

NEW Horizons

Vol 12 No 5

September/October 2008

addressing the important issues for today and tomorrow



inside...

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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 Scriptures. Over the centuries that truth has been buried, dug up, buried again. Our desire is to restore the simple apostolic message. We hope you will be excited by what the Scriptures reveal about life, and the horizons beyond

the views expressed by the writers are not necessarily those of the Editor

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new Horizons

Issue No 71

September/October 2008

'Holiness' has become tangled with notions of halos and monks and hermits and a 'saintly demeanour'. What is the reality?

The 'holy person' lives separate from the world - in a monastery, a nunnery. They are perceived as other worldly, consuming their time in prayer or religious ritual. Your local vicar or minister or Imam - and certainly the Pope - may also be generally so considered. In reality, holiness is more down-to-earth.

Saint is the Bible synonym for a Christian. That is, a man or woman in whom dwells the holy Spirit: *'...You are no longer ruled by your desires, but by God's Spirit, who lives in you. People who don't have the Spirit of Christ in them don't belong to him'* (Romans 8:9 CEV). The term doesn't imply the 'holy one', the 'saint', is what is popularly called 'sainted'! That individual is perfect only in the degree to which he or she reflects the character of Jesus.

Holiness applies not only to humans but also to objects, places *etc.*. The Scriptures talk of 'holy ground', of 'holy assemblies', of 'holy Sabbath', of 'holy garments', of 'holy gifts'. The Hebrew term is *qodesh*. It simply means - in line with the above definition - something *separated, set apart* for God's service.

Notice. It is *God* who determines what is and is not holy. In establishing the formal worship of His holy nation (Exodus 19:6) the LORD mi-

nutely detailed the form and dimensions of the Tabernacle. He gave the templates for each holy garment, each instrument, each sacrifice. Deviation resulted in dire consequences - *eg* Leviticus 10:1-2. Not some capricious 'act of God' but a demonstration of His own inherent holiness - to which we, as our destiny, are to aspire: *'...the Scriptures say, "I am the holy God, and you must be holy too'* (I Peter 1:16).

This has implications for the day-to-day life of all who profess to serve the one Creator God.

Worldly Contrast

Most folk - even the irreligious - lead reasonably moral lives. We go about our business aware of our impact on others, and often act 'the good Samaritan'. Some, strongly influenced by a Christian ethic as detailed in the Bible, lead positively fine lives. Without such our society would sink of those who oppress their nation, their employees, their neighbour.

That influence, sadly is on the wane. The bed-rock of society, stable marriage, has been undermined by false socialist principles imposed from the top. Sound principles of living are suppressed, and pre-school children subjected to amoral 'ethics'.

The divide between Christ-like behaviour and what passes for morality was recently highlighted by a judgment in the British High Court. The case was a privacy action by a high profile sporting light - a married man

- against a newspaper which exposed his grotesque sado-masochism and involvement with prostitutes. The judgement went against the newspaper on the grounds of invasion of privacy. In effect, the Judge set down in British Law, for the first time, that morality is neutral. Do what you like in private as long as no-one gets hurt, is the theme. (Though how 'hurt' is his family?)

Contrast that with the teaching of Jesus. He taught that his followers would stand out from the crowd - but in a vastly different manner. You are, he said, like a hill-top city - visible to all. You are a light in a dark place. Not that we are capped by halos or carry religious regalia. It's our *behaviour* that sets us apart, makes us 'holy'. Such a lifestyle could be summed up in the life of Job: *'...There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and turned away from evil'* (Job 1:1). Along with Noah and Daniel he was singled out from mankind for his righteousness (Ezekiel 14:20).

Here is God's verdict: *'...Have you considered my servant Job? for there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that fears God, and turns away from evil'* (v.8). He was, in New Testament terms a *saint*.

That's the lifestyle to which every true Christian, whatever his or her shortcomings, aspires!

A Christian Life

How, then, would you recognize a Christian? Note that Christianity isn't a list of 'do's and don'ts' (though

Take Time to be Holy

Request the free articles:
University of the Home and Spend a Lifetime - Together

some make it so.) Having entered into covenant with Jesus through repentance (a determination to change) and baptism God then imparts His holy Spirit. This is an implant of the divine nature: *'... his divine power has granted unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that called us by his own glory and virtue; whereby he has granted unto us his precious and exceeding great promises; that through these you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in that world by lust'* (II Peter 1:3-4).

That's why the Christian is 'holy' - God's holy Spirit indwells us, His nature. We are set apart for a divine purpose, and from that moment on we, as His sons and daughters, work to become perfect. Not that we become perfect on our own, but with that 'divine power' that Peter describes we can escape the kind of corruption mentioned above. Our goal is to reflect the character of Jesus - who himself behaved exactly as would our, and his, Father. So, 'moral neutrality' for the Christian is not an option. Having become part of His spirit Kingdom we are motivated by the Spirit to imitate Jesus.

[Note: if we have God's Spirit in us we are already part of the divine Family. That is not a goal to strive for but a present reality.]

Divine Standards

But how do we know God's standard of morality? Jesus gives an answer: *'...Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God'* (Matthew 4:4). He directs us for our lifestyle guide to *'...the word of God'*. That was his model, and with that model before us we - empowered by the Spirit - can modify our behaviour. If you have access to the Christian Scriptures you may readily compile a list of spiritual objectives!

We are in some degree bound by our habits. Indeed, life would be intolerable without the God-given ability to learn, practice and do many activities unthinkingly. [*Request the article **Reap a Destiny***]. But ingrained habitual patterns of behaviour - many

Holy in its varied forms stems from the Greek *agios*. The common word *saint*, for example, occurs in the New Testament sixty times. 'Sanctification', too, comes from *hagios*. One definition is *'consecration by God to be His own'* (ISBE)

the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control (Galatians 5:22-23)

sinful - die hard, with or without the help of the Spirit. But, writes John: *'...If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness'* (I John 1:8-9). And to Moses: *'...The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth'* (Deuteronomy 4:31). And that's the foundation of holiness.

Take Time

Anciently, agriculture was 'the bread of life' for the average Israelite, and farming analogies are frequent in the Scriptures. *Cont'd p.8*

TABERNACLES 2008

Dear Friends,

The *Feast of Tabernacles 2008* is just around the corner. How very quickly it comes each year!!

Trumpets: September 30
Atonement: October 9
Tabernacles: October 14-20
Eighth Day: October 21

Below is some information for those who might wish to consider one of the **CGOM sponsored sites**. Wherever you attend, enjoy the fellowship, give of yourself to your fellows - and return home with a renewed spirit!

The three CGOM-sponsored sites this year are:

Collingwood, Canada – hosted by the *Canadian Church of God*

For more detailed information: www.candianchurchofgod.com, then click on their *Feast Notes* link

San Antonio, Texas – hosted by the Church of God, San Antonio

For more detailed information: www.churchofgodsa.com

Tulsa, Oklahoma – hosted by the Tulsa Church of God

For more detailed information: www.tulsachurchofgod.net/fot/

Check back often for updates on the speaking and activities schedules!

Visit these websites at your earliest convenience and please consider joining us at one of our sites! We would love to have you celebrate with us this year. If you haven't yet made firm plans for elsewhere, give CGOM a consideration!

Also, if you can offer service in some capacity, please contact the coordinator of the feast site.

Again, regardless of where you attend, have a wonderful and profitable *Feast of Tabernacles 2008!*

Richard Gawith

Tulsa Church of God
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Christmas...*what would Jesus do?*

A time for family reunions. A celebration of the Saviour of the world.

Virtually a universal celebration.

So - what would Jesus do?

Jesus had some strong words to say about those who follow him. We're told to put him above everyone else - including our close family. Here's what he said: '*...You cannot be my disciple unless you love me more than you love your father and mother, your wife and children, and your brothers and sisters. You cannot come with me unless you love me more than you love your own life.*' (Luke 14:26 CEV).

That's serious business. And didn't Jesus teach that before we commit to him that we '*...count the cost*' of that discipleship? In this case, better not to 'have loved and lost'.

If Jesus and his way of life is our first priority that, said the Saviour, will inevitably bring family disunity. As Christians we are to be 'transformed: '*...Don't be like the people of this world, but let God change the way you think*' (Romans 12:2). We have a whole new mind-set, a whole new set of values, a different outlook on life.

Consequences

More than likely virtually all a Christian's relationships - including with our close family - will be with '*...the children of this world [age]*'. Much of what Jesus expects of his followers will be rejected by them. It can stoke up fires of hostility. Yet he said our relationship with him and with the Father, must come first.

Jesus' own family thought *he* was mad. He warns: '*...If the people of this world hate you, just remember that they hated me first. If you belonged to the world, its people would love you. But you don't belong to the*

world. I have chosen you to leave the world behind, and that is why its people hate you. Remember how I told you that servants are not greater than their master. So if people mistreat me, they will mistreat you. If they do what I say, they will do what you say. People will do to you exactly what they did to me. They will do it because you belong to me, and they don't know the one who sent me' (John 15:18-21 CEV). You can see why he urged us to '*...count the cost*' of discipleship.

Recall also: '*...Go in through the narrow gate. The gate to destruction is wide, and the road that leads there is easy to follow. A lot of people go through that gate. But the gate to life is very narrow. The road that leads there is so hard to follow that only a few people find it. Watch out for false prophets!*' (Matthew 7:13-15 CEV).

There has - so far - been little active violence against devout Christians in the Western world. Elsewhere - not so good. In Israel, for example, 'Messianic' Jews faithful to Jesus Christ are daily persecuted. Recently a pastor's home was bombed, his son seriously injured. They are with official connivance subject to taunts and opposition - even from some Rabbis.

There are, then, obvious consequences for committed discipleship - not only for celebrations at Christmas but also for many other areas of life.

Idol Practice

The informed believer can't have escaped the fact that Jesus wasn't born in mid-winter. That's well-

established - look up any standard encyclopaedia. Nor will it have escaped you that the 'Christmas' celebrations are essentially nothing to do with the birth of the Saviour but are a modern take on the ancient Saturnalia which celebrated the 're-birth' of the sun following its annual decline. Clearly its origins are rooted outside the faith of the Bible. But does that matter?

Biblical Christianity long precedes the first century! [Read: **6000 Years of Christianity**]. In fact there is but one fundamental faith that represents the divine will. It is built into the *kosmos*. It was revealed to man by our Creator. Like God Himself it doesn't change. And all other forms of worship - though derived from that gold-standard original - are idolatrous and will in time be eclipsed, expunged from the *kosmos*. The observance of Christmas included.

Christmas is, goes the song, 'the season to be jolly'. Christmas has become noted for its excess. Despite the undoubted pleasure of gift exchange (but can't that be done at any time), Christmas has become a burden on family finances. And the jollity is too often expressed in over-indulgence in food and alcoholic excess.

In the context of his own culture, the apostle Peter sums up what could be our modern Christmas celebration: '*... Christ suffered here on earth. Now you must be ready to suffer as he did, because suffering shows that you have stopped sinning. It means you have turned from your own desires, and want to obey God for the rest of your life. You have already 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*'.

He adds: '*... Now your former friends*

Each quotation from the Bible in New Horizons is from the translation which most clearly expresses the meaning

wonder why you have stopped running around with them, and they curse you for it' (I Peter 4:1-4 CEV).

To be a real Christian clearly means a total change of life-style. The early Christians, of course, didn't observe the birth of Jesus on December 25th, all indications pointing to the time of the autumn festival of *Tabernacles*. [Read *The Feast of the Nativity*] Gentile converts did, however, face similar challenges and no less a change of life-style.

Those who reject Christmas usually come to this understanding after prolonged exposure to the so-called 'spirit of Christmas'. It may have been enthusiastically celebrated from childhood. So to abandon the sentiment, the partying, the happy (if you are so blessed) family reunion, the carols, the general (if superficial) camaraderie - all this can be emotionally painful. But it is a matter with which the Bible-believing Christian must deal.

Then there's family and relations - for only you among them may no longer observe the festival.. There's the lead-up: shopping, decoration, gift-selection *etc* for your loved ones. There's the usual carol service, Christmas dinner, Boxing Day. It is a challenge to disappoint everyone. Yet isn't this something of the 'pain' Jesus warned about?

The Jesus Way

Add to this that the Bible teaches the observance of a different set of 'holy days'. They are days that were observed by Jesus, by the apostles - and by the first Christians, both Jew and Gentile. Observe them and you are thought 'odd' - though they're not as odd as eggs and rabbits and sun-rise services at Easter. And lies to our children about old men in red outfits flying around the skies and popping down the chimney - '...if you are good'.

Christians, of course, don't worship

totem poles - though the use some make of 'the cross' in various sizes is noteworthy.

But doesn't Jeremiah's description of idol worship ring bells?: '*...Don't follow the customs of those nations*

The Biblical observances are clearly outlined in the Scriptures—in Leviticus 23, for example. Search the Scriptures—Old and New Testaments—and you will find no reference to current Christian practices: Sunday, Christmas, Easter *etc*.

God's revealed annual observances are the framework within which His people express their obedience to His will, and within which they develop His divine nature.

. For further explanation request our booklet *God's Holy Days*, and the article *The Feast of the Nativity*

CGOM articles (no charge) related to the Bible Festivals:

Get Ready for Sunday

God's Holy Days

Remembering Jesus

The Easter Story

Passover - a double celebration

Tabernacles: mankind in flesh

Eternity: the closing of

man's day

The Origins of the Calendar

these are available in print, or you may view and download at

www.cgom.org

Bible Festivals 2008:

Trumpets September 30

Atonement October 9

Tabernacles October 14-20

Eighth Day October 21

see page two for information on Outreach Ministry sites for the Feast of Tabernacles

who become frightened when they see something strange happen in the sky [like the sun at it's lowest point in late December?] Their religion is worthless! They chop down a tree, carve the wood into an idol, cover it with silver and gold [baubles, lights?], and then nail it down so it won't fall over. An idol is no better than a scarecrow. It can't speak, and it has to be carried, because it can't walk. Why worship an idol that can't help or harm you? (Jeremiah 10:2-5 CEV).

Said the LORD: '*...Don't follow the customs of those nations*'. Jeremiah here echoes the words of the LORD to Moses and Israel before entering Canaan: '*... the nations that live there worship other gods. So after you capture the land, you must completely destroy their places of worship--on mountains and hills or in the shade of large trees. Wherever these nations worship their gods, you must tear down their altars, break their sacred stones, burn the sacred poles used in worshiping the goddess Asherah, and smash their idols to pieces. Destroy these places of worship so completely that no one will remember they were ever there. Don't worship the LORD your God in the way those nations worship their gods*' (Deuteronomy 12: 2-4 CEV).

Now, of course, we as Christians '*...worship in spirit and in truth*'. We don't go smashing up idols - or cutting up our neighbour's Xmas tree. Christianity is personal. But the lesson is clear: '*...Don't worship the LORD your God in the way those nations worship their gods*'.

No way would Jesus be celebrating His birth on December 25! Nor decorating a tree - no matter how pretty nor how excited the children. Nor gorging on turkey or goose.

Wrote the apostle Paul: '*...Imitate me as I imitate Christ*' (I Corinthians 11:1). All who profess Jesus Christ should so do. Ω

It's all in the genes. No, it is a lifestyle choice. Is there an answer?

How we live out our sexual lives increasingly preoccupies not just the media but also the armed forces, governments - and the church. Once upon a time an individual's sexstyle was personal, private. And if "aberrant" was swept into the closet.

Not any more. A debate now rages within the worldwide Anglican communion as to whether it is appropriate to appoint homosexual priests to the office of Bishop. A homosexual priest was recently approved for Bishop in New Hampshire. The Australian Uniting Church have voted to permit the ordination of practicing homosexuals.

We humans are intensely sexual - our survival depends on it! Whatever comparative statistical analysis may say about 'then and now', sex and all its beauty and all its abuse is now paraded in bold headlines.

Sexual Decay

A century ago statistics on marriage and divorce were not headline news. Or the level of sexually transmitted disease. Or the number of child abductions, cases of child abuse, rape, pornography. Such are now flaunted as if sex were a new discovery. Television is barely watchable, eyes are averted at the news-stands, certain newspapers avoided - at least by so-called 'moral prudes'. And hopefully by those who wish to follow the precepts of Jesus Christ.

The openness, however, certainly hasn't stemmed the tide of what used to be termed immorality and its sickening consequences. Britain, according to a Parliamentary Committee, is in the middle of a 'sexual health crisis'. Rates of gonorrhoea and chlamydia have doubled in six years, syphilis has soared almost 500%. Over a million are being treated by sexual disease clinics. 'Sex' pervades our culture. What was once 'evil' is now

'good', and 'darkness' has become 'light' - just as the Old

Testament prophets predicted (Isaiah 5:20).

Because of the abuse of human sexuality, sexually transmitted disease is almost epidemic, resulting in snowballing widespread infertility. (Health professionals firmly link much infertility with promiscuity - especially in the teen years.) AIDS is destroying millions worldwide, as is the vile practice of abortion - almost 200,000 annually in the UK.

Immature kids ignore or don't realize that sex leads to unwanted pregnancy with consequent burdens on themselves, families and society. And, encouraged by government and the media, the building block of a stable society, marriage, is in process of decay. Indeed more than half of children of British-born mothers are now born outside marriage.

Sexual faithfulness excludes much heart-break. Infertility often results from 'sleeping around', especially among children - one in seven underage girls are infected with chlamydia ('the silent disease'). A new case every ten minutes! Disregard of this divine principle has serious consequences. Yet government agencies actively promote teen 'sexperimentation'.

'Alternative lifestyles' are promoted as of equal value. Homosexual and

The Sexual Enigma

lesbian liaisons now receive the full package of benefits available to married couples.

Age-old Problem

Undoubtedly sexual dysfunction has plagued mankind since we were evicted from Paradise. There always was violent rape, infants were incinerated (not in a hospital as today, but inside an idol as a burnt offering), adultery, fornication, homosexuality. It was all there.

But it was in Eden that the guidelines for human sexuality were first set before mankind. By our Creator. And perfectly tailored to the beings He had just created to perfection. Any deviation from the divine guidelines for human sexuality will inevitably end in tears! We function best when we stick to those ground rules. Imagine a world where infidelity is unknown: no adultery or 'shacking up' or promiscuity. And no foul sexual disease, no divorce (or divorce lawyers), no pornography, no paedophiles.

Principles of Life

In respect of our sexuality God revealed vital fundamental principles, based on a single male-female partnership committed for life.

A man and a woman are to stay in partnership for life. Think of the grief avoided by this act of mutual self-discipline. Properly tended, a marriage can last until death, and can be joyous. But the widespread notion that marriage is just a temporary convenience leads to easy divorce with consequent 'serial marriage'. Many marry simply for the fancy wedding!

In homosexual relationships 'monogamy' is rare. While a few such long-term partnerships exist, yet over forty percent of homosexual men have hundreds of partners during their -

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 is for many a
 'Book of Mystery'*

unsigned articles are by the Editor

usually - shortened lifespan resulting from illness.

Covenant-bound couples were created to produce offspring. God issued the self-limiting instruction: *'Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth'*. The trauma and expense endured by naturally infertile married couples witnesses to this human desire to procreate. (Jesus recognized, of course, that some few individuals would correctly choose to remain single and celibate.) Same-sex liaisons no matter how loving or long-lasting frustrate this divine instruction. If homosexuality were universal - and an estimated one percent only of mankind is homosexual - it would end the human race in a generation.

Divine Image

Only heterosexual relationships align with the divine plan for mankind. Our physical time-limited human condition is merely the 'clay model' which the Creator is shaping into His divine image - individuals who will live forever as a part of the divine Family. God reveals Himself as 'Father'. Jesus is His first-born Son. Men and women can become His children, brothers and sisters of Jesus and joint-heirs with him of the created universe.

God, in other words, is a Family. This relationship is reflected in His church, which is 'the Bride of Christ' (Ephesians 5:25-32). We were created 'male and female' - perfectly designed only for a heterosexual relationship. The divine instruction was that each pair is to *'cleave to one another'*, partners - male and female - contributing to a unified whole, and neither complete without the other.

Battling Bishops

Debate over homosexuality has raged within the Anglican community worldwide for well over a decade. A 1991 confusing statement made a distinction between homosexual practice in the general church populace and among the 'clergy'. It was

deemed okay for the former, wrong for the latter. A line was drawn: homosexuality is acceptable but its practice is sin - if you are a bishop.

Sparked by the appointment of an openly homosexual priest as a bishop - he was this year banned from the Lambeth Conference - big clerical guns have been placed in battle order to defend both abstinence (evangelicals) and practice (the 'liberal wing' of the church). Schism has been threatened, especially from overseas bishops (Nigeria, West Indies, Indian Ocean). Both factions claim Biblical authority for their position!

But Is It Sin?

However Paul's words (Romans 1:26-32) are interpreted by those who seek solace in an interpretation contrary to their face value, there can be no doubt about the original divine instruction in the Old Testament. Said God: *"When a man lies with a male as with a woman, both have committed something perverse; they will certainly be put to death"* (Leviticus 20:13). As Paul tells us: *"The wages of sin is death"*.

Remember - the only 'Bible' known to Paul and the first Christians was what we know as the *Old Testament*. The *New Testament* was yet to be written.

Indeed the foul diseases and curtailed lifespan (up to twenty years below average) of practicing homosexuals bears witness to the destructive perverseness of the practice.

Hence the apostle Paul's urgent warnings that Christians must avoid such relationships - for their eternal salvation is at stake: *'...No one who is immoral or worships idols or is unfaithful in marriage or is a pervert or behaves like a homosexual will share in God's kingdom. Neither will any thief or greedy person or drunkard or anyone who curses and cheats others. Some of you used to be like that*

(I Corinthians 6:9-11 CEV).

Male and female homosexuality is *'contrary to nature'*, Paul asserts (Romans 1:26) and an *'error'* (v.27). It has not been identified in our genetic inheritance, though factors in the womb *may* have affected sexual orientation. Like other deviations from 'normal' it is a thought pattern that becomes fixed habit, spilling over into practice. Says James: *"Each person is tempted when he is drawn away and enticed by his own lusts. Then, when the passion has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and sin when it reaches maturity produces death"* (ch 1:13-15).

Homosexuality is, in the divine perspective, *sinful*. It is *not* to be contrasted with heterosexual behaviour but with defects in the latter - as, for example adultery, paedophilia, bestiality, narcissism, transvestism or promiscuity in and out of marriage. All are perversions of divinely intended sexual behaviour. There may be some individual predisposition to these - but they have to be conquered. And there is victory through the power of God's Spirit.

But that is why Jesus Christ came, that our sin, whether it is envy or greed or adultery or promiscuity - or homosexuality - can be repented of and forgiven through the love that God has for us - expressed in the awesome sacrifice of His Son.

With the indwelling Spirit of God to strengthen us, a new pattern of behaviour can take hold. Wrote the apostle John: *"If we confess our sins he is so faithful and just as to forgive us our sins - and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness"* (I John 1:8-10). There is hope for *all* sinners!

All of us have character defects, and as Christians we are to strive towards victory over them. Jesus addressed in principle the heart of the issue of human sexuality: even harbouring the

cont'd p.8

Blood ...the stuff of life

Of all people, Christians - portrayed in the Scriptures as having the Spirit of God indwelling them - ought to give heed to health matters. What does the Bible say about 'the stuff of life'?

God's instruction to Aaron could apply to Christians: *'...You must learn the difference between what is holy and what isn't holy and between the clean and the unclean'* (Leviticus 10:10 CEV). It is also clear in the Scriptures that - long before the time of Moses - blood, especially, was prohibited by the Creator for all mankind. *'...life is in the blood, and you must not eat any meat that still has blood in it'* (Genesis 9:4 CEV).

It is perhaps not surprising, then, that a large body of Christians (Jehovah's Witnesses) prohibits the use of blood transfusions. Many of Witnesses fear death - if they should need surgery. The reason? They believe that accepting a blood transfusion will not only cut them off from their church friends - but exclude them from God's Kingdom. Should they fear? Is their church right? Is this prohibition supported by the Bible?

Prohibited Substance

The blood prohibition is based on the Biblical text, Genesis 9:4: *'.....life is in the blood, and you must not eat any meat that still has blood in it'* This was imposed by the LORD just after the Great Flood in Noah's day.

After our first parents were excluded

from the Garden until the Flood mankind was 'vegetarian', but afterwards - whatever the cause - there was a vast reduction in longevity and some specified kinds of animal flesh were defined by the LORD

[see our MiniStudy: **Is Anything Unclean?**]

The nutrition derived from meat comes, of course, by way of our digestive system. The various elements (many unique to animal flesh) are

The prohibition on use of blood transfusions was introduced by the Watchtower Society in 1945. The decree has of late been relaxed to allow 'partial blood' infusions while continuing to exclude the main components of blood. Many adherents of the Society have died as a result of the ruling, and many more have been excluded from the church for their breach of the regulation. Recent changes, however, mean the congregation/elders no longer excludes a member, but the 'culprit' is deemed to have excluded themselves. The same sanctions (exclusion, etc) apply to such

Request: Will God Heal You?

healthy heart or kidney is transplanted to replace a diseased organ.

The transfused blood is not absorbed into every cell as with food, but simply replaces the oxygen-carrying ability of blood lost in an accident or during surgery. (This has been admitted in the JW *Awake!* publication - Oct 22 1990.)

The liquid part of blood (plasma) provides 55% of the volume (and is 90% water) and is the vehicle for transporting nutritional elements around the body.

(It should be noted that while the governing body in Brooklyn acknowledges blood transfusions as organ transplants - and bans them - yet it permits, since 1980, other organ transplants.)

Life-giving

Blood sustains our physical life. Lose a substantial portion of our 'eight pints' and we will die. On the other hand, a blood transfusion can restore life - 'soul in the Scriptures' - to the dying, and millions contribute to this by blood donation to a blood bank. Far from being negative, then, a transfusion of blood contributes to life and is not to be discouraged.

We should consider, in this matter, the symbolic role of blood. As in the text: *'...the life [Hebrew nephesh, soul] is in the blood'* (Genesis 9:4).

The ancient practice of a 'blood covenant' emphasises its role in human relationships. 'Blood brotherhood' is a familiar term - the blending of two 'souls' or communities by exchanging blood. It represents life itself (Genesis 4:10). Among the heathen it degenerated into the drinking of blood (eg Psalm 16:4).

And the practice of *sacrifice* - instituted by Jehovah following the first sin (Genesis 3:21, 4:4) - involves the shedding of the blood of an innocent victim: *'...no sins can be forgiven unless blood is offered'* (Hebrews 9:22 CEV). It anticipated the sacrifice of Jesus.

Primarily, the shedding of blood in sacrifice restores our relationship with God. It is our 'blood covenant' with Him (cp Exodus 24:6-7), mediated through the sacrificial blood-giving of Jesus (I John 1:7), and commemorated by Christians in the annual *Lord's Supper* [see MiniStudy 40: **The Lord's Supper**]

Hence, because of its symbolic life-giving properties blood is in a sense 'sacred', for all life is precious to

God. For this reason it is avoided in our food - the reason for the *kosher* regulations within Judaism, and similar regulations in Islam (Halal).

As children of God each Christian is, as Peter wrote, to '*...be holy as I [God] am holy*'. By abstaining from eating products containing blood is one way we proclaim we are His. **Ω**

Holy ...cont'd

James, for instance: '*...the husbandman waits for the precious fruit of the earth, and has long patience for it, (ch 5:7)*'. Apply that to the 'fruit of the Spirit [*see BOX*]'. They capture a glimpse, a snapshot, of God's character, His holiness - and are the characteristics to which Christians aspire.

Like the fruits of the earth they don't, following our baptism, develop instantaneously—as some misunderstand. No. The Father. gives the increase by carefully tending their growth in each Christian during their remaining life-span.

Holiness in any human being is the expression of the divine character as defined in His Word. **Ω**

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Enigma...cont'd

thought of adultery is sinful, he says (Matthew 5:27-30). That applies, too, to homosexuality and all other human frailty.

Homosexual thought and practice can be - and has been - overcome. As with all sin, it can be forsaken and forgiven. There is hope.

Hope!

To enter that Family relationship with God is a matter of choice. God calls on all of mankind to choose the way of life He has revealed. It's time to resolve mankind's sexual enigma by a return to the basic principles of human relationships which are the foundation for life - for now, and for the endless ages of eternity.

But God requires holiness of life. Wrote the apostle Paul: "*Be not misled; neither profligates, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor partakers in*

homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the avaricious, nor drunkards, nor slanderers, nor robbers shall inherit God's Kingdom" (I Corinthians 6:9-10).

The apostle doesn't stop there. He continues: "*And some of you were just that* [including, he says, homosexuals]; *but you were washed and you were made holy and you were made righteous by the power of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God*" (v.11).

All sin can - upon repentance - be forgiven through Jesus Christ. To make sense of this life and to live forever *everyone* must forsake what God says is sinful, and turn to what is pure and holy.

There's no way other than through Jesus the Messiah - for anyone who walks God's earth - to become part of the eternal Family of God. **Ω**

What's the Point...?

In our 'civilised' world we are all but drowning in information. '*...of the making of books there is no end*' wrote King Solomon. Daniel: '*...knowledge shall be increased*'. Add in newspapers, magazines, radio, television - and don't forget the internet - and we can be overwhelmed.

How much of it do you remember? Does it impact your daily life? Most of what we hear and read goes over our head. We tend, also, to be selective. Our daily paper is the one that best matches our own outlook! The rest we filter out.

What about this magazine, *New Horizons*? Straight into the waste? Just a cursory read? Something to growl at? When you read a piece with which you disagree - do you check it out, look into the Scriptures to see if is just so? Or do you ignore it?

What we believe largely derives from mum and dad, or your teachers, or your pastor. We are programmed to simply 'take it as gospel'. But on matters of religion there's more to or most of us what we now believe - 'doctrine' - is mere tradition. Demonstrably it isn't all a reflection of what the inspired Scriptures teach.

So - read *New Horizons* Bible to hand. We may not, however, always get it right! And if you challenge us on a matter from the Bible we will address it. But don't just ignore us! **Ω**

MiniStudy

Is Anything 'Unclean'?

'...I [the apostle Peter] have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean' (Acts 10:14)
'...whatsoever from without goes into the man, it cannot defile him; because it goes not into his heart, but into his belly, and goes out into the draught? This he said, purging all meats' (Mark 7:18-19)

Peter's comment sounds reasonable for a first century Jew. Indeed would anyone disagree? Only in most extreme circumstances - or in a celebrity game-show - would we eat some of the vilest species on the planet. Yet virtually anything that moves is eaten somewhere. So why would the Creator set aside some creatures as unfit to eat? Are 'unclean foods' merely an obsolete religious ritual? Did Jesus transmute unclean to become clean?

- The background to this topic is the instruction God provides in regard to food suitable for consumption - or not: *'...The LORD told Moses and Aaron to say to the community of Israel: You may eat any animal that has divided hoofs and chews the cud. But you must not eat animals such as camels, rock badgers, and rabbits that chew the cud but don't have divided hoofs. And you must not eat pigs...'* (Leviticus 11:1-4 CEV). He continues to identify other 'clean and unclean' creatures, and to give sound environmental and hygiene advice in their handling
- In the beginning man ate only selected (some is poisonous) vegetation (Genesis 1:29). The Flood and various changes altered the balance of nature, and JHVH prescribed flesh: *'...every moving thing that lives shall be food for you'* (Gen 9:3). Noah already knew which animals were 'clean', and would use only such for food. The difference between clean and unclean creatures did not originate with the Exodus from Egypt. They were known to Noah: *'...Of every clean beast you shall take to you by sevens, the male and his female: and of beasts that are not clean by two, the male and his female'* (Genesis 7:2). Post-Flood, animals (without their blood) became part of the diet (Genesis 9:3). Earlier, Abel's offering (Genesis 4:4) was a 'clean' animal
- It's well known that the 'unclean' animals were generally considered unwholesome. This is especially true of the pig, the very digestive system of which is totally unsuited for adequate processing of its food intake. It is designed as a scavenger, and is prone to worm infestation among many other drawbacks
- Today there is widespread disregard for this divine guidance - either through misunderstanding of the concept or simply because it is considered to be 'Jewish' (*ie* 'Old Testament stuff') - now obsolete since it is claimed that 'Jesus nailed it to the cross'. Should we ignore the difference between clean and unclean?
- Unless your conscience dictates otherwise (Romans 14:23), eating an 'unclean' substance won't affect your salvation, nor will observance of these physical laws save you. However, as they are instructions handed down to us from the Creator of these creatures surely they are worth consideration. God has a concern for mankind's health. JHVH covenanted: *'...you will no longer suffer with the same horrible diseases that you sometimes had in Egypt. You will be healthy'* (Deuteronomy 7:15 CEV). To reap the benefits of the Covenant Israel's part was to follow the guidelines issued through Moses - including the food laws. In the context of 'clean and unclean' the LORD said: *'...I brought you out of Egypt so that I could be your God. Now you must become holy [separate], because I am holy!* (Leviticus 11:45 CEV). Christians are to be 'holy' (*eg* II Corinthians 6:17)
- What about Peter (Acts 10:14)? Did he change his mind and tuck into a pork chop? Not likely. Interpreting the vision he says: *'...God has shown me that he doesn't think anyone is unclean or unfit'* (v.28 CEV). He needed to learn to abandon his racial exclusivism - not to change his diet
- Did Jesus wave a magic wand over every unclean - and perhaps poisonous - animal, bird or fish to make them edible (Mark 7:17-19)? Jesus here confirms that what we eat won't defile us spiritually. All that goes into the mouth passes through the digestive system and is expelled without making us better or worse people - though it may cause illness. It's what is generated in the human mind that defiles us (vv.20-23). Not here, not anywhere does Jesus change these fundamental food principles. The expression *'...purging all meats'* (KJV) is *foods in general* - not just animal flesh. 'Foods' are those items of our diet that are *'...sanctified [set apart] by the Word of God [the truth - v.3] and prayer'* (I Timothy 4:5). Those 'Word of God' texts that set apart certain natural products as food include Genesis 9:3, Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14

Ω

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