

**NEW**

# Horizons

Vol 6 No 6

November/December 2002

*addressing the important issues for today and tomorrow*

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**Is Jesus God?**

***Why I Don't Do Christmas***

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**Jesus - the Divine Tabernacle**

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# new Horizons

Issue 36

November/December 2002

**The Christian Church has since its inception been rocked by controversy about the nature of Jesus Christ. Was Jesus God? Was he human? What is he now?**

Jesus Christ has been described as the most noble of mankind, the greatest teacher ever, a moral giant. Most Christians, however, get hot under the collar if he is described as anything less than "forever God"! History has seen mutual excommunications - even executions - wielded by all sides in the dispute. The first four centuries of the Church seethed with numerous dissenting views on the nature of Jesus Christ.

## Jesus - God or Man?

Few will deny that Jesus Christ was unique. But controversy has raged as to his real nature. Was he God dwelling in a shell of human flesh? Was he an ordinary man mightily used by God? Was he an angel? A "phantasm"? Was he created - or eternal? Is he different now from what he was while on earth? All have been proposed, fought over, died for!

Let's look at what the Bible teaches! *The mystery of God's nature is not one for contention or argument!* We seek here to present what we perceive is the Bible evidence concerning Christ's nature while he sojourned among us on earth.

It's not within the scope of this article to demonstrate that Jesus had a life before his human conception,

or in what manner He existed. Our position is that he did indeed pre-exist as a part of the Godhead, and future articles will give the detailed evidence.

Was Jesus during his time on earth, then, God? Or man? Or a combination of God and man? Or a spirit with an apparent body, as some claim?

## The Word Became Flesh

When we seek the origins of Jesus Christ in Scripture we are drawn at once to John's account of his conception. He tells us "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.... And the Word became flesh and [nine months later] dwelt among us" (John 1:1,14). In context, the apostle is referring to Jesus of Nazareth. Whatever his prior role, he left it and "became flesh".

Let's examine more closely what that means. Most Christians gloss over what actually happened!

"The Word became flesh". When? Clearly, at his conception, when one of Mary's ova was miraculously fertilized by a single physical sperm, as in every human conception.

"The Word became flesh". How could this happen? Matthew gives us further background. He writes "Before [Joseph and Mary] came together [*ie* in a sexual relationship] she was found with child of the Holy Spirit" (*ch* 1:18). In other words, the Word - who existed in the realm of Spirit before creation

(John 1:3) - was transformed by divine fiat into human sperm, twenty-three chromosomes of a single one of which united with those of an ovum in Mary's womb to form the embryo which became Jesus of Nazareth, born in Bethlehem.

Matthew emphasizes this transformation: "Now all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, 'Behold a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is *God with us*'" (Matthew 1:22-23).

What love the Godhead had for mankind! "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son" (John 3:16). At that precise moment of conception the everlasting God begat a Son!

Paul tells us that "from the beginning [*ie* in his eternal pre-existence] he had the nature of God. Yet he did not regard equality with God as something at which he should grasp. No, he stripped himself of his glory ["emptied himself" - *KJV*] and took on him the nature of a bondservant by becoming a man like other men [*cp* Hebrews 2:17]. And being recognized as truly human, he humbled himself and even stooped to die" (Philippians 2:5-8).

Did you grasp that? In the counsels of heaven, and knowing all the risks of failure, the uncreated Word who "had the nature of God" determined to take on the nature of created mankind, to become "lower than the angels". He determined to die for us - even before mankind was created (I Peter 1:20)! And he divested himself of divine power -

he gave up his status as a part of the Godhead - to become human flesh.

### **Titanic Struggle**

Thus miraculously conceived, Jesus was born in an insignificant village in Palestine. He grew in stature and strength like any other lad. The evangelist Luke summed up his youth: "And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man" (Luke 2:52). As a youngster he knew nothing of his prior existence as the Word. He knew nothing of the heavenly counsels and discussion that had led to his voluntary assumption of human flesh. Only through the unfolding enlightenment of the Holy Spirit as he searched the Scriptures did Jesus come to understand his true origin and mission.

Having "emptied himself", as a human being Jesus did not know whether he would successfully fulfil his mission. He had no idea that he would be able to resist every temptation, conquer every sin. During his life on earth this knowledge simply was not revealed to Jesus.

Throughout his life he had - just like you and me - to contest Satan and battle his human nature in the power of the Holy Spirit. But always he was triumphantly successful! Throughout his life he had - just like you and me - to struggle to overcome "the world, the flesh and the devil".

Speaking of the risen Christ, Paul proclaims, "We have not a High Priest who is unable to feel for us in our weaknesses, but one who was tempted in every respect just as we are tempted, and yet did not sin" (Hebrews 4:15). He was "made inferior to the angels for a little while" (*ch* 2:9) - for the thirty-odd years of his human existence.

*Yes* - until his resurrection Jesus was fully human!

### **A Unique Person**

But in the context of his humanity he was, of course, unique. He was

unique in the physical protection afforded to him as the channel of God's mercy for all humankind. Angels ensured his physical preservation from life-threatening accident and illness (*see* Psalm 91) to ensure his real - spiritual - work could be completed. Though spiritual, that work required his suffering and death. It was such excruciating suffering and such a horrific death that it far eclipses any illness

or suffering most of us might encounter in our three score years and ten!

And Jesus was unique in his close and perfect association with the Father. So close, indeed, that he could claim "I and my Father are one" (John 10:31).

As he matured Jesus developed an unparalleled understanding of the Father, and of his own mission!

Luke records (*ch* 2:40ff): "And the child grew and became strong and full of wisdom, and the grace of God rested upon him".

He then tells us that at age twelve Jesus went to a Festival in Jerusalem where he was found "in the Temple sitting among the rabbis, both listening to them and asking them questions [Jesus had things to learn!], while all who heard him were astonished at his intelligence and at the answers he gave". His response to the worried reaction of his parents was "Did you not know that I must be in my Father's House?" (v.49).

Through his divinely endowed intelligence, his perfect genetic inheritance from God (perhaps, as the "last Adam", a replica of Adam's genetic make-up), the instruction from righteous Mary and Joseph and his extended family, the understanding that he had of the Holy Scriptures, his unceasing communion with his heavenly Father and direct revelations and "words of knowledge" from his Father, Jesus came to understand that he was the long awaited Messiah - and the very first begotten Son of God.

In sum, Jesus had a unique origin, a unique genetic inheritance, unique divine protection, unique intellect, Angels ensured his physical preservation from life-threatening accident and illness (*see* Psalm 91) to ensure his real - spiritual - work could be completed. Though spiritual, that work required his suffering and death. It was such excruciating suffering and such a horrific death that it far eclipses any illness or suffering most of us might encounter in our three score years and ten!

### **After The Resurrection**

During his life-time, then, Jesus the Messiah was subject to human limitation - though he exercised perfect faith. He was subject to controlled human emotion (he became angry, for example). He tired and had to rest and sleep. He became hungry and thirsty and had to eat and drink. When wounded he bled and suffered pain. He was, in fact, tested in every respect just as we are, and in all aspects of his character.

But when, because he never sinned, death could not contain him Jesus had new powers. After the resurrection he could at will assume a body of flesh and bone - yet he could walk through solid walls. He walked with his friends - but could instantly disappear. He appeared in different forms. He could ascend to the throne of God and return faster than the speed of light. He could appear shining as the sun in full strength, his eyes like flames of fire. Jesus Christ is alive for evermore (Revelation 1:18). And he has all authority in heaven and earth given into his hands (Matthew 28:18).

### **A Renewed Relationship**

In short, after his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ fully resumed his partnership with the Father as a part of the divine Family.

Now Jesus is pre-eminent. He has a name above every name. Jesus Christ is "high above all other government and authority and power and dominion, and every title of sovereignty used either in this age or the age to come" (Ephesians 1:21-22). To John he said: "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end" (Revelation 22:13).

Let no-one doubt that he who saved us through his suffering and death on the stake is now at the right hand of God. It is recorded in Hebrews .we see Jesus, who was made inferior to the angels for a little while, crowned with glory and honour” (ch 2:9).

Jesus Christ now has renewed his relationship with the Father: “And now, O Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory I had with you before the world was” (John 17:5). What a concept! That bright effulgence of glory which surrounds the Godhead, which once enveloped Jesus in his prior existence as the Word, which was too glorious for human eye to behold, once again adorns the resurrected Saviour of mankind! As the apostle Paul wrote: “In him dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily” (Colossians 2:9). to prior existence as the Word, which was too glorious for human eye to behold, once again adorns the resurrected Saviour of mankind! As the apostle Paul wrote: “In him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily” (Colossians 2:9).

### The Family Of God

For a short thirty-four years the Word who was with God from the beginning took upon himself to become wholly human. As a young lad he battled with peer pressures and was undoubtedly ridiculed for his rejection of the worldly ways of his young friends. He constantly battled his human nature - and won each battle over sin. At thirty he set out on His public mission - a mission that led to his agonizing death on a Roman stake.

Now resurrected to unending life, as the heir of God he sits on the right hand of the Majesty on high and controls and upholds the vastness of the Universe, exercising all the power of the Godhead. As our High Priest he pleads constantly for his brothers and sisters who are themselves heirs of the same reward (Romans 8:17). Jesus Christ has claimed his rightful inheritance as

God is *Father*. Jesus Christ is *God’s Son*. Christians are his *brothers and sisters*, and sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty. And by analogy we will be the *Bride of Christ*, and are “members of the household of God” (Ephesians 2:19).

The Family of God, indeed, as these terms indicate! [The Christian’s relationship to God’s Family is explained in the article *After The Resurrection*. Write for a copy if you haven’t read it.]

Let’s not allow our thinking to be limited by the outmoded pre-Christian notion that God is in some way limited. Many Christians bind themselves in an unbiblical trinitarian strait-jacket. They are blind to the magnificent vision revealed in Scripture that God’s plan is to enlarge His Family! The concept of “God” which He has revealed in His Word far eclipses the puny probings of the human mind.

God in a very real way and like any family is “reproducing” Himself after His own kind - the “God kind”! He graciously is making man “in His own image”. Now we are but “clay” - a muddied reflection of the glorious divine image. But as

Christians have the divine Spirit dwelling in us. During our lifetime in Christ, the Spirit of God prompts us to put on the divine character - to conquer our inborn human nature, to nourish our spiritual gifts.

We are thus prepared to become a part of the divine Family of God.

At our resurrection - at 'the last trumpet' - that in-dwelling Spirit transforms our physical bodies into the divine image. We become spirit. We become 'partakers of the divine nature'. We receive divine powers. We become 'heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ' (Romans 8:17)

Paul wrote: “we...are being transformed into the same image, from glory to glory” (II Cor 3:18).

Soon, Jesus Christ will return to this earth with all the power of the Godhead. This time he comes as King of all earthly kings to subdue all rebellion to the Eternal God and His Laws. With him, to reign with him as kings, will be all the people of God who throughout the millennia remained faithful to him in face of trials, persecutions, even death.

### God All In All

*What then?* Wrote the apostle Paul: “Then comes the end, when he will turn the Kingdom over to his Father, when he will have put an end to all other government, authority and power; for he must continue to be King until he puts all enemies under his feet.... And when everything has been put in subjection to him, then the Son himself will also become subject to Him [the Father] who has put everything in subjection to him [Jesus Christ] so that God may be everything in everyone” (I Corinthians 15:24-28).

At that time, then, after the return of Jesus Christ as King of kings. After his millennial reign. After the great judgment. After the earth is finally cleansed of all unrighteousness. After the full working out of this majestic divine plan - then the people of God, the sons and daughters of God, together with our elder Brother Jesus Christ, will all be part of the one divine Family. And - as wrote the apostle Peter - *partakers of the divine nature*” (II Peter 1:4).

All of those who overcome will be united in the Godhead. God will indeed be everything in everyone!

The Word of God willingly abandoned his place in the Godhead to become *fully human* as Jesus the Messiah so that sinful mankind could share in his glorious inheritance as the divine heir of God! □

# Why I Don't Do Christmas

**Some of my work colleagues were recently surprised to learn that I don't do Christmas. Here are ten good reasons**

**John Morton**

My colleagues were shocked to discover a follower of Christ who does not celebrate what they perceive to be a major Christian festival. Because of their reaction, I have put to paper ten good reasons why I don't do Christmas.

When God created mankind, He had a purpose and plan in mind. He provided laws to guide us in the way we live. Christ himself said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God'" (Luke 4:4). That word, the Bible, expounds and expands the law of God, which is summarised by ten commandments that form the basis for Christian living. The law defines how to worship God and relate to our fellow man.

Most people are under the impression that Christmas celebrates the birth of Christ, but religious scholars agree that Christ could not have been born in December. A little research in a reliable encyclopaedia will soon reveal the true origin of the celebration that takes place on 25 December. It is the pagan feast of *die natalis Solis Invicti*, the birth of the Invincible Sun. Not the birth of God's son - Jesus Christ, but the birth of the sun as it rises after the winter solstice. The festivities surrounding 25 December are mostly associated with sun worship, which is undeniably idolatry.

## Gods and Images

**I "You shall have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:3).** The

hearken diligently to God's commandments, to walk in His way and to take heed that we do not turn aside and serve other gods, or worship them (Deuteronomy 11:13, 16 and 22). In the New Testament the Apostle Paul said that involvement with idolatry, would keep us out of God's Kingdom. He said we are to flee idolatry, not embrace it (Galatians 5:19-21, I Corinthians 10:14).

Yet, from an early age, we incorporate 'Father Christmas' into our children's belief systems. This fictitious father figure is supposedly endowed with the power of judgement to determine if our children deserve reward or not. But the Bible says God is our judge. If God is our judge, why would I want to substitute a man in a red suit for Him in the minds of my children (Isaiah 33:22, Hebrew 12:23)?

**II "You shall not make for yourself any carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth" (Exodus 20:4).** This instruction seems straight forward, yet every year during the festive season, huge floats are made in the image of Father Christmas for our children to follow in parades through the streets of our cities and towns. The Santa Claus logo has become a commercial icon used to promote a vast range of 'Santa' products. Because of their constant exposure to these images, our children learn to relate more to Santa than they do to God.

## Vain Worship

**III "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain" (Exodus 20:7).** Our worship

is in vain if we go contrary to God's instruction – because of iniquity our prayers fall on deaf ears (Psalm 66:18, Isaiah 59:2). At no time has God consecrated 25 December as a Holy Day or event to be celebrated. Anything substituted for God is an idol. Elsewhere the Bible says we are to [Christ-mass]. To do so is a classic case of taking God's name in vain.

## Holy Days and Family

**IV "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy" (Exodus 20:8).**

Why adopt pagan celebrations when God has already given a set of Holy Days for us to observe? He not only consecrated the weekly Sabbath, or seventh day of the week, to remind us that He is our creator, He also sanctioned annual Holy Days to remind us of His plan of salvation. God called them *His Sabbaths* (Leviticus 19:3). And according to the prophet Zechariah, when Christ returns at the end of this age, he will restore God's festivals (Zechariah 14:16-19).

When God said remember the Sabbath He intended that we continue observing His Sabbaths, not that we should replace them with days dedicated to false gods.

**V "Honour your father and your mother" (Exodus 20:12).** It is obvious that family relationships are important to God. As Creator, His relationship with mankind is paternal, that is why He is called the Father. In a spiritual context, the term 'Father' is a religious title reserved for God alone: "call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven" (Matthew 23:9). I don't think we should give such an important religious title to a man by calling him 'Father Christmas'.

**VI "You shall not murder" (Exodus 20:13).** The Bible tells us that, "Sin is lawlessness" (1 John 3:4). It incurs a penalty - "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). If we teach our children to keep traditions borrowed from idol

## Murder and Adultery

**VI "You shall not murder" (Exodus 20:13).** The Bible tells us that, "Sin is lawlessness" (1 John 3:4). It incurs a penalty - "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). If we teach our children to keep traditions borrowed from idol

worshippers in direct contravention of God's law then we are teaching them to sin. And because the penalty for sin is death, I don't wish to cause my children to die because of what I teach them.

**VII "You shall not commit adultery" (Exodus 20:14).** Ezekiel the prophet said that idolatry is the spiritual equivalent of adultery and involving our children such practices is, in effect, sacrificing them to idols. "For they have committed adultery, and blood is upon their hands, they have committed adultery with their idols, and even sacrificed their sons whom they bore to me" (Ezekiel 23:37).

#### Stealing, Lying and Coveting

**VIII "You shall not steal" (Exodus 20:15).** If we turn the minds of our children away from the God, we not only rob God of our children, why would I rob my children of the blessings God bestows on those who obey Him?

**IX "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour" (Exodus 20:16).** To bear false witness is to lie. The stories about Father Christmas, his reindeer and elves, and how he comes down the chimney to leave presents, however quaint - are lies. Because I tell my children not to lie,

I would be guilty of double standards if I lie to them about 'Father Christmas'.

**X "You shall not covet" (Exodus 20:17).** The word, covet means - to desire. While there is nothing wrong in having desire, there is a wrong type of desire that turns us from God. The rest of verse 17 makes it very clear that it is wrong to desire the things forbidden by God's law.

King David said that covetousness is abhorrent to God because the desire of our thoughts can come to replace God in our lives (Psalms 10:3-4). The desire to take part, to fit in with everyone else, can be very powerful causing us to compromise. That sort of desire is tantamount to idolatry itself because it leads us to sin (Colossians 3:5).

For those colleagues of mine who were surprised to learn that I don't do Christmas, I have given ten reasons based on God's law. Clearly the celebration of a pagan festival, decked with pagan customs under a facade of Christ's name, blatantly contravenes all ten points of that law.

Because I want to please God in all aspects of my life as a Christian, I can't honestly do Christmas.

## YOU AND THE LAW

Christians have, should have, no difficulty in observing the laws of the land. (Don't you?) At least insofar as they reflect the will of God. And if we transgress those laws we - as Jesus tells us - pay the penalty imposed on us.

We steer clear of the courts: we pay our taxes, we don't steal or perjure or inflict harm, we live peaceably with our neighbours as far as is in our power.

Without law life would be intolerable, and every society knows it must have a civil and criminal justice system. All sane folk recognize that fact of life.

Why, then, do some Christians have a problem with the Law of God? Why - when every sane human law can be found in God's Law? The divine civil law - summed up in the last six of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20) - is the foundation for most civil administrations. And when sensibly enforced society is at peace.

Yet when it comes to God's Law most Christians perceive any Christian who professes to observe those laws as a 'legalist'. Somehow obeying God brands you as a virtual unbeliever.

Challenge this belief, however,

## LAW... cont'd

and an interesting fact emerges. No Christian says you should be permitted to abuse the elderly, kill, steal, commit perjury, etc. Nor would any 'born again' Christian say you are free to worship other gods or bow before images or take God's name in vain.

### God's Mistake?

Clearly this isn't where lies the problem, for ninety percent of the Ten Commandments are obeyed in practice by committed Christians. Or should be.

But God, apparently, made a mistake with that other ten percent! When He told us how to regulate society - way back before the time of Moses - He marred His perfect Law by including one that said you must rest and worship Him one day a week. And He specified the day - the seventh, today known largely as Saturday. For mankind in general it is a reminder - long ignored - that God is Creator. It identifies Him.

Now that bothers most Christians. For they have swallowed hook, line and sinker the erroneous pre-Christian notion that we ought to worship the Creator on the day that was assigned by the pagans to the sun - Sunday. It was an aspect of the nature worship by which mankind substituted the 'host of heaven' for that of the Creator of nature.

The House of Israel, too, sank into this depravity - and as a direct result were expelled by God from 'the land of promise' (see II Kings 17:15-18). The House of Judah ignored the lesson of their northern neighbour and were exiled for the same reason (II Chronicles 36:21).

### New Testament Observance

Given God's fierce jealousy over the Sabbath in 'Old Testament times' - why would He suddenly change? Indeed Jesus observed the Sabbath throughout his life and confirmed it. The apostles and the first Christians observed it. Towards the end of his life, the apostle Paul tells the Jews: "I have committed nothing [cont'd p.7

**Theology - 'the knowledge and study of God' - by-passes many Christians. Our modern 'post-Christian' world gets close to despising it - often seen as an arcane topic best left to priests and seminarians. But can we live without it?**

All over the Christian world, believers pour over the text of Scripture. Literally millions of books and periodicals seek to explain and expound a version of Biblical interpretation. Sound scholarship through to gross, often uninformed, misuse of the text has spawned a vast supermarket of Christian belief. Thousands of 'church denominations' have formed - from the one billion strong Roman Church to tiny dozen-strong independent congregations. And each has its own theology!

But can we *do without* theology? All too often Christians cry, 'All we need is Jesus'. *But why?* Doesn't it take a 'knowledge of God' to figure the answer to that very question? Without theology we wouldn't even know we needed Jesus, needed salvation. And saved from - and for - what? Nor could we be sure why our own personal religion is Christian and not Buddhist or animism. Or why an individual is Roman Catholic and not from one of the myriad Protestant churches.

Without theology we are blind to the divine character - is He remote? pure? loving? wrathful? interested in humanity? We couldn't, without a knowledge of God, fathom why humans suffer so desperately, or explain evil.. And how can we discern 'false teaching' without a grounding in divinely revealed knowledge? Clearly, theology is needed - whether a person is Hindu or Christian or Buddhist.

Jews and Christians have delved deeply into the Scriptures for centuries. It's a life-time profession for

some! The New Testament especially is chock-a-block with 'theology' - *and it's there for a purpose.*

For there is - despite claims to the contrary - *only one way* to God. Theology is how we may discern that way. Anything that seriously distorts God's revelation to us through the Judaeo-Christian Scriptures is 'false teaching'. Those Scriptures may be partially obscured by the mists of time and mistranslation

## THEOLOGY... *who needs it?*

*etc* - but the broad slopes of sound doctrine are clearly visible.

### **Tunnel Vision**

It's vital we get a balance. A major failing of amateur theologians is 'tunnel vision'. A text seems to leap out at them, and that becomes an obsession. Every aspect of Scripture is bent to support the 'new truth'. Writes one author:

*There exists not in the theological investigations of man's unaided intellect, an illusion of more frequent recurrence than that which attributes to his erring faculties an inborn illumination guiding them unto truth through discussions however intricate, or metaphysical abstractions however transcendent*

[James Kennedy:

*Mosaic Record of Creation, page 1]*

Hence the immense variety of interpretations of the Scriptures!

As commented the apostle Paul on a situation known to him:

Not much change, then, in two mil-

*: "...remain at Ephesus that you may teach certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, nor to occupy themselves with myths*

*and endless genealogies which promote speculations rather than the divine training that is in faith; whereas the purpose of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart, and a good conscience, and from sincere faith.. Certain persons by swerving from these have wandered away into vain discussion, desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding what they are saying or the things about which they make assertions"*

(I Timothy 1:3-7)

lennia! It's a salutary warning to all who would be 'teachers of theology'.

An example is the 'calendar' - a centuries-old theological chestnut - on which many Christians depend to observe the Biblical holy days (Lord's Supper, Unleavened Bread, Pentecost *etc*). Always claiming Biblical authority for each particular view, a dozen conflicting calendar formats are foisted on any who will, with itching ears, be willing to listen. (Any teaching, no matter how weird, will gain a following!) . A dozen other examples could be cited.

Not content with the new understanding, all too often a doctrine is actively and aggressively promoted as 'essential for salvation'. A spiritual ghetto is erected around the adherents of the new truth, excluding all who are 'blind' to it, and condemning them to fiery destruction. So developed the medieval Inquisition! Religious - 'Christian' - wars often reflected such doctrinal obsessions.

### **Distortions**

There are, of course, solid and foundational teachings that are indeed important. *Sin*, for example - a word now unuttered in government circles and rarely in the Church. Or the essential role in our salvation of Jesus. Or the Fatherhood of God, recently disputed by a leading Anglican bishop - a femi-



nist teaching drawn from spiritism. Or the need for personal repentance and baptism. Or willing submission - obedience - to the divine Law.

Yes - we do need theology. Jesus himself said: "The truth will make you free".

Yet theologians distort the clear Bible teaching, and substitute a garbage bin full of destructive pre-Christian nonsense. Bad theology, shackles humanity. It clouds the divine plan for mankind - as revealed through the Bible holy days. A variety of 'holy' days - Christmas, Easter *etc* - have been substituted for the Bible festivals.

Sunday replaces the Biblical Sabbath - the seventh day of the week instituted for all mankind by the Creator from creation, and the only weekly day observed by the apostles and the first Christians. The Christian's covenant relationship with our Creator is renewed Sabbath by Sabbath - not on Sundays. Bad theology exalts a human being - male or female - to lofty and ungodly heights of spiritual authority, entangling followers in a web of deceit.

A heavy yoke of bondage hangs around the necks of believers who place themselves under a hierarchical denominational church structure. Bad theology is, too, a weighty mill-stone around the neck of those who fear that death holds torment, and has led to untold misery and even suicide. The unbiblical notion of an 'immortal soul' distorts the true nature of man and leads to such spiritually poisonous pagan debris as re-incarnation, immediate entrance to 'heaven' upon death - for 'the good' - and a 'fiery hell' for the wicked. It also encourages the false concept that the living can communicate with the 'departed spirits of the dead' and even be helped by them - in reality concurse with foul deceptive demons which are the source of much false teaching (I Timothy 4:1-3).

#### The Source

You wonder, then, why there is

such religious diversity? No faith is free from it. The Roman Church is riven by myriad factions, as are Protestant denominations - though both share many of the same destructive heresies listed earlier! (And, indeed, share many of the same erroneous teachings as Eastern faiths.) Nor is the Muslim faith a united theological force, encompassing as it does a variety of deadly interpretations. Hinduism and Buddhism, too, have their factions.

*Yet there can be but one God - Creator, Sovereign, Lord of all, unchanging in His fundamental nature.*

Authentic study must inevitably lead to a unified understanding of who He is, His nature, His character. He is always the same - unchanging in fundamentals and in His overall purpose for His creation. All else is the product of human reasoning, all too often focused by Satanic forces, and a distorted understanding of God's nature and being.

However, '...without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he that comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him' (Hebrews 11:6).

We can, in other words, come to a right understanding of God - if we are truly serious in our desire to know Him. □

**If you would like to counsel about any matter related to your Bible studies or to your personal challenges our elders are eager to be of service. They may be contacted through any of our offices**

*in strict confidence*

*unsigned articles are by the editor*

## ***Bible Basics***

The *Outreach Ministries* publishes an *internet* home study course on **www.cgom.org**

The introductory lesson gives some hints about how to study your Bible. Eight lessons are now available

*We are pleased to reply to any questions you may have arising from any of our publications.*

*If you don't have access to the internet, contact us for a paper copy!*

## ***LAW... cont'd***

against the people or customs of our fathers" (Acts 28:17). Again (*ch* 24:14) "...so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law and the Prophets". With Paul, believing meant *doing!*

Indeed there is not one scrap of evidence in the New Testament that would indicate Christians began to observe Sunday! [For more detail request our free booklet ***Why Do You Observe Sunday?***]

## **What About Legalism?**

So - is it 'legalism' to obey God? As Christians we recognize the Father and Jesus Christ as 'LORD'. Even the *New Testament* scriptures urge us to 'fear God' (I Peter 2:17) - have a healthy respect for Him. Jesus told us to fear God (*eg* Matthew 10:28). And why not? But is our obedience 'legalism'?

All of us, even after conversion, have in some manner transgressed the law of God - *sin*, according to John (I John 3:4). And no amount of law-keeping will wipe clear our debt. Only the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ applied to our life will do that: 'by grace you are saved'.

Back to Sabbath observance. Can even the most ardent of Sabbath-observers claim never to have transgressed the Sabbath? *cont'd p.9*

### November - and already the tills are ringing up sales for Christmas. What are they celebrating?

The satanic rituals of Hallowe'en have now passed. But since late September Christmas cards, Christmas decorations, Christmas advertisements have been promoted on television and in stores. That's the commercial side of the festival.

One third of humanity is preparing to celebrate - though perhaps reluctantly for many - the birth of Jesus Christ. Ignored, of course, is the overwhelming scholarly evidence that the Saviour was not born at that time of year! You will find the evidence for that - and for the clear pagan connections of December 25 - in any comprehensive encyclopaedia.

For most Westerners, and even for many professing Christians, Christmas is simply a secular holiday. We are carried along on a wave of commercial enterprise into which the church buys its lucrative way. Christian magazines and charities join the bandwagon and carry ads for Christmas cards and trinkets, children's Christmas stories, Christmas events etc.

For many it's the one time of year to darken the door of a church! Pastors, priests, ministers, lay-readers conspire to maintain the fiction that Christmas marks the birth of Jesus. That has to be serious deception! For no serious journalist or scholar can make a connection between late December and the birth of Jesus.

#### Bible Celebrations

The birth of Jesus and its consequences has to be the most significant event since creation. The eternal God became flesh and entered into our world. Strange indeed if we didn't take note of it. Yet the Scriptures don't highlight *the date* of his birth, though they describe the events in glorious detail. They don't say 'Jesus was born on ....' We're left to figure it out for ourselves.

The only modern Christian festival that can be linked to the Scriptures is *Pentecost*, in early summer. Not Christmas, not Easter, not any 'saints day'. Yet God has given us clear guidance as to when He seeks our presence in worship. Apart from the weekly Sabbath - and that is *not* Sunday - God has set aside specific festival days annually when He formally fellowships with us. (Though we can, of course fellow-

ship with Him at any time, day or night.)

These festival days are of great significance, in figure spelling out the divine plan. It's a plan that has been all but lost to Christians. And at the heart of every part of that plan is Jesus Christ. [Request the free booklet *God's Holy Day*]

#### Immanuel

Writing of Jesus, the apostle John tells us (John 1:14): "The word became flesh and dwelled among us". This gives a clue as to when Jesus was born. He 'became flesh' - that is, was conceived in the womb of Mary. And nine months later he began to 'dwell among us'.

No ordinary baby, this, for God's messengers told Joseph: "His name shall be called Immanuel, which being interpreted is God with us" (Matthew 1:23).

'Dwell' (Gk *skenoō*) is significant. It's related to the Hebrew *sukkah* - a temporary dwelling, a tent. When Israel wandered forty years in the wilderness, God instructed: "You shall dwell in booths (ie *succhoth*) seven days..., that your generations may know that I made the children of Israel to dwell in booths" (Leviticus 23:43). During the seven days of the 'Festival of Tabernacles' - in autumn - they went to Jerusalem and lived in booths which they constructed from

branches (v.40 and Nehemiah 8:15-16). It was to remind them of His care for them during a time of wandering and their temporary existence 'under canvas'.

Indications of Scripture are that Jesus was born at this very time of year. Sheep were being tended in the high hills around Jerusalem (unlikely in late December. The city is 2500 feet above sea-level). It's generally accepted that Jesus lived thirty-three and a half years - being crucified in early spring at the time of Passover, (eg John 18:39) - and consequently born in autumn.

#### Divine Symbols

Many Christians are perfectly aware of the 'pagan symbolism' that has gathered around a 25th December celebration of Jesus' birth. They are largely associated with sun worship, for anciently it was then that the sun was 're-born' - beginning its long climb from the dark depths of winter.

By contrast, the Biblical festivals are appointed by God Himself as a signpost for His plan of salvation. Indeed you - if alive at the return of Jesus as King of kings - will have no option but to observe them.

For example, Jesus will ordain that the Festival of Tabernacles be observed by all who survive into the millennium:

Adverse weather will encourage the rebellious and unthankful to think twice about failing to attend!

"So it shall be that all who are left from all the nations that came up against Jerusalem shall go up as often as once a year to worship the King, the LORD of Hosts and to celebrate the Feast of Booths [ie Tabernacles]. But if anyone of the families of the earth does not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King there will be no rain upon them" (Zechariah 14:16-19)

Referring to the time following the return of the King of kings, the prophet Ezekiel writes: "They shall

observe my rules and my regulations at all my festivals, and they shall maintain the sacredness of my Sabbaths (*ch* 44:24).

### Life Is Temporary

This festival - Tabernacles - clearly represents a temporary existence and on many levels. It's a human condition that will extend throughout the millennial reign of Jesus and his saints.

On the larger canvas Tabernacles represents the grand sweep of temporary and physical human life since Eden - until all that is imperfect and temporary is consumed in a 'lake of fire'. (The thousand years of the 'millennium' itself is represented by the weekly seventh-day Sabbath.)

Applying it personally to his own death, the apostle Peter wrote: "Knowing that shortly I must put off this my *tabernacle*..." (II Peter 1:14). And Paul: "For we know that if our earthly house of this *tabernacle* were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (II Corinthians 5:1-3). Note the contrast between the earthly body - temporary, and the heavenly - eternal

Jesus, too, 'tabernacled' among us for a short lifetime of temporary existence. How appropriate that he came among us at the autumn festival season.

And the Father is at present 'tabernacling' in heaven, eventually to leave there and dwell on earth (Revelation 21:3) - a time foreshadowed by the 'eighth day' of the autumn festival.

All humanity is 'tabernacling' in decaying flesh. So far in human existence no-one has avoided 'folding his tent'. We all die! [*read* James 1:9-11, Hebrews 9:27] But thanks to Jesus Christ - his birth, and his death and resurrection and his continuing intercession on our behalf - we can put on a new and eternal spirit body.

This is what we ought to celebrate. And at God's prescribed and appropriate time. Not at the 'birthday' of the sun god!

[For further background you are invited to request a copy of the articles *The Feast of the Nativity* and *After the Resurrection*] □

### LAW... cont'd

Never to have slipped up? And where we do 'catch ourselves on' only God's mercy, His grace through Jesus, can forgive.

The apostle Paul had experience of this. He tells us (Romans 7:18-19): "*For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do I do not do, but the evil I will not to do, that I practice*".

Surely the experience of every Christian! The apostle continues (v.25-8:8) to glory in the total forgiveness we experience freely in Christ - as long as we are 'walking in the Spirit'. That is, 'subject to the

law of God' (v.7) As he writes elsewhere: "For by grace you have been saved through faith; not of works lest anyone should boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

### Delight In The Sabbath

Perfect obedience to the Law will not save. It will not wipe away past sin. It will not void the legacy of sin we inherit through Adam. Only our personal repentance, forgiveness through the death and resurrection of the Saviour of all mankind, baptism and receiving the Spirit of God into our minds can cleanse us and fit us for the Kingdom of God. Coupled with our willing submission to the divine Law we come to more closely resemble the divine character as lived by Jesus Christ.

### WHO ARE WE?

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, and are developing an internet presence ([www.cgom.org](http://www.cgom.org)). The *Outreach Ministries* also supports a network of independent fellowships, 'shut-ins' and brethren who do not have access to a local fellowship.

We cordially invite all independent fellowships of whatever size - or individuals - to associate with us in this worldwide ministry. Our *Statement of Beliefs* and a *Publications Catalogue* are available from any of our addresses. We are pleased to offer you, without charge, any of our publications. Our elders are ready to listen to your Bible or life challenges.

Do you wish to 'inherit the Kingdom of God'? Heed the powerful warning of the apostle Paul to the church of God in Corinth: "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the Kingdom of God?" He then proceeds to list virtually all of the Ten Commandments (I Corinthians 6:9-10).

Our observance of the Sabbath - the seventh day of the week - identifies us with 'the Lord of the Sabbath' - Jesus (Mark 2:28). All else is a form of idolatry.

The light that shines through the prism of Sabbath observance illuminates for us the many-faceted diamond of the Word of God. The closer we come to a fuller observance of it the more we are blessed. As we distance ourselves we edge closer to neglect of our great salvation. □

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on the web-site [www.abcog.org](http://www.abcog.org)  
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**Why Were You Born?  
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**Why Do You Observe Sunday?**

*all are available from any of the addresses listed inside*