

NEW **Horizons**

Vol 13 No 6

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addressing the important issues for today and tomorrow



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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

Who We Are

The *Churches of God Outreach Ministries* is an international association of independent local assemblies - Christians who meet together for worship, instruction in the faith and fellowship. Each assembly is self-governing according to Bible principles, but co-operates through our Conference with other like-minded assemblies to work towards agreed evangelistic goals

These goals are within the framework of the commission set for his church by Jesus: "...going, therefore, disciple all nations, baptising them...and teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19-20). He further commanded that we "...Shepherd...[and] feed my sheep".

To these ends we publish Bible-based literature - eg our bi-monthly Newsletter OUTREACH, NEW HORIZONS magazine, the BIBLE BASICS on-line home study course, and the 32-lesson Study Course. The *Outreach Ministries* also supports a network of independent fellowships and scattered brethren

We cordially invite all independent fellowships of whatever size - and individuals - to associate with us in this worldwide ministry. Our *Statement of Beliefs* and a *Publications Catalogue* is available from any of our addresses or from our web site www.cgom.org. We are pleased to offer you, without charge, any of our publications

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If you would like a copy of our *Statement of Beliefs* please request it from any of the addresses listed

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For some Christians there is a constant struggle to cope with 'The Law' Do we really need a lawyer?

All of us—apart from a few psychopaths—have an in-built concept, however ill-informed or unformed, of right and wrong. It's part of our human nature. Those precepts known to Judaism and to Christianity as 'the Ten Commandments' have their echo in all faiths. Paul sums it up like this: *'...when Gentiles who have no Law obey by natural instinct the commands of the Law, they, without having a Law, are a Law to themselves; since they exhibit proof that a knowledge of the conduct which the Law requires is engraven on their hearts, while their consciences also bear witness to the Law, and their thoughts, as if in mutual discussion, accuse them or perhaps maintain their innocence'* (Romans 2: 14-15).

In other words, mankind knows it is wrong to murder or steal *etc*—though we often indulge (or suppress)—the impulse. Indeed the last six of the Commandments express the well-worn *'...do to others as you would have them do to you'*.

What is widely known as 'the Law of Moses' (In reality, *God's*

Law) was enshrined at the heart of the Constitution which the LORD gave to the fledgling nation of Israel, around 1500BC. As with any civilised nation, the basic law was accompanied by case law and appropriate penalties. Paul informs us that the codified Law was given to Israel four hundred and thirty years after the Covenant of faith made with Abraham (Galatians 3:17).

Abrahamic Faith

In Abraham's day (he was born about 2050BC, about four centuries after the great Flood) the world would have been to us an unfamiliar place. The population was low, having been generated from just three fertile families in under five centuries. The powerful and godly witness of Noah—a *'preacher of righteousness'* (II Peter 2:5)—his son Shem, and the prophet Enoch was still fresh in the minds of the relatively few and not yet widely-scattered inhabitants of earth.

So the memory and lessons of the Flood still exerted a powerful influence on the human mind. (Indeed it still echoes down the millennia—see *Britannica*, 11th edition, for almost universal Flood traditions).

There was, too, a patriarchal society, dominated by strong lead-

ers—Nimrod, for example, and Abraham. There was a priestly line known as *'...the order of Melchizedek'* (Genesis 14:18). That office was held not by genealogy (as, later, was the Aaronic priesthood), but by men of faith.

At that era of human history the divine foundation life principles were firmly imbedded in human consciences. The Canaanite king of the Philistines, for instance, was concerned that Isaac's deception could provoke adultery and bring guilt and judgment on the nation (Genesis 26: 9-11). The most powerful and widespread Canaanite tribe (the Amorites), too, had not yet plumbed the depths of depravity—behaviour which later earned them extinction as a nation (Genesis 15:16). Said the LORD: *'... And in the fourth generation they [Abraham's descendants through Isaac] shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet full'*.

The elite of Egypt, in Joseph's lifetime, were well aware of these divine principles of life (Genesis 39). Remember, this was centuries before the divine Law administered by Moses.

Right from the beginning the transgression of these principles had natural consequences: Adam, Cain, Abraham, Abimelech, Joseph—all 'pre-Moses'—are recorded as being conscious of 'sin'.

Do You Need a Lawyer?

Recall that the apostle John tells us '...sin is transgression of the law' (I John 3:4). Abraham was familiar with the principles of divine Law. In renewing the Covenant with Isaac his son the LORD said: '...in your seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; Because that Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws' (Genesis 26:5).

Essence of Civilization

Although the Law as incorporated in Israel's national Constitution was 'not binding' (there were no prescribed penalties) on the patriarchs yet they were nevertheless guilty. '...by nature'—ie by the light of conscience and reason and observation they could tell right from wrong.

The divine principles were, however dimly, a part of folk memory, handed on from the first man. The LORD makes clear that the foundation of godly living was—*faith*: '...the just shall live by his faith' (Habbakuk 2:4). It's a principle hammered home by the apostle Paul: '...no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, is evident: for, The righteous shall live live by faith' (Galatians 3:11).

That is, observance of a law—any law—however minutely, is in divine terms 'normal'. That's how all mankind should behave for an orderly and peaceful society. The Law of the LORD as codified through Moses is the optimum—the model to which every code of law should aspire. It is the measure of perfection, and any deviation has adverse just

consequences. Hence our broken world.

For the Christian, then, observing the 'Law of Moses' (actually, the Law of the LORD—eg Exodus 16:28) is also a given. It's how God wants us to live for our own good. *But it doesn't earn for us salvation.*

And when that Law is transgressed—the apostle John calls that 'sin' (I John 3:4)—a penalty is exacted in our conscience and in our body. Only the sacrifice of Jesus can blot out what is otherwise an indelible stain. Not 'good works', not recurring rituals, not self-flagellation can erase it.

It's logical, then, that the divine Law ought to be integral to the life of individuals and nations. It is for our benefit.

Gospel Essence

Jesus made clear that this Law has relevance for our day: '...Heaven and earth may disap-

The last six of the Ten Commandments given to Israel are universal principles recognized by all—except perhaps by decadent governments. (Through laxity they ignore the elderly, encourage violence and sexual sin and covetousness etc.)

The first four of the Commandments—ignored or distorted both by the secular and most Christian communities—identify the one true Creator God.

Of especial significance is the command (*Heb* word) to observe the seventh-day Sabbath. It is a vital sign that identifies the God we worship.

pear. But I promise you that not even a period or comma will ever disappear from the Law. Everything written in it must happen' (Matthew 5:18 CEV).

As we have observed, it has had universal application from man's beginnings. Under Moses it was enshrined in the Constitution of the new-born nation of Israel. As the foundation of its justice system it had appropriate penalties for transgression.

Legal Principles

But do Christians need a lawyer—or a priest—to interpret the Law for them?

Several principles apply:

- The whole of the Scriptures—Old and New Testaments—teach spiritual lessons for Christians
- Guided by the Word, Christians are personally and individually responsible to apply the Law in our daily lives
- The administration of laws relating to the 'secular' (last six of the Ten) has been assigned by God to the secular authorities (Romans 13, I Timothy 2:2, Titus 3:1)
- Ceremonial Laws relating to the Temple worship ('uncleanness') need not concern us except as examples of the principles of holiness, separation, hygiene. Note that Jesus, as did Paul, negated the Pharisaical practices of purification—laws not enjoined in the Scriptures
- Laws relating to the sacrifices point to Christ and are a rich treasury of teaching concerning his life and *cont'd p.8*

AFRICAN OUTREACH

A message from Brian Davis

August 2009

In two weeks we will leave for Benin in Equatorial Africa. It's not a glorious place, no safaris there, not a land of plenty, not a place for vacations, not known for its beautiful buildings or resorts, not a place of comfort.

Why do we want to go there? It's a place where the history and culture are dark. A history of slave trading and a culture of war and bloodshed, and chieftain homes built of mud mixed with blood. Ruins of slave holding pens are still there. Benin is still a center for voodoo and animism, animal and snake worship, witchcraft. Why do we want to go?

When I use the word "we", I don't mean just my wife and me, but rather the inclusive concept of *we* as a part of the body of Christ, doing a part of what the body of Christ should be doing.

A new song by Casting Crowns includes the lyrics, "*If we are the body, why aren't his arms reaching, why aren't his hands healing, why aren't his words teaching, why aren't his feet going? Why is his love not showing them that their is a way*"

We, as part of his body, reach out to the needy, to those who live in spiritual darkness or in spiritually dark places. As we reach out, in various ways, with his word and his way, we often hold back from reaching out to third world countries where it is the darkest and where the needs are the greatest and where our dollar can go the farthest. Why?

It's a question that includes how can we best help, what can we provide that would help the most? How would our literature and our preach-

ing help those who speak other languages? For example, we visited a congregation of about 150 persons, and 17 languages were represented.

That begs the question who, who could speak to them in their language, who would also be converted, who would be dedicated, who would do follow up ministry, who would feed the flock, who would be zealous, who would be trained to lead, and most of all who would be trustworthy?

These questions and more, form barriers to an outreach. They are barriers to the body of Christ in it's outreach to the most needy places and peoples. They are barriers to bearing much fruit on the vine, as our Father desires, fruit for the lowly, weak and base of nations and tongues, among the poorest of the world.

The matter of how do we help and whom do we trust weighed heavy on my mind for over ten years. We all need to be involved in outreach, including to these places. We need to be doers of good works as many scriptures admonish. We must know who and how! There are thousands of great stories and holy sounding pleas coming from dark places where the needy are, but many are clever scams. I read of congregations who supported a mission in Africa for a year, and then visited them only to find gross fraud. Matthew 24:12 tells the result; "and because of iniquity, (wickedness) the love of many shall wax cold." Most of us are both careful and fearful of giving because of fraud, yet for our love to grow cold and for us to hold back from good

Quotations from the Bible in New Horizons are from translations which clearly express the meaning in modern terms

works to the poor makes us unfruitful on his vine.

Why Benin? Because the Lord has made the way there easier for us.

- *Other languages?* Yes, Michael Porter speaks several tribal languages plus French and English
- *Converted?* Yes, Michael grew up Muslim and converted to Christianity. He learned English in London, and returned to Africa to serve his people and to teach them Christianity. He and his wife Stella have labored for 30 years in this work
- *Able, Committed, Dedicated, Zealous?* Yes!
- *The Sabbath?* Over ten years ago, Michael was a student in his Bible class, and pressed he father on the Sabbath question until he studied it further, and so both his family and the flock he was feeding keep the Sabbath
- *Feast?* About nine years ago, Michael found a place to use a computer and sent out requests for information on how modern Christians keep the feasts of the Lord. Mama Margaret Forster, in Bermuda, answered his quest and sent him info and literature. She also sent help for the brethren there to keep the feast of the Lord. A few years later, she sponsored a Church of God radio broadcast, "*Born To Win* in Benin. The last email I received from her this year included news of her retirement and recent move back to her homeland, England
- *Who is trustworthy*—one of the biggest hurdles? In 2007 I wrote Michael to tell him that my wife and I would be going to Niger with a group on a mission trip. Michael came twelve hours, via bus, to meet us in Niger to work with me drilling water wells and setting hand pumps in villages there. Michael and I worked together every day, we ate together, sang together, prayed together, talked together, and studied to-

gether. His heart is true, his zeal is strong, his knowledge is secure, he is a dedicated and loyal laborer in that area for the Lord. He has raised up 8 congregations, including 7 outlying villages. He does outreaches to the poor in Benin, Togo and even in Niger. He plays *Born To Win* on the radio in Benin every Wednesday and Sabbath. Also, he and one of his associates do a follow up on the radio in both English and French. If they have any funds, in response to requests, they mail out literature and Bibles

These are hurdles and bridges that would take us years to cross. God has laid a marvellous groundwork for us in Benin. He has shined a great light in a very dark place. His work in Benin is bearing good fruit, but our poor brethren there are still in need of our help. They need literature, Bibles in English and French, funds for transportation to Feasts of the Lord, mosquito nets for malaria protection, especially for children. They need clothing, pens, pencils, writing materials, feminine hygiene items,

and many more things

Why do we go there?

- Because they are our brothers and sisters in Christ in need
- Because there are others who stumble in darkness and need light. They need to taste good fruit from the vine so that they can exclaim, "The Lord tastes good", and therefore seek him
- Because we as the body, are commissioned to go and reach and teach and love
- Because we are admonished to do good works and to continue a pattern of good works
- Because, as individual Christians and as part of the body of Christ, we need them to reach out to as much as they need us. They need Christ in us to supply their needs and, as James 2:14-16 admonishes us, we need to do more than say kind words. "I will pray for you brother" is not enough for the needy, if we don't supply those things needful
- Bearing the fruits of love toward

God and toward fellow man (the two great commandments) involves action and sacrifice, lest we become unfruitful and our love grow cold

- We go to bring to our congregations, names and faces of both those in need and those who are trustworthy, faithful, dedicated laborers doing God's work there

Finally, we go to help facilitate outreach with trust, to point out who is in real need, to show who is trustworthy, by bringing back trustworthy proof through reports and photos to enable a continual flow of love from the body of Christ so that His living water which flows into our innermost beings can also flow out to others. It's part of His plan.

P.S. We are going by our own means to bring back this information in order that 100% that is given will go directly to Benin, Africa. We will be giving a report on our trip as soon as we return during the Feast of Tabernacles in Squaw Valley. Follow up reports and photos will be at a later date. **Ω**

Resident Aliens

'Multi-cultural' is today's buzz word. Incomers 'not like us' are invited to establish their own culture, their own religion, even their own legal codes and dress, in the hope of promoting racial and religious harmony. Experience has thrown considerable doubt on its effectiveness—as Denmark and France will testify.

Given our human nature it isn't surprising that such are widely viewed as 'aliens', and often subjected to abuse.

The Christian Scriptures, however, highlight one group of 'resident aliens' which does have divine approval: And which has His powerful backing: *Bible-observing Christians*.

Writing to believers, the apostle Peter said: '...I beseech you as strangers

[paroikoi] and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul (I Peter 2:11). Anciently, such 'strangers' dwelled and worked in a country and contributed to its welfare—but were denied certain civil rights.

Christian 'aliens' (Gk. *paroikoi*) retain a unique culture that flies in the face of the world's commonly-accepted values—often to the point of derision, persecution and perhaps martyrdom. They may be viewed with suspicion, considered odd—even (or especially) by other professing Christians.

Peculiar People?

How, for example, would you react if

there were just one home in your street that wasn't festooned with Christmas lights? Or whose children were 'denied' the fiction of Santa Claus? And who clearly avoided the usual Christmas festivities?

Would your charity extend to such, knowing they held to a different faith—Muslim, for example? And if, in your Christian neighbourhood, these residents claimed to be *Christian*? Indeed these believers may add to their oddity by other aberrations from the teachings of your local church. Church on Saturday. Holy days that differ from the usual Christian calendar of festivals (Christmas, Easter, saints' days *etc*). Unusual dietary habits.

These are the folk that Peter calls 'aliens'! These, indeed, were the beliefs and practices of all **cont'd p.8**

John Morton (NZ)

Faith is usually associated with belief. It is the confidence a person has in what they believe.

It also implies assurance, conviction, reliance and trust. In a religious context it means having absolute confidence that God is the supreme, divine power and authority whose word is law and that He can accomplish what He has promised.

The Bible defines faith as "...the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." (Hebrews 11:1). By this definition faith is evidence of what is believed. Some may be satisfied with faith as evidence, but others will not. To them the concept of faith is just as intangible as the "things not seen". They seek more substantial evidence of God.

Things not seen

Those who doubt are challenged by God to consider the creation as evidence of His existence, "For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse:" (Romans 1:20).

The complex and amazing creation with its life sustaining processes and diverse but interdependent species is no accident. Something so intricately designed indicates a designer (Isaiah 40:12, 26). It required a creator! The universe is governed by laws of nature that signify a lawgiver. The things seen are evidence of that which is not seen.

Evidence of Faith!

On the other hand, the challenge for those who *do* believe is that their faith is evidence of that God whom they cannot see. If it is to be credible as evidence then faith must have substance. Mere belief or religious emotion is not enough to convince non-believers. To be effective evidence, faith must be discernable in the life of the believer.

Conclusive and undisputable proof of God will of course come to all in the resurrection, "Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation." (John 5:28-29).

All doubts will be dispelled when everyone comes to stand before God, "And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God;" (Revelation 20:12). Faith will determine how we stand, "...for by faith you stand." (II Corinthians 1:24). Those without faith will not please God, "But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that comes to God must believe that he is, and that

he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." (Hebrews 11:6). Those who have it will be rewarded.

Things hoped for

A reward has been prepared, "But as it is written, Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." (I Corinthians 2:9). He wants mankind to become '...sons and daughters' (II Corinthian 6:18), joint heirs with Christ (Romans 8:17), who is the image of his Father (II Corinthians 4:4).

God is creating man in that same image (Genesis 1:26), with the same divine nature that is common to both the Father and Son so that they all, "... may be one; as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that you have sent me." (John 17:21). He wants believers to partake of His divine nature so they are perfected to the fullness of Christ to live forever in God's Kingdom (Ephesians 4:13). These are the rewards - the things that are not seen but for which believers hope.

That divine nature that God wants to share with His sons and daughters is described as love, "God is love; and he that dwells in love dwells in God, and God in him." (I John 4:16). When activated love gives substance to faith, "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments:

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and his commandments are not grievous.” (I John 5:3). How believers live and worship is determined by law, “*Jesus said unto him, You shall love the Lord your God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, You shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.*” (Matthew 22:37-40).

The law is an expression of God’s mind and to live by it is to partake of His nature which sets those who do apart from the world, “... you might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world...” (II Peter 1:4).

More than Belief

Faith obviously involves a lot more than mere belief - it is a way of life that is evident to others by the conduct of the believer. Belief is the initial foundation from which one progresses to perfection, “*Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God.*” (Hebrews 6:1). They go from faith to faith as more is revealed, “*For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.*” (Romans 1:17).

Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these you might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue;

and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that you shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacks these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and has forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if you do these things, you shall never fall: For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

II Peter 1:4-11

Through faith believers are saved by grace. That is God’s gift to mankind, “*For by grace are you saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.*” (Ephesians 2:8). But if that faith is not perfected it comes to naught, “*And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.*” (I Corinthians 13:2). Love is the outcome of faith perfected, “*And now abides faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity [love].*” (I Corinthians 13:13).

Faith not substantiated by love is of little value. It must be substantiated by the way believers worship God and in how they treat others. Consequently love becomes more noticeable in their lives as they grow from strength to strength - from faith to faith. Then their faith becomes credible evidence of the hope they have for what God has prepared - the evidence of things not seen. **Ω**

Waiting for God ...cont’d from p.7
It is fir them to choose. How, then, can He grant our request?

A prayer of Daniel gives insight (*ch 9*). God had promised Judah’s return to Jerusalem (from Babylon) after 70 years—a time now due, but with no sign of it as yet. Daniel’s reaction? Fasting and prayer—day in and day out for three weeks.

He fervently believed God—his bio confirms that; remember the lion’s den! But answer came there none—until an angel showed up to confirm that he had been sent by God to answer Daniel’s prayer (v.20). When? The very time Daniel began, three weeks previously, to pray (v.23). Why the delay?

Divine Messenger

Here we see, in part, the way God answers our prayers—through the ministry of angels; in this instance, Gabriel (*see Luke 1:19*).

Notice how the angel worked. He and the archangel Michael (*ch 10:13*) during those three weeks acted to persuade King Cyrus to carry out his divine mission—a prophecy given some two centuries before his birth (Isaiah 44:28)! [Note that individual angels have limited powers.]

In part his action was to overcome the opposition of ‘...the prince of the Kingdom of Persia’ (Daniel 10:13)—likely, a high-placed fallen spirit, if not Satan (*cp. Zechariah 3:1*). [Satan and his angels retain their pre-fallen hierarchy—*cp* Ephesians 6:12.]

In other words, *pray*. But if the answer doesn’t come when we want it—then understand that God is working on it!, perhaps (as with Job) by restraining Satan’s influence.

A grasp of these principles may help us understand why we must sometimes have to patiently ‘wait for God’. **Ω**

WAITING FOR GOD

Here's why we shouldn't give up on prayer

That we should pray is a given—a practice that underpins all faiths.

But there's mystery in prayer—unanswered questions. Why do it, for example? How does it work? Will my desired answer have adverse effect on others? Why doesn't my particular God just do it—doesn't He know without my asking?

And the big one: why are my prayers not answered?

Muslims pray 'religiously' five times a day, every day. It's habitual and on time. Christians are constantly exhorted to pray, though in a less formal manner.

The Practice of Prayer

The Bible is full of examples of the varied ways men and women prayed. Standing. Eyes uplifted. In bed. On our knees. Standing. But always praying: constantly, urgently, tearfully, thankfully, in despair, in joy.

But it isn't easy. The sleepy bedtime prayer is proverbial. The mind wanders, concentration difficult—and sleep takes over. Unless, of course, we are desperate. Then we really experience prayer.

Technique, then, won't matter. Tears may flow and we just do it. Wrote James: '*...The heartfelt supplication of a righteous man exerts a mighty influence*' (James 5:16 *Weymouth*)

seem to be shut. The heavens are like brass, and our petitions appear to bounce from the ceiling, unheard.

Some of our prayers, of course, may get immediate attention from the heavenlies—perhaps when our life is in immediate danger. For some the answer unfolds slowly. For others? Well, we may die without our request being fulfilled to our specification! So—is God capricious? Does He just 'play' with us?

God's innate goodness is universal. He, as Creator, has provided an abundant store from which all mankind gains sustenance—both '*...just and unjust*' (Matthew 5:45). Only man's rejection—or ignorance—of natural (*ie*, divinely-created) laws turns fertility to desert, health to sickness, prosperity to poverty.

Why Delay?

There's a clue here to unanswered prayer. Man, the pinnacle of Creation, is not meant to suffer but to thrive. But when, for example, we tread underfoot those principles that promote health—what we eat and drink, our lifestyle, even what we think; then we block God's intervention. (Healing may come through our application of Bible principles.)

The principle applies, too, in economics—both national and personal. It applies in business, in education, in social matters.

Another obstacle to having our

No Answer

More often than not, it seems, God's ears

prayers answered may be the vital matter of God's will. For He won't act contrary to our long-term interest. Indeed delay may well be because *we* need to change, to align ourselves with His perfect will. That may take time—years, sometimes!

James highlights a further obstacle. You pray for someone's material need—that the Father will provide for them. He is well able to do so—remember the account of the loaves and fish supplied to feed a multitude (Matthew 14-16).

However: '*...What good is it, my brethren, if a man professes to have faith, and yet his actions do not correspond? Can such faith save him? Suppose a Christian brother or sister is poorly clad or lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, "I wish you well; keep yourselves warm and well fed," and yet you do not give them what they need; what is the use of that? So also faith, if it is unaccompanied by obedience, has no life in it--so long as it stands alone*' (James 2:14-17 *Weymouth*).

The principle here is that God doesn't necessarily intervene when we can do it ourselves.

Free Will

Then there's the matter of our freedom to choose. In this age God doesn't force His will on anyone. Take, for example, our calling to be part of His Family; acceptance is not forced on us. It is for us to choose.

So, if we were to pray for someone's conversion the same applies: God won't positively answer our prayer contrary to the individual's will. *cont'd p.6*

Need a Lawyer? ...cont'd

- work. They are in abeyance until Jesus returns (eg Ezekiel 44:11, Isaiah 66:20-21)
- Laws relating to health and safety are the province of our modern medical and Public Health professions. They would do well to heed the Bible principles! As should all Christians. In Israel, priests and Levites had this role (eg Leviticus 13, 14)

Faith in Action

But central to our application of the Law of God is that even perfect obedience will in no way earn us entrance to the Kingdom of God. Only the sacrifice of Jesus applied personally will do that, through faith.

John recognizes that we all transgress the Law ('sin' - I John 3:4), and states: '*... If we say that we have not sinned, we are fooling ourselves, and the truth isn't in our hearts. But if we confess our*

sins to God, he can always be trusted to forgive us and take our sins away. If we say that we have not sinned, we make God a liar, and his message isn't in our hearts' (I John 1:8-10 CEV).

A Precious Gift

As of now, *today*, all those in whom resides the divine Spirit are already, in embryonic form, the spiritual children of the Father. We are His '*...sons and daughters'* (II Corinthians 6:18). John again: '*...Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it does not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is'* (I John 3:2).

It's a precious gift—that we are destined to live abundantly and forever in the active service of our God. And it is ours, now. '*...Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, By a new and living way, which he has consecrated for us, through the veil,*

that is to say, his flesh; And having an high priest over the house of God; Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; for he is faithful that promised (Hebrews 10:19-23).

Day by day in some way we each 'miss the mark'—we sin, we transgress some aspect of God's holy Law, we fall far short of the glory of God. But as His children as long as we hold fast, as long as we continue to grow in grace and in our knowledge of him and his way, as long as we confess our sin and seek his help to forsake it—then we remain secure in his love. And forever.

Strive, certainly, to live by every word of God. But we don't need a lawyer to shoe-horn us into the Kingdom. We are already part of it. Ω

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Aliens ...cont'd from p.4

the first Christians. It is what Jesus taught. It's what the apostles taught. And there is no authority in the Scriptures for change in any way.

Don't Be Deceived

Recall that Jesus warned us of religious deception, as did his representatives and ambassadors, the apostles. Many, he said, would be deceived and will follow 'the broad road' to destruction.

Note that he warned also that those who stayed faithful to his teachings would, just like 'foreigners', experience hostility: '*...if they have persecuted me they will also persecute you'* (John 15:20).

In a letter to the brethren, the apostle John wrote: '*...Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knows us not, because it knew him not.* (I John 3:1).

Unknown to neighbour, unknown to work colleagues—unknown, even, to family and (perhaps now former) friends. *But not unknown to a loving Father!*

We may be 'aliens' in the world. But we share the culture, the language, the thoughts, the mind-set of our Father and His heavenly Kingdom (Hebrews 11:16). Our true country. There lies our citizenship. Ω

MiniStudy**Christmas...holiday or holy day?**

When the LORD your God shall cut off the nations from before you, wherever you go in to dispossess them, and you dispossess them, and dwell in their land; take heed to yourself that you be not ensnared to follow them, and that you inquire not after their gods, saying: 'How used these nations to serve their gods? even so will I do likewise.' You shall not do so unto the LORD your God; for every abomination to the LORD, which He hates, have they done unto their gods; for even their sons and their daughters do they burn in the fire to their gods. All this word which I command you, that shall you observe to do; you shall not add thereto, nor diminish from it
(Deuteronomy 12:29-13:1)

The darkness at year's end invites us to party to lighten the dreary days. The religion of most people living in the northern hemisphere fills the depressing gap with some form of celebration. For most Christians it is the festival of *Christmas*. For Jews, *Hanukah*. And for those without some official recognition of the death of the old year and the birth of the new—well, Christmas sounds good. It has almost become a global celebration. If you are not personally 'into religion' well, never mind, it's a chance of a knees-up. And indeed Christmas has largely become a secular holiday when all work grinds to a halt—sometimes for two or three weeks. The months leading to December 25 are an eternity of credit-fuelled frenzied shopping, and poisoned by Christmas 'music'. Christmas has become a bacchanalian holiday, not a holy day.

- *Christmas* is promoted by the Christian church as the time of the birth of Jesus—the Messiah, Christ
- *the name derives from the Roman Catholic 'Mass of Christ'*
- The timing derives from the ancient celebration, known as *Saturnalia*, of the annual re-birth of the sun god: that is, when the sun begins its ascent from our shortest days in late December
- *During the festival, homes—and churches—are today festooned with evergreen trees, brightly-coloured baubles, candles; songs lauding the birth of Jesus as 'a babe in the manger' are sung; food is consumed in excess; and not infrequently the celebrations dissolve into drunken debauchery. All such practices were derived from the worship of 'gods that are no gods'*
- None of this, of course, is a concern to most Westerners. Christmas is a holiday, party-time. And anyway, who cares about religion any more?
- *But what if you are a Christian, have strong beliefs in Jesus and in the Christian Scriptures? The text quoted above should give pause for thought. Clearly, the God of the Christian Scriptures is not happy with religious celebrations He has not authorised*
- It is a well-established historical fact that Jesus was not born in the dead of winter, but in the early autumn—possibly the *Day of Trumpets* or the first day of the *Festival of Tabernacles*.
- *The Scriptures do not provide a date for the birth of Jesus as it does for the divinely-appointed holy days (see Leviticus 23). The celebration of Christmas is a late starter—from around the mid-fourth century AD*
- The New Testament does not recognize any celebration of the birth of Christ; the focus is on his death and resurrection, and on God's Spirit indwelling and transforming His people
- *However sincere a believer may be, the observance of Christmas is an affront to the Saviour. Jesus perfectly reflects the teachings of the Old Testament, and expects his disciples to follow his example*
- Jesus, the apostles and all members of the early church observed the Biblical holy days—days appointed by the Creator. Each of these highlights aspects of the life and mission of Jesus: they also provide a prophetic outline
- *Many Christians around the world in our day have come to understand the importance and significance of the Biblical days, and faithfully observe them. Over 5000 observed it this year in Jerusalem, and many more around the world*
- Observance of these days harmonizes the Christian with the will of our Creator Ω

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