

outreach

The Newsletter of the Churches of God, UK

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Biblical teaching
Matthew 28:19-20*

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The Dignity of Man the Salvation Army, Sunday Schools, Bible Societies, the work place all instilled personal responsibility, sobriety—and self-respect.

It's not just your age.—it *has* got worse!

Half a century ago comedy was funny, and kids could watch it. Today too many 'comedians' think sewage is funny. Our parliamentary representatives were respected fifty years ago. Today many have a reputation for criminal behaviour—and, in general, they get away with it.

Days of Yore

In those days we trusted the medical profession for caring, even when inconvenient for themselves. Now we fear they are out to prematurely dispose of us. And now the police 'service' no longer serves but is self-serving and 'enforces' petty laws.

The institutions remain—television, Parliament, the NHS, the Police. It's the people that have changed. No longer do many in the public eye have self-respect. The 'dignity of man' is a concept far removed from so-called celebrities and 'stars', from our leaders, from the average reveller rolling in the gutter, from the drunken celebrants at a wedding or office party—especially at 'holy' Christmas.

In recent centuries we have slipped the stranglehold of debauchery that marred ancient Rome or Greece or Babylon. And the malign influence of a universal and overbearing false Christendom waned as humanism and evangelical faiths—drawing their creed from the Scriptures—took hold. Victorian gin palaces were ousted by temperance movements. Mean, dangerous city streets were swept clean by improved law and order that reflected Biblical values. Philanthropy,


Sadly, the past half century has seen the decline of those hard-won values. Binge drinking, drug use, foul language, sloppy and scanty dress, discourtesy, vulgar 'comedy', violence and obscenity on the small screen and the large—all serve to degrade the human condition.

Image of God

That's not what the Creator of all intended. Out of 'clay' (Genesis 2:7)—the elements of earth—He fashioned mankind, enlivening him with a motivating spirit far superior to that of every other creature. That spirit—breathed into every human being—unique in all creation gives us a God-consciousness.

But that was just the beginning, for God '*... created man in His own image*' (Genesis 1:27). Implanted in us is the potential to be like Him: It's a challenge too far for mankind—without the indwelling Spirit of God, which we rejected. For those who take up the challenge '*... he has chosen us in him... that we should be holy and without blame before him in love*' Ephesians 1:4). Peter adds: '*...in imitation of the holy One...you also must be holy in all your habits of life*' (1 Peter 1:15).

Peter adds: '*...You {Christians} have lived long enough like people who don't know God. You were immoral and followed your evil desires. You went around drinking and partying and carrying on. In fact, you even worshiped disgusting idols. Now your former friends wonder why you have stopped running around with them, and they curse you for it. But they will have to answer to God, who judges the living and the dead*' (ch 4:3-5 CEV).

As Christians our day-to-day behaviour, in public and in private, must come to represent those values that reflect the best that man can achieve, as exemplified by the life of our Saviour. 

The Perplexed

Steven J. Kieler

Confusion abounds. Who can make sense of this crazy world? Maybe you believe that, because you believe in God, life should be a bed of roses. But the truth is, we suffer problems and doubts and, along with the rest of mankind, we are troubled. Furthermore, even with all our 'knowledge', we can often offer no better explanations of situations than can others.

Lack of understanding may lead to despair, desperation, or rebellion. Weariness is the harbinger, the 'red flag,' and it is, in itself, especially hazardous for a Christian. The danger results from being in a continual state of confusion, progressing in three stages.

In *Stage One*, I've often found myself filled with anxiety, distress, or fear. *Stage Two* is 'weariness in well doing'. Thayer puts it as giving up on living up-rightly: (2Thessalonians3:13). And *Stage Three* is abandoning the source of your deliverance. It is critical to take action, long before stage three!

The antidote, your defence, is a good dose of *hope*. Unfortunately, this is often confused with pie in the sky optimism or putting on rose-colored glasses, which only produces more confusion when a person's hope is again dashed.

The following quote by Czech president and playwright Vaclav Havel (1936) illustrates the difference: "Hope is definitely not the same thing as optimism. It (hope) is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty (emphasis mine) that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out." A great difficulty is that the fulfilment of our hope is not in the immediate future. Proverbs 14:32 says: "*The wicked is driven away in his wickedness: but the righteous has hope in his death.*"

Our hope rests in three intertwined concepts:

- Christ's return (Titus 2:13)
- The Resurrection (Acts 24:15)
- Immortality (our crown, eternal life) (Colossians 1:5.6)

I can agree with Paul when he said: "...*We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair;*" (II Corinthians 4:8.) No matter what happens, no matter how dense the fog around us, no matter our perplexity, there are three things that remain: *faith, hope and love*.

Don't weary. Be happy.

Ω

Easter—or Passover?

Jesus the Messiah, by the use of spiritual law we find incomprehensible, raised the dead. It was a demonstration of his divine power. But, of course, those raised later died again—Lazarus (John 11) is an example.

The greatest 'miracle' of all time, however, was his own resurrection. Beaten and whipped, then killed by a lance Jesus lay in the tomb three days and three nights—just as he predicted. But his resurrection late on the Sabbath was to a spirit body, a body that is alive to this day in heaven at the right hand of the Father. Records the apostle Paul: Jesus was '*...declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead*' (Romans 1:4).

Passover Season

Year by year in Christendom, in the Spring, this awesome event is recognized in the 'Easter' celebrations. Despite historical distortions and the parading of foolish and pointless symbols (*eg rabbits, eggs, chicks*) the world is alerted, however vaguely, to God's intervention in man's affairs.

The death and resurrection of Jesus coincided—and indeed is a fulfilment of—the ancient *Passover* celebration observed famously in Judaism. The apostle Paul tells us: '*... Christ our passover is sacrificed for us*' (I Corinthians 5:7). Jesus died at the time for the Passover sacrifice in the Temple. Indeed the first Christians—as do many believers today—continued to joyously observe *Passover* (surely a night to be remembered) and the related seven *Days of Unleavened Bread*, alongside the solemnity of the *Lord's Supper* the preceding evening (*see* I Corinthians 5:6-8).

Only in later centuries were these observances supplanted in Christendom by what is now called 'Easter', an ancient pagan observance condemned in the Scriptures. (The word is a corruption of the goddess *Ishtar*).

Annual Memorial

The *Lord's Supper* is the *annual* memorial of the suffering and death of Jesus—observed '*... the same night in which he was betrayed*'. The seven *Days of Unleavened Bread*—'*Passover*'—which follow represent the sin-free life that is the goal of each believer: '*...be you holy as I am holy*'. (*Leaven*, a raising agent, is symbolic of sinful—'unholy' - practices.)

The apostle Paul outlined to the brethren *cont'd p. 3*

Lord's Supper:	Sunday evening March 24
Unleavened Bread:	March 26-April 1

WHY THE CHURCH?

It is generally expected of the church that it has a divine mission to change the world for the better. A worthy aim, and a goal of every liberal-minded person.. But is that a true reflection of the ‘Great Commission’?

Every year billions of hard currency is expended by the Christian church on ‘evangelism’ and its various support agencies—Conferences, Missions, hospitals, outreach programmes, poverty relief, Bible Colleges, church administration *etc.* The goal, to convert the world to the faith of Jesus Christ.

Leave aside for now the content of the message preached—a message that has been grotesquely distorted over the centuries. What about the *purpose* of this evangelism—is it on target? Does it accomplish Jesus’ purpose?

Jesus asserted that he would build a church that would continue on earth until his return—a promise fulfilled for almost two millennia. And today there are some two billion ‘Christians’. The name persists—‘Christian’—but how many are true believers? Indeed should we not expect believers to be a minority? Note the words of Jesus: ‘*...the gate to life is very narrow. The road that leads there is so hard to follow that only a few people find it*’ (Matthew 7:14).

We might ask *why?* Why ‘few’? The overlooked factor is that the Father, as part of His age-long master plan to ‘*...bring many sons to glory*’, sets His sights on specific individuals, drawing them to Jesus (John 6: 44). It is these (few), who respond to the Father’s invitation to follow the ‘narrow way’, whom Jesus will then add to his church (v.37).

Not that no-one else has a chance of salvation, for their time will come in God’s perfect timing. Ω

Easter ...cont’d from p.2

at Corinth the manner and timing of its observance (I Corinthians 11:19-34).

Before the meal with the disciples at which he was betrayed, Jesus by example introduced ‘foot-washing’ (John 13) - a practice continued in the churches of God to this day. It’s a simple and practical reminder that it is our responsibility to serve one another as exemplified by the life of Jesus.

If you are unable to join with other Christians [by definition it is communal] you may observe the Lord’s Supper and Unleavened Bread at home. The following article gives more detail:

Letter from England

Hello from Lincoln

The prophet Ezekiel spoke words that resonate in the modern world: ‘*...Walk through the city of Jerusalem and mark the forehead of anyone who is truly upset and sad [KJV: ‘who sighs and cries’] about the disgusting things that are being done here*’ (ch 9:4 CEV).

Whether it is the yielding up of sovereignty to a foreign power, or the failure to control our borders, or the risible criminal justice system, or social degradation, or disintegration of family life, or distrust of national institutions, or intrusive bureaucracy—if you retain the values of the Bible you can’t help but ‘sigh and cry’ about such in our twenty-first century.

We ‘sigh and cry’ (pray fervently) for the only ‘final solution’ to all of this—the return of the King of kings to put in place the laws essential to curb our human nature, to remove ‘*...the veil that is spread over all nations*’ imposed by ‘*...the god of this world*’, Satan. In this age the Father is selecting His family members. When Messiah returns *all* will receive the invitation to form a relationship with Him, receiving the Spirit that transforms our human nature into divine nature.

And in the meantime we do our best to reflect in our own lives, in our own sphere of influence, the divine character as lived out by Jesus. That course will at times involve hardship, opposition, alienation.

There’s little we can do to overturn the juggernaut of Government policy—most of which is contrary to the pattern set out by God for sound government. But the apostle Paul urges us to pray ‘*..for kings and those in authority*’ to the intent that however they legislate it will result that we, as Christians, ‘*...may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty*’ (I Timothy 2:2). God does intervene in human affairs!

However, when opposition comes our way let us hold fast to the promise: ‘*...all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose*’ (Romans 8:28). As sings the Psalmist: ‘*...Fret not yourself because of evil men, neither be you envious at the wicked*’ (Psalm 24:19).

James

<http://www.cgom.org/Publications/Articles/ObservingTheFestivalsAtHome.pdf>

We will be pleased to respond to any questions you may have regarding this vital observance. Ω

Dead Men's Bones

Archaeologists do it. So, too, do grave-robbers. They dig up and inspect or pillage old bones. And on occasion find something of interest and saleable.

It's also a preoccupation of some religious folk—though here it is the dry and crumbling 'bones' of some long-deceased and once prominent guru—his (or her) interpretation of the Bible, for example.

Probe the teachings of the 'Church Fathers' and there's a smorgasbord of choice—and confusing musings and opinions. You will, of course, find the occasional jewel that reflects a sparkle of light. Journey through the ages and there are others—Luther, Calvin, Wesley, Millar, Joseph Smith, Ellen G. White, Rutherford, Armstrong to name a few. All long gone, but having left a lasting legacy with ideas to be picked over by succeeding generations. And all claiming to have shed new light, to have special insight, open access to God.

Logically, they can't all be right, yet each probably has merit, has contributed, (along with error) some degree of understanding—truths buried under centuries of corrupt Christianity. It's like gangrene, cancerous, eating away at the Body says the apostle Paul (II Timothy 2:17).

It didn't take long for the infant church to spawn its heretics, even before the end of its first century. Paul foresaw it—a 'falling away' he called it (II Thessalonians 2:3), an apostasy, a forsaking of the '*...faith once for all delivered to the saints*' (Jude 3), arising from interlopers *and* from within the church leadership (Acts 20: 29-30). And, boy, did that happen. The mediaeval church was ravaged by false doctrine, cruelty, murder, greed, deception, persecution of true believers. Just as described by Paul in writing to Timothy.

There will be an end-time resurgence of the horrors of that era of church history (*see* II Timothy 3), a further falling away from the truth, the persecution and martyrdom of believers.

Jesus, however, assured us that the candle of truth would stay alight until his return. It still burns. Yet at no point in history has any individual, any 'church', got it *all* right—nor will we, until that glorious return of the King of kings, the LORD of lords. (Don't let anyone coerce you into the belief that they, and they alone, 'have it all'!)

A Work To Do

The harvest for the Kingdom has still not been fully in-gathered. The Father continues to call and to beget new 'children'—through the active efforts of His

Prophetic Alert!!!

Jesus warned his people to always be alert. Alert to the 'signs of the times'. Alert to the intrusion of false prophets. Sadly, such prophets pepper the religious scene of century twenty-one.

The Sabbatarian churches of God, historically, are not behind the door when dispensing wrong predictions of the end of human rule. The 'Great Disappointment' of 1844. The expectation of flight to a 'place of safety' in 1975. The spate of predictions of 'the end' during the last decade. All failed.

Indeed some brethren at this moment are preparing to flee in the next few weeks, persuaded by a church leader with a string of failed predictions to account for (to his Creator). Another languishes in prison (for financial fraud) having repeatedly erred in his prophetic understanding with failed prophetic dates. But still they come—2017, 2023, 2033, 2053.

So who knows? The short answer—the Father. In His own time, at the appropriate moment (as always), He will send Messiah to continue His mission plan. The 'prophets' will undoubtedly be surprised, as will all of us.

But no-one knows precisely when God's time clock even started ticking ('6000 years')—nor when it will end. It is not, however, open-ended! The end *will* come, the prophecies *will* be fulfilled.

Until that time it is *our* mission—those who claim no prophetic insight—to remain faithful whatever our life challenges, to trust our loving Father in all matters spiritual and material, to be sensitive to the world scene, to prepare ourselves for an eternity of service. Ω

Family on earth, the church. It is our commission for as long as we draw breath, and we have the assurance of the continuing support of our Lord and Saviour.

It's time for the churches of God—large or small—to recognize our own deficiencies and to work in harmony with one another, recognize legitimate differences, focus on the Great Commission: '*...Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations; baptize them...and teach them to obey every command which I have given you. And remember, I am with you always, day by day, until the Close of the Age.*' Ω
