

new Horizons

Vol 16 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 e-mail Newsletter OUTREACH, the 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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new Horizons

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All of us will be judged by our works

A prominent feature of the modern Christian community is what is labelled 'good works'. Church denominations establish a variety of medical clinics, hospitals *etc.* There are, too, orphanages, soup kitchens, drug rehab centres established in the name of Christianity. Such activities are an expression of concern for the needy—a virtue that reflects the mind of Jesus Christ. He had compassion, sympathy for those in need and distressed.

Support for the needy is not, of course, a solely Christian virtue. Our responsibility to provide it suffuses the writings of the Old Testament—a basic human virtue, and seen in the vast array of modern charities dedicated to a wide range of needs. Every major faith—and none—encourages such support.

It's noteworthy, however, that the early Church isn't recorded as having corporate involvement in so-called 'good works' outside the community of faith. There is nothing in the record to suggest that the brethren set up 'soup kitchens' - though such were much needed. Nor did they found charitable institutions such as hospitals or homes for the homeless or drug rehab centres. Yet the need was no less than in our own century—indeed throughout the ages.

The apostle Paul urges his readers in the Galatian assemblies that '*...we should help people whenever we can, especially if they are followers of the Lord (ch 6:10 CEV)*'. However, this was not a command to embark on the

deployment of resources by 'the church' but, as in the Old Testament era, an encouragement for individuals to meet needs when they encounter them—from their personal resources—as exemplified by the account of the 'good Samaritan'.

Spirit Power

Jesus didn't set up charitable institutions, nor did he urge the disciples to do so. Indeed his compassion was expressed by means of spiritual power. He miraculously multiplied the loaves and fishes'. He restored sight to the blind. He enabled the dumb to speak, the lame to walk. All by the miraculous power of the Spirit. And he imparted the same powers to the church: '*... He that believes on me, the works that I do*

shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father. And whatsoever you shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it' (John 14:12-14). It's an authority the church deploys to this day as and when God supplies it through His Spirit.

The book of *Acts* bears witness to the exercise of this authority by the apostles: '*...they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them. There came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits: and*

they were healed every one' (ch 5:15-16). Or, another incident:

A man who had been born lame was being carried to the temple door. Each day he was placed beside this door, known as the Beautiful Gate. He sat there and begged from the people who were going in. The man saw Peter and John entering the temple, and he asked them for money. But they looked straight at him and said, "Look up at us!" The man stared at them and thought he was going to get something. But Peter said, "I don't have any silver or gold! But I will give you what I do have. In the name of Jesus Christ from Nazareth, get up and start walking." Peter then took him by the right hand and helped him up. At once the man's feet and ankles became strong, and he jumped up and started walking. He went with Peter and John into the temple, walking and jumping and praising God' (Acts 3:2-8).

The apostle Paul tells the Christians in Rome: '*...For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ hath not wrought by me, to make the Gentiles obedient, by word and deed, Through mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God' (ch 15: 18-19)*. Their 'works' were the direct intervention of the Spirit of God. And were directed, as said Paul (v.19), to the proclamation of the Gospel of Christ.

Our Purpose

The focus of 'the church', then, is the calling, spiritual nurture and care of those being added to it through God's personal invitation (John 6:44). We work together (*good works!*) to this end. As with the church in its beginnings each assembly is an independent unit, but co-operates with other like-minded assemblies in outreach and general support for one another.

Are Your Works 'good'?

In a sense, God's invitation is general—all are invited. The Father, however, takes a personal interest in those who respond to the invitation issued through the proclamation of the Gospel by the church (Luke 6:47). The work of the apostles is a template for that proclamation: They diligently proclaimed 'Christ crucified', even to death. They proclaimed the need to turn from sin—the 'transgression of the Law' (I John 3:4). They proclaimed that their hearers must turn aside from idolatry—that is, worship that is not authorised in Scripture (*cp* I Thessalonians 1:9).

Missing from that template is the attempt to lure people into believing through food programmes ('rice Christians'), through popular music, various clubs *etc.* Rather the apostles by their dedicated preaching despite hardship and persecution, and by the brethren through their every day witness set forth Jesus crucified as the one and only Saviour of mankind, the one way to become part of the Family of God.

Good Works, Bad Works

Our 'good works' are made known through the lives of each Christian. Paul contrasts the 'works of the flesh' with the *good* works: '*...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance*' *Galatians* 5:22-23. These are in sharp contrast to human nature in the raw, the 'works of the flesh': '*...People's desires make them give in to immoral ways, filthy thoughts, and shameful deeds. They worship idols, practice witchcraft, hate others, and are hard to get along with. People become jealous, angry, and selfish. They not only argue and cause trouble, but they are envious. They get drunk, carry on at wild parties, and do other evil things as well*' (*ch* 5:19-21).

Not the *good* works of a follower of Jesus! The true Christian is being '*...transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what*

is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God' (Romans 12:2).

One Faith, One Way

At the return of Messiah all true believers since man's beginnings will be raised from their graves. Following a tumultuous time for earth's inhabitants, and a time of massive material destruction and loss of life, Jesus will establish his rule over all mankind—a thousand-year reign of universal peace and prosperity. The resurrected saints will, as a '*...kingdom of priests*', reign with him.

There will be one faith, one way of worship—that revealed by God in the Christian Scriptures. There will be one law for all. And one way to become part of the Family of God—that of the Gospel, at that time salvation freely offered to all. Every move to believe otherwise will receive a warning: '*... your teachers [will not] be hidden any more, but your eyes shall see your teachers: and your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, This is the way, walk you in it; when you turn to the right hand and when you turn to the left*' (Isaiah 30:20-21). Sound counsel.

Idolatry will be eliminated. All mankind will worship the one and only Creator God—and in the way He has established. All will observe His seventh-day Sabbath (Isaiah 66: 23). All—every nation, every individual—will observe God's festivals and they alone.

The annual Passover season will be observed: '*...In the first month, in the fourteenth day of the month, you shall have the passover, a feast of seven days; unleavened bread shall be eaten*' (Ezekiel 45: 21). The annual Festival of Tabernacles, too: '*...every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts,*

unsigned articles are by the Editor

and to keep the feast of tabernacles', Zechariah 14: 16.

Given that there will universally be no other form of worship, it's no surprise that all will in those days be judged by their attitude towards those who live godly. For not everyone will embrace the true Gospel: '*...he shall judge between the nations, and shall reprove many peoples* (Isaiah 2: 4). Even after a thousand years of direct rule by the LORD and the resurrected saints many will rebel (Revelation 20:8-9).

Judgment to Come

That thousand years will be a time of judgment. The Gospel will be universally proclaimed and all will be invited to embrace it, to become part of the divine Family. No-one will be coerced! But they will be judged: '*...When the Son of Man comes in his glory with all of his angels, he will sit on his royal throne. The people of all nations will be brought before him, and he will separate them, as shepherds separate their sheep from their goats. He will place the sheep on his right and the goats on his left*', Matthew 25:31-33.

Note the time of this judgment—it is '*...when the Son of Man comes in his glory*' (*See ch* 16:27). The saints will have been resurrected to reign with Jesus when he returned, and will symbolically 'sit on thrones' as judges (I Corinthians 6: 2). The Twelve, said Jesus, will at that time be assigned as senior judges over the restored nations of Israel (Matthew 19: 28).

Here's what Jesus tells us about the criteria for judging the nations: '*...when I was hungry, you gave me food; when I was thirsty, you gave me drink; when I was homeless, you gave me a welcome; when I was ill-clad, you clothed me; when I was sick, you visited me; when I was in prison, you came to see me.*' "*When, Lord? the righteous will reply.... "In solemn truth I tell you that in* **cont'd p.7**

Why does God consider adultery a capital offence?

Stephen Green

In many modern versions of the Bible, John 7:53 to John 8:11 is written in italics, with a foot-note to the effect that this passage is omitted from “some ancient manuscripts.” Why should that be? Why should a passage of God’s word which is there in the Greek ‘Textus Receptus,’ authenticated by Erasmus and relied upon exclusively by Bishop Andrewes and his team of translators for the King James version, be absent from other sources? We need to remember that just because a manuscript of the Bible is ancient is not to say it is accurate. Manuscripts were often altered to bolster a heretical view.

The letters of the Apostles reveal that there were heresies around in the earliest days of the church. The Gnostic heresy, which demoted the material world to be beneath the concern of God, was the most prevalent, and to the Apostle John, the most dangerous. (1 John 4:3) There will have been manuscripts of the Bible emerging in the first few centuries which had a Gnostic frame of mind. Subtle changes will have been made, to slant the New Testament message into the spiritual realm alone.

Heavenly Armies

The same sort of thing happens today. In Psalm 24:10, and on fourteen other occasions in the Psalms, the Hebrew word ‘tsava’ah’ is translated as “hosts” in the KJV, in expressions such as “The Lord of hosts.” The word indeed means a host, an army, a great number. One modern bible version persistently renders the expression into “Lord of the heavenly armies”. The word for “heavenly” isn’t there in the Hebrew – these translators had a problem with God being in charge of earthly armies, so they relegated Him to the spiritual sphere alone, and they did it by adding to the word of God.

Is it for a similar reason that the account of the woman taken in adultery was omitted by some ancient, heretical, manuscripts? Had the scribes, despite their training to be faithful reproducers of documents, spotted something they just didn’t like? Did the account oppose the Gnostic view? Or did it possibly oppose Antinomianism, the view that Jesus did away with the law of God?

One would hardly think the latter, given the stance of many recent and contemporary commentators. Thanks to their efforts, the popular view today is that the passage shows Jesus abolishing either the death penalty for adultery in particular, or the death penalty in general. For example, the following was written by a prominent reformed churchman: “Christ himself refused to allow the stoning of the adulterous woman.” The proposition being made is that at some point in the passage in question, Jesus said something like, “I will not allow you to stone her,” or “I say do not stone someone caught in adultery” or gave the impression that the death penalty is no longer valid.

Taken in the Act

Let us see if that is true. The passage is John 8:1-11, the account of our Lord Jesus and the matter of the woman taken in adultery. The Scribes and the Pharisees were hypocrites only to bring the woman, of course. The woman was “taken in the very act”. That means a man was there as a partner to the act. He seems to have been allowed to leave, even though the law says: *the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death.* (Lev 20:10) Those who just brought the woman were not quite so hot on the law as they pretended.

The Lord did not point out their hypocrisy, as he did on other occasions, but events in any case were moving swiftly. He was immediately, as it appears, in the cleft stick of having to oppose the Roman occupation if he wished to support the Law of God given by Moses. It was a similar challenge to that of Caesar’s coin. *Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou?* (John 8:5) They were challenging this upstart young rabbi to accept the role of judge, and pronounce.

Now, the Romans would not allow the Jews to carry out a death sentence of stoning, although that would not stop them later stoning Stephen to death for blasphemy. So if Jesus were openly to support the stoning of the woman, he could be denounced for sedition to Pilate. And if he refused to allow her stoning, as our friend suggests he actually did, then he would be revoking, changing, or “destroying” the law.

Taken in Adultery

Feast of Tabernacles

We must remember that this is he who said, back in Galilee: *‘Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil’* (Matt 5:17). More recently, and more fresh in the mind to these Jerusalem Scribes and Pharisees, Jesus had just been teaching in the temple in the very middle of the feast of Tabernacles. (John 7:14) *“Did not Moses give you the law,”* he asked, *“and yet none of you keepeth the law?”* (John 7:19) Keeping the law was for him and for them an important matter. To be accused of not keeping the law was a serious charge.

It would be an especially serious charge to lay at the door of a teacher of the law. Teaching about the law, especially during the feast of Tabernacles, was the solemn duty of the Levites. (Lev 10:11, Deut 33:10; Neh 8:2,3,13,18)

Incidentally, the Greek word used for ‘law’ in all its facets in the New Testament is ‘*nomos*’ which means ‘a law’. We get words from it such as ‘antinomian’ (against the law) theonomy’ (God-law) and autonomy’ (self-law). The word ‘*nomos*’ does not quite capture the full import of the Hebrew word ‘Torah’ with its overlay of teaching, or instruction, as well as what is allowed and what is forbidden. Both the Lord Jesus and His interlocutors would have in mind the word ‘Torah’ or its Aramaic equivalent. Of course Jesus is the author of the Torah, and its embodiment. Anyway, by adopting the function of the Levites on that day, the Lord Jesus was shaming the religious establishment in Jerusalem. Then he went even further.

Matters became heated enough for Jesus’s followers to be denounced as *“this people who knoweth not the law,”* (vs 49) and to poor Nicodemus, who was only trying to uphold the law, to be rubbished as a Galilean. *“out of Galilee ariseth no prophet,”* they said (vs 52). In fact they were wrong on the last count, but for Nicodemus to have pointed out that both Jonah and Nahum came out of Galilee (Jonah from Gath-hepher, two miles from Nazareth, Nahum from Capernaum – Kaphar-Nahum) would have only made matters worse – both men were sent to

prophecy to Gentiles.

Witness Involvement

There was clearly a lot at stake for both Jesus and the men who challenged him with the case of the woman taken in adultery. On another occasion the Lord Jesus refused to judge between a man and his brother (Luke 12:14) in order to make a point about greed and possessions. But here, after the curious episode of writing on the ground, he accepted the role of judge and made a ruling, as we shall see, based totally on the law.

A basic principle of God's judicial law is that people must be properly convicted, which means at the mouth of two or three witnesses. (Numbers 35:30) The humanist version, 'Beyond reasonable doubt' just will not do before the Throne of Grace. And we have to remember that human agents are carrying out divine will, for the judgment is God's. (Deuteronomy 1:17) The necessity for a matter to be established in the mouth of two or three witnesses is strongly upheld in the New Testament (eg: Matthew 18:16; John 8:17-18; 2 Corinthians 13:1).

In addition to testifying, the hands of the witnesses had to be the first against the convicted person. (Deuteronomy 17:6-7) It is a terrible and solemn duty to testify against someone, and biblically that is reinforced by requiring the witnesses to put their stones, as it were, where their mouths were. After that, all the community were to join in to execute judgment.

Can anyone imagine the horror of such an event? The Bible says: '*The people shall hear, and fear, and do no more presumptuously*'. (Deuteronomy 17:13) There would surely be an immediate decrease in crime in that community. It is difficult for us today to understand living in a society which takes adultery so seriously – the generation in which Jesus lived was not like that, being similar to our own, but more of that later.

Come with Clean Hands

A false witness in the Biblical system was in a dreadful predicament. Not only had he helped a person to be wrongfully convicted, but he had thrown the first stone. That was something so appalling that the only remedy was for him to suffer the same fate as would the man or woman he had given false testimony against. (Deuteronomy 19:15-19) '*Thou*

shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour' (Exodus 20:16).

It is reasonable to assume that there would be fewer false witnesses if they had to cast a physical first stone.

A further principle of God's law is that witnesses must be totally impartial. This was well understood by the Scribes and Pharisees, even if they had forgotten it in their rush to try to catch Jesus out. Witnesses and judges must not be related to the accused. They must not be moved by hatred or love towards the accused. They must not have taken a bribe either for or against the accused. (Deuteronomy 16:19) Lastly, they must not be implicated in a similar crime themselves. (Hosea 4:14) They must come with clean hands, a Godly principle of law which survives to a limited extent even today.

All of this allows Jesus' eventual ruling to be much more penetrative than a simple "Yes" or "No" would have been. When he said: *He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her*, (John 8:7) he gave support to all these parts of the law, and put the onus back on the accusers. Some have attempted to say that "without sin" means perfect, but in that case, if perfect people were the only ones allowed to testify or convict, justice would be impossible. Where would we find them? The Lord's statement would be ridiculous. Thankfully, the Greek word here translated "without sin" is "*anamartetos*". It does not mean perfect, for that is "*teleios*". It means not absolutely without sin, but only in a particular case.

The Passage Makes Sense

Knowing that, the passage suddenly makes sense. Jesus was calling for the witnesses who presumed to condemn the woman to carry out the sentence, whilst reminding them of their legal obligation to come with clean hands. They did not have to be perfect, they just had to be without sin in this one offence.

But these men could not even manage that. Jesus did not maintain eye contact with them, but stooped down and wrote on the ground again. It was an '*adulterous and sinful generation*' (Mark 8:38) and he knew already that no-one would be prepared – or able in terms of the law – to be the first witness. So we read: '*And they which heard, being con-*

victed by conscience, went out one by one beginning at the eldest, unto the last, and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst' (v 9).

Imagine the situation today. We have everyone in court, the judge, the prosecution lawyers, the prosecution witnesses, a full public gallery, all the court officials and the prisoner in the dock. The judge reminds the prosecution team and their witnesses of their legal duties to maintain a fair trial. Then quietly, the prosecution witnesses melt away and the prosecuting barrister and the CPS instructing solicitor collect up their papers, bow to the judge and leave the room without a word. In practice today they would say, 'I am sorry, your honour, but the prosecution has no case to offer. Beg to be excused'.

What does the judge do in a Court of Law when the witnesses absent themselves and no-one is left to accuse the defendant? He can hardly condemn. He is obliged to acquit the defendant. That is precisely what the Lord did, but with that sting in the tail, "*Go and sin no more*." (v11) There is no earthly judge who would say that to someone just acquitted. Only a prophet, or the Son of God, can do that.

This is much truer compassion from our gracious Lord than abolishing the death penalty (as some contend the Lord did) would have been. The latter would have shown no compassion to the victim. The Son of God demonstrates his compassion by warning a sinner to repent and escape the wrath of God. '*As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live*' (Ezekiel 33:11).

Law of God Upheld

So the Lord Jesus Christ, in this defining moment, upheld the law of God by Moses to the very letter whilst convicting his challengers of sin and setting the adulterous woman free with a warning. This is greater than the wisdom of Solomon. It is all so obvious that it beggars belief that anyone could seriously maintain that the passage shows Jesus changing the law, or refusing to allow the woman to be stoned, which was the claim quoted at the start.

Perhaps the very endorsement which Jesus gives here to the Mosaic law is the

reason for the passage's omission from some of the early manuscripts. Perhaps certain scribes who wanted to separate Christianity from its Hebrew roots had understood what was going on in the passage only too well. Perhaps they were Gnostics, who wanted to separate the kingdom of God from any earthly expression of it. Perhaps they wanted to spiritualise everything of God, and send Him away to inspect His 'heavenly armies'. Or perhaps they felt that man would make better laws than God.

Is God Barbaric?

When the laws of God are discussed in critical terms, the laws about stoning, and especially stoning for adultery, are always wheeled out as a prime example of God's alleged barbarism. Even Christian people seem to single out stoning for adultery as that law of God they particularly do not like. *"You don't believe in the law of God, do you? You'll be stoning people for adultery next!"*

Despite the fact the God does not change, it is very tempting for us to say, "Oh, that's just the Old Testament." But with Christ's own endorsement of the law in general, and this law in particular, that dispensationalist option seems closed. I am personally appalled by the idea of stoning, but I cannot say the Lord opposed it.

It is little comfort to realise that in our own sinful generation, we should probably have no greater success at finding witnesses with clean hands than did the Lord Jesus. But it is in any case not the function of this article to recommend stoning as a penalty. Instead, I want to discern the mind of God and look at the 'general equity' of the penalty, to use the term in the Westminster Confession. Why does the righteous law of God include such a provision? What is its purpose? What is God saying, through it, to us in our day?

Public Involvement

Perhaps we should first look at the element of public involvement, with the casting by the witnesses of the first stone, and also the deterrent effect so well expressed in Deuteronomy 17:13 and Ecclesiastes 8:11.

In Britain today, only our jury system involves the public in the judicial process, and long may it do so. We have no

modern-day equivalent of the Biblical community involvement in carrying out penalties. Even though God instituted the death penalty for murder in His covenant with Noah for all mankind for ever, we abolished it in 1965, in our 'wisdom'. Of course our current record for wrongful convictions overturned on appeal years afterwards argues against re-introducing it without major reform.

Even when the death penalty was in force, it was carried out for almost 100 years behind closed doors in the depths of a prison. The public baying for blood at Tyburn Hill and Newgate was horrible and unbiblical, but tucking execution away from view is bad from another point of view. It says that something unrighteous is being done. The truth is that capital punishment is God's will, and righteous. It is not a dark deed to be done in a corner.

As to stoning itself, the method of execution is less important than the principle of public involvement of both witnesses and people. Interestingly, after public execution was abolished in 1868, the yearly number of homicides increased. Nor do we give witnesses the solemn duty of casting any first stone, metaphorical or not. They testify and then they go home, taking their conscience with them.

Betrayal

Perhaps, however, people today approve of adultery just as much as they disapprove of stoning. Adultery is a complete betrayal of another's trust, but today it is almost fashionable. Folk may 'tut-tut' at the revelations of adultery in the news, but, just like the woman's accusers, their hearts are full of sin. Not only is there no death penalty against adulterers in Britain today, we have allowed our politicians to put no penalty at all. Indeed, in the divorce courts, a wife's adultery is usually rewarded with residence of the children on the grounds that the court can see a 'new father figure' for them.

Is such a lack of justice something of which us British should be proud? What would the Lord Jesus, King of kings, say to us? Rather than casting stones at God's law, should we not be slinking away in shame at the covenant-breaking and breach of promise which our law now firmly encourages? We may even find those things to convict us in our own hearts.

"From this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part, according to God's holy ordinance, and thereto I plight thee my troth." Even in the modern versions, the couple give their solemn word, in public. But our law allows either one of them to break his or her word and ruin another's life without consequences. And they say God's law is barbaric!

An Act of Betrayal

If we look at what God says about adultery, then firstly we see that God regards it as a great evil. That is because adultery is an act of betrayal and because it strikes at the very root of the family in which a Godly seed is to be raised (Malachi 2:15). God even likens the idolatry of Israel to adultery, to emphasise the seriousness of 'whoring after other gods.' (Judges 2:7)

Secondly, God regards adultery not just as an individual sin, but as a capital offence. That is because His judicial law is based on the principle of restitution, and in common with murder and rape, nothing can restore what has been taken by the act of adultery.

At the same time, the death penalty for adultery is a maximum, and the guilty parties are able to make a limited form of restitution financially, presumably if the innocent parties are willing and forgiving, and not beset by what Jesus described as 'hardness of heart'. (Matthew 19:8, cf Deuteronomy 24:1)

We infer the principle of financial recompense from Numbers 35:31, where it is written: *'take no satisfaction for the life of a murderer, which is guilty of death'*. The word translated here as 'satisfaction' is 'kopher' which means a ransom, or sum of money (1).

For this verse to be given implies that ransoms were being paid for all capital
cont'd p.8

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Schadenfreude

Steven Kieler

Some languages have one word to describe something that, in English, requires many words.

I have only seen this German word “*schadenfreude*” [shahd-n-froi-duh] used in print three or four times in my lifetime. Simply put, it means: taking satisfaction or pleasure felt at someone’s misfortune.

Mark Twain gives a perfect example of it when he said: "I didn't attend the funeral, but I sent a nice letter saying I approved of it." Perhaps we have had similar sentiments ourselves but is that morally permissible according to scripture?

Job's commentary on the subject makes five major points in three short verses:

“This [schadenfreude] also were an iniquity to be punished by the judge: for I should have denied the God that is above. If I rejoiced at the destruction of him that hated me, or lifted up myself when evil found him: Neither have I suffered my mouth to sin by wishing a curse to his soul.” (Job 31:28-30).

The first three tell us what Job did and points 4 and 5 tell what he did not do.

- Job did not rejoice when some sort of calamity struck his enemy
- He did not wish evil on him
- Job did not wish him dead
- Job equated these things with denying God (v 28)
- Job did not sin (v 30).

Clarence Darrow is quoted: “I have never killed a man, but I

have read many obituaries with great pleasure." Have you ever come to the point wishing evil on a person or even wishing him dead?

I have come perilously close at times. The Bible roundly condemns that attitude when it tells us that if we hate someone we have committed murder already in our heart. Then, to make it harder yet, we are to love our enemies. After all, God loved us even though we sinned against Him.

God and Job saw eye to eye on the matter. Compare what God says:

“Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord GOD: and not that he should return from his ways, and live?” Eze-kiel_18:23

“For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord GOD: wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye.” (Eze_18:32)

“Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?” (Eze_33:11)

It does little good to eliminate a bad behavior unless you replace it with a good one. Consider what God recommended when He said “do good to those who hate you.” It means changing the attitude from hate to love. A change of heart is a major transition. It means we no longer “badmouth” our enemy; we help and encourage him, at least insofar as he will let you.

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

Courage comes from the French word *coeur*; it means heart. When you give encouragement you give one the heart to carry on - or to change. If we are to encourage our enemies how much more each other, after all, we are in this together. That point is made clear by the frequent use of the word 'together', especially in the epistles.

Peter addresses both sides of the issue of attitude:

Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful [tender-hearted], be courteous: Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing. For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile: Let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue it. For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil.”

(1Peter 3:8-12)

“And, in Peter's next book, he echo's the three verses previously quoted in Ezekiel: “*The lord is... not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.*” (II Peter 3:9)

We should foster a spirit of cooperation instead of conflict, rejoicing in the success of others. After all, it is said: “a rising tide lifts all boats” (except those that are already sunk). Just think what we as a nation could accomplish with that mindset; think what we as a church could accomplish." The way I see it, we have no choice. Let's get on board. Have a heart and eliminate *schadenfreude*! Ω

Church-going is in decline, certainly in the UK. Yet millions still attend one or other denomination. Is it important?

It's clear from the record of the New Testament that it was normal practice for brethren to gather in assemblies for worship, instruction and fellowship. In that age these assemblies were in the homes of the brethren—'house churches'. [Examples may be found in Romans chapter 16.]

Indeed, we are urged in the book of *Hebrews* to '*...consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as you see the day approaching*' (ch 10:24-25).

Clearly such regular contact was highly valued. The life and writings of the apostle Paul sheds light on those early days.

Ritual Observances

As in churches today there was a time-honoured pattern for regular worship, brethren meeting on specific days—Sunday, for example or Christmas, Easter, Saints Days etc.

Works ...cont'd from p.2

so far as you rendered such services to one of the humblest of these my brethren, you rendered them to myself' (Matthew 25: 35-40). That is, how did you treat those who are my brothers, those who are spiritually related to me (Hebrews 2: 12).

In the beginning years of the Millennium there will be opposition to the Gospel both by individuals and by governments. Some Christians will

But in contrast to the modern church those assemblies were grounded in the Scriptures, observed on God-appointed occasions, at God-appointed times.

The apostle—we cannot doubt his faithfulness to the teachings of Jesus—established this Christian principle: '*...Neither against the Jewish Law, nor against the Temple, nor against Caesar, have I committed any offence whatever*' (Acts 25:8). [He is referring to the *written* Law—not to the Jew's oral law and traditions.]

We can trace how Paul applied this principle. As long as the Temple continued (to 70AD) he as a Jew observed its rites and ceremonies. He had no qualms, for example, against the circumcision of Timothy, a Gentile (Acts 16:1-3). The apostle is also recorded as taking on a vow (ch 18:18), and agreeing to Temple purification rites (21:26).

Festival Observances

We also find him continuing to assemble, as did Jesus, on the weekly seventh-day Sabbath: '*...there was a synagogue of the Jews. Paul--following his usual custom--betook himself to it, and*

be prosecuted, jailed, cast out. Some will become ill. How you treated them, said Jesus, will be the basis for judgment. As Jesus said: '*...whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his re-*

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Why Go To Church?

for three successive Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures' (Acts 17:1-2). We find, too, that seekers among the *Gentiles* crowded to the synagogue on Sabbath to hear Paul's message (Acts 13:42-44).

We can also trace Paul's attitude to God's *annual* observances. He guides the Corinthian church in their observance of the Passover season—the seven *Days of Unleavened Bread* (I Corinthians 5: 7-8). He is recorded as having observed this spring festival at Philippi (Acts 20:6). We also find the apostle urgently trying to reach Jerusalem for the *Pentecost* festival in early summer (I Corinthians 16:8), and referring to 'the Fast'—the annual *Day of Atonement*. (Acts 27:9).

These festival observances have been a hallmark of Bible believers down the centuries since. However, they have been almost buried by alien influences that have imported observances that were condemned by God and never approved by Jesus.

Surely an example for all Christians to follow! **Ω**

ward' (Matthew 10:42).

'Good works', then, are a combination of expressing from the heart the fruits of the Holy Spirit and submission to God's worship plan as outlined by His holy days. Without the indwelling Spirit our works have only limited value: '*...if I distribute all my possessions to the poor, and give up my body to be burned, but am destitute of Love, it profits me nothing*' (I Corinthians 13:3). **Ω**

Adultery ...cont'd from p.5

offences, including for murder. This was actually the case in Anglo-Saxon England. Money would settle anything. But the Bible says that in the case of murder – and only murder – a ransom may not be paid: ‘*but he shall surely be put to death*’. (2).

Justice and Mercy

In looking to be compassionate, we Christians need first to hate sin (Psalms 97:10), to love the things which God loves (Psalms 119:97), and stop finding fault in what He says (Psalms 5:4). Nobody wants anyone to die, least of all God, so there is an element of mercy available for adulterer and adulteress, but only with the primary principle of justice in place.

We start from the wrong end, trying to be nice and merciful first. Then we wonder why there is no justice. (Isaiah 59:14) Justice comes

before mercy in the Bible (Psalms 89:14). God’s way is that justice can be tempered with mercy, but not mercy with justice.

Even some Christians lose sight of the fact that God gave His law for our good, and not because He is a spoil-sport. But talking of God spoiling our sport, is adultery really so much fun? And even if it is, is it really worth living in a society where the extended family is now an intricate network of step-parents, live-in boyfriends and all their exes? Where half a generation of children have lost their fathers? Where crime increases as all sense of self-respect declines? Where a public promise can be broken on the whim of one of the parties? Have we gone completely mad?

Spiritually, neither an individual nor a nation ever stands still.

References:

(1) They increased from an average of 339 offences of homicide per year known to the police over the ten years prior to 1868 to 383 offences per year for the ten years after and continued rising to a peak of 428 in 1886. Thereafter, there was a decline in the early years of the 20th century. A more substantial rise in homicides occurred after the abolition of the death penalty in 1965.

(2) Murder is the only capital offence, and may not be ransomed. But manslaughter, which the Bible defines as accidental homicide, is not a capital offence. The next verse, Numbers 35:32, also forbids a ransom for manslaughter

We are either going towards God or moving away from Him. (Matthew 7:13) At the moment, Britain is travelling fast on the road to destruction. ‘*For great is the wrath of the Lord that is poured out upon us, because our fathers have not kept the word of the Lord, to do after all that is written in this book*’ (2 Chronicles 34:21).

God hates divorce, and the breaking of promises, and He also hates injustice. People are fallible, and miss the mark. Some are plain lawless, and it is an injustice for them to get away with the misery they cause.

If by God’s grace our nation repents, then bringing some justice back into family law and upholding the Godly solemnity of the marriage vows will be one of the things it will do first. Would it not be a wonderful thing to see our leaders searching the law of God for its wisdom, knowing that we are a nation under Christ, and that Christ upholds His law?

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A Message from God

It would be a courageous—if that’s the word—man or woman who barefacedly rejected a message direct from the Creator. Yet isn’t that what so many Christians do? Yet the prophet Isaiah counsels: ‘*...hear the word of the LORD, you that tremble at his word*’ (Isaiah 66:5).

That word is so precious that the Psalmist says: ‘*...you have magnified your word above all your name*’ (Psalm 138:2). What God says surpasses all that is done in His Name. And the New Testament writings bear testimony to that word as recorded in the ‘Old Testament’: ‘*...continue in the things which you have learned and have been assured of, knowing of whom you have learned them; And that from a child you have known the holy scriptures, which are able to make you wise unto salvation through faith which is in*

Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works’ (II Timothy 3:14-17). A strong testimony! And, of course, the apostle refers to the

writings of the ‘Old’ Testament.

So, if a preacher comes along with a teaching that is nowhere found in the Scriptures (and we must include the New Testament) does that trump what God has clearly said? Listen to Moses: ‘*...the prophet [preacher], which shall presume to speak a word in my name, which I have not commanded him to speak [God’s Word], or that shall speak in the name of other gods, even that prophet shall die*’ (Deuteronomy 18:20).

Read the account in I Kings 13. It is a salutary warning for those who would discard a direct word from God for a contrary message. Even a prophet can lie for his own ends (v.18)!

Every believer must prayerfully and diligently compare his beliefs with the only sure word of God—the God who ‘*...changes not*’ (Malachi 3:6). Ω

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MiniStudy**Other Days**

'Take heed to yourself that you not be snared to follow [other faiths] ... and that you not inquire after their gods, saying, How did these nations serve their gods? And I shall do so, even I. You shall not do so to Jehovah your God; for everything hateful to Jehovah, which He detests, they have done to their gods.... All the things that I command you, take heed to do them and you shall not add to it, nor take away from it' (Deuteronomy 12:30-32)

- The kaleidoscopic variety of religious belief in our world is confusing to men or women seeking a right way for themselves. With Pilate, they may just give up and ask *'What is truth?'*
- Logically - unless we subscribe to a pantheon of gods each competing variously for man's attention - then 'God' must surely be consistent. The Christian Scriptures agree and claim: *'God is not the author of confusion [disorder]'*. So we might ask ourselves why the confusion as to *when* to worship Him
- Christians lay claim to Sunday for weekly worship. In Judaism it is the seventh day and in Islam it's Friday
- Now add in the many annual 'feast days': Christmas, Easter, Ramadan, Eid, the Hindu Divali *etc etc*. Each festival has significance for each faith. But is God - the One supreme Creator God - happy with all of them? Are all these 'other days' perfectly acceptable to Him?
- Consider how 'religion' began. Every faith recognizes mankind has gone astray - hence the universally recognized need for a 'way back to god'. [Evolutionists and atheists close your eyes here.] The one Creator God revealed that way - *one way*. Peter, inspired, recognized this same concept (Acts 4:12)
- But humanity came to ignore this one way and set about devising suitable paths. As they dispersed around the world new religions were spawned. By the first century of our era those who followed that 'one way' recognized that *'...the things the nations sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons, and not to God'* (I Corinthians 10:20). All worship not derived from the Creator's revelation is vain, futile, and is an affront to God
- Careful study - even of 'heathen' practice - reveals that the first directive from the Creator relating to worship days is a memorial of creation: the weekly *seventh-day Sabbath* (Genesis 2:1-3). Indeed we owe the seven-day weekly cycle solely to this divine directive: the notion of a 'week' relates directly neither to the sun nor to the moon but to divine fiat [atheists please note]
- Given that the creation of mankind is not a mindless random act but part of God's grand design, it would be surprising if the all-powerful Creator left us without guidelines for His plans. And He has so provided. Built into the very structure of the heavens is a prophetic pattern on which is based a series of annual worship days: *'And God said, Let luminaries be in the expanse of the heavens, to divide between the day and the night. And let them be for signs and for seasons, and for days and years'* (Genesis 1:14). 'Seasons' - Heb *moed*: the word means a fixed time, appointment, festival, assembly, place of meeting
- These '*moeds*' are based on the annual round of harvests. *'These are the set feasts of Jehovah, even holy convocations, which you shall proclaim in their appointed season [Heb moed]'* (Leviticus 23:4). God proceeds to outline these festivals, each on its appointed time in spring, summer, autumn. Note that Moses, on God's instruction, sought leave from Pharaoh - before the Exodus took place - to take the nation to observe a feast (Exodus 5:1) - a time Pharaoh (v.5) perceived as a 'rest' (Heb *shabath*)
- We don't have to read far into the New Testament to discover that Jesus, his apostles and the early Christians - both Jew and Gentile - continued to weekly observe the *seventh* day, alongside the annual festivals. Early on, the church abandoned these festivals - including Sunday - absorbing the culture and religious practices (eg Easter, Christmas, Sunday, saints' days) of the surrounding heathen religions

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