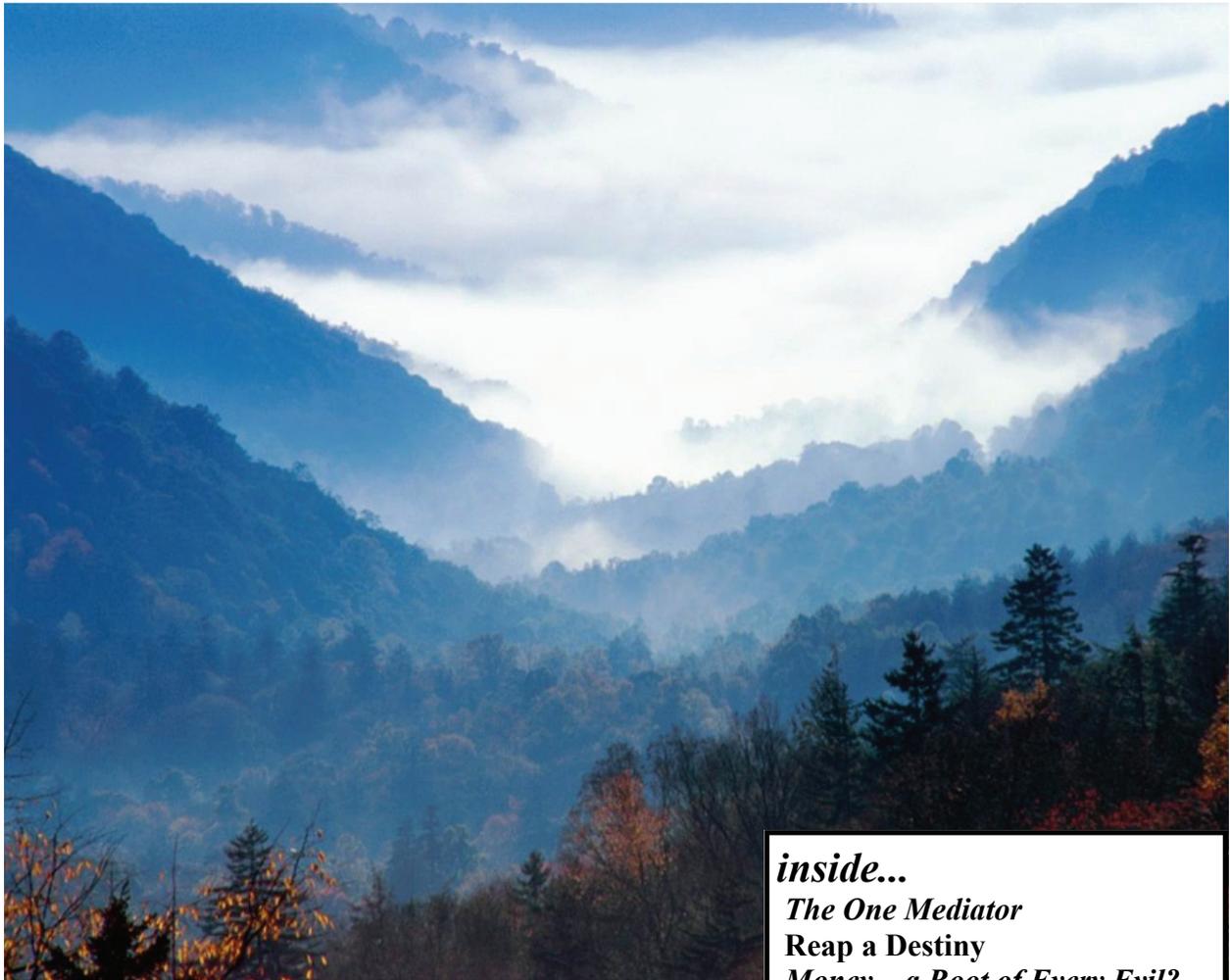


new **Horizons**

Vol 17 No 3

May/June 2013

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

New Horizons is published by the *Churches of God Outreach Ministries*, an association of independent churches, to make known the good news of the soon-coming Kingdom of God

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

**Churches of God Outreach Ministries
P O Box 54621
Tulsa, OK 74155-0621
USA**

e-mail: information@cgom.org

1-800-611-8080

Editor: James McBride

e-mail: coguk@aol.com

England:

The Churches of God, UK
PO Box 2525
LINCOLN LN5 7PF United Kingdom
Regd Charity No 283358
e-mail: coguk@aol.com

Canada:

The Churches of God Outreach Ministries
PO Box 476 Don Mills Station
Don Mills Ontario M3C 2T4 Canada
www.canadianchurchofgod.com

or from:

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new Horizons

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Jesus, says the apostle Paul, is the one Mediator between God and man. What does that mean?

The answer to our question carries us back before the creation of the first air-breathing, God-conscious, sentient being. The eternal ever-living, self-existing God having purposed to ‘...bring many sons to glory,’ Elohim created a material universe fit to sustain these future ‘sons’, a Family capable of open-ended expansion. He then made Himself known to us by His Name JHVH (Jehovah) - the One ‘...who is, was, and will be’. Through aeons of time [see side bar] He prepared this material ‘jewel in the crown’ of creation, Earth, furnishing it with all the resources necessary to ‘dress and keep’ it. It was, He said, ‘...very good’.

The One Mediator

God (Elohim), however, has

never been seen by man. Records the apostle John: ‘...No one has seen God at any time’ (John 1:18, 6:46)! From his beginning man (our first parents) has had access to that one God—but at all times through a ‘go-between’. At Sinai, God (Jehovah) appeared to the Israelites, who feared they might die in His presence. Even the Mediator inspired awe! (Exodus 20:18-21) Yet He is a personal God, as Father desiring to form an intimate relationship with his spiritual Family.

The Scriptures record numerous occasions when that go-between, that mediator, has down the millennia appeared to men, talked with men—even ate with men. An early instance is recorded in Genesis 18. The LORD, along with two powerful angels, came visibly and in the flesh to meet with Abraham, and was en-

tertained by him and by Sarah. Earlier, Jehovah had visited to make a covenant with Abraham (*ch* 17:1) Later, Moses encountered Him at the burning bush (Exodus 3) - here (*v.2*) under the guise of the ‘Angel of the LORD’
Indeed, Jehovah (JHVH) appeared

The term *angel* (Heb *malak*, Gk, *aggelos*) refers simply to any messenger, and is so used in both Testaments. The meaning is determined in context. It is applied to men, to angels, to representatives of God and of men—good and evil. Haggai, for example, was a *malak* (1:13), as was John the Baptist (Malachi 3:1, Matthew 11:10). Jesus, too, was a *malak*—‘...the messenger of the covenant’ (Malachi 3:1)

often to mankind from the creation of the first man—but only through this Mediator, this divine messenger: ‘...Not that anyone has seen the Father, except He who is from God, He

Bible commentators have provided a variety of scenarios to account for creation. Some—the ‘evangelical’ position—usually believe in a ‘young earth’ (six thousand years or so) - though with variations. Many Christians hold to an ‘evolutionary’ form for creation to accommodate geologic phenomena—again with variations. Others accept ‘intelligent design’, or a ‘gap’ between Genesis 1: 1 and Genesis 1:2.

But all accept that God was in creation, however formed., opinion differing according to the understanding of the Genesis account.

has seen the Father’ (John 6:46).

The Scriptures record abundant instances of God’s appearances through His Mediator. To Adam, to Cain, to Noah, at Shinar. At Shinar, indeed, we are told that ‘...Jehovah came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of Adam had built’ (Genesis 11:5). Some centuries later this Mediator again visited our planet: ‘...Jehovah came down on the mountain of Sinai, to the top of the mountain’ (Exodus 19:2). Remember, John—writing years after Jesus had returned to the Father—records that *no-one* had seen the Father at any time.

Throughout time the Mediator, God’s representative, appeared to men, gave directions to men, intervened in judgment to mankind—the Flood, the dispersion of rebellious Hamites, the expulsion of the degenerate Canaanites, the Exodus from Egypt, the destruction of armies, the overthrow of nations. He led the Israelites into Canaan, appeared to Solomon.

Who Was He?

It’s clear that the Mediator carried all the authority, all the power, all the majesty of the God-head. What He said would happen, happened. Yet God, the Father, has never been seen, never heard by any human being. Who, then, was He?

This Person was present at Creation and in Eden. It was God, YHVH, who created everything, who spoke—and it was done. Or, as says the Psalmist, ‘...Through the Word of Jehovah the heavens were made; and all their host were made by the breath of His mouth’ (Psalm 33:6). Our first parents’...heard the voice of

Jehovah God walking in the garden (Genesis 3:8).

He appeared to Moses, having arrested his attention in a burning (but not burning!) bush. It was holy ground. He was *'the Messenger of Jehovah'* (Exodus 3:2) and Moses came to the understanding that this august Person was God. Addressing Moses, He said: *'...I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God. And Jehovah said...'* (vv.6, 11).

The Mediator, in other words, is the perfect reflection of all that God was and is. In further conversation Moses sought to learn God's Name and was told: *'...I AM THAT I AM. And He said, So you shall say to the sons of Israel, I AM has sent me to you'* (v.14). He claimed, therefore, to be God, and to be eternal—always present: *'...I am'*. Without beginning, without end.

[Note that the *'Angel [Heb. malak] of the LORD'* (Exodus 3:2) is equated with the *'I AM'* (v.14).]

Forty years later the same Mediator led Israel out from two centuries of Egyptian slavery: *'... I will pass through the land of Egypt this night, and will smite all the first-born in the land of Egypt...I am Jehovah'* (Exodus 12: 12). And for the next forty years: *'Jehovah was going before them by day in a pillar of cloud, to lead them in the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give light to them, to go by day and by night'* (ch 13:21). The same is identified as *'...the Angel of God'* (ch 14:19).

Seven weeks after they began to leave Egypt He appeared before the assembled hosts of the Israelites at Sinai: *'...the LORD will come down in the sight of all the people upon*

mount Sinai' (Exodus 19:11). A few generations on, and He again appeared, this time to the young Samuel: *'...Jehovah again appeared in Shiloh. For Jehovah revealed Himself to Samuel in Shiloh, by the Word of Jehovah'* (Samuel 3:21) ..

Time and again throughout the history of Israel (and who knows where else!) God has visited our planet to encourage, to guide—and to judge—mankind.

There is, however, but *one* Mediator between God and man (I Timothy 2:5). And the Word of God makes clear that person is *'...the man, Christ Jesus'*

One Mediator

Jesus is introduced by the apostle John as *'...the Word [who] became flesh and tabernacled among us. And we beheld His glory, glory as of an only begotten from the Father, full of grace and of truth'* (John 1:14). Further, *'... In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and without Him not even one thing came into being that has come into being.'*

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Provided by courtesy of Lynn Meakin

In Him was life, and the life was the light of men' (ch 1:1-4).

Begotten by the divine Spirit, empowered by the Spirit Jesus came, for the first time, in human flesh and subject to our temptations—without succumbing to sin (Hebrews 4:15). Yet Paul describes him as *'...who being the shining splendor of His glory, and the express image of His essence, and upholding all things by the Word of His power, having made purification of our sins through Himself, He sat down on the right of the Majesty on high'* (Hebrews 1:3).

Logically, God is one—there cannot be two competing wills! And, of course, Jesus time and again emphasized his perfect unity with the Father. He is indeed one with Him, though for a short time dwelling among us as the perfect reflection of the unseen God. As the Father's appointed Mediator throughout the ages Jesus shared His very divine nature, His Name, exercising His authority, self-existent, the sole Judge of all: *'...For the Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son'* (John 5:22). Jesus, as the representative of Jehovah ruled on the sin of our first parents, judged sinful mankind by the Flood, scattered the rebellious at Babel, judged the Egyptians for their attempted genocide, punished Israel's apostasy, raises up and puts down nations. And came to die for all mankind—the Father, in their unity, no doubt suffering with him.

Yes, Jesus Christ *'...was God'*. The apostle John relays the words of Jesus: *'... I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the Ending, says the Lord, the One who is, and who was, and who is coming, the Almighty'* (Revelation 1:8, 22:13). Jesus, that same Mediator, says: *'...behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be'* (Revelation 22:12). Ω

Where is your life going? The path you are *now* treading will determine it

REAP A DESTINY

From our first rising until bedtime much of our day is bound by routines. They make life easier. Each morning we don't have to struggle with figuring how to wash and groom, or how to dress, or how to make breakfast.. Such activities simply become 'habit'.

Habits are '*a settled tendency or practice*', and we can't comfortably get through the day without them. In general they are positive and helpful. They are occasionally acquired slowly, undercover, un-noticed. Other desirable habitual behaviour is acquired painfully, with much persistent effort. For Christians it may be the habit of daily prayer or study of the Word or regular fellowship.

But there's a dark side to habitual behaviour - as would be agreed by the alcoholic, or the chronic worrier, or the TV addict. Wrote Dr Samuel Johnson: '*The chains of habit are too weak to be felt until they are too strong to be broken*'.

Those chains can bind us for life - and for eternity: '*Sow an act and reap a habit. Sow a habit and reap a character. Sow a character and reap a destiny*'.

However, for the Christian the chains can - with effort and with divine empowerment - be snapped.

It's unlikely *you* are not bound by some practice that you would prefer to finish with! And undesirable habits can be forsaken, put behind you. As with helpful habits, so too with the negative - effort must be applied. Wrote the apostle Paul: "*...who on earth can set me free from the clutches of my own sinful nature?*" (Romans 7:24).

The good news is that the Scriptures

provide the tools needed to break those chains.

Examine Yourself

A first step in conquering a wrong habit is an awareness that you are in its grip. Habits become 'second nature' - so much a part of us that we don't recognize their presence. The Psalmist knew this and prayed: "*Search me, O God, and know my heart...and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting*" (Psalm 139:23-24).

Self-examination, Word of God in hand, can uncover buried unsavoury character traits that are hidden from us because now habitual. You could, too, ask someone you trust - though your spouse has probably already told you, and often!

God's Word is the mirror that reflects our wrong habits. It 'hits us between the eyes' with right practices and thus condemns our sin (for that is what it is). Study it. Allow the Bible to shine a light into those dark corners of life.

What Are the Consequences?

What hidden habits lurk in your life? Anger, perhaps? Do you often 'fly off the handle' - and not realize it has become a habitual reaction to your circumstances? Anger may have its beginnings in the example your parents set you. Or, it may be that you 'got away with' responding in anger to life's challenges. It became habit.

Wrote King Solomon: "*He that is soon angry deals foolishly*" (Proverbs 14: 17). And Job understood the consequences: "*Wrath kills the foolish man*" (Job 5:2). It's general knowledge that anger and wrath and resentment can cause illness - and even may literally kill!

And that's a further step in getting rid

of a habit: *understand the consequences*. Look at the alcoholic retching in the gutter and note the effect it has on family and work and life. And on your church brethren - for Christians are far from being immune. See the iron grip that imprisons the paedophile - the consequence of habitual pornographic input. Or, watch the perspiring grossly overweight man or woman as they gasp for breath on an incline. *Consequences!* Such habits don't just happen. They result from a chosen life-style - whatever the cause of that choice.

There are, too, *long-term* consequences to ingrained habit. The apostle Paul: "*Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the Kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the Kingdom of God*" (I Corinthians 6: 9-10). They are '*works of the flesh*' Paul told the Galatians (*ch* 5:19-21). Allow any of these practices to become habitual - part of your total life-style - *then you are barred from God's eternal Kingdom*. If that concerns you then it should be incentive enough to deal - *now* - with your habit!

Some of the Corinthian brethren had been ensnared by these practices. Paul adds, however (v.11): "*Such were some of you*". They had come to grips - and beaten - their poisonous life-styles, their destructive habits.

Nip in the Bud

So you are now aware of your problem. But that doesn't stop it spilling out! A sudden burst of anger. Simmering resentment. More gossip. Another back-stabbing. Another drink, another cream cake, another

furtive paging of a top-shelf magazine. Bang goes your resolution!

You must move on. Writing to the Christians in Ephesus, Paul says: "...you must no longer behave like the Gentiles [ie the unconverted], whose lives are spent in the uselessness of their ways of thinking" (ch 4:17). He is pointing out that our behaviour results from our thought patterns. Or, as Solomon wrote: "As a man thinks in his heart so is he" (Proverbs 23:7). To conquer a habit, then, we must work on our habitual mode of thinking, be 'transformed by a complete renewal of mind' wrote Paul (Romans 12:2).

Divine Help

How? By first looking in the mirror of God's Word to identify what's right and what's wrong, to focus the spotlight of truth on your personal sinful habit. Many men and women have successfully identified and beaten undesirable habits through sheer unaided gritty will-power.

Christians, who have God's Spirit - His mind - indwelling them, must in like manner exercise the same power of their mind. It's the Spirit of a sound mind implanting in us the seed of spiritual fruit - including *patience* and *self-control* (Galatians 5:22-23). Soul-destroying habits don't happen in isolation. They affect - and are affected by - the whole of life.

A man who is habitually resentful or angry - or has other life-dominating problems - harms his family, friends, social activity, finances, work, church, his relationship with God. He is deficient in the all-encompassing *divine love* that is another vital 'fruit of the Spirit'.

As we nourish the growth of the Holy Spirit's influence - through 'the means of grace' - we can win battles beyond our normal strength. The Christian way of life is more than just 'pie in the sky when you die'!

The man or woman converted to Jesus Christ links to the power-house of the universe.

In working with the alcohol-dependent, AA appoint a 'buddy' to help - someone to contact when the going gets tough. Christians have also the support and encouragement of their church fellowship. God's Spirit guides us, but the Spirit works, too, through human instruments - those brethren in whom He dwells.

Such support is an important key to successfully overcoming any habit. Wrote James: "...Is any of you suffering trouble?... Confess your sins [ie offences, problems] to each other, and pray for one another that you may be cured. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great effect" (ch 5:13-16). We can call on the brethren - as well, often, as family and friends - for support when faced with destructive habits.

Avoidance

Another key to conquering habitual life-style patterns is to identify those 'triggers' that initiate a bout of anger or gambling or alcohol abuse *etc* - and avoid them. The apostle Paul gives us the principle: "*Flee fornication*" (I Corinthians 6:18), and "*Steer clear of the activities of darkness*" (Ephesians 5:11).

Is 'demon drink' a problem? Don't linger around bars - take another way home! Where appropriate avoid the bakery or the betting shop or the race track or the TV or top-shelf magazines. And don't carry cigarettes around with you.

Tough - but decisions you must make in the light of your eternal destiny.

Use and Disuse

Now link with this a further principle. You could call it 'put off-put on'.

Writes Paul, again: "*You are to rid yourself of the old nature with your previous habits, ruined as it is by deceitful lusts [rotted through and through with lust's illusions]; that you be renewed in your mental attitude and that you put on the new nature which is created in God's likeness in genuine righteousness and holiness*" (Ephesians 4:20-24)

So - become aware of your wrong habits. Consider their consequences - for this life - and for the next. Discipline your mind - that is, use sustained daily effort aided and strengthened by God's indwelling Spirit - to develop a new healthy and positive thought process encompassing every aspect of life.

The chains of habit *can* be broken. The prize of becoming a member of the spirit-Family of God is worth every drop of sweat we expend. Ω

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Autumn Festivals 2013

Trumpets: September 5
Atonement: September 14
Tabernacles: September 19-25
Eighth Day: September 26

unsigned articles are by the Editor

Soon you may have no choice but to cease work on Sundays.
Are you ready?

Friday. Saturday. Sunday. Each is considered special by large segments of the world's populace. Those who observe in some degree the Christian Sunday are most numerous – near enough two billion. All Protestant denominations write Sunday observance into their catechisms – a practice shared by the various sects of Roman Catholicism. [Request our free article *The Day To Remember*]

How the day is observed varies from a 'nod and a wink' through to the dedicated Sabbatarian who treats the day as if it were a divinely-appointed Sabbath. For serious Christians Sunday observance is considered a vital part of their religious practice. It is— for now— a voluntary choice, freely observed. *But not for long!*

Blue Laws

The twentieth century has witnessed a sharp decline in the veneration of Sunday as a day for worship. The century ended with a catastrophic fall in church going. Yet when the century began we had not long emerged from the influence of the 'blue laws'. These were prohibitions against various activities on Sunday – often with attached penalties. Indeed America's first state Sunday law, in Virginia in 1610, included the death penalty for failing to show up for church for the third time. Serious breaches, in the 1656 Connecticut law, also included a death penalty. As late as 1898 a New Hampshire Senator proposed to Congress a national blue law. It was a Bill "...to secure to the people the enjoyment of the first day of the week, commonly known as the Lord's Day, as a day of rest, and to promote its observance as a day of religious worship". The Bill was opposed by seventh-day Sabbath observers, and eventually failed.

In England the established Church exercised widespread coercive au-

thority on religious matters. There were 'Sunday laws' in

some form since the 7th century, and especially since Edward VI's *Act of Uniformity* (of religion) in 1551. Ecclesiastical censure and fines were imposed by statute in 1558 – the penalties repealed only in 1846. Only in recent years has Sunday trading been permitted by Law.

Such laws arose from the sincerely-held view – however misapplied - that a godly nation ought to venerate a weekly day of rest and worship, dedicated to the Creator. Indeed Sunday is held in high esteem to this day by two billion Christians whatever the law of the land may be.

The current lax legal approach to Sunday observance, however, may soon come to a grinding halt!

Unholy Alliance?

Whatever the profound differences and historical antagonism between Romanism and Protestantism, they are certainly agreed on which day of the week to set aside for worship. Since the fourth century the majority in Christendom, willingly or by force, have observed Sunday. Perhaps surprisingly, as the Roman Church claims to be the 'mother of Sunday', having changed it from the apostolic (and divinely-appointed) seventh day Sabbath. Even Protestant scholars agree that Rome made the change contrary to the Scripture teaching.

Sunday, however, is fast becoming a bridge of reconciliation for Protes-

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Get Ready for Sunday

tants and Catholics. The seed-bed for this is the United States. Roman Catholics now represent 25% of the population – some 77 million, up from well under 2% in 1776. They are increasingly influential in private and public life. And this can be seen as a positive influence, given the papal stand on such matters as abortion, personal responsibility, family values - and morality in general. It contrasts sharply with the general immorality of government and the populace at large.

Indeed the two issues of abortion ('pro-life') and Sunday observance are the key to the new alliance between the Roman Church, and evangelical Protestantism represented by the *Christian Coalition of America*, founded by Pat Robertson. Together they are a powerful political force, representing perhaps half of all Americans. What, though, does this new alliance bode for religious liberty?

Free To Obey

The moral pressure exerted by the late Pope John-Paul was almost irresistible. Seen as an icon of moral stability he was all but worshipped by the general populace wherever he went, and feted by governments. He was seen as a major architect of the downfall of communism, courted by politicians and religious leaders and his influence continues.

But, for Pope John-Paul, the observance of Sunday as a day of worship was of high priority. Concerned at the increasingly low attendance at Sunday mass, he published (May, 1998) his pastoral letter *Dies Domini* – the Day of the Lord. Equating (wrongly!) Sunday with the Biblical Sabbath, the Pope called for Catholics to use their influence in legalizing Sunday observance.

In Catholic *Canon Law*, attendance at Sunday mass is a 'grave obligation' – non-attendance sinful. *Dies Domini*, however, goes further. In it the Pope urges Christians to. "strive to ensure that civil legislation respects their duty to keep Sunday holy". (Incidentally, only God can 'make something holy'!)

Legislation, of course, is written by the *civil* authorities. Addressing some 15,000 public officials from around the world in November 2000, Pope John Paul said that political leaders must conform civil laws and policies to God's objective moral law – meaning, of course, as understood by Rome.

[The same theme continued—but less obviously—under the 'retired' Pope Benedict XVI. As Cardinal Ratzinger he was largely responsible for the theological position (and the writings) of John-Paul II—especially on Sunday laws. They worked together for twenty years. Benedict also mentors the new Pope Francis I]

In support, former Soviet Union president Mikhail Gorbachev told the assembly that the task of civil leaders in the twenty-first century would be to unite morality to politics. In the latest Roman *Catechism* (also crafted by Ratzinger) it is stated "... Christians should seek recognition of Sunday and the Church's holy days as legal holidays".

This theme has been taken up by the *Christian Coalition of America*, which also wants to see Sunday protected. Ratzinger also masterminded the Global Christian Forum as a way to 'co-operate' with Protestantism.

Indeed an increasing number of Roman Catholics are members of the *Coalition*, and in key posts within it. Given the propensity for politicians to 'roll over' to protect their position, a grass-roots opinion swell for Sunday ('blue') laws is likely to succeed in the United States. And it's now

thought that Catholics, 26% of the population, command the 'swing vote'. They are expected to vote according to conscience – the conscience of the Pope.

In Washington in 2008 Pope Benedict met with the leaders of the United States and Great Britain. Ways to halt the moral decline of the U.S. were discussed.

Is It Important?

So, doesn't that just mean an extra day off? It's an attractive idea in our frenetic western world. And to slide past the *Constitution* and the *First Amendment*, the health and family aspects of such legislation are highlighted by Catholic spokesmen - not the 'promotion of religion'. What, however, does it mean for you – for Judaism, for Adventists, for Muslims and for the multitude of seventh-day observers and non-observers of Sunday? It's the freedom of such religious minorities that is at stake.

Commerce and the entertainment industry have been the driving force behind the abolition of restrictions on Sunday work, coupled with the decline in religious observance in general. Business is not likely to take kindly to such legislation. Especially if you request off Saturday – or Friday – to fulfill religious obligations! Should Sunday blue laws be introduced or revived (they still quietly grace the legislation of some States) then minorities would be excluded from the economy: "Work on Saturday, or else".

Prophetic Insight

Such a scenario was predicted by Jesus in his message to the world for the end-time – for *now*.

We are to expect the rise of a short-lived, humanistic anti-God [*ie* opposing the God of Scripture] confederation of nations in Europe described as a 'wild beast' (Revelation 13:1-10). It will attain world dominion and be widely acclaimed – but will, how-

ever, be a persecuting power, hell-bent on destroying true believers, those '*...written in the Book of Life*' (v.7, 8). Behind the beast is the shadowy figure of man's arch enemy, Satan (v. 2).

Perhaps surprisingly, this secular power gains its vast worldwide authority through the influence of religion. Another 'wild beast' – also motivated by Satan (v.11) – is personalized as an individual practicing deceptive miraculous acts, even calling down fire. In an echo of the great image erected by King Nebuchadnezzar of ancient Babylon, he will order the fabrication of an 'image to the beast' which he will miraculously cause to speak (vv.14, 15).

Indeed the first beast's persecutions are instigated by the influence of the second, religious, beast. It's a reflection of the medieval practice of committing heretics to the secular power to administer punishment - including the death penalty, martyrdom.

The initial trigger is economic: "*And he causes all...to receive a mark on their right hand or on the forehead [indicating submission and obedience], and that no-one may buy or sell except one who has the name or the mark of the beast, or the number of his name*" (vv.16-17).

It's all a bit mysterious!

Prepare For Sunday

We get a clue to the mystery in the next chapter. Jesus—not so 'meek and mild'—tells us that those who submit to and obey the beast power will suffer 'the wrath of God' (the seven last plagues). By contrast those who will suffer under the hand of the beast "*...keep the commandments of 'God and the faith of Jesus'*" (ch 14:12).

That's interesting! They 'keep the commandments of God'. *And* this co-exists with '*...keeping the faith of Jesus*'. No religion *cont'd p.8*

Money - a Root of Every Evil?

It 'makes the world go round'. Everyone, it seems, wants more. Is money the root of every evil?

Stock market fever. 'Keeping up with the Jones's'. A bigger house. New car. Credit 'shopping pollution'. The good life. Economic growth. And in their wake debt, bankruptcy, poverty, taxes, inequality, corruption, drugs, crime, suicide. Money underpins all:

Money - we need it. The accumulation of wealth can be a positive benefit - we all need to save for 'a rainy day'. The Bible encourages it. Earth's bounty is a divine gift to provide resources for increasing mankind's prosperity. Human skill and ingenuity can turn 'earth' - it all comes from there - into an object of beauty, a practical device, comfort. Fair work deserves fair reward.

Yet 'the economy' preoccupies the minds of humble treasurers, business people, mortgage holders, shareholders, you and me - and Chancellors of the Exchequer. An army of accountants swarm in every nation, probing every tax loophole, every tax haven. In every nation there flows, like sewage, a stream of scavenging men and women intent on gain by any foul means.

Whole nations, Big Business, industry giants, banks, stock dealers - charities even - thrive in a culture of fraud and sly dealing. The man-in-the-street isn't averse to shady deals, to unquestioningly accept what 'fell off the back of a lorry'. The Internet swarms with scams intent on robbing you and me of our assets. The 'black economy' -

avoidance of taxation - undermines good financial governance. The urge for a 'fast buck' and high taxes combine to fuel widespread financial

criminality. VAT fraud has this past year cost European Exchequers a whopping €100billion. Insurance mis-selling has undermined the financial stability of countless savers. Pension funds have collapsed projecting bleak retirement prospects. The euro threatens global financial stability. Yes, money is indeed a root of every evil. Increasingly, true values are discarded.

Fundamental Cause

Despite all this financial complexity the cause is neatly summed up in four words: *'You should not covet'*. It could also be summed up in the words of one writer concerning the area in which he now lives: *'People are, in a material sense, poor. In terms of their life-style, however, they are among the world's super-rich'*. Or, hear the apostle Paul: *'But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we have brought nothing into the world, and it is plain that neither can we carry anything out. But having food and clothing, we will be satisfied with these'* (1 Timothy 6:6-8, Ecclesiastes 5:13-15). Translated into cold northern climes it means we should be content to have food in our bellies and a roof over our heads.

Money of itself, of course, isn't a problem. It is prudent - legally - to increase our wealth, to diligently and wisely exploit our talents and hone our skills for profit. Wealth lawfully gained by our efforts is a gift from God - and to be enjoyed in a godly way - for family, for charitable purposes, for service to God. (see Deuteronomy 8:18, Ecclesiastes 5:19,

Proverbs 13:11, 22, Job 20:10.)

Over-zealous Christians can violate this principle by 'giving all to God's work'. The apostle Peter, however, makes clear (Acts 5:4) that it is our personal responsibility to determine how we apportion our resources in the light of God's Word.

Conspicuous Consumption

What hurts, on the other hand, is the dedicated pursuit of money. Paul again: *'For the love of money is a root of all evils, by means of which some having lusted after it were seduced from the faith, and they themselves pierced through by many pains'* (1 Timothy 6:10). Pursuit of gain for its own sake, for self-indulgence, can divert us from that narrow path that leads to eternal life. But especially by those *not* 'in the faith', where there isn't the restraint of the teachings of Jesus.

The urge to acquire a larger home or the latest mobile phone or tv or hi-fi or new-model car, or Christmas overspend, or to satisfy a craving for nicotine or so-called 'recreational drugs' or harlotry or gambling, - all conspire to fuel Britain's trillion pound plus debt mountain. Such activities do indeed bring 'pain', for *'the payback from sin is death'*.

Such behaviour requires money and is, in the Scriptures, called *'covetousness'* [avarice, inordinate desire for more]. God warns against it in His guide to human happiness: *'You shall not covet'*. Jesus, too: *'And he said to them, Take heed, and keep yourselves from all covetousness: for a man's life doesn't consist in the abundance of the things which he possesses'* (Luke 12:15).

Rather, says Jesus, invest in the intangible: *'But treasure up for you treasures in Heaven, where neither moth nor rust [wear and tear] cause to perish, and where thieves do not dig through [break in] and steal. For*

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The Day To Remember

where your treasure is, there your heart will be also' (Matthew 6:20-21).

Look around your home. How much goes beyond keeping you at the comfort level? *'Have money will spend'* is a common attitude. In the UK, over £1 billion is stashed away in unused domestic hardware. And how much of it drips from your credit card? The average credit card debt in Britain is over £3000.

Credit fuels economic growth. But limit its use to what you can affordably repay - allowing for emergencies. Invest your resources, wisely, in projects that enhance the lifestyle of the underprivileged. Invest in activity that will reach beyond the grave. Invest in those things which cannot perish.

Above all invest in what is 'treasure' in God's eyes. This latter we discern as we steep ourselves in His Word. What does God see as *'the pearl of great price'*? *'How much better is it to get wisdom than gold'*, wrote King Solomon (Proverbs 16:16). Gold - anything that we consider precious. *Wisdom* is the principle thing (*ch* 4:7; *see also* 8:11).

Paul advances the same message: *'Set your mind on things above, not on things that are upon the earth'* (Colossians 3:2).

Your investment is an indicator as to *'where your heart is'*. What do you consider to be your 'treasure'? Jesus again: *'Seek first his Kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be added to you'* (Matthew 6:33).

Accumulating in this life for 'heaven' - for your eternal future - ensures that as a part of the Kingdom of God you will have free access to everything that is good for you!

It's a concept to be meditated on as we wrestle with our fast-depleting financial reserves. Ω

Sunday...cont'd

and no secular power advocates that its people kill or perjure or steal or dishonour the elderly—though they may encourage it by defective laws. That is, they would in general support obedience to the last six of the Ten Commandments. But this humanistic authority egged on by the religious power turns against those who keep the commandments'. In other words, the focus is on the *first four* of the Commandments, which teach us how to 'love God'.

Pivotal to these four is *"...Remember the sabbath day to keep it holy"* (Exodus 20:8-11). The only day God made holy was the seventh, basically our Saturday (Genesis 2:3). *That's why many of those Christians who observe the seventh-day Sabbath will at that time be martyred!* As the apostle Peter said to the secular/religious authorities: *"...We ought to obey God rather than men"* (Acts 5:29).

Mass Extinction

Before the first Christian century expired, most of the church had departed from the faith of Jesus. Over time true teachings were ditched, new practices added. Echoing the departure from the faith of the northern House of Israel's King Jeroboam (I Kings 12), the age-old faith of the Bible was abandoned and the trappings of sun worship were grafted on to the church.

Prominent was the transfer of worship to Sunday and the abandonment of the seventh day Sabbath and the annual holy days, all of which were the apostolic practice. Biblical Christianity—the religion of Jesus—became all but extinct.

Prophecy indicates this 'lawless' form of Christianity will be widespread in the end-time. It will lead to the unholy alliance of a false

form of religion co-operating with the secular authorities. Those who 'worship the beast' will bask - briefly - in a time of peace and prosperity. *It won't last.*

A Warning Unheeded

During the preceding time of 'stress upon nations' the signs of the times and the warnings of the church of God will have gone unheeded. The publishers of *New Horizons*, for example, have been part of a work which for over seventy years has been calling for our nations to turn to God.

The vast majority of those who have heard the warning, however, have refused to respond. By the time Jesus Christ returns all the world will have heard, will have been confronted by their idolatry. Here's what Jesus told John: *"But the rest of mankind who were not killed by these plagues [largely the effects of our misuse of the planet] did not repent of the works of their hands that they should not worship demons [any religion that isn't based on the Scriptures], and idols...and they did not repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts* (Revelation 9:20-21). We're back to those Ten Commandments again!

Clearly, our 'choice of religion' is limited: God's way, the Biblical way. Or any other way—leading to death.

Many of those who become, and remain, patiently faithful to the Word of God, however, will be martyred. Their lot is to be resurrected shortly thereafter at the return of Christ and to reign with him perpetually in the Family of God.

We each have a stark choice. Anciently God gave the seventh-day Sabbath as an identity sign for His people (Exodus 31:12-17). But hear what a prominent cardinal mistakenly says: "Sunday...is one of the most patent *signs* that we are a Christian people". And Pope John-Paul in *Dies Domini*: "More than a replacement of the Sabbath, therefore, Sunday is its fulfillment".

You are urged to *believe God* and not men - and live for eternity. Ω

MiniStudy**Why the Holy Days?**

'Don't suppose that I came to do away with the Law and the Prophets. I did not come to do away with them, but to give them their full meaning' (Matthew 5:17 CEV)

Whether Christian, Jew, Muslim or Hindu, believers love their annual holy days. Christmas, Passover, Ramadan/Eid, Diwali - all are joyfully celebrated by the faithful. They mark special events and are believed to have been decreed by their respective God. But why do many *Christians* observe what are viewed by most Christians as '*Jewish* days'?

- The Bible holy days are listed in Leviticus 23, and are observed annually by thousands of Christian believers. Indeed they are the only days recorded in the Scriptures - Old Testament or New - to have been decreed by the God of the Bible, JHVH, the LORD, and observed by the first Christians
- Although considered (often disparagingly) as 'Jewish' these annual holy days were introduced to the new nation of Israel (c. 1500 BC) as '*...appointed seasons of Jehovah, holy gatherings which you shall proclaim in their appointed seasons'* (Leviticus 23:4). *God's* days, note - not 'Jewish', not traditions concocted by mankind!
- Perhaps surprisingly, only one of the days observed in modern Christianity - *Pentecost* (also called *Whitsunday*) - is mentioned in the New Testament. Others (Christmas, Easter, saints' days *etc*) were imported from dubious sources into Christianity long after the time of Jesus and the apostles. They obscure the Creator's plan for mankind—a plan initiated before the creation of the universe, and man
- Each of these '*appointed seasons*' has direct reference to and clarifies some aspect of the life and mission of Jesus Christ. They are 'shadows' cast by the real events they portray. *Passover*, for example, is a reminder of the LORD's deliverance of His people - anciently from Egypt and, now, from the slavery of our sin. The *Unleavened Bread* festival emphasises our continuing need to live a holy life free from hypocrisy, malice and error. *Pentecost* is the on-going mission of the holy Spirit through the church. The *Day of Trumpets* has direct reference to the tumultuous time just prior to the return of Messiah, while *Atonement* looks forward to the reconciliation of mankind with the Father. The seven-day autumn *Festival of Tabernacles* depicts man's temporal nature - an ever-present reminder of our frailty, that we are 'clay' being shaped for perfection by a loving God, while the *eighth day* (which immediately follows on *Tabernacles*) looks forward to eternity.
- As with the weekly seventh-day Sabbath, in observing these divinely-appointed days '*...there is great reward'* (Psalm 19:8-11), and our annual observance reinforces God's Word to us. They provide spiritual '*food in due season*'
- The holy days were appointed by God. So - *must* we observe them? In ancient Israel they were indeed required observances - though so often neglected. Certainly important, for King Jeroboam set up an idolatrous festival (1 Kings 12:32) and was ever after branded as perhaps their most sinful king: '*...he caused Israel to sin*'. God expected their observance - so long as all else was in order, and done from the right motives
- Most professing Christians joyfully and happily—and *without coercion*—observe festive days that are *not* authorised by God—indeed condemned by Him. They know that as Christians no amount of law-keeping will save - only the sacrifice of Jesus, freely embraced, can do that. But as Christians we should '*...live by every word of God*' as magnified by the teachings of Jesus. We '*...worship in spirit and in truth*' (John 4:22-24)
- It is said of Abraham '*...the father of us all*' that he '*...kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws*' (Genesis 26:5). This was some four centuries *before* Moses and 'the Law'. He obeyed - as should Christians - because of his faith, not because the Law demanded it. The festivals are '*statutes*' - *eg* Leviticus 23:21 (*Pentecost*). (There are indications that the three harvest festival seasons were observed since creation) **Ω**

Request the free booklet: God's Holy Days

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