacrifice, His only Son: ‘*... 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)
- Governments seek to ‘nudge’ the populace to achieve their (often dubious) ends—by laws, by mass advertising (our money!), by psychological subterfuge, by nudge units behind closed doors. But they can but try to persuade and cannot ‘change the heart’. That takes place only by the direct intervention of God with our whole-hearted co-operation: As wrote the apostle Paul: ‘*...they that are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.*’ (Romans 8:8-9)

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