

new Horizons

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addressing the important issues for today and tomorrow



inside...

Marriage—just a piece of paper?

Beyond the Millennium

Religion—blessing or curse

Is God a 'trinity;?'

Eternity ...a new beginning

The Role of the 'Minister'

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

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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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For Christians, marriage transcends the mere physical and material. It has spiritual implications that extend beyond this life into the world to come. But what about the rest of mankind? Is marriage 'just a piece of paper'?

It's unnecessary to repeat here the statistics regarding marriage breakdown. Few of us are unacquainted with divorce - first or second hand. It results in much distress and in the disruption of lives beyond those of the immediate involved family. *Children* don't escape the pain - pain that stretches beyond the emotional disturbance caused by what is too often a long drawn-out war of attrition leading to the break-up of a home that was established in the warm glow of love and service. Behaviour, education, peer relationships, career are all affected.

Husband and wife, too, suffer. The material break-up of the family home carries severe financial penalty. The comfort of beloved established family traditions is swallowed in the loneliness of separation. Disputes over custody and property blight the family, with mutual recrimination and even a hatred that gnaws for years at the human spirit. Then there's the distress inflicted on *grandparents* and other relatives of both families, on friends, on colleagues.

Clearly divorce is not - usually - a happy situation.. Yet it is, too often, the first resort in foundering relationships.

A Valued Institution

No longer in Western society is marriage highly valued - by individuals, by government. In the United Kingdom, for example, financial incentives to encourage marriage have

been whittled away to almost zero, while co-habitation and homosexual relationships have, contrary to public opinion (and Scripture) been given equal status with marriage.

A Universal Institution

Yet marriage is a universal cultural institution, though differing in form from society to society. Since the dawn of history the family grouping has been instinctive, and essential to an ordered society. It has "...provided the foundations for the social order in every known society". Marriage is recognized and highly prized by all the major religions.

Among the billion strong Hindu people the family is central, and that religion as such does not approve divorce. According to *Hinduism* marriage is a sacred relationship, a divine covenant and a sacrament - and lasts through several lifetimes!

Marriage

...just a piece of paper?

In *Judaism*, there is an elaborate marriage ceremony, and again - divorce is reluctantly permitted through the religious courts. In *Islam*, marriages are usually 'arranged' and are effected by a contract, confirmed by a bride dowry and by her consent in the presence of witnesses. In most Islamic societies, though, the divorce court is restricted to men.

Marriage is highly valued - at least, outside Western 'civilised' societies. Yet even today our society seeks to

limit its breakdown. Divorce is not a complete free-for-all.

Given the problems and tensions that can arise in marriage, there must be strong reason for such an institution to have been adopted universally - even in primitive tribal systems. Clearly, alternatives are unacceptable. Mere co-habitation is a fragile substitute, with such relationships disintegrating on small pretext, and especially when a child comes along. The homosexual relationship, while satisfying to a very few individuals, yet is a blind ally which would if universally adopted spell the death knell of humanity - by definition, there would be no offspring.

Perhaps worse is the ally-cat mentality of rampant sexual permissiveness, with its legacy of broken lives, sexually transmitted diseases and superficial, inadequate and transient relationships.

How, then, did the concept of marriage come about?

Origins

Evolutionists may say marriage developed as a convenience, the first identifiable humans taking the idea from pairings noted among some primates from which they themselves supposedly derived.

The notion of 'family' is deeply imbedded in the human psyche. Indeed it's the building block of civilisation - discounted only by the academic ravings of an elite totally out of touch with reality, and intent on justification of their own permissive philandering.

The origin of marriage is much more simple: *God created man and woman within the same time-frame*. The first man didn't have to wait a zillion years for the first woman to catch up with his evolutionary advance (or

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vice versa). The idea that two incredibly complex individuals who are so perfectly complementary could 'evolve' within a single life-time is the stuff of comic books.

No. *God created* mankind - the pinnacle of His creation: "*God created man in his own image...male and female created he them*" (Genesis 1:27).

Vital Lessons

Consider ancient Israel - the divine pattern for every sovereign nation. Although never fully embraced by them, God's instructions to Israel - based on His divine purpose for mankind revealed at creation - are a guide to the purpose of marriage.

However much society has changed, there are vital lessons for our age. These fundamentals of marriage are the essential social adhesive designed to protect and maintain society. Jesus himself referred his opponents to this creation guidance: '*...Because of your hard-heartedness Moses allowed you to put away your wives; but from the beginning it was not so*' (Matthew 19:8).

First, the man is to separate from his parents and '*...cleave [be 'welded'] to his woman*' - his equal, his complement, his counterpart. The pair would become 'one flesh' - physically (through their offspring), and in their life-style.

Each couple would establish a new dynasty. It was designed by the Creator to be a lifetime partnership. Adam and Eve (the 'mother of all living') were, said God, to '*...be fruitful; multiply; fill the earth and subdue it*' (Genesis 1:28).

Constraints

God 'who inhabits eternity' - Himself a 'Family' - shared life with models of Himself made from the physical elements. To protect and preserve such families God revealed some necessary constraints.

Marriage was a coming together of two 'clans' - it was not a whim, but carefully planned and bound by an

agreed legal contract fair to both parties. Because of this, divorce was - originally - rare.

The law protected both children and property, and cared for both orphans and widows. That 'piece of paper' was essential to the stability of society. *It still is*—though now disregarded.

Romance was certainly part of marriage, but the framework for stability was the marriage covenant and the written contract.

No-go Areas

Sexual activity that would frustrate the bearing of children was prohibited.

The people of Israel were warned to remove themselves from the practices of surrounding nations - nations which had abandoned the divine way. They had descended into practices God termed 'detestable': "*...Do not lie with a male as with a woman; it is detestable; you shall lie with no animal whatever and defile yourself with it; neither shall a woman stand before an animal to commit lewdness with it; it is perversion. Do not defile yourself in any of these ways, for by all these practices the nations whom I am driving out before you are defiled*" (Leviticus 18:22-24).

The terrible pain inflicted on children coupled with the rising tide of sexually transmitted disease in our day should confirm the wisdom of this. Trampling over God's protective laws - which are '*...for our good that he may preserve us*

alive' (Deuteronomy 6:24) - always has adverse consequences.

Property rights, too, were among the various constraints on marriage. It's in our nature to be protective of what we have laboured for, and marriage laws in Israel were designed to uphold this. The heart-break of broken marriage with its often unfair division of property is a scourge of our time and a drain on personal and national resources.

Maybe worse is the abandonment of children and the chaotic outcome that results from feckless co-habitation.

Children thrive best when settled in a stable home in which they are lovingly nourished and educated in true family values.

The life-time commitment of a man and a woman provides the ideal environment for this. Sadly, many of today's parents are in ignorance of the principles that promote a successful life. Easy access to divorce undercuts commitment.

And co-habitation provides an easy escape route when faced with the inevitable adjustments within formal marriage. 'Marriage for life' is a challenge. But within its constraints there is the will to work out problems rather than the convenience of an open 'back door'.

More, then, than 'just a piece of paper' but a building block of a stable society—and one that we undermine and neglect at our peril. **Ω**

Religion ...cont'd from p.4

exile (II Chronicles 36:21).

Change...

But—*change is on the way*. Jesus the Messiah is coming as King of kings and LORD of lords to overturn all human political and religious institutions. He will restore to mankind 'the faith once for all delivered'. That one true faith will envelop all mankind.

No more Crusades. No more Islamic in-

fighting and terrorism. No more persecution. No more suicide bombs. Just the way of the one true Gospel—the good news of peace and prosperity for all: '*...the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever.*' Isaiah 9:6-7 **Ω**

Mankind's unhappy tenancy of Earth will come to an end. Beyond lies life beyond human imagination

Beyond the Millennium

'...Your kingdom come on earth...as it is in heaven'. Wow! Can we begin to imagine what that will be like? There, in heaven, all is perfection. There—no sin. No sorrow. No pain. Perfect righteousness. Holiness. Immortality.

And all of that will '...come on earth'. It is the goal to which we, as Christians, aspire. It is why we apply all diligence to become Christ-like in our thoughts and in our behaviour. Why we turn aside from worldly pursuits, endure loss of friendships, experience alienation, loss of jobs.

We are, however, secure in our understanding that all of life is subordinate to a divine plan. The plan is symbolized by the annual festivals appointed by God (*see side-bar, Leviticus 23*).

That Kingdom clearly does not as yet exist on earth. It is a spirit Kingdom. It is eternal—but now there is imperfection, decay, suffering and death. Then '*...God will wipe away all tears from their eyes. And there will be no more death, nor mourning, nor crying out, nor will there be any more pain; for the first things passed away*' (Revelation 21:4).

That certainly is not what the apostle Paul calls '*...this evil world*'. Nor, may we note, is it the world that is coming, when Jesus Christ returns as King of kings, and Lord of all lords—Master of the political and the religious realm, and to reign for a thousand years.

For at that time, death will still reign. There will be sickness. People will sin. They will build

houses, plant crops, tend to their animals. Much as it is today—but under the careful shepherding of Jesus and his resurrected saints all mankind will live guided by divine Law. No more corrupt and incompetent politicians and businesses. No confusion of multiple faiths. Just God's way.

7000 Years

The seven-day week is symbolic of God's seven thousand year representative plan for human life—one day representing a thousand years. It indicates that God works to a time-table, and that man's time in the flesh is limited.

The seventh day of the week—the Sabbath—represents the thousand

The Plan

So *stage one* of the Father's plan is now being worked out as He invites individuals to commit their life to Jesus, to be his servants in a corrupt world, to be trained in the way of truth, the laws of the Kingdom.

The *second stage* is during the millennial reign of the Messiah, during which the way of salvation will be opened to all mankind. All will experience the way of the Kingdom and will be invited to become part of the Family of God.

Stage three begins as the millennium ends: '*...the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were ended*' - Revelation 20:5. All others who have walked the earth since creation

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

will be raised from the dead to experience a period of testing, and given opportunity to embrace the Gospel message—to become part of the divine Family, to '*...partake of the divine nature*' (II Peter 1:4).

This sees the completion of 'mankind in the flesh' (Symbolized by the festival of *Tabernacles*). Should any continue to reject the mercies of God, their life will be ended and their body consumed in what the apostle Peter describes as '*...the present heavens and the earth being kept in store by the same Word, are being kept for fire until the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men*' (ch 3:7).

Eternity

The stage is now set for the realization of God's ultimate purpose for His creation! It's the final stage of His present plan.

At man's creation '*...God created man in His image; in the image of God He created him. He created them male and female*' (Genesis 1:27). Perfect DNA. Healthy. Reasoning. Rational. Competent. And in perfect communion with Him. Perfect, yes—but *with the capacity to choose*.

And the purpose? That His Spirit-led offspring may become '*... heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ*' (Romans 8:17). That, surely, is mind-blowing—that we will share Christ's inheritance of the Universe! The Father will by then have taken up His residence on a renewed Earth: '*...the tabernacle [dwelling] of God is with men, and He will dwell [tabernacle] with them*' Revelation 21:3. There will be, *cont'd p.8*

Religion - blessing or curse?

Millions have died in the wars of religion. Should all religion be abolished?

Militant atheists will give a resounding *YES* to that question—and, given the on-going religious conflicts, probably quite a number who never think much about the matter.

Of course, religion will never disappear, for it is hot-wired into the human psyche. It has even been suggested that *atheism* is a faith! And given the weak arguments for Darwinian macro-evolution, so too has that been called a faith, a belief system.

Service To God

There is no argument that religion is dangerous. It has spawned wars since man's beginning, and more often than not the perpetrators proclaim they are on God's side, doing His work.

That surely was the case in mediaeval Roman Catholicism with its racks, torture, executions, live burning of Protestants opposed to catholicism, as recorded in mid sixteenth century by John Foxe in his *Acts and Monuments* (the 'Book of Martyrs').

The twelfth and thirteenth century Inquisitions were set up by the Church to combat the perceived heresies of the Cathars and Waldensians. Multitudes were martyred. And more such inquisitions followed.

A century and a half of religious conflict between Catholicism and Protestantism erupted in Europe (16th-17th centuries) in a time of religious change and fervour.

The English civil war, too, had religious roots stemming from the aftermath of the Reformation.

Our Times

But we don't need to look back in anger at *past* conflict. Our own lifetime witnessed brutal religious and

political war in the Balkans, Orthodox Christians v. Islam. Thousands were butchered, there was mass rape and callous 'ethnic cleansing'.

The internecine destructive struggle between various Islamic factions is a major feature of our time, with endless cover in the media. Many thousands have been murdered, in the name of Allah, throughout Africa and the Middle East. Religious conflict, indeed, appears to be hard-wired into humanity.

Also in the name of peace is the ongoing war waged against Israel by the surrounding Islamic powers, aided and abetted by international institutions and by nations who should know better—notably Britain and the United States. Simply because the 'enemy' is Jewish! (Israel is the sole bastion of democratic freedom in an ocean of Islamic dictatorship and tyranny.) Despite open declaration that the goal is to destroy Israel the international community stand idly by while spouting empty words.

So—*who wants religion!*

Real Religion

Christianity, Hinduism, Islam—all are culpable. All have in their time, and in our time, spawned religious hatred, conflict, death. I said religion is hard-wired into the deepest recesses of our being. But is what we've got what the Creator God intended?

In the beginning man walked with God, talked with God, worshipped God. There was one faith—God-appointed, beneficial, peaceable. But exercising his God-give power to

There is but one God, and the record shows He is guilty of 'ethnic cleansing'. Yet Jesus claims that *he* perfectly represented and reflected the Father. *So...*

Why Does God Kill?

choose, man devised his own religions.

One God

The one and only Creator God was abandoned in a frenzy of human ideas influenced by demonic powers, and sinking to the worship of the inanimate, the lower creation—and even humans:

...knowing God, they did not glorify Him as God, neither were thankful. But they became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man, and birds, and four-footed animals, and creep-

The vast array of faiths is illogical—for there can be but one God, and there can be but one way to engage with Him. *He is not a God of confusion!* Which 'God', then, do we believe?

The apostle Paul observes: *'though there are those who are called gods, whether in Heaven or in earth (as there are many gods and many lords), but there is to us only one God, the Father'* (I Corinthians 8:5-6). Sensible!

Is it *Jehovah* (JHVH)? Or is it *Allah*? Or *Shiva*? Each—and every other of the multitude of gods man has devised—has a different set of values to live by.

To preserve *His* way—the one true faith—the Creator destroyed perhaps billions in a universal flood. To preserve His way of life He raised up the descendants of Isaac—expelling those with a different (and destructive) faith from Palestine for Israel to inherit. 'Ethnic cleansing' on a massive scale.

And to preserve His way—He is consistent—the God of the Christian Scriptures chastised Israel for their abandonment of His way, notably their neglect of Sabbaths sending them into a 70-year *cont'd p.2*

The early centuries of the Christian church were riven by fierce dispute regarding the nature of God. Is God a “trinity”, as the church chose to believe?

Our human perception of the nature of God in no way affects the reality. God is what He is no matter what anyone believes! He probably chuckles at the varieties of belief - but undoubtedly gets pretty angry at the violence of the protagonists. Christians through the centuries have literally tortured and killed in support of their particular trinitarian view. And today scorn is heaped on any professing Christian who denies so-called “Holy Trinity”.

Of course no-one, whatever view he or she holds about God, has any thought of disrespect for Him. All are trying to express their understanding of the Scripture teaching, and few hold “unorthodox” views from malice. (Many protagonists, however, were heavily influenced by prevailing—pagan—views of ‘god’.)

So it is at least uncharitable to self-righteously condemn all who differ from a trinitarian view! This is especially true in face of the large volume of scholarly objections to the orthodox concept.

Objections

The doctrine “bristles with difficulties” writes pro-trinity Louis Berkhof (*Systematic Theology* p.82). He points out the “deficiencies” of early writers on the doctrine - including Tertullian, Origen. It’s not until Augustine (d.430AD) that we have what modern protagonists of the trinity would deem acceptable! Yet controversy continues to this day. It remains “a mystery beyond the comprehension of man” (p.89)!

The existence of “the Holy Spirit” is universally accepted by Christians of every persuasion. What is in dispute is the nature of the Spirit, and the relationship within the Godhead.

Whatever that nature and relationship, the Holy Spirit is divine and is an integral part of the Godhead. It’s

our view, however, that the Scriptures

are unambiguous that the Spirit does not have any separate “bodily” existence - the commonly-held and misunderstood lay view of the trinitarian doctrine. There’s the Father, there’s Jesus and there’s the Holy Spirit. And somehow the three are one. A mystery!

Divine Persona

In essence, the Holy Spirit is God’s “persona” - by which He acts throughout the universe. By analogy, in human terms we talk of a “powerful personality”, by which the individual exerts influence by his or her very presence. It is the force of the human spirit.

God’s Spirit is of course holy, perfect, infinitely powerful and everywhere present. God, through the Spirit, can perform any action - move a mountain, for example, in answer to prayer! - without a “physical presence”.

It’s the way Jesus Christ, now located in heaven at God’s right hand, carries out on earth the work He did in His human body. As Paul writes, “*The Lord [ie Jesus Christ] is that Spirit*” (II Corinthians 3:18).

The terms used in Scripture of the holy Spirit confirm this. They don’t lend themselves to a person but to an influence, a dynamic force: baptized by the Spirit, filled with the Spirit, quench the Spirit.

Trinitarian Texts

This “mystery beyond comprehension” isn’t evident in the text of

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is for many a

unsigned articles are by the Editor

Is God a ‘trinity’?

Scripture. Indeed the only ‘clear’ verses are laughed out of the text by theologians. Take, for example I John 5:7, rarely included except as a foot-note in modern translations. [*‘there are three bearing witness in Heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one’*]

It’s “an insertion” (*Berkeley*). ‘Added in late MSS of the Vulgate’ (*New International*). “Clearly a gloss and rightly excluded from the RSV even in the margin” (*New Bible Commentary Revised*). “The best authorities do not consider it to be part of the original text” (*SPCK Commentary*). “Not the shadow of a reason for considering them genuine” (Alford: *On the New Testament*). It is “the only passage speaking of tri-unity”, say Protestant scholar Louis Berkhof.

Source

Noted textual scholar F H A Scrivener writes: “We need not hesitate to declare our conviction that the disputed words were not written by St John: that they were originally brought into Latin copies in Africa from the margin, where they had been placed as a pious and orthodox gloss on v.8: that from the Latin they crept into two or three late Greek codices, and thence into the printed Greek text, a place to which they had no rightful claim” (*Plain Introduction to the Criticism of the New Testament*, 1883, 3rd ed).

Judgment on this text is summed up by Wm Cunningham: “...most Trinitarians now admit that there is a decided preponderance of critical evidence against the genuineness of I John 5:7” (*Historical Theology* v.2 p.216).

Matthew 28:19

There can be little doubt that this text, too, “*baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*” is an early spurious gloss on the original form of words used in baptism - “*in my name*”.

Wrote F C Conybeare:

“In the course of my reading I have been able to substantiate these doubts of the authenticity of the text of Matthew 28:19 by adducing patristic evidence against it so weighty that in future the most conservative of divines will shrink from resting on it any dogmatic fabric at all while the most enlightened will discard it as completely as they have its fellow text of the Three Witnesses [I John 5:7] And "...of any other form of text [Eusebius] had never heard until he had visited Constantinople and attended the Council of Nice” [Hibbert Journal, 1902].

The *Acts of the Apostles* gives us a photo-fit of the practices of the primitive Christian community. There we find that baptism was done ‘...in the name of Jesus’.

The use of ‘the three-fold name’ is now recognized as a late doctrinal expansion. “The facts are, in summary, that Eusebius [church historian of the early 4th century] quotes Matthew 28:19 twenty-one times, either omitting everything between ‘nations’ and ‘teaching’, or in the form ‘make disciples of all nations in my name’, the latter being the more frequent” (*Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*).

Consequences

The only ‘clear Biblical evidence’ for a view of God as a ‘trinity’ collapses under the weight of historical judgment. It arrived very late in Christian theology, and can be traced in the teachings of the inspired apostles only by reading into them concepts that derive from sources other than the Scriptures.

While all human views of the Godhead are seen “through a glass, darkly” - and in no way affect what the Godhead is really like - yet acceptance of a non-Biblical view can have serious consequence.

The truth frees us. Embracing error

in one doctrinal aspect distorts other teaching. How we perceive the nature of God affects our understanding of the Scriptures.

For example, a narrow trinitarian concept of God blinds us to the clear and breath-taking Bible teaching that man can become - through the same indwelling Holy Spirit - a part of the divine Family. If God is a closed “trinity” - a pre-Christian and unbiblical notion - how can mere humans become part of the divine Family, His children? How can we come to be in the *very image of God*? How can God, as Paul wrote, “...become all in all”? Or, as writes the apostle Peter: ‘...that we might be partakers of the divine nature’ (II Peter 1:4).

Another adverse consequence of trinitarian belief seems to be the un-

The doctrine of a ‘trinity’ of gods was adopted by Christianity only in the early third century of our era. It was an attempt to define the nature of the God of the Bible.

Pagan Roman religion was familiar with the concept, and indeed it has also been ascribed to the ancient Sumerians and Egyptians—under a variety of names—eg Re, Ptah. Amun—a triune deity.

The third century church in Rome promoted this indigenous belief, and it became firmly implanted in Christianity under the Emperor Constantine (Council of Nicea).

Christ-like urge to persecute - historically to the point of death - or ostracize all who reject it! Certainly Christians who reject it - and on strong Biblical evidence - are often branded a ‘cult’ and excluded from Christian facilities.

It is remarkable that most protagonists for a ‘Trinitarian’ view of God are in the forefront of a whole package of other unbiblical doctrines. In general they accept the non-Biblical days of worship - Sunday, Christmas, Easter *etc.* They embrace the false notion of an immortal soul, confusing their hearers by teaching that they have an “immortal soul” that dissipates to heaven or to hell on death—yet also preaching a future bodily resurrection.

They frighten by teaching the pagan notion of an eternal ever-burning hellfire for the wicked, and deceive by promising the unbiblical notion of “going to heaven” at death.

By contrast, where a Biblical concept of the Spirit is held, such false teachings are likely to be firmly rejected. And human destiny is recognized as becoming, truly and fully, “sons and daughters of the Almighty”.

While respecting other “guesses” at the nature of God, we strive to express what we perceive to be the Bible view. Ω

Are You a ‘Saint’?

Over the last twelve months Pope Francis canonized ten ‘saints’ - including two Popes. Just what is a *saint*—according to the Scriptures?

God, unsurprisingly, has the ‘right to choose’ who will be invited to become part of His Family. Those who respond are baptized (by immersion) and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Thus begins a life of transformation. Anyone, then, who has the Spirit is ‘holy’, set apart as a Family member, and is called a ‘saint’. In the New Testament all Christians of whatever status are termed ‘saints’.

“A person who after death is formally recognized by a Christian Church, especially the Roman Catholic Church, as having attained, through holy deeds or behaviour, a specially exalted place in heaven and the right to veneration” *Definition*

‘Saint’ Gk *hagios*
Things dedicated to God
Persons consecrated, holy

Request our free article: **Should You Be Baptized**

'Where will you spend eternity?' is a common query by evangelical Christians. And there is a Biblical answer Here is the Plan.

Eternity is the very reason God created mankind. It is the new beginning when we leave behind our temporary dwelling in fleshly bodies and acquire a new spirit body: *'...it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body* (I Corinthians 15:44).

For some—those *now* invited, in this age—that transformation takes place at the return of Jesus Christ to reign for a thousand years (the 'millennium'). Those who physically survive into that era—after the chaos of the 'last days'—will have the opportunity to also become spirit. While for the rest of mankind—from every age of man since his beginning—there will, after the millennium, be a resurrection to physical life with the same chance to take on the same spirit body: *'...the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished'* Revelation 20:5).

Outline Plan

The entire plan has been outlined for us in the series of 'feasts of the LORD' (Leviticus 23). There are seven of these, but in the autumn there are four with reference mainly to the end times—and beyond.

One of these festivals is the seven-day *Feast of Tabernacles*. Although it has wider significance, it specifically encompasses the events from the return of Jesus as King of kings and LORD of lords until the end when, *'...he [Jesus] shall have delivered up the kingdom to God'* (I Corinthians 15:24).

Eternity—a new beginning

Tabernacles references our temporary pilgrimage in the flesh, dwelling in our temporary physical mortal bodies. It derives from the Israelites dwelling in booths (temporary dwellings) for the seven days of the feast: *'...You shall live in booths seven days'* (Leviticus 23:42), after which they could return to their houses (note John 7:53).

Nehemiah fills in some detail: *'...Also day by day, from the first day unto the last day, he read in the book of the law of God. And they kept the feast seven days; and on the eighth day was a solemn assembly, according unto the manner'* (ch 8:18). Note here: Nehemiah records that 'the last day' of the feast is the *seventh* day of *Tabernacles*. The *Modern KJV* translates John 7:37: *'...the last day of the great feast'*.

A New Beginning

There is, however, a final annual festival immediately following on *Tabernacles*. This '*Eighth Day*' completes the outline plan, and can only refer to eternity. For all flesh has by then been either consumed by fire or transformed as spirit: *'...Behold, the tabernacle*

of God [the Father] is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they will be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away all tears from their eyes. And there will be no more death, nor mourning, nor crying out, nor will there be any more pain; for the first things passed away. And He sitting on the throne said, Behold, I make all things new' (Revelation 21: 3-5).

The Eighth Day

The symbolism of the Eighth day (Leviticus 23:39) of the autumn festival focuses on *eternity* - God's 'end game'.

The number 'eight' - mentioned eighty times in Scripture - is associated with new beginnings, a new order. Examples are the 'eighth day' - the first day of a new week. Jesus, following his resurrection as the *eighth day* was beginning (the first day of the week, Sunday) presented himself before the Father on that day in his new spirit body. Eight persons survived the Great Flood to enter the new world. God's people were covenanted through circumcision on the eighth day of life. Even in physics - for the eighth note on a musical scale is the same as the first note, *etc.*

Within Judaism, this eighth day - following the seven days of *Tabernacles* - is 'a festival in itself'. It is a time of exuberant jubilation - a veritable marriage feast. "...it is this day which above all expresses the joy of the Jewish religion" (*Teach Yourself Judaism* p.188).

Each of the 'holy days' God has revealed is an important guide to the divine plan for mankind - for now and for eternity. Not least is this *closing day* of the festival year, pointing us to the culmination of His magnificent plan. Ω

Festival Symbolism

Pentecost represents the firstfruits harvest during this present age.

Tabernacles concerns mankind in his physical state with specific reference to the Millennium. The *last day* of *Tabernacles* refers to the general resurrection after the millennium ends.

The *Eighth Day* carries us forward

Are You 'Worldly'?

The Christian lives in the real world. But the authentic Christian life demands change

For some a 'decision for Christ' merely means signing a card or a church register, or saying '*I believe*'—and carrying on life as before. But does God ask for more?

The apostle Paul urges his readers in Rome to '*...be transformed by the renewing of your mind, in order to prove by you what is that good and pleasing and perfect will of God*' (Romans 12:2). Given the challenges we have when we try to change our life-style—doesn't that sound like there is indeed more to being a Christian?

How We Are Seen

So what changes in you does 'Tom next door' see in you since you became Christian? He probably notes that you go out every Sunday at a certain time—though maybe not. But is that all?

Jesus says his disciples are to be like a city up on a hill, like a bright light—visible to all. Let's explore what that means, in terms of God's revelation.

The apostles have much to say on this. Look at what the aging John wrote in his first letter: '*...Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him*' (ch 2:16). There must be, in other words, a radical change in our world-view. A change in how we look at life—and how we live it. What, then, is 'worldly'?

External Observances

John again: '*...all that is in the world, the lust [desires] of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world* (I John 2:16). Normal life, then, lived just as does unconverted 'Tom'! It's the expression of our human nature—and in Christ that begins to change.

Source Code

Those who respond to the Father's invitation to come to Jesus Christ (John 6:44) are given the holy Spirit (Acts 2:38)—the inner potential to follow the divine code for life as exemplified by the life of Jesus.

Over time, following our baptism, the characteristics of the godly life are opened to us as we become immersed in the Scriptures—the Word

Beyond...*cont'd from page 3* writes Peter '*...a new heavens and a new earth, in which dwells righteousness*' (II Peter 3:13). That is, no more death, but immortality. A new beginning when all will have been transformed as Spirit. And—'*...we shall be like him*' (I John 3:2).

The immensity, the vastness, of the Universe will be the stage for the next phase of the divine plan. Our puny minds cannot begin to envisage what God has in store—for eternity!

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of God, the Christian Bible. Through God's revelation in the Scriptures, there our personal character flaws are exposed and we can devise a strategy of on-going change.

Godliness Exemplified

It's a mistake to assume change takes place without our co-operation. Certainly the Father prompts us to change through His indwelling Spirit speaking to us through His Word, and indeed He will at times intervene in our lives to correct us (*see Hebrews 12*). But the apostle Paul makes clear we are to actively 'put off' our old worldly nature, and to 'put on' our new nature: '*...put off all these things: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, shameful speech out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, having put off the old man with his deeds and having put on the new, having been renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him*' (Colossians 3:8-16).

That nature, that image, is set before us in the life of Jesus—the perfect life of godliness, living in the world but not of the world. It's a world, says Paul, that is '*...passing away*', one in which we are '*...strangers and pilgrims*'.

Worldliness, then is attitude. We could, like the Christians at Colosse, go overboard: '*...touch not, taste not, handle not*' (ch 2:21), unnecessarily restricting ourselves from the proper enjoyment of life.

Or, we can focus on the truly godly—and unworldly—characteristics that Paul then describes: '*...bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness*' (ch 3:12-14).

Jesus sums it up: '*...You however are to be complete in goodness [KJV perfect], as your Heavenly Father is complete*' (Matthew 5:48). **Ω**

MiniStudy**The Role of the 'Minister'**

'... whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister' (Matthew 20:26)
'...are they ministers of Christ?' (II Corinthians 11:23)

It's generally accepted that 'every church needs a minister' What is disputed is his - or her - role. Within Christianity there are indeed many ecclesiastical structures—ranging through the hierarchical (as in the Roman church or some contemporary sects), to the Anglican churches, to the informality of some of the 'house churches'. What, then, of popes and archbishops and bishops *etc*? Do these offices derive from the Christian Scriptures?

- Search the New Testament text, however, and but two church offices are listed: '*...to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons*' (Philippians 1:1). Elsewhere the 'bishops' (Gk *episkopi*, overseers) are equated with *elders* (Titus 1:5, 7), while Peter urges the elders to '*...Be shepherds of God's flock which is among you*' (I Peter 5:2)
- These *elders, bishops, shepherds* are appointed within individual congregations. They are not appointed over dioceses, nor does any one 'bishop' (however titled) rise to supremacy over any denomination-or indeed the entire Church of God. The rumpus over female bishops in the Anglican community is, on this basis, an irrelevance. So, too, the Papacy. The office of 'bishop' as today generally understood had no place in the church for at least a century from its beginning. Any 'superiority' arose from respect for individuals (Polycarp, for example) who were exemplary for their faithfulness to the apostolic teaching and their dedication to the service of Christ. They exercised *moral* authority—only. Every office bearer answered, answers, directly to Jesus
- Much of the confusion extant in church office arises from the model used. Episcopal churches compare their offices to the Old Testament priesthood. The early church, however; was based on the synagogue model
- In popular use, the church is divided into *clergy* and *laity*—referring, of course to the 'ministry' and the 'flock'. Again, a practice not derived from the Scriptures. *Clergy* derives from the Greek *kleros*, meaning an inheritance. Note Peter's comment: '*...Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage [Gk *kleros*], but being ensamples to the flock*' (I Peter 5:2-3). The real 'clergy' are those brethren - the '*...flock of God*' (v.2) - committed by the Lord to the care of the 'shepherds'
- A key to the function of church leaders derives from the instruction by Jesus to his apostles: '*...!... whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister [Gk *diakonos*, servant]*' (Matthew 20:26). This attitude underpins the care to be exercised by those appointed to positions of leadership in the church of God. Biblical leadership is not authoritarian: '*...you know that foreign rulers like to order their people around. And their great leaders have full power over everyone they rule*' (v.25 CEV). That's not what Jesus prescribed for his church! The apostle Peter, too, emphasizes this attitude (I Peter 5:1-3). This does not mean there is no discipline and authority in any local assembly. Such, properly exercised, is essential for order and is God-appointed
- The only other New Testament-sanctioned office' is that of *deacon* (Gk *diakonos*). The word simply means a servant, and is an everyday word - *eg* the attendants at the marriage feast at Cana (John 2:5). It is used by Jesus of himself (Matthew 20:28) and by the apostle Paul (I Corinthians 3:5). Early in the life of the church it was specifically applied to men and women (Romans 16:1) appointed as 'servants of the church' for administrative functions (Philippians 1:1, I Timothy 3:1)
- Additionally, Christ imparts spiritual gifts to *all* of 'God's heritage' to benefit his purpose (I Corinthians 12). Some have gifts that, when nourished and exercised, equip them to function as dedicated evangelists (*eg* Ephesians 4:8-12). Others have those qualities that equip to function as pastors of the flock and teachers of the Word, or as servants ('deacons') of the local assembly (I Timothy 3:1-13)
- The term 'ordain' (Gk *kathistemi*—Acts 6:3, Titus 1:5) is widely misused. It is simply an *appointment* - through the laying-on of hands (Acts 13:3) - by the local church to a recognized function or office of leadership of an individual who is seen to have the appropriate qualifications/gifts. It is a public procedure, as illustrated in Acts 6, but elaborate ritual is not Biblically supported

Ω

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