

# *new* **Horizons**

*Vol 19 No 4*

*July/August 2015*

*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**

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### **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](http://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

It is distributed free on request, being a co-operative voluntary effort financed by the members and friends of the *Churches of God*. We also welcome the financial support of all who benefit from our publications and who wish to labour with us.

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

Issue No 112

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## What is 'sin'? Does it have any place in the modern world?

Have you sinned today? It's not a topic we much like to talk or think about! Rather, we ignore it, suppress it—even deny its existence, viewing it as a relic of a by-gone age of strait-laced morals of no relevance in our modernity.

You have likely heard of 'the seven deadly sins' - usually given as [wrath](#), [greed](#), [sloth](#), [pride](#), [lust](#), [envy](#), and [gluttony](#). And your path through life this very day may have exhibited one or other of them. They are difficult to avoid! But is that all there is to sin? Does it matter?

All religions have their sin-lists. *Islam* notes seventy major sins (without limiting the number of possibles). *Hinduism* is less specific, relying on *karma*. *Buddhism* has five cardinal sins. And to check in with some Christians, nearly everything is sin! So—card playing (the 'devil's cards'), dancing, make-up, short skirts, alcohol and much else is added to the Ten Commandments and to those 'mortal' seven. [The latter are defined in the Roman church as sins that 'cut our relationship off from God and turns man away from his creator'. Lesser sin is known as *venial*.]

### Sin Defined

If you are concerned about the future life you will want a clear definition. What about '...all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God?' (Romans 3:23). Would that exclude you—any of us? Or how about '...sin is lawlessness (*Gk anomia*)' I John 3:4)? Have you ever broken any laws, any rules—including *God's* laws? That's a pretty inclusive list! We are all guilty.

If you think you have escaped, the apostle Paul (he calls sin 'the works of the flesh') provides an impressive list: '...Now the works of the flesh are clearly revealed, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lustfulness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, fightings, jealousies, angers, rivalries, divisions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revelings, and things like these' (Galatians 5:19-21).

If that's not enough then listen to the words of Jesus himself: '...I say to you, Everyone who is angry with his brother without cause shall be liable to the Judgment. And whoever says to his brother, Raca, shall be liable to the sanhedrin; but whoever says, Fool! shall be liable to be thrown into the fire of hell' (Matthew 5:22). Or, '...Everyone looking at a woman to lust after her has already committed adultery with her in his heart' (v.28). For in God's economy, adultery is worthy of death.

## SIN—IT MATTERS!

### Consequences

And to highlight how serious this is he adds: '...of which I tell you beforehand, as I also said before, that the ones practicing such things will not inherit the kingdom of God'. Elsewhere he notes: '...the wages of sin is death' (Romans 6:23). So—worth giving *serious* consideration! But that's not the end.

Life is a mixed bag of experience. For multiple millions it can be horrendous, a constant struggle against illness or poverty or hunger. Yet whether this is your experience or you are privileged to live a relatively cosy life—most of us believe that death cannot be the end, that our experiences have purpose beyond our three-score and ten years. *Then what?*

You die, then you are buried and your flesh decays into earth's elements and disperses—'then the worms will come and eat thee up'. But your human spirit continues—though without any conscious thought. We '...shall return to the earth as it was, and the spirit shall return to God who gave it' (Ecclesiastes 12:7).

Next? It is recorded in the book of Hebrews: '...it is reserved to men once to die, and after this, Judgment' (Hebrews 9:27). As Jesus said: '...an hour is coming in which all those in the tombs will hear His voice. And they will come out, the ones having done good into a resurrection of life; and the ones having practiced evil into a resurrection of judgment' (John 5:28-29). And, as quoted above, the possibility of having our lifeless bodies thrown into an all-consuming fire.

So what you do in *this* life really counts. You cannot hide behind a self-imposed belief that God doesn't exist! Nor can you bank on a death-bed repentance—death can hit suddenly.

### Judgment...what you may not know

You will face judgment after you die—whether or not you believe God exists! But there's much misunderstanding about this.

There is a divine plan to solve humanity's problems. At this time in history that plan is known as 'the Gospel' or Good News, and it's available to all. When anyone comes within the sound of that message they can choose to accept its terms—or not. If truly accepted you become a child of the Father, the one and only God. Remain faithful until death and you will live forever.

Acceptance, however is no easy passport through life, for God trains His

children—and that sometimes means chastening! Jesus warned: ‘...’ *For narrow is the gate, and constricted is the way that leads away into life, and few are the ones finding it. But beware of the false prophets’* (Matthew 7:14-15).

For that path demands that we have a change of direction. That we recognize our sin and our sinful nature and submit to the will of the Creator of all. When we positively respond to the Message the Father draws us to Jesus - there is no other way to an unending life (Acts 4:12).

### Blinded

But note carefully that last part of Jesus’ warning, about false prophets. There are preachers who will present an utterly false concept of this perfect plan of God. As a result, millions set out on the Christian life—but, perhaps persuaded by rhetoric and sentiment, fail to lay the solid foundation of conducting every aspect of life in accord with the Word of God, the Christian Scriptures.

Most of mankind, however, are blinded by the Satanic influence that envelops our planet—its education, its false religions, its perverted values in politics and in business, its focus on self-gratification.

Jesus spoke of this: ‘...’ *these are those by the wayside where the Word is sown. And when they hear, Satan comes at once and takes away the Word having been sown in their hearts’* (Mark 4:15). Or, as the apostle Paul writes: ‘...’ *in whom the god of this age has blinded the thoughts of the unbelieving, so that the brightness of the gospel of the glory of Christ who is the image of God, should not dawn on them’* (II Corinthians 4:4).

That’s our world! Multitudes thus come within sound of the Gospel message but toss it aside as an irrelevance. They have ‘stopped their ears’. Still others persist for a time in the Christian life—but become overwhelmed by mundane concerns. They simply don’t stick the course.

However, you probably don’t know that rejection does not mean you will be ‘cast into the fires of hell’ when you are brought back from the dead in that ‘*resurrection of judgment*’. For in that resurrection your spirit, preserved by God, will be clothed again with human flesh, your present character re-instated.

At that time Satan’s worldwide influ-

ence will have been neutered and you will be free to choose—life or death—through the one remedy for sin.

### The Remedy

The apostle Peter explains: ‘...’ *there is salvation in no other One [Jesus], for neither is there any other name under Heaven having been given among men by which we must be saved’* (Acts 4:12). The apostle calls on his hearers to face the fact that it was *for them, because of their sin*, that an innocent was cruelly tortured and horrifically murdered.

Jesus, the Creator of the material universe and of mankind, was sent from Heaven by the Father (John 17:5), willingly giving up his Deity and his life *...for you*. We can’t enter eternal life with our sin, with our sinful nature—and it is only through his death and resurrection that that sin may be forgiven.

That means *change*. That means we must each turn our backs on all that is contrary to the Glory of God—‘repentance’ is the apostle’s word: ‘...’ *Repent and be baptized, each of you on the name of Jesus Christ to remission of sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit’* (Acts 2:38). **Ω**

### Church—a danger zone!

*There’s a bewildering choice of church organizations calling for the new Christian to join their denomination. You may have expressed interest by attending evangelistic campaigns and study groups and been drawn to Christianity. Where should you go? What criteria should you consider before making a commitment? Here are a few.*

- Remember that you are not joining an organization but committing for life to Jesus Christ  
*...some churches confuse loyalty to themselves as loyalty to Jesus*
- Baptism into Christ is merely the first step in perhaps a lifetime of change—and adversity

*...too often a church seeks numbers, and your money, but doesn’t teach God’s way of life*

- Beware a church that seeks to control all aspects of your life  
*...God wants you to develop as an individual, to use His spiritual gifts for the benefit of all*
- Check that the pastor doesn’t claim his church to be ‘the one and only true church’  
*...the Father knows who are His, and all such are family members of His church—wherever they fellowship*
- Carefully compare a church’s teachings with that of the Scriptures

*...flee a church that demands obedience to its teachings alone, for salvation*

- Don’t assume a large megachurch has divine blessing and teaches the true faith  
*...Jesus warns that his way is difficult and that ‘there are few who find it’*
- You will never find a church that’s perfect  
*...any assembly is composed of imperfect people—but most doing their best to emulate Jesus*
- Be sure that the *whole* word of God is preached  
*...thoroughly check in the Bible what you hear from the pulpit. Get safe guidance* **Ω**

## The Middle East is in turmoil. Can religion help?

Globally over two-thirds of the world openly admit to being 'religious'. At heart, though, everyone harbours some concept of a higher spiritual power, no matter how vaguely.

Which faith we embrace is largely down to our parents—for few of us stray far from that tree. Once Christian always Christian, and so on for Hinduism, for Islam, for Judaism *etc.* The level of our involvement and commitment is a matter of individual choice. Change by individual believers usually means a drift away rather than radical change, but we still continue to be influenced by early teaching and experience.

### The Source

Every major religion has myriad divisions, but all look back to a particular source—the founder, the holy books, the traditions, the later gurus each with his or her own interpretation.

Thus *Christians* look to Jesus Christ as Founder, and to the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament as their source. *Jews* focus on Moses and on the Old Testament Scriptures with their traditional interpretations by rabbis down the centuries. *Muslims* on Mohammed and on the Koran, the Sira (a biography of Mohammed) and the various interpretations by the Imams (the Hadith).

It is such factors that influence the behaviour of whole religions, of nations, of individual believers. And not least on the attitude to conflict.

### Conquest

Most world leaders like to stake a claim to being peaceable, to bear arms only in the defence of their

sovereign territory. In this world that position is acceptable, for the Creator—God—has delegated ruler-ship to human governments (Romans 13:1-7). Human government, like the family, is a divinely approved institution.

Inevitably the style of any secular government reflects the underlying national philosophy or religion. Or, in some cases, the beliefs of a powerful autocratic leadership. Few, however, understand that they—those who comprise the Government—will be held accountable by the Creator for its conduct. *Misrule*, and the nation fails, their authority diminished or removed.

The approach of the Anglo-Saxon nations, for example, tends to be undergirded by the faith of the Christian Bible—Christianity, Judaism by the Old Testament (the *Tanakh*), Islamic nations by the Koran. The approach of each to conflict is a reflection of their religious source.

Thus *Christian* leaders, until recent decades, are inclined to restraint—as large sections of the populace are anti-war and are still influenced by the Bible. The *Israeli* philosophy is 'an eye for an eye' - even-handed justice. While *Islam*, reflecting the path pursued by Mohammed, tends to pursue a path of conquest.

### Holy Terror

*Christianity*, of course, has much blood on its hands. The Middle Ages was awash with the blood of Muslims and the blood of mil-

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

# Religion at War

## Genocide

There is no denying that the God of the Old Testament commanded the people of Israel to drive out the occupiers of the Land of Promise—men, women and children. Is that a parallel with the current activities of the 'Islamic State'?

- Palestine was earmarked by the LORD for Israel (Gen 15:7, Joshua 1:4)
- The Canaanites were present as squatters
- Warned to leave the Land—evicted
- The occupying nations were corrupt (v.16. Leviticus 18:24). God gave them notice of four generations to repent (*cf* Exodus 20:5)
- When they refused to leave God commissioned Israel to drive them out—by force, if necessary
- Israel had divine blessing in the Land only as long as they followed His guidance and He remained their Ruler (I Samuel 8:7)

lions of Christians who opposed the established church. Civil wars have pitted Protestants and Catholics against one another. Recent years have seen 'Christian' nations invade Muslim nations.

*Islam* is deeply divided against itself, with different sects bent on annihilating one another in several Islamic nations across the globe. This has roots in the thousand year rift between Shia and Sunni Islam, and later sects. Those roots were nourished by the military training of millions of Muslims begun in the early 1980's in Iran under the supervision of the influential Ayatullah Khomeini.

The recently-formed and fanatical so-called *Islamic State* has its own gruesome specialty killing methods and a focus on the de-

struction of opposing Islamic sects, and on Jews and Christians. And too many Muslims living in democratic nations seek to undermine the stability of their hosts.

### **Motivation**

You might think that ‘religion’ is a path to peace and harmony, that it unites rather than divides. Indeed *that* is the kind of ‘religion’ that came from the mind of the Creator.

Man is a spiritual being and the human spirit has a built-in religious impulse—the desire, too often suppressed, to express our yearning to be at one with the Creator. But by abandoning the ‘laws of the spirit’ that impulse is distorted, divided, diseased—leading to indulgence in all kinds of *isms*. Since records began, however, religion has been a source of conflict—being ‘united’ only by coercion.

### **Universal Faith**

Into the wretchedness and debauchery of the ancient Roman Empire God sent His son with the mission to restore the true faith. Jesus commissioned his church to sow the seeds of that true faith.

The ‘weapons’ used by the infant church, however, were never violent: ‘...we do not wage war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not merely human, but powerful to God for the tearing down of fortresses, tearing down arguments’ (II Corinthians 10:3,4). It is what the Creator intended in the beginning! It is how the early church evangelized.

Any attempt to use physical force or coercion to advance the faith—*any* faith—does not come from the one and only God but from the ‘god of this world’, the Adversary.

Mediaeval Christianity, sadly, abandoned its early roots in the teaching of Jesus, torturing and murdering those who opposed its heretical teachings. The Protestant reformation largely quenched this blood-lust, but itself had blood on its hands.

Islam, however, is now reverting to the path of conquest by the sword pursued by its founder and followed intermittently until the present, though individual Muslims may resist the trend and happily embrace the Western value of freedom of conscience.

### **Still To Come**

Jesus (Matthew *ch* 24) foretold a future just prior to his promised return when religious deception will lead to destructive wars resulting in widespread famine and deadly disease epidemics. It’s a pattern recurring throughout history from earliest times.

The current Islamic wars and infighting are but part of that pattern. The essence of Islam is its historic pursuit of a worldwide ‘Caliphate’ conquering every other faith for the religion of Mohammed. That aspiration is timeless, but varies in intensity depending on the strength of the opposition.

But don’t be complacent, for we do live in perilous times! The words of Jesus are sure—the scenario he depicted so vividly *will* come about.

When mankind reaches a tipping point towards self-destruction the Father will signal the unstoppable intervention of the King of all kings, the LORD of all lords—Jesus the Messiah. Then will ensue the spread to all mankind of that true way of life—the peaceful faith imparted to mankind in his beginning. **Ω**

*The following may also be of interest (no charge):*

**Babylon—fountain of error**  
*the true source of modern Christianity*

**The Faith Once Delivered**  
*Bible truth doesn’t change*

**What Do You Mean—Repent?**  
*few understand its real meaning*

**Why Were You Born?**  
*God’s incredible purpose for you*

**Should You Be Baptized?**  
*An important step to salvation*

*All are available for viewing or to download from our web-site*

[www.cgom.org](http://www.cgom.org)

*Also:*

**God’s Grand Design**  
*history attests to a future golden age*

**Message of Hope**  
*God’s wonderful plan for mankind*

### ***CALLING ALL INTERNET USERS!***

*The Outreach Ministries website lists over a hundred Bible-based articles which address issues frequently on the minds of Christians. You may download any, or request print copies. There is, too, a section of on-line audio sermons, links to associated groups, back issues of *New Horizons* and an on-line magazine for our younger readers.*

**Q. A reader says: I'm confused as to who is 'God' in the Old Testament.**

We are introduced to God by the name *Elohim* (Genesis 1:1). It is God's 'family name'—like saying 'the Jones family'. The word itself is plural, so we can expect multiple members; how many is not revealed. But '...*God is one*' (Deuteronomy 6:4) - that is, perfectly unified in every way (but not a 'singularity' and certainly not a 'trinity').

We are also informed that '...*God is Spirit*' (John 4:24) and He is '...*the only One having immortality, living in light that cannot be approached, whom no one of men saw, nor can see*' (I Timothy 6:16). God is uncreated, eternal, not visible to human eyes. As records the apostle John: '...*No one has seen God at any time; (John 1:18, I John 4:12).* (Written, by the way, decades after Jesus returned to Heaven.)

**Creation**

However, what is revealed is that a plan was prepared in Heaven to create a material universe—to include humans 'made in the image of God' (Genesis 1:26) who could later have opportunity to join the Family.

One of the immortal and co-equal God Family took on the task of creation, and was the 'face', the Mediator, between the God-head and their creation (I Timothy 2:5). He is known in the Scriptures as YHVH—'Jehovah' (in the *KJV* translated as LORD), a name shared by all of the God Family.

The New Testament reveals that the *Elohim* '...when the fullness of time came, God sent out his Son, born of a woman' (Galatians 4:4). To him was assigned judgment of mankind: '...*the Father does not judge anyone, but he has given all judgment to the Son*' (John 5:22). YHVH, in Heaven, was now known as 'the Father'.

Given the name *Jesus*, the Creator was '...*the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, that One declares Him*' (John 1:18). Unknown to mankind (including within Judaism!), the Father was first revealed to mankind through the life of Jesus in the first century AD in Palestine.

We are assured that it was he, Jesus '...*who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation, because all things in the heavens and on the earth were created by him, things visible and things invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers, all things were created through him and for him, and he himself is before all things, and in him all things are held together*' (Colossians 1:15-17).

**Incarnation**

Jesus himself says that he had pre-existed with the Father: '...*now, Father, you glorify me [at your side] with the glory that I had [at your side] before the world existed*' (John 17:5).

The Family of God is enlarging. Paul states that Christians are '...members of the 'family [household] of God' Ephesians 2:19). Believers are called 'children of God'. We are, too, 'brothers' of Jesus (Hebrews 2:11). As such, all in whom is God's Spirit will be transformed to spirit by a resurrection (I Corinthians 15).

This member of the Family of God, the Creator: '...*who, existing in the form of God, did not consider being equal with God something to be grasped [a prize], but emptied himself by taking the form*

*of a slave, by becoming in the likeness of people. And being found in appearance like a man*' (Philippians 2:6-7). As wrote John: '...*the Word became flesh*' (ch 1:1, 14).

**Still To Come**

Jesus, having defeated sin and Satan, is now '...*at the right hand of God [ie the Father], having gone into heaven, with angels and authorities and powers having been subjected to him*' (I Peter 3:22). They are, in every way, one (John 10:30)—for Jesus is '...*the radiance of his [the Father's] glory and the representation of his essence*' (Hebrews 1:3).

They share the same authority, the same dynamic power, the same compassion, the same love and concern

for mankind and for their creation (Gk. *kosmos*).

Paul describes what follows:

'...*then the end, when he [Jesus] hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when he has abolished all rule and all authority and power. For it is necessary for him to reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be abolished is death....when it says "all things" are subjected, it is clear that the one who subjected all things to him is not included. But whenever all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will be subjected to the one who subjected all things to him, in order that*

We will then have reached the time when, following the earthly reign of Jesus as King of kings and LORD of lords and on a 'new heavens and a new earth '...*the dwelling of God is with humanity, and he will take up residence with them, and they will be his people and God himself will be with them*' Revelation 21:3

Jesus, having voluntarily submitted himself to become 'lower than the angels' (Hebrews 2:7) will then—along with all those resurrected to spirit life from among mankind—submit himself to the Father (Romans 11:36). God, *Elohim*, will be 'all in all'.

'...*to the only God our Saviour, [made manifest] through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, power, and authority before all time, and now, and for all eternity*' (Jude v.25)

Ω

Request also the articles:

**God Is One  
Is God a 'Trinity'?**

## The Twelfth Imam

The recent one-sided Six Nation Treaty, brokered by President Obama, to limit nuclear weapon production has focused the world's eyes again on Iran, and on its Supreme Ruler, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Since the late 1970's that nation has been a hot-bed of revolutionary fervour, fuelling terrorism throughout the Middle East and far beyond. The present (since 1989) Supreme Ruler is no less vigorous in pursuing his dream of a worldwide Caliphate.

He is known for his dedication to facilitating the expected return of Mohammed al-Mahdi, the 9th century Shi'ite Imam, the twelfth in descent from Mohammed's son-in-law, Ali ibn Abi Talib—the fourth Caliph. The latter was also the first Shi'ite Imam (Islamic leader).

When Mohammed died without an appointed successor, the Sunni faction assumed control. Ali claimed the right but was assassinated as was his eldest son (Mohammed's grandson) and all succeeding Shi'ite Imams. The beheading of his younger son, Husayn (680AD) led to a permanent split between the two factions.

### The Mahdi

The 12th Imam (al-Mahdi: 'the Guided One') was born around 868 A.D. at a time of great persecution of Shi'ites, and in order to protect him, his father, the 11th Imam, sent him into hiding. He appeared in public briefly at the age of six when his father died—but then 'disappeared'. Shi'ites believe he continues to guide Muslims.

The Shi'ite community expect his "messianic" return to bring order from chaos and righteousness from unbelief. (That is, to conquer the world for Islam.) Conquest will largely be by force of arms, and his coming will be heralded by 'black flags from the east (Iran)'.

It is believed that his return will come only at a time of extreme difficulty for Islam. But it is also widely

believed that to hasten that 'time of trouble' Muslims themselves will stir chaos. (Hence Iran's urgent push for a nuclear arsenal.)

In Islamic theology, the Mahdi will have all the marks ascribed in Christian thought to the Anti-Christ. He will, for example, return riding a white horse, he will be worshipped and lauded by everyone and will im-

pose his faith on all on pain of death, will rule from Jerusalem having made a seven-year peace treaty, and will be a warrior causing worldwide mayhem.

There is widespread speculation within Islam that the era of the Mahdi is about to dawn on the world with all that entails for the future of mankind. Ω

## Jesus and Islam

Islam is often regarded as being one of the 'people of the Book' - the Jewish/Christian Scriptures. Does that stand scrutiny? Is Allah the same God as YHWH?

A comparison of sources should lay the notion of compatibility to rest. Even a superficial survey of the Koran uncovers numerous variations from the Bible. Each claims to hold the sole key to 'salvation'. Indeed the meaning of *salvation* could hardly be more different.

In Islam Jesus is revered as a prophet, but he was not crucified nor, it is said, did he rise from the dead. The final word on salvation comes from Allah through his final prophet, Mohammed.

Although acknowledged as a prophet Muslims do not recognize Jesus as the Son of God, specifically rejecting, for example, the idea that God has offspring—and thus further setting Allah apart from the God of the Christian Scriptures, Jehovah (YHWH). Nowhere in the Koran is Allah, among many other titles, called a 'Father'.

It is the expectation within Islam that Jesus will return at the same time as the Mahdi (he will reign for seven years)—and together they will turn all of mankind to the Islamic faith.

While the average man-in-the street in Western society can learn from the moral stance of many Muslims, given such differences between them there can be no doubt that Christians and Muslims each ascribe their worship to a different God, for God is not the author of confusion (I Corinthians 14:33), nor does He change (Malachi 3:6, James 1:17).

## Islam v. the Bible

Weekly Friday observance, in Islam (Saturday, in the Bible)  
 Ramadan, Eid  
 (seven Bible holy days)  
 Salvation by works  
 (grace and calling)  
 Salvation only through Allah  
 (only through Jesus)  
 Saved in a hedonistic heaven  
 (the saved reign on Earth)  
 Sharia Law  
 (Torah, personal conscience)  
 Polygamy permitted  
 (Monogamy)  
 Conversion by force  
 (by peaceable persuasion)  
 The soul is immortal  
 (mortal, as is the 'spirit in man')  
 Sinners (*ie* non-Muslims) burn in hell  
 ('hell' consumes the dead)  
 Men are superior to women  
 (all are equal but different)

## STUDY THE WORD

*Be sure to enroll for our free 32-lesson Study Course. It's a key to what is for many a 'Book of Mystery'*

*unsigned articles are by the Editor*

*We in the Outreach Ministries strive to present the teachings of Scripture in a fresh way. We welcome any Bible related questions and are happy to address them in print or on-line*



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

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.

Likely, *you* are bound by some practice that you would prefer to finish with! And undesirable habits can be forsaken, put behind us. But 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 often 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

## Reap A Destiny

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*" (1 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 backstabbing. Another drink, another cream cake, another furtive paging of a top-shelf magazine or a delve into the internet. 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' - prayer, Bible study, fasting, fellowship - 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. ['Confession' is to 'each other' and to God—not through the mediation of a cleric, unless he is counselling you.]

### **Avoidance**

Another key to conquering habitual life-style patterns is to iden-

tify those 'triggers' that initiate that 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 or the internet. 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 ounce of energy we expend.***

## MiniStudy

### *Where's My Daddy?*

*'Respect your father and your mother'* (Exodus 20:12)

*'Marriage is to be honored by all, and husbands and wives must be faithful to each other.*

*God will judge those who are immoral and those who commit adultery'* (Hebrews 13:4)

The oldest of institutions—marriage (Genesis 2:24)—has been undermined during the last half century, to the degree that, in the United Kingdom, there are but four million households (fifteen percent of all families) with a father, mother and children. At the same time militant feminism has sought to side-line the role of the father, a theme beaten to death by comedians and cartoonists. The role of a father figure impacts the outcome for our children.

- Above two million families in the UK are single parent—most often female, with Great Britain having the greatest percentage in Europe. More than half of all children are now born out of wedlock. In several constituencies the proportion of such families is above fifty percent
- *Family* is the God-given foundation of society, and according to the Christian Scriptures it needs both man and woman—who equally bear His image (Genesis 1:27). Equal in value, potential and destiny. ('Adam' is a generic term, embracing male *and* female—*ch* 5:2)
- The first pair were partners, joined 'till death do us part', a man and a woman for life, and forming a safe environment for one of life's major purposes—the nurture of the following generations (*ch* 1:28). It was a pattern for 'family' esteemed and promoted by (almost) every society since. Within that family children could be physically, intellectually and spiritually nourished, and grounded in life skills. It has been tried and tested successfully over millennia
- Although equal before God, male and female fulfill different roles—a different approach to life, different physically, different strengths and different weaknesses. And in the family each has equally important functions with the shared responsibility, as notes the apostle Paul, to '*...nurture them [children] in the discipline and admonition of the Lord'* (Ephesians 6:4)
- The Christian Scriptures present clear guidelines, notably in the book of Proverbs, and emphasize respect for both parental roles: '*...My son, hear your father's instruction [reproof], and do not forsake the law of your mother'* (Proverbs 1:8). And: '*...hear the instruction of a father, pay attention to know understanding'* (*ch* 4:1). Father imparts an understanding of the ways of the world, passes on his experience of life, guides on relationships (*ch* 7) from a male perspective. The relationship with one's mother, by contrast, is more emotional, softer, and often—having spent the earliest moments of life in her embrace—closer (*cf ch* 29:15), a different but essential learning experience (*ch* 4:3)
- Within the committed, balanced and structured family with both a father and a mother the children can be socialized—prepared for a life in the world at large, the motivation to be law-abiding instilled, imbued with the perception of right and wrong, a grasp of sound relationship dynamics imparted through example (parents watch your own behaviour!)
- God is the family Mentor, providing the example for proper fatherhood: '*...whom Jehovah loves He corrects, even as a father corrects the son with whom he is pleased'* (*ch* 3:12). He is also '*... God, full of pity; and gracious, longsuffering and rich in mercy and truth'* (Psalm 86:15)—a family message picked up by the apostle Paul (Ephesians 6:1-4)
- The prevalent family breakdown in our society will inevitably result in its collapse. The prophet Isaiah was prescient: '*...Though you are God's people, you are ruled and abused by women and children. You are confused by leaders who guide you down the wrong path'* (*ch* 3:12) Ω

Read also: *Children– the best job*: <http://www.cgom.org/Publications/Articles/ChildrenTheBestJob.pdf>

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