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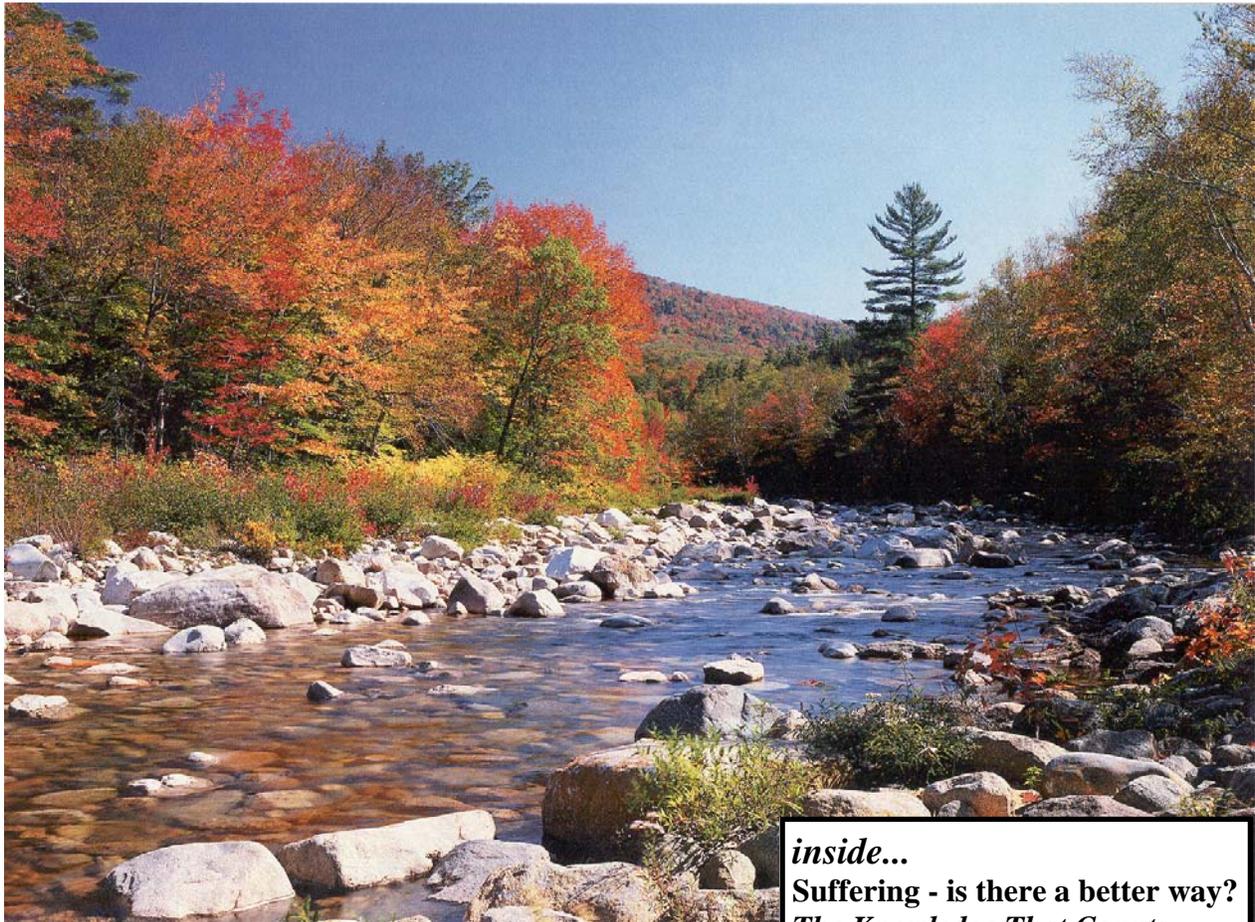
# **Horizons**

*Vol 10 No 3*

*May/June 2006*

*addressing the important issues for today and tomorrow*

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*inside...*

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**CGOM**

Churches Of God Outreach Ministries

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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 57

May/June 2006

## **The Human Condition**

Suffering and death - "nature red in tooth and claw" - is the lot of all creation. The innocent lamb is mauled by the marauding fox, Bambi is torn to pieces by the hungry lion. And everywhere man suffers.

Six billion of us inhabit our shrinking planet. We're born, we experience joy and adversity and then we die. Sometimes horribly. Sometimes within days of drawing our first breath. Most of us are always hungry, don't even have access to clean life-giving water and die early.

## **Suffering...is there a better way?**

A minority may live longer - but are increasingly heir to destructive illness. Hospitals overflow with pain and disability, and new diseases emerge to challenge us.

## **Cause and Effect**

Much of our suffering is self-inflicted. Land which once produced abundantly turns to desert through mismanagement. Vast areas are devastated by pollution and greed-driven deforestation. Ignorance of basic hygiene fouls huge cities and gives rise to epidemic infections. Profit motive ignores sound animal husbandry with horrendous effects on human health. Seas once abundantly stored with riches are overfished, polluted and poisoned - and fish die. Perverted sexual practices and the current alley-cat mentality generate an obnoxious harvest of death-dealing foul STDs, infertility,

## *the story so far...*

A long time ago a very rich young prince married a very rich princess. They were very happy. Then the princess met a guru who persuaded her that happiness would result from joining with him. She persuaded her husband to join her - but as a result they lived in squalor for the rest of their lives. Unhappily.

As their children grew they, too, were poor and became street urchins for many, many generations, living off one another's cast-offs, even killing one another. The couple's children filled the face of the earth.

The King was greatly saddened by the decision of the prince and princess, and distressed by their lifestyle. He saw them as feckless, but still wanted them and their descendants to inherit his massive wealth - but only under certain wise conditions. So he set up a Trust Fund for them.

From time to time he proclaimed throughout his kingdom the terms of the Trust, and throughout the generations his Trustees made them known to the descendants of the prince and princess. Occasionally one or two would accept the terms and they became very rich - and happy. But the vast majority despised the Trustees and thought they were being conned by them. They continued to listen to the guru who had deceived their first parents. As a result they suffered all manner of disease and distress throughout their generations.

Eventually they came almost to the brink of extinction...

In parable, that's the story of mankind!

unwanted and unloved children.

It's all self-inflicted. And we wonder why man suffers?

## **Unique Origin**

But it didn't have to be that way. Man, despite the twisted all-pervasive pseudo-scientific notion to the contrary, is not an animal. Animals act instinctively. They are born, they live out their allotted function and they die - often in the bloodstained teeth of larger predators.

Man is unique. We were not created to die as were the sub-human creatures, from microscopic bacteria to 'primates' or elephants, over which we have stewardship.

The 'King' - the Creator, God - created us in His image. Made us with the intention that we would live for ever. Thinking, planning beings with the capacity to relate to our Creator. No animal intelligence has that ability. The 'spirit in man', deriving from the awesome chemical and electrical interaction of our unique hundred billion brain cells, imparts the unparalleled human capacity to worship, to design, to plan, to appreciate - and to choose.

Like any wise manufacturer, God gave His new creation all the instructions needed to maintain life, to avoid destruction and death. Follow the instructions - the divine guidelines, the divine Manual - and live, He said. Adam and Eve could have lived forever!

## **Why Suffering?**

Why, then, did they - do we - die? Why do we suffer? That 'prince and princess' - our first parents -

## When A Christian Suffers

Will becoming a Christian bring an end to your illness, your adversities?

*Not likely.* All past sin can, in Christ, be freely forgiven. But lose a limb in a drunken fracas and getting into a right relationship with God won't restore it. Nor will it restore to life a neglected or murdered child. We live with the consequence of our past separation from God, our past sins - our transgression of the perfect laws of life.

But that new relationship as a child of God adds a new dimension to life. Faith. Trust, that is, in an ever-concerned for our welfare. In Christ present loving Father who is totally we have the certainty that no matter what befalls us. If we persist in His benign ways to the end of our life God's original creation purpose will be fulfilled in us. We will be resurrected from death to an endless life in an endlessly perfect body.

Now, however, we suffer the conse-

quences of six thousand years of disobedience, coupled with the effects of our own misdeeds and those of the other six billion citizens of our world.

In addition, disciples of Christ will often find themselves derided, even persecuted, for their belief. We will, too, inwardly groan because of the suffering generated by the godless choices of those around us. If it were not for the absolute fact of our glorious future resurrection, wrote the apostle Paul, Christians would be 'of all men most pitiable' (I Corinthians 15:19)!

### Divine Purpose

Jesus, too, warned us that commitment to him would not be roses all the way. "Enter by the narrow gate", he urged. "For wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it" (Matthew 7:13-14). No - resurrection to an endless life does not come cheap. In preparing us for rulership at the side of Jesus Christ in His

Kingdom, God personally tutors each member of the human family who comes to Him by way of His Son, Jesus Christ.

### Support System

Our heavenly Father has a 'support plan' tailored to the needs of each of His children. It's a plan that ensures - if we stand fast - our resurrection from among the dead at the return of Christ to live eternally.

Wrote Paul "*No temptation [trial] has overtaken you except such as is common to man. But God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation also make a way of escape that you may be able to bear it*" (I Corinthians 10:13).

When we experience adversity of any kind - family problems, financial reverse, unemployment, illness for example - our trust in Him, our faith, undergirds us. We know He's there for us - *always*. Even when He seems to have 'gone away'!

Ω

chose to follow the guidance of a fallen and malevolent spirit-being which was intent on dethroning God and claiming the universe for itself. "Enjoy - you won't die" was its siren call. Taken in by Satan - the first cause of evil - they disobeyed the sovereign will of their Creator and, in time, died just as God had warned them. With awful consequences.

Use a dud fuse in your brand-new computer - it won't work. Misuse it, connect it wrongly, tamper with the programme and it will 'crash'. Outside of the benign divine will our first parents lives 'crashed'. Access to 'the Tree of Life' was barred by a God of mercy who didn't wish to see them suffer endlessly in their corrupted state - death for most a happy release (Genesis 3:22).

Since then, the pattern has been endlessly repeated. The same corrupted nature reigns in century twenty-one. With the same consequences. *That's* why we suffer. Don't blame God!

### God's Remedy

That habitual ingrained habit of disobedience - sin - shackles mankind to a way of life that leads to sickness, confusion, death. Over the millennia the Creator has sent His representatives - culminating in His own Son - to invite us to open

that trust fund of eternal life. Few have accepted the invitation. Most have chosen to refuse it.

Given that we are free to choose, God will not coerce us. Patiently He is allowing us to try every humanly-devised option for ushering in man's utopian dream of heaven on earth.

They won't work - though we do keep trying. Only when we are on the brink of worldwide self-destruction will He step in to save the race. Built in to God's plan is the wise provision that none of us suffers more than one lifetime - often mercifully short! Every generation experiences the futility of human solutions divorced from divine wisdom.

All who have ever drawn breath, however, will in the end - by resurrection from their graves - experience the beautiful fruit of a world transformed by a millennium of 'following the Manual'. *cont'd p.7*

**Is it possible to know the Bible inside out - and still miss the point of it? Has the Church of God complete knowledge of the truth? How important is "doctrine" to the Christian life?**

Former Russian leader Nikita Khrushchev reportedly could recite the entire New Testament word for word. Thousands of accomplished and eminent scholars have researched and dissected the whole Bible, and have amassed an awesome knowledge of its content. Yet Khrushchev and many of these same scholars would disdain the label "Christian". Some scholars even profess atheism as their "faith"! For such the Scriptures are mere literature. They don't seek out doctrine as a guide to life. All too many Christians reflect a similar approach to doctrine!

**The Value of Knowledge**

It's clear from the Scriptures that Jesus Christ seeks "perfection" in his people. We must become "*all glorious with no stain or wrinkle or anything of the sort, but holy and without blemish*" (Ephesians 5:27). That is, we are to mature spiritually, to become holy - to "*grow in grace*", as the apostle Peter words it (II Peter 3:18).

However, he also charges us to "*grow in knowledge*". It's the responsibility of God's people to search out from the Scriptures the golden nuggets of pure and wholesome doctrine. And certainly over the years this Church has mined rich treasures of knowledge, unchallengedly derived from the Word of God. We have insight into Bible teachings that for centuries have lain buried in the sinking sands of tradition.

This is no mere academic exercise. For if we are to be truly free, if we are to develop holiness and joy in Christ, if we are to follow the leading of the Spirit - then we need to grow in knowledge.

"*The truth*" said Jesus, "*shall make you free*" (John 8:32). As an example of this freedom, a right understanding of what happens at death in large measure removes death's sting. Our joy in Christ is enhanced by the true doctrine of what at death befalls our "unsaved" loved ones, or the billions of adults and count-

less children who died not knowing Jesus.

And how can we "*become holy*" if our doctrine of true holiness is at fault? The word "holy" signifies separation - separated and belonging to God. As God explained to Moses "...*you shall remember all the Lord's commands and obey them, and not go your own wanton ways, led astray by your own eyes and hearts. This token is to ensure that you remember all my commands and obey them, and be holy unto your God. I am the Lord your God*" (Numbers 15:39-41). True holiness isn't a "sainted look" at a religious celebration. It is submission to what God requires of us! He is jealous, demanding loyalty and obedience of His people. Indeed, a true Christian is a "slave" of Jesus Christ.

It is by searching out and following God's way of holiness as detailed in His Word - not what our own desires dictate - that we learn true holiness. This is knowledge beyond price.

**Blemished Fruits**

Is the Church, then, doctrinally perfect? Do we now have it all sewn up? Is there no further need for the Holy Spirit's guidance into truth? The fact is, never in history have God's people known the whole truth.

To this day there are stains to remove, wrinkles to iron out. Here and there may be blemished doctrinal fruits. But does the farmer fell the tree because of a few damaged peaches? Does the owner raze his home because of a few warped timbers? Or is minor injury or sickness a valid reason for taking your life? So it is with the Church of God. As a body it is healthy, vigorous, strong and abounding in the work of the Lord. But as long as the church organism is in the flesh there will be warts! Doctrinal blemishes are inevitable.

Jesus promised to preserve his church - it will never die, never be extinguished from without. Sometimes it is highly visible, sometimes all but eclipsed. But always there will be new Christians to stand where others have died or been

martyred or gone astray. The Church continues, however imperfectly, to fulfil its divine commission: to proclaim repentance and deliverance, to make disciples, to warn sinning mankind of the end result of its chosen way, to proclaim the good news of the Kingdom of God.

Doctrinal imperfection, however, is not solely a twentieth century affliction. It has dogged the Church for two thousand years! God's people have never known all. Nor can we expect today's Church to solve every theological difficulty that has plagued it since its inception.

Notice some of the doctrinal blind spots of God's saints both of the Old Testament and the New. Errors which in no way invalidated their inheritance in the Kingdom of God.

**A Universal Faith**

Abraham, Moses, Isaiah, Daniel - stalwarts of Bible history - had a far from perfect understanding of the truths of God. Yet they will be a part of His ruling Family.

These esteemed men of God did not, for example, fully understand a teaching which in our day is a flagship doctrine of Christianity - that God wants all men to be saved. He waited some four thousand years before making this fundamental truth crystal clear. Here's how the apostle Paul recounts its unveiling: "*It was by a revelation that his secret was made known to me. In former generations this was not disclosed to the human race; but now it has been revealed by inspiration to his dedicated apostles and prophets, that through the Gospel the Gentiles are joint-heirs with the Jews - part of the same body, sharers together in the promise made in Christ Jesus*" (Ephesians 3:3-6).

God welcomes Gentiles. Yet not even the first century martyr Stephen knew this!

**Circumcision**

Then there's circumcision. It's a rare Christian who would consider circumcision to be essential to the life in Christ. Yet this concept smouldered in the Church for some twenty years before bursting into a flame that scorched Church unity. It was

## THE KNOWLEDGE THAT COUNTS

passionately believed by some influential members of the prestigious and august mother Church at Jerusalem. They even thought Gentiles could not be saved without circumcision. Paul hurriedly convened a conference to determine God's intent - and God's Spirit in them led them to see it as unnecessary (Acts 15:28).`

But whose salvation was annulled because until then they had believed "*they must be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses*"? Certainly not the apostle James - martyred some seven years before (Acts 12:2). And indeed not any of God's people prior to the Council of Jerusalem. God certainly wants His people to move towards purity of doctrine, direction of "all truth". He wants us, like little children, to be teachable. It's our resistance to clear truths of Scripture that brings His just judgment upon us.

### Prophetic Truth

What then of prophecy? Isn't prophetic understanding a mark of "the true Church"? Surely this is necessary!

If so, then we must exclude a whole galaxy of glittering saints - Abraham, Moses, David, Paul to name but a handful. Then there's Daniel. Surely he of all people understood every twist and turn of prophecy? God gave him skill in all knowledge and wisdom. And he "*had understanding in all visions and dreams*". Did he therefore "know it all"? Judge for yourself, from his own pen: "*And I heard but I did not understand*" (Daniel 12:8). What Daniel saw in vision, and recorded, puzzled him! Indeed he was told to "*Seal the book, even to the time of the end*" (v.4).

In fact it wasn't till the apostle John received the visions recorded in the book of Revelation that a right understanding of end-time prophecy even became possible. This was towards the end of the first century, John alone surviving. Yet without this vital book the detail and sequence of prophecy is sealed to our understanding.

The apostle Paul, for instance, wrote at length about resurrection. But not until John pencilled in the details did it become clear there will be more than one future mass resurrection, each sepa-

rated by many years.

Peter wrote of earth's "*being kept in store, reserved unto fire...*" - but John's visions are needed for us to see this awesome conflagration in its time context.

John outlived all the other apostles. So it's likely even they were in ignorance of the full scope of the prophecies.

The Churches of God believe we have a sound grasp of the overall direction of future events - knowledge gleaned from long years of study of the Scriptures and history, and guided by God's Spirit. But we "sit lightly in the saddle" - we won't know with absolute certainty until all is fulfilled. Or not!

Wrote Paul: "*Whether there be prophecies they shall fail For our knowledge and our prophecy alike are partial, and the partial vanishes when the wholeness comes.... Now we see only puzzling reflections in a mirror, but then we shall see face to face*" (I Corinthians 13:8). .

The apostle - God's channel for so much "new truth" - admits his prophetic understanding is incomplete. Isn't it clear that an incomplete knowledge of prophecy won't exclude us from the Family of God! Yet whole denominations originate in the prophetic scenario concocted by one person.

### Time To Change

More important, though, than this failure through ignorance or misunderstanding is another type of prophetic failure. Jesus himself warned of it. Prophecy isn't annulled because it is not fulfilled according to our expectations - especially in regard to the *time* element. How many intricate schemes have been drafted - and torn up - in regard to when this or that prophecy would be fulfilled! Countless hours, miles of print, have been consumed on this vain pursuit.

But Jesus also said, speaking of his return to reward his servants: "*But if he is a bad servant and says to himself, 'The master is a long time coming' and begins to bully the other servants, and to eat and drink with his drunken friends, then the master will arrive on a day that servant does not expect, at a time he does not know, and will cut him in pieces*" (Matthew 24: 26-51).

In other words, the prophecies will come to pass in God's time and in God's way despite our incomplete knowledge

But notice the vital importance of what Jesus Christ went on to say: "*the master...will cut him in pieces. Thus he will find his place among the hypocrites*" (v.51). Why? Because he misinterpreted the prophecies? Not at all. The bottom line is that our reaction to "prophetic failure" - as we see it - is the key to our personal future. If, when Jesus returns, we are found (however late according to our private interpretation) still totally absorbed in doing our allotted tasks in His work - then we are blessed. We will share in the Kingdom of God (vv.46-47).

The alternative (v.51) is horrific.

### Is Doctrine Important?

Jesus - in whom, said Paul, "*lie hidden all God's treasures of wisdom and knowledge*" and who has "*all power*" - assured his Church he would never forsake it (Matthew 28:20). He is the living Head of the Church and walks in its midst. Without committing himself to preserving the Church (nor any individual of whatever standing) from error Jesus in a very real way guides and directs and corrects it - just as he did in apostolic times (Revelation 2, 3).

Sadly, since the earliest days of the Church - and to this day - many Christians have ceased to respond to the Head. They are at sea, anchors dragging and without compass or bearings. And doctrinally lost.

Such a calamity can indeed happen. Throughout history whole Christian communities and individual Christians, whole denominations, have been shipwrecked through gross error, or moral decline, or refusal to grow in knowledge - or simple neglect of what they understood. The words of Stephen, the first Christian martyr, still ring loud and clear. Addressing the leadership of the people of God in his day he said "...*you always fight against the Holy Spirit*" (Acts 7:51).

The Church of God in first-century Pergamon is an example for today's Church. Jesus first commended them for not denying his basic teachings. He

then warned them not to entertain those who "...hold to the teachings [doctrines] of Balaam...and of the Nicolaitains" (Revelation 2:14-15). These teachings concerned idolatrous worship - not serving God in the way and at the times He prescribed. It's a doctrine close to God's heart.

And if change were not evident? "So - repent," said Jesus. "If you do not I will come to you soon and make war upon them with the sword that comes out of my mouth" (v.16). So it is important that we do all in our power to get right the true faith.

Jesus has not left his Church rudderless or without guidance. Notice his words to the apostles: "There is still much that I could say to you, but the burden would be too great for you now. However, when he comes who is the Spirit of truth, he will guide you into all truth" John 16: 12-13).

Against all odds this guidance to the apostles has been preserved for us - in the Holy Scriptures.

That Spirit of truth is still in the Church of God, still guiding it. And step by step, as the Church is open to it and ready for it he expands our understanding of these same Scriptures. It's our responsibility to seek out and maintain true doctrine.

While we are nowhere promised - in this life - a complete unveiling of the mind of God, we have been furnished with the essentials for eternal life. "His divine power", wrote the apostle Peter, "has bestowed upon us everything that makes for true life and religion" (II Peter 1:3). Jesus Christ is committed to reveal to his Church every scrap of information that will expedite his work on earth. And all the power needed to enable the people of God to enter the Family of God.

#### What Counts?

It's clear, then, that every single one of God's people recorded in Scripture, with the sole exception of Jesus Christ himself, has lived in error to some degree.

While the Church taught circumcision, or proclaimed salvation for Jews only, or had incomplete understanding of the

doctrine of resurrection, or misunderstood prophecy - at that time the Church was in error. Or was at best teaching incomplete knowledge. Yet a man like Noah, with his family, alone survived a worldwide flood - without complete knowledge. It is recorded of him: "By faith Noah, divinely warned about the unseen future, took good heed and built an ark to save his household" (Hebrews 11:7). He had but a glimmer of light about the coming Messiah and of God's grand design for mankind. But he died in faith, and will be rewarded at Christ's coming.

Lot, termed "a righteous man", fled Sodom's destruction unscathed having only limited knowledge of God's plan and purpose. He simply trusted God.

Then there's Abraham who sacrificed his career, his family, his civilized life-style and "went out not knowing whither he went". He wrote, as it were, a blank cheque acknowledging God's claim on the whole of his life. For a hundred years he surmounted trial after trial.

He resisted every imaginable pressure to opt out. Yet he endured, dying with the unique epitaph "the friend of God". And without perfect knowledge.

What set these men apart and gave them high esteem with God? Was it that they fully understood doctrine? Or prophecy? Did they comprehend the whole mind of God?

By no means. What counted with these men - and with a countless host of other men and women of God - was their willing submission to what they understood, coupled with the quality of their lives. Typical of them all were God's satisfied words concerning Abraham: "For I know him that he will command his children and his household after him and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment" (Genesis 18:19). Years later God gave majestic promises to Abraham's son "because that Abraham kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes and my laws" (26:5).

They lacked complete doctrinal and prophetic knowledge. But once called of God they walked with Him. They committed to obedience to His laws

according to the knowledge they had. They diligently sought out truth and obeyed what they understood. And they lived - and died - by faith.

This is what counts with God!

#### Crusade With Us

Today, Christianity is sorely divided. Traditional denominations can't, for example, even agree a common date for Christmas or Easter. Other traditions also split over not only the calendar, but when to observe festivals on that calendar. Clearly, when sincere Bible students can "incubate different offspring from the same egg" it's likely it's not a matter which greatly bothers the egg's producer - the Author of the Word!

The Church of God must focus on its divinely-appointed purpose. Tunnel vision focused on disputed doctrinal territory leads only to war. Swollen egos are puffed up as exegetical swords are crossed. Rather, let's concentrate on the foundation truths of God's Word and unite to reach out to a dying world with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Let's focus on the knowledge that counts!

Soon Jesus Christ will return to our planet as Supreme Ruler over every government. With him he will bring rewards for work accomplished by his people. Doctrinal perfection won't be among those works! When this momentous event occurs - will you be found still labouring in his vineyard, still abounding in the work of the Lord despite prophetic appearances? Will he find you have given him your all, dedicated your spiritual and creative and temporal resources to him? Will you have submerged your desire to "get it right" in wholehearted support for the global mission of God's Church, in promoting the true unity of the Church? Will Jesus Christ find you active in your allotted task?

Or will you have abandoned the work of God in a fit of pique because of some error - real or imagined, doctrinal or prophetic - in one or other part of the Church of God? Will you embrace gross error simply because your leader asserts "we were wrong"?

True knowledge is important, and our doctrinal understanding may yet lack perfection. It may be incomplete. Nevertheless let's all take *cont'd p.7*

# The Makings of an Apostle

## It's time to look at what the New Testament tells us about 'apostleship'

At the heart of governance in the church of God lies the function of 'apostle'. The term is avoided by some church organizations but embraced by others. When used it is in the context of church authority - one man (usually) rules - and dominates - the organization, his word unchallenged in doctrine, in administration

Jesus is the archetypal Apostle (Hebrews 3:1) but the New Testament notes numerous other 'apostles'. They include The Twelve, Paul, and several others. What is their function? How did they operate?

### The Twelve

The word *apostle* simply signifies 'a person (or thing) sent'. Jesus during his ministry, sent out twelve of his disciples to 'herald' the nearness of the Kingdom of Heaven. They had been carefully selected following close observation and a night spent in prayer. These men he named 'apostles' (Matthew 10: 2). They were originally selected by Jesus for special training and were with him from the beginning to the end of his ministry. This was essential to their calling (Acts 1:21f ), as were the 'signs of an apostle': endurance, signs, wonders, works of power (Acts 2:43, II Corinthians 12:12).

Frequently called 'The Twelve', they were also 'apostles of the Lamb' (Revelation 21:14), 'apostles of the Lord' (Jude 1:17) and 'holy apostles' (Revelation 18:20). So special are they that they are forever remembranced in the foundations of the 'holy Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God'.

## apostolic work...

There is no indication in the Scriptures that the apostolic authority was in any way autocratic. The Twelve were endowed with special powers to 'launch' the New Testament church - an extension of the ministry of Jesus. Note Paul's approach to the brethren in Corinth: 'Not that we have lordship over your faith, but are helpers of your joy: for in faith you stand fast' (II Corinthians 1:24).

The apostles, guided by Jesus, set the pattern for the governance of the church and passed on his teachings in purity. The church is '...built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the chief corner stone' (Ephesians 2:19-20). That is, on the writings of the Old and of the New Testaments. These represent '...the faith once for all delivered to the saints' (Jude 3), and which was to be passed down the generations: '... the things which thou hast heard from me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also' (II Timothy 2:2).

Wherever they laboured, to these ends the apostles, instructed, corrected and encouraged the infant church of God.

When necessary an instruction was given always based on Christ's teachings (I Corinthians 7:10). Or, when there was no such guidance it was made clear the guidance was personal (I Corinthians 12:25). By virtue of God's oversight such 'apostolic opinions' are preserved in Scripture for our guidance.

### The Apostle Paul

Paul, too, was an apostle equal to the Twelve. During his lifetime the apostle Paul fought to maintain his status as an apostle. He had been a bitter and violent persecutor of the infant church, and indeed himself recognized his unworthiness on that count to be an apostle equal to the Twelve (I Corinthians 15:9). But Jesus himself had commissioned him and taught him. On the road to Da-

mascus Jesus struck him blind to get his attention. To a local Christian to whom he was sent Jesus said of Paul:

*'...Go, for this one is a chosen vessel to Me, to bear My name before nations and kings and the sons of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of My name. (Acts 9: 15, 16). His ministry exhibited all the 'signs of an apostle' and he certainly 'endured' (II Corinthians 12:12). It could be said that Paul - guided and inspired by Jesus - contributed more than any to the future education of the church.*

The Twelve and Paul were uniquely commissioned by Jesus. Their function [see sidebar] can not be duplicated at any time, in any church organization.

What, then, of those called in the Scriptures 'apostles of the churches'?

### Apostles of the Churches

Paul had numerous co-workers helping to fulfil his commission. At least some are called 'apostles [KJV messengers] of the churches' (II Corinthians 8:23). Epaphroditus, for example, is so called: 'But I thought it needful to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow-worker, and my fellow soldier, and your messenger [Gk apostle] and minister of my need' (Philippians 2:25). He was the 'apostle' to the Philipian assemblies. This class of 'sent ones' were faithful brethren entrusted by their local assembly with important functions. Another example may have been those men sent out by the church at Antioch (Acts 13:1-5) - in this case to preach. They were not necessarily 'elders, deacons' though some may have been. Note the varied use of the word for 'deacon' in the Scriptures. (In Judaism the term was applied to officers who conveyed the Temple tax from the local synagogues of the Diaspora to Jerusalem.)

unsigned articles are by the Editor

Recall that at the end of the first century the Ephesian assemblies were encouraged by the apostle John to discern which 'apostles' were authentic (Revelation 2: 2). In Paul's day such bore with them '*letters of commendation*' (II Corinthians 3:1) as they were possibly 'strangers' - unknown - to the assembly (III John 5,6).

Thus the term 'apostle' had a dual application - to those especially, uniquely and personally commissioned by Jesus (The Twelve and Paul), and to those delegated by their local assembly for specific tasks.

It would not be wrong to assume that in the church of century twenty-one there could be some such 'apostles of the churches'. There are indeed such functionaries in the churches today but they don't have the title. The governance of modern church of God organizations, however, can exclude such emissaries, given the control structure in place. But there are, sadly, false apostles as in the first century.

### Modern Apostles

The title ('apostle') is often viewed as an office - even a 'rank' - rather than what it really describes, a function, and in modern usage is confined to 'the man at the top'. He is considered, by himself and by his followers,

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**KNOWLEDGE...** *cont'd from p. 5*  
up the challenge of reaching out to our dying world with the bitter-sweet message of the true Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Let's give our best shot to this magnificent crusade! Ω

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## BORN IN INDEPENDENCE

"All the churches of the first age, however closely united by the bond of faith and love, and however ready to lend to each other all mutual good offices, were under their own jurisdiction, and governed each one itself without foreign aid, or any external authority.

"Nowhere, either in the sacred books or in any other ancient documents, is anything recorded from which we might learn that some churches were dependent on the authority and will of other churches larger or more dignified than they. On the contrary, evidences meet us on all hands which place it beyond doubt that all had an equal right and were entirely peers and equal to one another.... Each society [*ie* local assembly] was a sort of little state governing itself by its own laws - laws either introduced or approved by the people"

*Mosheim, church historian,  
quoted in Alexander: Anglo-  
Catholicism not Apostolic*

"The societies which were instituted in the cities of the Roman Empire were united only by the ties of faith and charity. Independence and equality formed the basis of their internal constitution"

*Gibbon: Decline and Fall  
of the Roman Empire*

"It appears plainly from the sacred narrative that though the many churches which the apostles founded were branches of one *spiritual* brotherhood - of which the Lord Jesus Christ is the heavenly Head - though there was '*one Lord, one faith, one baptism*' for all of them - yet they were each a distinct independent community *on earth*, united by the common principles on which they were founded and by their mutual agreement, affection and respect; but not having any one recognized head on earth, or acknowledging any sovereignty of one of these societies over others"

*Whateley's Essays on the  
Kingdom of Christ*

to have the same status as did Peter or John or the other apostles directly appointed by Jesus. Often he claims divine inspiration for his pronouncements on doctrine, and sees himself as in unbroken 'apostolic succession' from the Twelve.

Jesus has, of course, imparted spiritual gifts individually upon his or her baptism to each Christian . Among these gifts is that of 'teaching'. A blend of skills enables some individuals to clearly expound the Scriptures. But, even though so gifted, a teacher can at times be in error. He or she is not infallible. Some human emotion - such as vanity, arrogance - can instill a sense of superiority and if the individual is charismatic can attract a supine following. Even Paul recognized his limitations: '*Imitate me*' he said, '*as I also of Christ*' (I Corinthians 11:1). Peter, too, was in error at times (Acts 10:9-17, Galatians 2: 11-14).

At the end of the first century the apostle John commended the brethren in Ephesus for their discernment in regard to those claiming to be apostles: '*...and you tried [tested] those pretending to be apostles and are not, and found them to be liars*' (Revelation 2:2).

It's a lesson the modern church of God must heed. Ω

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### Suffer...? *cont'd from p.2*

All who have ever drawn breath, however, will in the end - by resurrection from their graves - experience the beautiful fruit of a world transformed by a millennium of 'following the Manual'.

But His 'trust fund' is still there, now, for every individual who wants to tap into it. It's there for you. The riches God has in store are available to you - if you change direction, believe His original offer of living for ever, and enter a personal relationship with Him through Jesus Christ.

*There's no other way.* Ω

# Dealing with the 'S' Word

**The "S" word doesn't appear too often in the newspapers, nor does it feature much on radio or TV - yet the media are full of it! Indeed very little human behaviour would today be classified in the media or by psychologists - even in church - as "s..!"**

But the Bible has much to say about "sin". It's the one obstacle between you and fulfilling the purpose for which you were created. Fail to deal with it and your life, no matter what you have accomplished, will have been an empty shell. Futile. You may as well wave goodbye to unending life beyond the grave.

Call it what you will, *sin* is part and parcel of our nature.

## Ignorance Of Sin

Sin is largely ignored today. Powerful preaching at one time wrought in many minds a fear of judgment to come, a desire to get right with God. Not any more.

No matter how explicit a contemporary preacher may be about sin and its awful consequences - there is little response. Rarely is there a deep conviction of having offended against God or against man. No crying out to a righteous but merciful God for forgiveness.

The very concept of sin has been blunted and blurred in decades of psychological conditioning by atheistic and humanist educationalists of every kind. Teachers, psychologists, psychiatrists, counsellors - and (perhaps especially) ministers of the Gospel - have all calloused the minds of our generation to sin.

Around the world Bible-based mo-

reality is ignored and sneered at by so-called intellectuals. Parliament daily opens with prayer - but immediately shuts God out of its law-making and its deliberations. We are beginning to reap the sad and painful reward for that folly.

What is "sin"? It doesn't exist says a generation of hedonists. "Eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die". There is no sin, no external morality, no God and no fearsome judgment to come. As Isaiah prophesied we "*call evil good and good evil*". But there is a God - only the fool denies it - and He has clearly defined sin for us.

Sin goes deep. Every ill that assaults mankind results from it. And unless that sin is dealt with in God's prescribed way the end result is a waiting for fiery judgment.

The Bible clearly defines sin: "*Sin is transgression of the Law*", the apostle John tells us (I John 3:4). Not only the Law of the "Ten Commandments" - but the very attitudes of mind which lead to the breaking of the whole Law of God. So - not just the act of adultery, but the imagery, the thoughts, the preparations which lead to the act. Not just murder but the plotting, the hatred that precedes it (Matthew 5-7). And not just idol worship, bowing before an image, but worshipping God at a time and in a place and in a manner He has not prescribed, and making Him play second fiddle to anything.

Notice some closing words of the Bible: "*Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life and may enter in through the gates of the city [the new Jerusalem]. For outside are dogs and*

*sorcerers and whoremongers and murderers and idolaters and whoever loves and makes [practises] a lie*" (Revelation 22:14-15).

Who, then, has not sinned? Whether or not you see yourself as a sinner doesn't affect the result. All of us have sinned and all sin leads to death. If not dealt with it leads to endless oblivion in an inescapable global conflagration. None of life's suffering will have been of any value. The future is a black hole - in contrast to the never-ending excitement and power and joy of those who have dealt with it in God's way.

## Turn From Sin!

Man was created perfect, but free to choose. His choice was rebellion against his Creator. Immediately, a merciful God provided a pre-planned way to neutralise sin and get rid of guilt. That way was through a promised Messiah and through the shedding of blood.

God requires each of us to turn from our sin. To quit. To repent. And He has provided a way to deal with our past and future sin. Through the shed blood of His own Son, Jesus the Christ (Messiah), we can have our sin purged, washed away, forgiven. No other religion on earth holds this secure promise! When we come to sorrow for our sin, sorrow to the point of wanting to stop sinning, sorrow that works a transformation in our life - then we can simply ask God's forgiveness through the shed blood of Jesus Christ. And He will give it.

Believe this! Believe God's promise! When we do, all the burden of our sin and guilt is removed as far as the east is from the west. Ask God to give you an open mind, a fear for the consequence of unforgiven sin - and a vision of what God has in store for those who come to Him through His Son Jesus Christ. Ω

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## MiniStudy

### The Law: *Blessing or Burden?*

“Take my yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and you shall find rest unto your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.” (Matthew 11:29-30)

Are the commandments and statutes of God a burden? Not too many people would argue with the boss if he told them to “take an extra hour off for lunch.” Yet, man refuses to rest on the Sabbath day. We refuse to tithe even though God promises great blessings for doing so. (Malachi 3:10) “Bring you all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in Mine house, and prove Me now herewith, says the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.” Most people look at the commandments of God as a burden or restriction yet they are described as “The law of liberty.” (James 1:25) “But whoso looks into the perfect law of liberty, and continues therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.”

That phrase seems an oxymoron, but if we would all live by the “law,” we would all be truly free. (John 8:32) “And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”

Look at the following verses; some of the key words are in bold>.

- “The law of the LORD is *perfect*, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is *sure*, making wise the simple. The statutes of the LORD are *right*, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD is *pure*, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the LORD is *clean*, enduring forever: the judgments of the LORD are *true* and *righteous* altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them is your servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward. Who can understand his errors? Cleanse you me from secret faults. Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression.” (Psalm 19:7-13)
- “Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are *true*, whatsoever things are *honest*, whatsoever things are *just*, whatsoever things are *pure*, whatsoever things are *lovely*, whatsoever things are *of good report*; if *there be* any virtue, and if *there be* any praise, think on these things. (Philippians 4:8)
- “Whosoever commits sin transgresses also the law: for *sin is the transgression of the law*.” (1 John 3:4)
- “Know you not, that to whom you yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?” (Romans 6:16)

The law can be a burden if you make it so. Like a rug, it is soft, comfortable, warm and safe if you rest on it. If you carry it or wear it, it is a burden. The law delivers us from the dominion of sin. Look at the divine law as a blessing, not a burden.

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