

The New Horizons Newsletter

New Horizons
Box 25250
6 Slington House
Rankine Road
BASINGSTOKE
RG24 8PH

e-mail: coguk@aol.com
web-site: www.cgom.org
Editor: James McBride

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The Obedience of Faith

For many, the ‘O-word’—*obedience*—is a no-no, especially when it’s obedience to God. ‘I’m saved by grace—obedience is works’, is a common cry.

That view is quite illogical. For, although we are free to choose, we will quite willingly trust that the cliff-edge danger warning sign is to be trusted. Or the police when we’re told to ‘move along’ when faced with a bomb threat. Or to show our passport when travelling and that the pilot will take us where we want. It’s the same within the family setting. Children (sometimes!) obey their father’s command.

Don’t we obey because we *trust* that the sign or the police have good reason for the command? That dad has his reasons?

So why not obey God? Don’t you *trust* Him? When He laid down those ‘Ten Commandments’ was it a mere whim, a code by which He could control us? Or punish?

Clearly not. For example, no society will tolerate murder, a crime written into every justice system. It’s for our protection. So, too, with theft or perjury or respect for the elderly. And are we not, as individuals and nations, reaping the penalty for shattering His marriage code?

God’s ‘Law’—human and divine—is for our protection, to guide us in a way that leads to a successful and longer life. And the path to salvation. [*torah* simply means *instruction*. It is the spiritual Law from the beginning but was written into the Constitution

of the physical nation of Israel.

We can, of course, choose not to accept its guidance. And if we don’t trust that God gave it for our benefit—then we can simply experience the adverse and inevitable consequences!: ‘...*Jehovah commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear Jehovah our God for our good forever, to keep us alive, as today*’ (Deuteronomy 6:24).

So—I can choose not to obey my Creator and Saviour—or is that rebellion (Romans 8:7)? But what *should* we ‘obey’?

The former Bishop of Norwich, Dean Stanley contends that Exodus 20:7 (the Third Commandment) should be translated as: ‘...*You shall not bring the holy Name to anything that is vain [unholy, empty]*’ (History of the Jewish Church). *In other words*, any practice—religious or secular—should be in accordance with the divine will as revealed in the Scriptures. What if you were to test your own religious practices against those criteria?

For example: God says some foods are not to be eaten. Do you argue they have no relevance today? Do you observe Sabbath—or Sunday, which is not observed weekly in the Scriptures? Are your ‘holy days’ listed in the Bible or do you observe Christmas, Easter *etc*—days that the Bible relegates to pre-Christian practice?

Our often devious excuses for not doing what God has revealed won’t wash with Him. As observed King Solomon: ‘...*If you keep being stubborn after many warnings, you will suddenly discover you have gone too far*’ (Proverbs 29:1).

Shouldn’t we trust that when God invites us to ‘do this’ that He has good reason? Not human reason, then, but ‘the obedience of faith’.

'DON'T BLAME ME!'

What awful things happen in our world—wars, terrorism, personal conflict, all manner of physical destruction. Why did God create a world capable of such destructive forces? Why earthquakes and tsunamis and volcanic eruptions? Why accidents and disease?

When thousands are wiped from the planet by seismic forces it is usual for the blame to be placed on an uncaring Creator. Should God, then—as Creator—shoulder the blame?

First, consider our own role. Global warming, reportedly, is upon us. Industrialization coupled with the gases expelled from a burgeoning and uncontrolled (seven billion) human population and from uncounted cattle may be changing our climate. Add in widespread deforestation at man's hand. Add in the devastation in the wake of wars—and we have a toxic mix that holds *mankind* responsible for much of what adversely affects our planet. (The same principle applies in our personal life!)

God didn't do that!

Divine Mandate

As with any complex mechanism, Earth has a finely balanced operating system. Unexplained by science, the oceans maintain a 3.4% salinity despite the huge volume of salts washed in from the rivers. The atmosphere is a delicate balance of gases. And we could add our precisely-placed location in the solar system and in our galaxy. All are inter-related.

Man was presented with a perfect pristine productive ecosystem (Genesis 1) and given responsibility to look after our home, planet Earth: '*...God said, let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the heavens, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over all the creepers creeping on the earth*' (Genesis 1:26). And: '*...the LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it*' (ch 2:15).

Given that man was created in God's image he was endowed with the wisdom to 'rule' in a manner that would preserve the planet. So what happened? How did we arrive at the point where science says survival is on a knife-edge? Could our profligacy and natural disaster be related?

It was *God* who established our ecosystem—and it was perfect: '*...God saw all that He had made, and it was very good*' (Genesis 1:31). It was *man* who threw a spanner in the works, who introduced a deadly virus to the perfectly-running programme. It's called *sin*.

Paradise Lost

Man's existence is inextricably bound to the earth—we are '*...of the earth, earthy*' (I Corinthians 15:47),

and Adam's rejection of divine rule opened the way for powerful demonic forces to unleash destruction on the planet. The ground under our feet and our ecosystem—even our economy—were no longer in harmony as mankind ignored the revealed foundation principles for stability.

Violence soon erupted (Genesis 4-11). Idolatry engulfed mankind. Agriculture was disrupted. Human relationships soured. And earth spewed its anger in a devastating universal flood that swept away all but those few faithful to the Creator.

Lessons Learned?

With a further five millennia of human experience have we learned our lesson? Have wars ceased? Is earth itself now at rest? Is the ecosystem and our economy restored to balance? Have we acknowledged our dependence on divine guidance and accepted that human reason must build on that guidance? Have we embraced the way of life revealed by the Creator, and renounced all spurious forms of worship and philosophies?

No to all of these! God gave mankind one hundred and twenty years in the days of Noah to turn to Him and to save themselves. During that time Noah witnessed to God's true path, warning of the need to turn their lives around (II Peter 2:5). Few heeded.

The Gospel, the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ alone has been trumpeted worldwide through the widespread dissemination of the Scriptures and through missionary effort for well over a century. Have we responded? Should we be surprised at economic collapse, at earth's increasing violence?

No—in our personal lives, in our local and national government, in our global institutions, the finger of blame points firmly backward—at our promiscuous waste of resources, at our primitive savagery, at our inordinate desire for more, at our neglect of the weak and vulnerable—and *at our neglect of true religion*.

Just don't blame Me, says the Creator. Ω

What You Can Do...

In face of such overwhelming natural and spiritual forces seemingly about to sweep away mankind, it's tempting to simply throw up our hands in despair. We all face challenges—that's life. But how we deal with them determines the outcome.

As Christians we know we can trust God to fully oversee our lives, know that '*...all works together*' for our benefit—no matter how ominous the clouds, how fierce the storm. We may experience with our neighbours the earthquake, the firestorm, the flood, though as with Noah our Father may for His own reasons mercifully '*...provide a way to escape that we may be able to bear it*'. (I Corinthians 10:13).

As Paul here notes, God never allows His children to face a challenge beyond their ability to cope. Ω

Insight from Paul

The apostle Paul's letters shed a bright light on our walk with God

As noted on page four (*Read the Book*) many Christians are all at sea when it comes to their understanding of the Christian Scriptures—because they remain unread. The apostle has some useful thoughts on this.

Paul is firmly anchored in the writings of the Old Testament. He is proud to acknowledge his roots: ‘...brought up in this city [Tarsus] at the feet of Gamaliel, having been trained according to the exactness of the ancestral law, being a zealous one of God, even as you all are today’ (Acts 22:3). He was later moved to re-state his zeal for the Scriptures before Governor Felix: ‘...believing all things according to that having been written in the Law and the Prophets’ (24:14).

Paul’s zeal for the written Scriptures wasn’t just theoretical, for it was the structure on which he based his life and his Gospel outreach. In Rome his preaching involved ‘...persuading them the things concerning Jesus, both from the Law of Moses and the Prophets’ (ch 28:23). When in Thessalonica he ‘...according to [his] custom, he went in to them and reasoned with them from the Scriptures on three Sabbaths’ (Acts 17:2),

Recall, of course, that at that time there was no other Scripture than the ‘Old’ Testament. In writing to the young Timothy he recounts: ‘...from a babe you know the Holy Scriptures, those being able to make you wise to salvation through belief in Christ Jesus (II

Timothy 3:15). Indeed it has been estimated that he quotes the Old Testament some one hundred and eighty times, with many other references to people, places and events associated with Israel.

The apostle knew that ‘...All Scripture is God-breathed and profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, so that the man of God may be perfected, being fully furnished for every good work’ (vv.16-17). The Scriptures inspired his every action. He lived what was written in them. Citing historical events recorded in the Scriptures he says: ‘...All these things happened to those [in Israel] as examples, and it was written for our warning, on whom the ends of the ages have come’ (I Corinthians 10:11). That means recorded for us!

Israel sank into idolatry, abandoning the Sabbath and holy days. Have we? They absorbed the culture of the heathen in their midst. Have we, in our ‘Christian’ society, also succumbed? Only through the Scriptures can we come to understand both the form of true Christianity and what it means in our day-to-day life.

Paul’s diarist notes of the Bereans (recently evangelized by Paul): ‘...They gladly accepted the message. Day after day they studied the Scriptures to see if these things were true. Many of them put their faith in the Lord’ (Acts 17:11). To come to an understanding and acceptance of the Gospel, to learn what God expects of us, to truly grow in grace and knowledge of Christ—we need to daily immerse ourselves in His inspired Word. Ω

Letter from England

Hello from Lincolnshire

To be truly Christian in these times—to be a dedicated follower of Jesus Christ—is no easy task. As mentioned on this page, we are enveloped in a ‘heathen’ society and bombarded daily with life-styles far removed from that expected of the Christian.

When did you last hear of someone prosecuted for adultery? No—it’s endemic, considered normal. Have you viewed a ‘decent’ modern film? Unlikely, as they overflow with violent and sexual scenes once confined to the bedroom. All publicly ‘normal’ now. There’s widespread promiscuity and alcohol abuse and pornography and horrific child abuse. The internet, for all its value, pours out an unending torrent of filth.

Dare to open the Christian Scriptures and the stark contrast of the pure ‘faith once delivered’ by Jesus and his apostles with our engulfing foetid society cannot but shock the Bible believer.

Nor does Government meddling help. Law is weighted in favour of perpetrators of criminality and

against Christian values. New legislation favours minority views, discarding ancient principles tested over thousands of years. Nations once steeped in Christian values are engulfed by a foul-smelling secularism imported from alien cultures. God-given sovereignty is sacrificed on the altar of material prosperity and secular ideology.

Can’t we see the clear parallel with what the Scriptures call, what Jesus describes as, ‘the days of Noah’? : ‘...as they were in the days before the flood: eating, and drinking, marrying, and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah went into the ark. And they did not know until the flood came and took all away. So also will be the coming of the Son of Man’

‘Eating and drinking’? There’s a worldwide obesity crisis. ‘Marrying and giving in marriage’? Governments increasingly legislate for promiscuous ‘marriage’. Just about anyone can take a partner—with the easy option of opting out of what a stable civilization requires: a lifetime commitment.

As sang the Psalmist: ‘When the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?’ James

One World...many nations

The Scriptures teach us that, as the apostle Paul told his hearers in Greece, we—all of mankind—derive from a single source. Here's what he said: '*...He [God] made every nation of men of one blood, to live on all the face of the earth, ordaining fore-appointed [assigned] seasons and boundaries of their dwelling*' (Acts 17:26).

Today there are around two hundred sovereign 'nations' - identifiable groups with common bonds, a shared culture (except where the alien notion of multiculturalism has intruded!) and a recognizable Government of sorts.

Sovereign Nations

However you believe man came to his present status as *Homo Sapiens*, there's no doubt that we can trace our ancestry to a single compatible pair. (But isn't it remarkable that they 'evolved' that billion trillion-to-one physical compatibility within a single lifetime!) As they multiplied, families formed and families of like-mind amalgamated. Shared beliefs and physical similarities served to unite into what became sovereign self-governing 'nations'. Later, diverse languages added to national identity (Genesis 11:6-7).

But not only is God Creator—He also, as Job relates, controls history: '*...He increases the nations, and destroys them: he enlarges the nations, and straitens [confines] them again*' (Job 12:23). Nations and empires rise to great heights and then lose their power and influence—seemingly as a result of internal intrigue or moral decay or by conquest. But '*... Judgment does not come from the east or from the west, from the north or from the south; it is God who is the judge, condemning some and acquitting others*' (Psalm 75:6-7).

King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had an awesome prophetic dream experience from God. The prophet Daniel interpreted, predicting the King's period of madness until he learned '*...that the most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomsoever he will*' (Daniel 4:25). The prophet Isaiah informs us that nation states will be extant during the millennial reign of Christ, when: '*...he shall judge among the nations*' (ch 2:4).

Of Like Mind

All men are indeed 'brothers' - of one blood, of one 'race', one parentage. It is, however, integral to our nature to associate with those of like mind, of a shared culture. Hence the innate God-given desire to form sovereign nations. A nation is headed for extinction when it submits itself—its laws, its culture, its religion—to foreign domination and control.

The plan for the successful integration of individuals from a different culture, as was the pattern in ancient Israel, was for those of an alien culture to live wholly by the laws and the faith of the sovereign nation of Israel.

Read the Book

The source of our belief as Christians is the Bible—yet fewer than half of those who attend church read it more than once a week. And a fifth of churchgoers, according to one survey, *never* read it! Yet many Americans own three or more Bibles while nine out of ten have at least one.

In Britain a survey notes that thirty percent of adults don't recognize famous stories as being in the Bible (eg David and Goliath, Adam and Eve, Jonah and the fish). while twenty-seven percent thought *Superman* and *Hunger Games* were in it. Among children it's worse—not even Noah and the ark!

Given that the Bible contains God's revelation as to how we relate to Him it is unsurprising that there exists such ignorance of what the Bible teaches! Even those who read regularly are, too often, ignorant of its teachings, blinded by tradition.

Getting prophecy wrong won't negate your salvation—but correctly understood it could save you confusion when it turns out differently. Get God's weekly and annual holy days wrong and you will be confused as to the divine plan. Heaven or hell? You could be in for a surprise. And without the Scriptures how will you know right from wrong (Romans 3:20)?

The *Outreach Ministries* have two study courses available (no charge). **Bible Basics** is a low-key introduction to foundation teachings, and there is a more comprehensive **thirty-two lesson** course. Both are available in print form from our addresses. *Bible Basics* may be viewed on-line at www.cgom.org. They may be ordered on-line.

We encourage you to study with these as an aid—but to compare carefully with the Scriptures themselves! (See 11 Timothy 3:16). Ω

But as with Israel, failure to pursue this path results in disharmony. Ghettos emerge, and incomers retain their native customs and language—increasingly isolated from the indigenous population. Rather than peaceful integration the spotlight falls on differences which become the focus of division.

Of special significance to Bible believers is that most incomers to the West are not Christian, and practice the tenets of their own alien faith, worshipping a different God. Thus arises inter-religious tension.

Nations, in the millennium, will all be subject to one Law—that of the Christian Bible. There will be one faith—that of the Christian Bible. (And that is not what passes for Christianity today!) There will be one 'heart' in mankind as the Holy Spirit will be freely available to all nations, all mankind—without the malign influence of the present 'god of this world', Satan (II Corinthians 4:4, Revelation 20:2-3). Ω

Read our article (cgom.org/Articles/):
The Faith Once Delivered