

outreach

The Newsletter of the Churches of God, UK

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Matthew 28:19-20

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Churches Of God Outreach Ministries

Are You Safe?

We live in troubling times - and it looks like it will get worse. How can we as Christians cope? When the world's house of cards tumbles will you be safe?

For many professing Christians security lies in what has been termed 'the Rapture'. That is, before calamity envelops the world Christians will be snatched away to heaven and safety while the rest of mankind faces the awful consequences of their rebellion against God.

Others are convinced that 'the good Christians' will also be protected at that same time - but somewhere on earth. Lapsed or 'lukewarm' Christians will be abandoned to face all that Satan can throw at them. To purify them, supposedly.

Can these similar views be sustained from Scripture? Logic might dictate that it's *the weak* who need divine protection and the strong who can better face persecution and even martyrdom, and be a strong witness to an unbelieving world.

The latter notion arises in part from the belief that we are saved through our obedience to the divine Law. If you are failing in some points of obedience then God will use fiery trial to 'purge' you, to get you back on track. But 'the obedient', the 'goodies', don't need that and will be protected.

Reality

God, of course - as a loving and all-powerful Father - deals with each of His sons and daughters in a manner appropriate to our individual needs. He does correct us, but in a variety of ways and not usually with a 'big stick'. If you are 'weak' spiritually the fiery trial could finish you!

We are told, however, that our Father takes our weaknesses and our strengths into account. Wrote Paul: "*No temptation [trial] has come your way that is too hard for flesh and blood to bear. But God can be trusted not to allow you to suffer any temptation that is beyond your powers of*

endurance. He will see to it that every temptation has a way out so that it will never be impossible for you to bear it" (I Corinthians 10:13 *Phillips*).

End-time Scenario

The Bible is clear that when the 'end-time' comes there will be chaos on Earth. Frightening times summed up as 'the Great Tribulation'. And it won't be an easy time for Christians.

Satan, we're told, will make war with the saints. Satan, roaming free on Earth and enraged at the frustration of his foul plans, "*...was enraged with the woman [Israel] and went to make war with the rest of her offspring who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ"* (Revelation 12:17). These 'did not love their lives unto death' (v.11)

Jesus had previously given this same warning during his ministry. He told the disciples: "*...they will lay hands on you and persecute you...You will be betrayed...and they will put some of you to death. And you will be hated by all for my name's sake"* (Luke 21: 8ff).

Tough times for Christians, indeed.

Yet in His wisdom and to fulfil His purpose God may well deliver some of us from the worst of these trials. He saved Noah and his family on the ark. He led Lot out of Sodom to the mountains. He marched the nation of Israel out of slavery. He fed the fleeing Elijah by ravens. He is able! Wherever we are He can protect: "*A thousand shall fall at your side, and ten thousand at your right hand; but it [plagues] shall not come near you"* wrote King David (Psalm 91:1-8).

None of us has anything to fear. The Holy Spirit plants in us '*the peace that passes understanding*' (Philippians 4:7). **ف**

*Whoever desires to save his life shall lose it.
But whoever loses his life for my
sake will find it*

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What Do You Expect From God?

Drums of War

As I write, the smart bombs are still in their holds. The Gulf, however, is awash with armies and deadly weaponry. Millions, February 15, took to the streets to protest the possibility of war. They are a disparate group from 'anti-war at any price' to, for all I know, protests promoting the abolition of pets.

War is always horrific and most outside a few hawks in government would like to see an end to it - totally. That time will come, but not until the King of kings settles matters after his return. Human nature will ensure that death and destruction go on.

The world has its fill of tyrants. Petty dictators deeply line their pockets and entrench themselves in permanent power to the detriment of their subjects - starvation, torture, murder. Their mass conversion to peace and humility is a far-fetched dream. It won't happen. We're stuck with our Saddams and our Mugabes and their successors. In the meantime, what should we think as Christians?

March for Peace?

Well, the apostle Paul tells us: *"Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercession and giving of thanks be made for all men: for kings and all who are in authority..."* (I Timothy 2:1-2). Recall that Paul lived under the dominance of the Roman Empire - whose despotic rulers often eclipsed modern dictators!

Yet nowhere in the New Testament writings do we find exhortations - or examples - for Christians to march against 'the powers that be'. Rather, Paul tells his Christian readers: *"Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority but from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment to themselves"* (Romans 13:1-2).

He continues: *"For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil"* (v.3). That's their God-appointed function, and if they fail they inevitably face divine judgment. Refer again to what Paul told Timothy. He explains the reason for our prayers: *"...that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour"* (I Timothy 2:2-3).

It's well nigh impossible for you or for me to make the fine judgments faced by governments when war looms. We simply don't have the facts or the military

intelligence - nor do the anti-war marchers. In his 'burden against Babylon' God says: *"The LORD has raised up the spirit of the kings of the Medes [today, Iran] for his plan is against Babylon to destroy it"* (Jeremiah 51:11, also Ezra 1:1). Has God now 'stirred up' President Bush and Prime Minister Blair? Who can know! The outcome, certainly of major conflict, is in His hands. He is Judge of all mankind.

Christian Nations?

There's no such thing, of course, as 'a Christian nation'. There may be on Earth some two billion who loosely use the name. But just because 70% of Americans or Britons claim to be Christian does not make for 'a Christian nation'. The aim of governments is to stay in power and to scrape clean the national pork-barrel. To achieve this they use any means they can get away with. In the West they may on occasion mouth Christian principles - but no nation on Earth is ruled as 'one nation under God'! We *don't* trust Him

Real Christians, however, are few and far between. They are gravel scattered in an ocean. Their role is to develop and to reflect the life and character of Jesus in their personal life - small pebbles in a bowl, their individual sphere of influence. They are motivated by the Spirit of God and thus in their thoughts and actions they strive to reflect the divine morality - as revealed in the Scriptures.

Christians pray that circumstances will be peaceable to enable us to *'lead quiet and peaceable lives in all godliness'*. That may or may not mean our nation becomes embroiled in wars between nations - and we suffer together with non-Christians. The outcome of those wars is in the hand of Him who *'removes kings and raises up kings'* (Daniel 2:21).

That means, sometimes, war.

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CONFERENCE 2003

The annual Conference of the *Churches of God Outreach Ministries* is planned for March 28-30, to be held in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

Delegates from associated independent assemblies come together to review the activity of the past year and to plan future joint projects. If your assembly isn't yet in association - or if you have a personal interest - you are recommended to come along to express your views and perhaps take part in *CGOM* plans. Pray for good success. Together we can make a difference!

Details may be obtained from any of our addresses or from information@cgom.org

FINANCES (COGUK) - February 2003
INCOME.... £ 325 OUTGOINGS... £ 309