

NEW

Horizons

Vol 8 No 2

March/April 2004

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 the clearest of terms - and
recorded for us in the Scrip-
tures. Over the centuries
that truth has been buried,
dug up, buried again. Our
desire is to restore the sim-
ple apostolic message. We
hope you will be excited
by what the Scriptures re-
veal about life, and the
horizons beyond**

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new **Horizons**

Issue No 44

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Is the Church of God modelled on the Levitical Priesthood? On secular government? Or some other form?

'Governance' is a sore point among various churches, with numerous claims and counter-claims. Rather than uniting it divides. A survey of the churches depicts variety - from the tightly structured Roman Church through to the largely unstructured, often independent, 'home church'. Most will agree, however, that Jesus Christ will return as Supreme Ruler to establish his Kingdom - and governance. We have but a glimpse in Scripture as to what that perfect state will be!

The Bible provides no 'thus says the Lord' on God's governance up to the time of Moses. Having created mankind, He instructed them as to how to live in harmony with their deepest human needs. In general His governance was largely 'hands off', though He had His servants who conveyed His message.

Divine Guidance

Law is pointless without enforcement. Divine 'Law' - *Torah*, instruction - existed from Creation and enforcement was delegated to mankind. But when it became necessary, and having given warning, He intervened - spectacularly by means of the Flood in the time of Noah some seventeen hundred years from the time of man's creation. Later He scattered the nations at Babel. He also stepped down to eliminate the gross perversion of Sodom.

After Babel nations, in rebellion, set

up their own forms of government, largely rejecting the divine *Torah* and dreaming up their own idolatrous - and largely Satan-inspired - religions. Recall that Jesus, in contending with Satan, did not contest the latter's claim to world rulership (Matthew 4:9). He - Satan - is, too, '*the god of this world*' (II Corinthians 4:4). He founded and perpetuates all religious belief contrary to the Scriptures, and inspired rebellion to God's guidance.

Of course, God throughout history continued a personal relationship with those individuals who willingly served Him. He entered covenants

Restoring God's Government

with them, promised them - and delivered - blessings (eg Genesis 26:2-6).

A Model Nation

But to further His promises to Abraham, God rescued his descendants from slavery and idolatry in Egypt. The Israelites were, under the direction of Moses, forged into a nation. It was a nation purpose-made to model God's way of life.

As with any nation a system of governance was essential, and Moses was given, by the LORD, a system designed to curb the excesses of human nature. (The Israelites did not in general have faith nor the indwelling divine Spirit!) God's *Torah*, His instruction, was enshrined as Law for Israel (Galatians 3:17). It has,

though, universal application - the perfect form of government for any nation - ignored at our peril. Its basic principles were the age-old - even then - 'Ten Words' (Heb *dabar*, commandments). The legal system God gave to Israel was its national constitution .

Initially the 'top man' of Israel's government was - God Himself. He guided His nation through a series of prophets and judges who conveyed His will to the people. The strategy for the occupation of Canaan was devised by God. The partition of the Land to the various Clans was God-guided. Strategies in battle emanated from God. Personal disputes beyond human solution were settled by God. The Creator was, in other words, active in the governance of His special nation.

At the human level was the clan system. The 'patriarch' of each extended family governed his own, with ear attuned to the words of God's mouth-pieces, the prophets, and to God's *Torah*. Disputes were settled according to the divine Law devolved through the court of the elders of each city. They were responsible for local law and order. At the grass roots each individual was responsible for his own behaviour: '*every man did that which was right in his own eyes*'. And, of course, each was subject to the law.

Human Government

But true to human nature community leaders sought personal power. They sent a delegation to the prophet Samuel and called for a king '*like the other nations*', to be their judge. God outlined for the people what that

would entail - heavy taxation, centralisation, conscription, bureaucracy, a standing army and an arms industry, an expanding Court, confiscation of private property (I Samuel 8). (Doesn't that sound modern!) Said God: "*They have not rejected you [ie Samuel the prophet] but they have rejected Me... Make them a king*". 'Democracy' had its way - and the nation descended into disorder and idolatry, eventually to again feel the hand of God on their destiny. Disgusted by the state of His nation God, to stop the rot, exiled them into foreign lands. [Request the free article *The Two Nations of Israel*]

Religious Life

The seven annual festivals [see Leviticus 23] were at the centre of Israel's religious life. The 'pilgrim feasts' (Passover and Tabernacles) drew multitudes from throughout the nation and beyond to the central altar in Jerusalem. No coercion to attend - but in times of national concern or spiritual awakening men and women flocked to the city to the Temple and its worship. Locally, meetings were held Sabbath by Sabbath in every city in the synagogues - often several such to a city. Each synagogue had its own rulers who conducted worship, instructed the people from the Scriptures and often dispensed secular justice according to their understanding of the Law. Synagogues were scattered throughout the world (Acts 15:21).

God has not, however, 'gone away' leaving man to his own destructive devices. The 'government of God' was hands off and from time to time He inspired prophets to warn, to call to repentance. Usually His message was rejected, with awesome consequence as mankind reaped the fruit of disregard for God's perfect guidance.

So by the time of Jesus both government and religion were in the hands of the people. God did not intervene

personally. For some four centuries there had been no 'word from the Lord'. When the time was ripe, however, God stepped in by the birth of His Son, Jesus.

He intervened in visible power when 'the Word became flesh', and when Jesus was resurrected - and some fifty days after his resurrection.

The Church

At this latter intervention - at the Feast of Pentecost (Acts 2) - God made His Spirit available to mankind. Upon repentance, acceptance of the shed blood of Jesus for forgiveness of our sin and following baptism the Holy Spirit could dwell within individuals (Acts 2:38).

That indwelling Spirit is a channel for the power of God's grace to transform lives - to enable us to take on the very character of God, to move us to willingly submit to His instruction, His *Torah*. God's influence, His governance, is thus embedded in the mind of each Christian (I John 2:27). As he is the Head of the Church it is to Christ we submit - directly and not through any intermediary. Each of us is responsible to him for our behaviour and for our beliefs.

The church of God is made up of individual 'families' of Christian brethren. Each such family is directly responsible to Jesus Christ. As in any

sound family there has to be order. At home there's the father and the mother who lay down the guidelines for that family. In the local churches there are overseers and deacons to serve the 'family'- both carefully selected according to inspired criteria (I Timothy 3, Titus 1 - and Matthew 20:20-28).

request the free article
On Church Governance

Jesus Directly Involved

Within each assembly there is an array of Christ-given spiritual gifts which when integrated can perform the work Jesus has for that assembly at that time. The leadership is charged to develop, encourage and use those gifts for works of service, the nature of which is determined by the gifts Christ has there bestowed (Ephesians 4:12).

Jesus is directly involved with these local assemblies. An example is how he intervened in the welfare of the 'seven churches of Asia' (Revelation 2, 3). He knew specifically the problems and the challenges faced by each independent assembly. And he dealt with each individually, even to knowing the names of individual brethren, good and bad. He had the authority to 'close down' an assembly (*ch 2:5, 3:16*).

Each assembly, through prayer and fasting, sought Christ's direction without recourse to a central authority. The assemblies in Antioch are an example (Acts 13:1-4). Paul, too, while expressing his need to confer with others, asserted his independence from Jerusalem (Galatians 1:15-20).

In sum, God has a 'hands' off' policy regarding secular government reserving the right to intervene to bring about His overall purpose. Christians are to submit - but not blindly - to the devolved authority of secular government (*cp* Romans 13:1-5), excepting only when it is contrary to God's instructions (Acts 5:29). Remarks the apostle Paul '*law is for the lawbreaker*'.

Within the local assembly there are 'leaders' [*KJV* 'them that rule over you'], to whom we voluntarily submit. ['Obey': Gk *peitho* = be persuaded]. "The obedience suggested is not by submission to authority, but resulting from *[cont'd p 9*

Remember me, said Jesus. *How? Is there an alternative to Easter?*

Easter! New hats and frocks. The Easter parade. Rolling coloured eggs. A Sunday sun-rise service. Great fun for the kids. A focus on life renewed: the resurrection of Jesus, triumphant over the grave.

The season, though, began less joyously. Friday - 'Good Friday' - is a day of sadness. By tradition that's when Jesus suffered an ignominious death on a Roman stake. In some Christian societies it's a day for self-flagellation. Some individuals submit themselves to a mock crucifixion. The steps of Jesus along the Via Delorosa in Jerusalem are traced in pageantry.

Death and Resurrection

But such remembrance is far removed from actuality. The spring festival known as Easter - as most Bible students know - did not originate with the death and resurrection of Jesus, pre-dating him by hundreds of years. The 'death and resurrection' of a Saviour is a concept well-known in the Old Testament.

Some scholars see it implied in the Genesis description, in Eden's garden, of a 'promised seed', a suffering Messiah: "*He will crush your [ie Satan's] head and you will crush his [the Redeemer's] heel*" (ch 3:15). Job, one of the earliest of the Bible writers, also understood it: "*I know that my Redeemer lives, and at last he will stand upon the earth; and after my skin has thus been destroyed then out of my flesh I shall see God*" (Job 19:25).

The Psalmist sings: "*Therefore my heart was glad and my glory [soul, life] rejoiced; my body too will dwell securely. For you will not leave my soul in [the grave] nor allow your holy one to see corruption*" (Psalm 16:8-10).

Jesus, too, saw this teaching - in the

life of the prophet Jonah, drawing from there the analogy of his own death and resurrection (Matthew 12:40). Examples of this could be multiplied!

It isn't surprising, then, to find that early in man's history the concept had crept into the religion of those

resurrection is an important Old Testament theme

who had rejected God's revelation - men who *'altered God's truth into falsehood, and revered and served the creature rather than the Creator'* (Romans 1:25).

That a Saviour would die and be resurrected is a concept known widely in the ancient world - even apart from the Bible revelation. It gave rise to the various mythical cycles in which the 'god' dies and is miraculously restored to life.

Pagan Mythology

One such myth is that of the Egyptian *Isis and Osiris*. Then there's *Cybele and Attis*.

Another - mentioned by the prophet Ezekiel is that of *Tammuz and Ishtar*. The apparent 'death' of nature in autumn and subsequent 'resurrection' in spring also contributed to the Babylonian myth. Every year Tammuz, the god of the underworld, was mourned by his worshippers. Ezekiel found him - an abomination to God - being worshipped in God's Temple where "...women sat weeping for Tammuz." (ch 8:14). This was for forty days leading to the last week of March when he was 'resurrected'. Tammuz was the husband of his mother - some say sister - Ishtar. (*Ishtar* - also called *Astarte* - has a familiar ring: *Easter!*)

The Easter Story

Any substantial Encyclopaedia, of course, will detail how these various rites were absorbed into the Christian church from around the fourth century. They include the forty days of Lenten abstinence, the sun-rise service on Easter morning (*ie* facing east), the rolling of coloured eggs. Ezekiel 8:16 is instructive.

These practices replaced the 'death and resurrection' festivals instituted by God and observed by Jesus, the apostles and the first Christians.

Worship - God's Way

Having initiated human life, the Creator gave us guidance on how to live and how to worship Him. One aspect was a series of annual reminders of His plan - seven recurring annual festivals each of which highlights an aspect of that plan, and each pointing to Jesus Christ. The Spring festival consists of the sacrifice of the *Passover*, followed by the seven *Days of Unleavened Bread*, the whole being loosely termed 'Passover'.

In harmony with God's perfect timing (*eg* Galatians 4:4), Jesus died late in the afternoon of Nisan 14*. At this time, between 3pm and 4pm, the Passover lamb was ceremonially sacrificed in the Temple. Paul refers to Jesus as '*Christ our Passover*' (I Corinthians 5:7). Many Christians today observe it as the 'Night to be remembered', investing it with Christian significance. It begins a week of rejoicing known in the Scriptures as *Unleavened Bread*. To the Corinthian brethren - largely Gentile - Paul in that same passage acknowledges that the brethren were observing these days (vv.6-8). Passover is to be observed 'throughout your generations' - and will continue to be observed after Messiah returns. [*cont'd over*]

EASTER ...cont'd

Jesus, however, introduced a further observance which is to continue *until* he returns.

Lord's Supper

It is a solemn memorial of his night of betrayal, anguished suffering and subsequent crucifixion on a Roman stake. Called by Paul the *Lord's Supper*, it is held *annually* 'on the night in which he was betrayed' - the beginning of Nisan 14*.

At the evening meal on that Passover eve he introduced the simple everyday symbols of bread and wine as representative of his broken body and shed blood: "*For I have received from the Lord what I have also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks he broke it and said, 'Take, eat. This is my body broken on your behalf. This do in remembrance of me'. Similarly he took the cup after they had supped saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood.. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me'. For as often as you eat this bread and*

drink the cup you shall proclaim the Lord's death till he comes" (I Corinthians 11:23-26). Note that the Passover is '*for ever*', while the memorial is '*until he comes*'.

A Lesson in Humility

Further, Jesus enjoined the practice of 'foot washing', having himself set the example to the disciples at that last meal before he suffered: "*...if I, your Lord and Teacher, wash your feet you surely ought to wash one another's feet; for I have set you an example so that you might do just as I did to you.... If you grasp these truths, blessed are you if you practice them"* (John 13:12-17).

A Pure Heart

The *Days of Unleavened Bread*, also observed by the early church, was a period of seven days starting with the Passover during which no 'leavened bread' - ie yeasted, raised, fermented bread - was eaten. In Christian use it is symbolic of a pure life, energized by the risen Christ through his Spirit. Leaven is corruption, physically. Spiritually it signifies hypocrisy (Luke 12:1), and false teaching (Matthew 16:12). This festival thus

encapsulates the concept of *resurrection*, a *pure heart* and *pure truth*. The Scriptures therefore give no specific day - eg 'Easter Sunday' - to commemorate this momentous event. Rather it is an entire week of celebration during which Christians live without this symbolic corruption in our bodies or our homes. By our eating daily of *unleavened* - 'sweet' - bread we are reminded that throughout life we 'feed on *that bread which came down from heaven*' (John 6:51).

The Bible festivals (the 'appointed feasts of the LORD' - Leviticus 23:2 - not of Moses) are free from the leaven - hypocritical and false - that permeates most of Christianity by the observance of days which are plainly from idolatrous sources.

This year, why not commit yourself to the observance of those days God has set aside for His people! □

**This on the calendar widely used throughout the then known world. On the current, Julian, calendar it falls sometime in March/April. A calendar linking the old calendar and the new is available from any of our addresses.*

Spring Festival 2004
 Lord's Supper: evening of April 4
 Unleavened Bread: April 6-12

The King's Speech

Jesus Christ is planning a take-over of all human governments. How will He rule?

Every year in the United Kingdom the Sovereign appears before both Houses of Parliament to outline the Government's plans for the year ahead. (Though the Queen has now abdicated virtually all responsibility for its content) With so much legislation, why is the nation in a mess?

Most politicians want to make a positive difference to their nation's welfare. Sadly, they are like a ship

lying storm-tossed, rudderless and without a compass. For them, there is no 'standard' for what is effective legislation.

God's legislation, which is perfectly in tune with man's need and nature, is despised by national leadership. Add '*God-given*' to any proposal and it is laughed out of Parliament. '*Hush - don't mention God!*' It's an error for which we pay dearly.

Hope

Many Christians look forward to the 'Millennium' - the one-thousand year reign of the returned Messiah. It's a time of worldwide peace and pros-

perity, and the hope to which we cling. It's the desire of all sane men and women.

However, that sublime state will not happen with the wave of a magic wand. Indeed the preparation for it has been in hand since Creation!

Throughout the ages the LORD has been carefully selecting and preparing his 'government officials'. Most now rest in the sleep of death - but await a glorious resurrection to immortality - to reign with Christ (Revelation 20:5). The Christian Bible even names some, and defines what their role will be.

The apostles, for example, have been

selected by Jesus to be heads of the Judiciary in the restored twelve nations of Israel (Matthew 19:28).

Church and State

There's much ado in religious circles - even in secular Government - about the relationship

between 'Church and State'. The concept is much misunderstood. In today's

world, the faith of Jesus - Biblical Christianity - is *personal*. It impacts individuals with a message of love for God and love for neighbour. It works a change in human nature, in the heart.

Christianity's influence spreads through example and by the wide dissemination of the Scriptures - often by men and women who don't understand them! Many nations have, through two millennia, benefited from the gentleness of Biblical Christianity through these means - though it has by-passed much of the 'third world'.

But - despite the open invitation God extends to mankind to take part in His Plan, few are willing to pay the heavy personal price.

Until God's Kingdom comes the Bible is clear about the laws by which national governments should rule. All mankind battles with *human nature*. It leads to all kinds of criminal behaviour, suicide bombings, personal and corporate greed, corruption at all levels of society, terrorism, tax-dodging, poverty, pollution and even religion - to name a few of mankind's ills.

The Kingdom of God will ultimately replace every human government. Just what is it? Do you want to be a part of it? Request the free booklet *The Kingdom of God...what does that mean to you?*

The King's Speech

Let's be clear. The mind of Christ - supposedly present in every true Christian - curbs the excesses of human nature. But that Spirit dwells in only a tiny fraction of humanity. All the rest need *law!*

Messiah's 'Cabinet' for his world government has already been selected

The King's Speech will contain legislation that will address all human ills - *once and for all!* And these laws are precisely the laws all national Governments, for the peace and prosperity of their citizens, should be applying *now*. They are the true standard which when applied - rigorously but with mercy - will curb the excesses of human nature in the here and now.

True Morality

A culture has evolved, especially in the 'Christian West', which seeks to fuse the teachings of Jesus Christ with carnal, self-seeking humanity. *It doesn't work.*

However desirable the teachings of Jesus are they cannot simply be applied universally, for they demand *a change of heart*. 'Love your neighbour' is a great prin-

ciple - until he crosses you. That's when you need that change of heart!

Says God through the prophet Jeremiah: "*The heart is deceitful above all things and utterly corrupt. Who can know it?*" (ch 17:9).

So until that day of Christ comes, mankind must be subject to Law. 'Law', said the apostle Paul, '*is for the law-breaker!*' Which implies there is a body of Law, a standard to live by. On this our governments are confused, basing legislation on transient and flawed human imagination.

"*Woe to those who devise iniquity [lawlessness]*", says God - to all peoples - through the prophet Micah (2:1). Micah's words are rooted in the state of the two nations of Israel in his time, the eighth century before Christ. But they are a clear reflection of the 'enlightened' world of century twenty-one: corrupt business practice, immorality, idolatry, collusion between Government and its 'cronies', burden-some taxation.

Through His prophets, God - who still has 'hands on' His Creation - warns of the consequences. Change your ways, He says. Live by My Laws. Or I will remove your prosperity and send you national destruction and exile. Ancient Israel had crossed the line - they were beyond redemption without suffering.

Have our Western democracies, too, now passed that point? □

Bible Basics

The *Churches of God Outreach Ministries* publish an internet home study course.

If you would like to study with us please visit our web-site:

www.cgom.org

The introductory lesson gives some hints about how to study your Bible.

We are pleased to reply to any questions you may have arising from any of our publications. However, at this time we are not in a position to 'grade' your studies in Bible Basics

Under the rule of the Messiah planet Earth will be transformed. In contrast to today's world the world to come is full of hope for all mankind. Request: *A Message of Hope for the World of Tomorrow*

Can You Believe the Bible?

The message and character of Jesus Christ would fail all the tests of humanitarian practice - if he were taken literally!

That may shock some Bible students. For is not the Bible the very Word of God? Surely every word of the text of Scripture is divinely inspired? Dare we tamper with it? For we are warned not to add to the Scriptures, nor to take from it (Revelation 22:19). Otherwise our salvation is at stake.

Let's look at some examples in illustration. Your son is tempted to grab a watch from a display in a department store. Jesus said "Cut off his hand". Your husband has an eye for the girls - Jesus says, "Pluck out his eye". See Matthew 5:29-30. And what would happen to business and the economy if we literally took Jesus at his word when he commanded, "Give to him that asks of you, and from anyone who would borrow from you turn not away" (v.42)? Uncompromising words indeed. But how many handless, eyeless and shirtless Christians do you know?

Jesus also gave his approval, in "story" form, to the millionaire who ordered a servant to be "delivered to the torturers", apparently on the man's first offence (Matthew 18:34). What happened to his very own statement that we ought to forgive "until seventy times seven" (v.22)? And why did he not simply forgive the money-changers whom he drove out of the Temple with a whip? Or Peter when the latter caused Jesus offence (Matthew 16:22-23)? *Double standards?*

We could also challenge Jesus on his understanding of physics. Didn't he know that a camel could not possibly pass through "the eye of a needle"? What, too, about his statement that a

tiny bit of faith could move a mountain? Certainly there is no record of Jesus doing that - nor any of the apostles (who, with all believers, would do "greater works" than Jesus), nor anyone throughout the history of the church of God! And did Jesus not know that the throat - even of a Pharisee - was too small to swallow a camel (Matthew 23:24)?

We need to deal with such texts. Instinctively we cringe at the thought of taking them literally. But they are there in the divinely-inspired Word. So, surely they must be accepted if we are to "live by every word of God" (Matthew 4:4)?

Literally Wrong

The short answer is *No*, we don't accept them at face value. We are here dealing with language. And a language that is far removed from English or indeed other Western languages. Not merely the sound of it nor the grammar nor word meanings. If we are to properly understand what God is telling us in His inspired Book then we must take note of the thought behind the language, the culture, in which it was written.

The languages of the Orient, of the Middle East, of Bible lands - of the Bible - expressed a different thought pattern to ours. Even the Greek of the New Testament expressed semitic thought patterns, for that was the way the writers' - mostly mid-eastern - own language was cradled. It was not "logical" or precise or always to be taken at face value. The speaker of Hebrew or Aramaic *spoke to convey an impression*. By piling metaphor upon metaphor, by gross exaggeration, by unconditional assertion, by a display of gestures and facial expression he made his hearers *feel* his meaning! The "imprecatory Psalms"

are an example.

Another example is the role-play of the prophets of both Old and New Testament times. Their language and behaviour was dramatic, powerful, figurative - we would brand it as "over the top"! Read John the Baptist's denunciation of the Pharisees and Sadducees, for example (Matthew 3:7f), or what Jesus told the Pharisees (*ch* 23). But it was effective language.

To this day a visit to a mid-eastern market highlights this. There's what to a Western eye is wild gesticulation - the portrayal of thoughts and emotions by body movement. A hubbub not known in the West in day-to-day life - at least outside a World Cup final!

Read It Right

What a Westerner would call an exaggeration, even downright lies, was the normal currency of speech. But, of course, no-one took it literally! And that's an essential tool for understanding certain aspects of the Scriptures. Try to put yourself, when studying the Word of God, into the shoes of "a man from the east".

Of course, this does not mean we can play fast and loose with the text. There is much "technical" language in the Scriptures - historical, doctrinal *etc* - not addressed in this article. But for the rest we must go behind the words. Seek their real meaning, be aware of the cultural aspect of the language.

All languages use "figures of speech". That is, a "designed and legitimate departure from the laws of language in order to emphasize what is said". Bear in mind that in the Scriptures we are dealing with "words which the Holy Spirit teaches" (*eg* I Corinthians 2:13). God Himself uses this figurative language! The ancient classical languages described several hundred

different forms of speech. And they are integral to the Scriptures both in Hebrew and in Greek. Well-known examples - also in English use - are *metaphor, allegory, simile, hyperbole, personification* and *idiom*.

Such a manner of thinking isn't entirely foreign to the Westerner. For example, we readily understand the expressions "a storm in a tea-cup" or "keep your hair on" or "take the shirt off your back" and would not normally think of taking them literally. The language of certain portions of Scripture more so. Yet questions on these matters do bother Bible students.

Serious study of the Word of God should take on board the existence of such speech forms. Awareness enables us to glean a clearer picture of what God is conveying to us in His Word.

Jesus' humorous exaggerations of a camel going through a literal needle's eye, or a hypocritical religious man swallowing a camel yet straining a tiny fly from his cocoa as a religious act of "purity" - these con-

"This Pastor Has Guts"

In Kansas at the opening session of their Senate in 1996, it seems prayer still upsets some people. When Minister Joe Wright was asked to open the new session of the Kansas Senate, everyone was expecting the usual generalities, but this is what they heard:

"Heavenly Father, we come before you today to ask your forgiveness and to seek your direction and guidance. We know Your Word says, 'Woe to those who call evil good,' but that is exactly what we have done. We have lost our spiritual equilibrium and reversed our values. We confess that we have ridiculed the absolute truth of Your Word and called it Pluralism. We have exploited the poor and called it the lottery. We have rewarded laziness and called it welfare. We have killed our unborn and called it choice. We have shot abortionists and called it

faith moves mountains: Jesus contrasts the minute mustard seed with a huge object - a mountain. In true eastern fashion he used the illustration to idealize faith. A favourite attack by atheists on the Bible, this, for no-one has ever done it!

the eye of needle is not a small gate in a city door - which was known as a "plum"! Jesus was using his own language in a normal way to express the impossibility of salvation for anyone besotted by material wealth - the largest animal and the smallest opening his hearers knew.

"turn the other cheek" does not prohibit self-defence or protection of property. It is the antidote for the then contemporary misinterpretation of the "law of revenge" (*lex talionis*).

The instruction (Matthew 5:39-41) to settle a legal action by ***giving away coat and cloak*** would leave the eastern man virtually naked. The words mean the under-garment and the over-garment - all, virtually, that he was wearing! Clearly the equivalent of "going the extra mile", or "giving the shirt off your back".

justifiable. We have neglected to discipline our children and called it building self-esteem. We have abused power and called it politics. We have coveted our neighbor's possessions and called it ambition. We have polluted the air with profanity and pornography and called it freedom of expression. We have ridiculed the time-honored values of our forefathers and called it enlightenment.

Search us, Oh, God, and know our hearts today; cleanse us from every sin and set us free. Guide and

vey powerfully the message of false dependence on material wealth, and of hypocrisy. The fact of judgment to come, of hell-fire, was burned into the consciousness of the hearers of Jesus as they gazed over his shoulder at the curling smoke, noticed the breeding worms (Isaiah 66:24, Mark 9:44) and breathed the awesome stench arising from the nearby Valley of Hinnom (*ge-Henna*, translated *hell* in the *KJV*) - Jerusalem's city dump.

Just a second's thought, then, will convince any one of us that cutting off a hand or gouging an eye won't stop a person from the desire to steal or to lust - which was the whole point of Jesus' message. Nor is serial forgiveness appropriate in every situation - we do not extend it to murderers, thugs, fraudsters, perjurers. (At least, not always!) Yet such imagery drives home the vital importance of these weighty matters.

Let's give our study of the Word of God that second thought. All Scripture is indeed "*inspired by God*", but let's "*rightly handle the word of truth*" (II Timothy 2:15)! □

bless these men and women who have been sent to direct us to the center of Your will and to openly ask these things in the name of Your Son, the living Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen!"

The response was immediate. A number of legislators walked out in protest.

In six short weeks, Central Christian Church, where Rev. Wright is pastor, logged more than 5,000 phone calls with only 47 of those calls responding negatively. The church is now receiving international requests for copies of this prayer from India, Africa, and Korea. Commentator P a u l Harvey aired this prayer on his radio program, "The Rest of the Story," and received a larger response to this program than any other he has ever aired. □

"If you don't stand for something you will fall for anything"

Where Are the True Christians?

Bill Faith

How can you identify a believer in Christ?

A recent article posted December 3, 2003 on *World Net Daily* titled, "Church doesn't think like Jesus" stated that, "A new survey by pollster George Barna finds only 9 percent of born-again Christians hold a biblical worldview."

What is a biblical worldview? The article explains, "For the purpose of the research, a biblical worldview was defined as believing that absolute moral truths exist; that such truth is defined by the Bible; and firm belief in six specific religious views.

Those views were:

- Jesus Christ lived a sinless life
- God is the all powerful and all knowing Creator of the universe and He still rules it today
- salvation is a gift from God and cannot be earned
- Satan is real
- a Christian has a responsibility to share their faith with other people
- the Bible is accurate in all of its teachings.

It would seem that most professing Christians could accept these biblical worldviews. Yet, only an astonishing nine percent believed them.

Mr. Barna surveyed 2,033 adults also found that only percent of those founot claiming to be Christian have a biblical worldview. And so he rightly suggests that many of the nation's moral and spiritual challenges are directly attributed to this fact.

It is hard to believe that a nation that is considered to be Christian would have so few people with these views.

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 a bi-monthly outreach magazine *New Horizons*, the *Bible Basics* and a *Correspondence* home study course). The *Outreach Ministries* also supports a network of independent fellowships and scattered brethren.

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* is available from any of our addresses. We are pleased to offer you, without charge, any of our publications.

Pollster George Barna mentioned, "If Jesus Christ came to this planet as a model of how we ought to live, then our goal should be to act like Jesus."

How true that statement is. For in I John 2:6 we read, "He who says he abides in Him [that is, in Christ] ought himself also to walk just as He walked." As Christians, it is our duty to forsake the ways of the world and follow righteousness.

"Sadly," Mr. Barna writes, "Few people consistently demonstrate the

love, obedience and priorities of Je-

"The primary reason that people do not act like Jesus is because they do not think like Jesus. Behavior stems from what we think - our attitudes, beliefs, values and opinions. Although most people own a Bible and know some of its content, our research found that most Americans have little idea how to integrate core biblical principles to form a unified and meaningful response to the challenges and opportunities of life."

sus." He continues:

The Apostle Paul addressed this very concern in Romans 8:5,7 where he wrote, "For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.....Because the carnal (fleshly) mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be."

The problem is that many who consider themselves Christian have never truly been converted. If they had been, then they would be as it is written in II Corinthians 5:17-18 where we are told "If anyone is in Christ, he is a *new creation*; *old things have passed away*; *behold, all things have become new*. *Now all things are of God...*" The Apostle Paul also wrote, "If you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God" (Romans 8:13-14).

"If we are led by the Spirit of God we will not allow sin to reign any longer in our mortal bodies nor obey it in its lusts. Rather, we will present ourselves as instruments of righteousness" (Romans 6:12-13). If we act and think like Jesus we need to have the mind of Christ. The Apostle Paul tells us that truly converted

Christians do have [cont'd next page the mind of Christ (I Corinthians 2:16, Philippians 2:5).

All Christians believe they are under the New Covenant. However, the Bible teaches us that if we are under the New Covenant we will have God's laws in our mind and written on our heart (Jeremiah 31:33, Hebrews 8:10). In other words, our life will be governed by God's laws. This understanding is fortified by Mr. Barna's

"Upon comparing the perspectives of those who have a biblical worldview with those who do not, the former group were thirty-one times less likely to accept *cohabitation*, eighteen times less likely to endorse *drunkenness*, fifteen times less likely to condone *homosexuality*, twelve times less likely to accept *profanity* and eleven times less likely to describe *adultery* as morally acceptable. In addition, fewer than half of one percent of those with a biblical worldview said voluntary exposure to pornography was morally acceptable (compared to 39% of other adults), and a similarly miniscule proportion endorsed abortion (compared to 46% of adults who lack a biblical worldview)."

research:

These figures certainly reveal that if Christians practiced what the Bible teaches the world would surely be a better place in which to live.

It's a shame that so many professing Christians evidently do not accept the Bible as absolute truth. Yet we are instructed: "*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work*" (II Timothy 3:16-17).

As Christians we need to walk worthy of our calling. We need to put complete trust in God and allow His word to be a lamp to our feet.

Perhaps then we can begin to think and act like Jesus. □

Understanding the Scriptures

You might be surprised to learn that many Christians around the world have no idea what the Bible really says about concepts as fundamental as *life and death*, *heaven and hell*, and *grace* - with or without works. One thing is certain: without a solid and in-depth knowledge of the Bible our faith can be subject to every wind of doctrine and the commandments of men - just as Jesus himself warned against in Mark 7:7.

This *Bible Correspondence Course* has been designed to lead you in a comprehensive study of your own Bible. Whether you are old or young, a Bible scholar or a Biblical novice request our free *Course* - and join us on a journey of discovery and truth.

The *Course* is projected to be 32 lessons in length with a new issue mailed to you approximately each month, or as each new issue becomes available.

Some topics covered are:

- **The Dramatic Return of Jesus Christ.** *When and where will Christ return? (Lesson #3)*
- **Just What IS Man?** *Is man an immortal soul in a material body? (Lesson #5)*
- **Will You Go To Heaven?** *(Lesson #7)*
- **Angels.** *Your Bible reveals that angels inhabited the earth long before Adam and Eve. (Lesson #14)*
- **What is the TRUE Gospel?** *Jesus Christ came to earth over two thousand years ago to announce a message from God. He was killed for bringing it! What was that message? (Lesson #18)*
-

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CONFERENCE 2004

the *Churches of God Outreach Ministries* is sponsoring the **eighth annual CGOM conference** during the weekend of **March 26-28** in Tulsa, Oklahoma, beginning Friday evening.

Your presence is important for several reasons:

- To share with other congregational representatives the outreach activities and evangelism efforts ongoing in your region
- To take away ideas from other congregations for use at home.
- To stir the spirit and find encouragement among others laboring with you
- To meet new like-minded believers and renew old friendships
- To learn what *CGOM* can do to help with meeting the needs of the brethren and the world at large

Further information may be obtained from any of our addresses

GOVERNMENT... cont'd

persuasion" (Vine: *Expository Dictionary*). Each individual Christian and each local assembly leader - who '*must give account*' (Hebrews 13:17) - is responsible directly to Jesus Christ for personal behaviour, for beliefs - and for an orderly assembly.

Jesus Christ is Head of his church, given this responsibility by our Father who has '*given all judgment to the Son*' (John 5:22). He has given us the guidance we need through the writings of the Scriptures. And he will when necessary intervene personally to protect his 'precious jewel', the church.

Jesus actively governs His church - when necessary by-passing any form of humanly-devised system of governance. □

New Horizons may be viewed
on our web-site
www.cgom.org
e-mail: coguk@aol.com and
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Easter - Is It Christian?

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The Churches of God Outreach
Ministries publish an internet
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If you would like to study with
us check it out at

www.cgom.org

The introductory lesson gives
some hints about how to
study the Bible

*We are pleased to reply to any ques-
tions arising from any of our publica-
tions. However, we are not yet in a
position to 'grade' your responses*

all are available from any of the addresses listed inside