

NEW **Horizons**

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addressing the important issues for today and tomorrow



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CGOM

Churches Of God Outreach Ministries

With around two thousand Christian denominations vying for your attention, it's easy to miss the important issues of life and religion. It's our hope that through *New Horizons* our readers will come to understand the true meaning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Gospel was proclaimed by Jesus and by His apostles in the clearest of terms - and recorded for us in the Scriptures. Over the centuries that truth has been buried, dug up, buried again. Our desire is to restore the simple apostolic message. We hope you will be excited by what the Scriptures reveal about life, and the horizons beyond

Who We Are

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

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

To these ends we publish Bible-based literature - eg our bi-monthly e-mail Newsletter OUTREACH, the NEW HORIZONS magazine, the BIBLE BASICS on-line home study course, and a 32-lesson Bible Correspondence 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

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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It's a recurring theme: must Christians obey God's Law?

Stranded on a deserted island a group of British pre-teens struggle to organize their 'society'. Without guidance their efforts end in anarchy, superstition and murder. [Wm Golding: *Lord of the Flies*]

Anyone who vies to lead a nation—or a club!—understands the need for order, for a set of rules, laws, to curb our human nature in its extremes. The church is not exempt! Yet too often we hear the cry that law—indeed God's Law—is obsolete.

Just Human

Nations are hide-bound with home-made legislation—often petty rules dreamed up by civil servants with nothing else to do. Bureaucracy gone mad. Yet the fundamental principles of good order are trodden underfoot, principles that deal with our nature and its proclivity to lawlessness.

At our best we show humanity, kindness, compassion, love even. There are countless examples day in day out, and some even dare to die to save their fellow-man.

Yet every year multiple thousands of the unborn are killed in the womb while murderers walk as good as free. Corruption in high places is overlooked and the innocent prosecuted. The plight of the vulnerable is ignored. The building-block of a sound society, the family, is despised while sterile same-sex relationships are given

the status of normality.

Lawless we are at heart. Weaken the constraints on negative behaviour and out seeps the badness. Given the opportunity we avoid taxes, pilfer the office stationery, have clandestine relationships. Under personal pressure we betray others, as during conflicts. And CCTV moderates our behaviour!

Law Valued

Extended experience of human nature unearths behavioural characteristics which most people will deem unacceptable—so we enact a law against it. Law is

framed to regulate human behaviour. Without restraints we revert to that deserted island. Clearly, we are far from perfect!

Life is precious so murder and assault is universally outlawed. We cherish our personal property, so theft, burglary *etc* are legislated against. Commit a serious sexual offence and jail beckons. Lie in court and you may be locked up.

All of us, surely, whatever our faith or absence of religious faith, will be happy to embrace the freedom that well-framed law brings.

Origins

Christian believers generally endorse the view that mankind is a special creation of God. He made us. He built into us our physical,

psychological, mental and spiritual operating system. 'God's Law' (Heb *torah*) is the manual by which that system works in us effectively. It is summed up for us in the 'Ten Commandments' formalized for the Constitution of the new nation of Israel around 1500BC, but has been active since we first walked the earth. Indeed it conforms to every sound principle of human behaviour discovered by psychology.

However delayed, the negative consequence of going contrary to this in-built law is inevitable, for both individuals and the populace at large. If widely ignored, society implodes. As predicted by Jesus for the end-time: '*...Such will be the spread of evil [Gk *anomia*—lawlessness] that many people's love will grow cold*' (Matthew 24:12).

Law and order

There is a lesson to be learned from Israel's experience—and their experience of *torah* was of a perfect law from the hand of the Creator (Deuteronomy 4:8). But even the best and most equitable of laws must be accepted and obeyed by the people. Israel happily accepted God's legal programme: '*...all the people answered together, and said, All that the LORD has spoken we will do*' (Exodus 19:8).

Given human nature, however, a system of penalties for disobedience was an essential accompaniment to maintain law and order, and a system of penalties

Bound by Law?

was prescribed.

The ancient Law as applied to the Constitution of Israel was for the governance of a nation. It was *not* the path to spiritual salvation—though in Israel’s case the nation was uniquely bound by Covenant with the Creator. His part was to care for them, and they were to follow His guidance.

The Law, the *torah*, is like a protective hedge (*cf* Job 1:10, Isaiah 5:5) that guards individuals and nations (insofar as it is applied) from the lawlessness that wreaks destruction and destroys lives.

Aside from God’s dealings with Israel, since man’s beginning lawless acts received penalties by the hand of God—either directly (Cain, the Flood, Canaan *etc*) or by natural consequences.

All such lawlessness is ‘sin’ (I John 3:4). Thus we find that centuries *before* Moses, sin—the transgression of that law—was well understood. The Canaanite King Abimelech, for example, was ruler of ‘...*a righteous nation*’, (Genesis 20:4). Abraham ‘... *listened to My voice and heeded My charge, My commands, My statutes, and My laws*’ (*ch* 26:5). Joseph (a son of Jacob; *ch* 39:7-8) resisted the adulterous intentions of an Egyptian official’s wife.

God’s Law, then, is eternal. It is man’s operating system, going contrary to which carries automatic negative consequences for every human. It was not dreamed up out of the blue by Moses or just for Israel. As *you* are human you are subject to it—whatever your faith may be. You are indeed ‘bound by Law’.

Writes the apostle Paul: ‘...*The Gentiles do not have the Law of*

Moses; they sin and are lost apart from the Law. The Jews have the Law; they sin and are judged by the Law’ (Romans 2:12).

The ultimate consequence is - *death*. Not just end-of-life death but also eternal death. Records King Solomon: ‘...*For the living know that they shall die; but the dead do not know anything; nor do they have any more a reward, for their memory is forgotten*’ (Ecclesiastes 9:5).

Until, that is, they are brought back to life to face judgment. Said Jesus: ‘...*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).

The Gospel

What of those reconciled to God through Jesus, Christians? Through him we are no longer subject to that eternal death, our transgressions of law being through him forgiven.

Yet we are still subject to any physical or material or mental consequences of transgressing it. Man, writes Paul, has been delegated the responsibility to administer justice: ‘...*Let every person be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except by God, and those that exist are put in place by God. So then, the one who resists authority resists the ordinance which is from God, and those who resist will receive condemnation on themselves*’ (Romans 13:1-2). That includes serving the penalty, Christian or not!

So it is a misunderstanding to claim that ‘the law is done away,

nailed to the cross’. As wrote the Psalmist ‘... *they have made void your law*’ (119:126). The consequence of transgressing this eternal Law is still there, a Damoclean sword ready to take vengeance for wrong-doing. Paul again: ‘... *the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good*’ (Romans 7:12). By studying—and personally applying God’s Law he could steer clear of its penalties. Or King David: ‘...*O how love I your law! it is my meditation all the day.*

You through your commandments have made me wiser than my enemies’ (Psalm 119:97-98).

Character

Israel experienced the Law as a tutor (Galatians 3:24-25). Its numerous detailed observances—there are an estimated 613 ‘laws’—were onerous and time-consuming (Acts 15:10-11). But their aim was to inculcate the habit of ‘holiness’ in each Israelite and to map out for *our* learning those principles that tend to Christ-like behaviour. Many an Israelite in the time of Jesus exhibited this godly character, Simeon and Anna, for example. And, of course, Mary and Joseph.

Everyone, including those ‘in Christ’, will experience the temporal consequence of transgressing the Law. The *eternal* consequence of sin, however, is annulled for true believers: ‘...*if we say that we have not sinned we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, so that he will forgive us our sins and will cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us*’ (I John 1:8-10).

God’s in-built Law is a blessing—for all of mankind. **Ω**

Just what is the ‘Kingdom of God’? Is it here, now? Or, is it a future event?

Many Christians consider the Kingdom of God to be ‘the Church’. Parables are adduced to indicate it will begin small (1st century) and gradually grow over the centuries, culminating at the return of Jesus. For others the ‘Kingdom of God’ is a limited earth-bound kingdom, ruled over by Jesus and the saints—the ‘Millennium’. Would it surprise to learn that both views have merit?

Consider the words of the Psalmist: ‘... *Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and Your dominion endures throughout all generations* (Psalm 145:13, Daniel 4:3). Here we have a definition of God’s Kingdom. It exists eternally. It has total authority over time and eternity. It is a spirit kingdom (otherwise it wouldn’t last for ever!). And, v.1, God is the King of the Kingdom (Jeremiah 10:10)—the everlasting Spirit (John 4:24). He is ‘...*from everlasting to everlasting*’ (Psalm 41:13). His ‘... *throne is established of old: you are from everlasting*’. (Psalm 93:2).

Here and Now

‘*Throughout all generations*’. So we need to ask in what manner the Kingdom is ‘here and now’. Jesus made a strange statement: ‘...*if I with the finger of God [ie His power] cast out devils, no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you* (Luke 11:20). And ‘... *when he was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, The kingdom of God comes not with observation: Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is*

within you [ie in your midst, here with you, now]

(Luke 17:21). Further: ‘...*if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you [Gk, arrived]*’ (Matthew 12:28). That is, the Kingdom was with them in the form of its King.

Is that any different from today, in this twenty-first century? Recall that Jesus told his disciples: ‘...*I am with you always, even to the end of the world*’ (Matthew 28:20). How? By his Spirit.

Soon to Inherit

Jesus is living in each Christian by his indwelling Spirit (*cp* II Corinthians 3:17). Not some ephemeral notion, but *reality*. Selected by the Father, each Christian is spiritually begotten by Him, enabling us to become His children, His sons and daughters.

Writes John: ‘...*now are we the sons of God*’ (I John 3:2). And Paul, to the Christians in Rome: ‘...*You are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his*’ (Romans 8:9).

It’s a real transition from *death to life*. It’s our entry into the very Kingdom of God. The Father ‘...*has delivered us from the power of darkness, and has translated [ie, transferred] us into the kingdom of his dear Son*’ Colossians 1:13). That is, there has been a change of kingdoms, from the physical to the spiritual.

More: ‘...*if children, also heirs,*

The Kingdom...here and now

heirs, indeed, of God, and heirs together of Christ’ (Romans 8:17). Christians are *heirs* of the Kingdom. As children of the King, as in any royal family, it is now ours (if we continue in the faith) to be fully realized at the resurrection. We are, now, ‘...*a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people [a people for God’s possession]*’ (I Peter 2:9).

The Kingdom of God is wherever the indwelling Spirit of God dwells. It is the task of the Church of God to proclaim this message worldwide to all nations: ‘...*this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come*’ (Matthew 24:14).

The Gospel is the good news that God has a plan that delivers mankind into the Family of God. By turning from sin and embracing the divine way we embrace that destiny and—like children in the womb—are ‘begotten’ children.

New Birth

Jesus and Paul tell us exactly when we will thus inherit. Jesus calls it ‘...*the resurrection to life*’ (John 5:29), while Paul pinpoints the momentous event in time: ‘...*the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first*’ (I Thessalonians 4:16). Another stage of the Father’s plan will have been accomplished.

Earthly Rule

And next? Together with the resurrected saints, Jesus will begin to establish the rule *cont’d p.8*

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

Gospel Focus

Jerusalem in the 30sAD buzzed with excitement as thousands of Jews—including ‘...a great company’ of priests and Pharisees—became convinced that Jesus was the Messiah and the long-promised Saviour.

They responded to the simple message that despite their past commitment to Judaism yet they each needed to personally understand that they had crucified that same Saviour. They experienced guilt and shame—and a burning sense of their sinfulness and need of forgiveness. Distraught, they asked Peter what they should do.

The apostle pulled no punches, explaining that they needed a radical change of heart—‘to repent’ ‘...*Each one of you must turn away from your sins and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, so that your sins will be forgiven; and you will receive God’s gift, the Holy Spirit*’ (Acts 2:38).

Mere outward observance of ordinances, however important—and it is important—isn’t enough. Paul warns Timothy of those ‘...*having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof*’ (II Timothy 3:5). The outward structure (Sabbath, holy days etc) is there but they lacked the empowering of the indwelling Spirit (Acts 1:8).

Way of Death

Sin separates us from the Deity. It has blighted mankind and all our works since we first rejected God’s way in favour of our own devices. Unless dealt with our destiny is that we crumble into dust. Only by heart-felt repentance, acknowledgement

of the sacrifice of Jesus and commitment to his revealed way is reconciliation possible.

Feeling sorry for yourself isn’t repentance! Writes Paul: ‘... *godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, a repentance not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world finally produces death*’ (II Corinthians 7:10).

Two millennia of the distortion of this good news of salvation has dulled the terrible nature of Calvary. But our alienation from God is no less complete than with Peter’s hearers. Nor the urgent need for repentance—for sin is no less sinful today!

The Difference

Peter’s focus in that first outreach sermon was on what makes a difference—the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38).

Whether a person’s life is ‘good’ or ‘bad’ is *not* the bench-mark for salvation—the planet is peopled by millions of both! The indwelling Spirit alone is the key: ‘...*if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his*’ (Romans 8:9).

The Spirit imparts new (spiritual) life to us, witnessing to us that we are (like the child in the womb) in process of a new birth: ‘...*The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God*’ (v.16). The apostle adds: ‘...*if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature [person]*’ (II Corinthians 5:17).

Such have the constant awareness that they are the Almighty’s ‘sons and daughters’, that they are chil-

‘Salvation’ is the opportunity to become part of the Family of God, His everlasting spirit Kingdom

dren of the Father (II Corinthians 6:18).

An Enduring Inheritance

The good news that our sin can be forgiven is available to all. Respond to God’s invitation and the rewards are immeasurable—an eternity working in harmony with our Saviour—heirs of God, joint-heirs with Christ—in the outworking of the Father’s plan. It’s a plan veiled from the world but revealed to us through God’s Spirit:

‘...*Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for them that love him. But God has revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searches all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knows no man, but the Spirit of God*’
(I Corinthians 2:9-11)

The apostle adds ‘...*the mystery having been hidden from the ages and from the generations, but now was revealed to His saints*’ (Colossians 1:26).

And to the brethren in Colosse, he adds: ‘...*of the Lord you shall receive the reward of the inheritance*’ (Colossians 3:24). And not only heirs of a mere temporal estate but ‘...*those being called might receive the promise of the everlasting inheritance*’ (Hebrews 9:15).

By a quirk of history or through hard graft or by hook or crook individuals build vast estates to pass on to their progeny. But as history reveals—they in their turn crumble to dust or pass from the family. *Our* inheritance is immeasurably different. It is ‘...*an inheritance imperishable [over*

Mind Your Language

Any public speaker today—in or out of the pulpit—treads on eggshells. Carefully choosing their words lest some sensitive soul takes offence. Complainants are amply supported by perverse laws and then they run off to claim compensation or to make thuggish comments on the social media.

Clearly all who address the public should boldly present a strong case—but with courtesy and with sensitivity towards their audience. And they should be sure of their facts.

Blasphemy

It's almost a decade since blasphemy law was repealed in the UK, having been in place for four centuries. (Only Ireland has recently introduced such laws.) It has been defined as '*the action or offence of speaking sacrilegiously about God or sacred things; profane talk*'.

'Free speech' (while it lasts!) allows us to express often controversial views—and, for us, permits the proclamation of the Gospel—which increasingly offends the authorities. Recent legislation could lead, indeed has done, to prosecution for expressing Bible teachings.

Such opposition isn't, of course, new. Witness those who sought to speak freely about the Bible in mediaeval times. Or the experience of the apostle Paul beaten almost to death for proclaiming God's Word—and that by religious leaders!

The God Factor

We are each free to decide on our view of the existence or oth-

erwise of a Creator God; though—given that overwhelmingly mankind believes in a deity—a degree of respect from dissenters would be expected.

Those who have concluded that there is no God are branded in the Bible as foolish (Psalm 53:1). It is the mentality that shows ignorance of how God is presented in the Christian Scriptures—certainly not 'utterly evil', not 'totally selfish', not 'quite clearly a maniac', not 'capricious, mean-minded and stupid' as claimed one self-confessed atheist.

We here in the West, are—for now!—free to speak our minds. God in His Word has revealed the path to temporal and spiritual success, the Way that all true Christians embrace, reflecting the mind of God as revealed in the Scriptures. It is far from being 'politically correct' and the law doesn't like it.

The apostle Paul's words to Timothy are appropriate: '*...I urge that petitions, prayers, requests, and thanksgivings be offered to God for all people; for kings and all others who are in authority, that we may live a quiet and peaceful life with all reverence toward God and with proper conduct*' (I Timothy 2:1-2).

We pray for such that they will provide the environment in which we can live that perfect Way of God, as we strive towards being transformed into becoming like Christ. Ω

STUDY THE WORD
Be sure to enroll for our free 32-lesson Bible Correspondence Course. It's a key to what is for many a 'Book of Mystery'

unsigned articles are by the Editor

Gospel Focus...cont'd from p.4 and undefiled and unfading, reserved in heaven for you (I Peter 1:4).

As children of the Father true believers are assured of a permanent inheritance stretching through the endless millennia ahead. As notes the apostle, we are now being prepared for the immensity of this incredible endless future: '*...giving thanks to the Father, who has made us fit [capable] for a share of the inheritance of the saints in light*' (Colossians 1:12).

It is a process of tender supervision by a loving Father: '*... Have you forgotten the encouraging words which God speaks to you as his children? "My child, pay attention when the Lord corrects you, and do not be discouraged when he rebukes you. Because the Lord corrects everyone he loves, and punishes everyone he accepts as a child." Endure what you suffer as being a father's punishment; your suffering shows that God is treating you as his children*' (Hebrews 12:5-7).

This is the plan—and you can have a role! *Will you take on the challenge?* Ω

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.

*Be sure to take a look at
www.cgom.org*

The Enduring Faith

‘Something borrowed, something blue, something old, something new’. Is that how you see Christianity? Bits of Old Testament Judaism. Some new teachings from Jesus. Certainly much borrowed (from pagan sources) and possibly a few ‘blue’ bits. So it may come as a surprise that the Christian faith as taught by Jesus Christ is the oldest faith on the planet.

Resurrect Adam today and his eyes would pop at what is presented as the way he was taught by the LORD in Eden. Show him what Jesus taught, however, and Adam would feel quite at home.

Mankind worships a pantheon of ‘gods’ from the God of the Judaeo-Christian Bible, the Islamic god, the many gods of the Hindu religion. Each god has its own belief system, its own festivals and practices and worship days, its own ethical standards—which identify each ‘god’. You could sum up the totality of the world’s religions as *confusion!*

Ancient Greece is notorious for its many gods: Zeus, Hades, Poseidon, Artemis, Aphrodite for example. But the apostle Paul, a voice of reason, told some in Athens: *‘...God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwells not in temples made with hands; Neither is worshipped with men’s hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he gives to all life, and breath, and all things’* (Acts 17:24-25). That is, there’s one omnipotent self-sustaining Creator who alone gives and sustains all that’s living, and who is sovereign.

That is the Bible account which is a coherent narrative from before the universe began through to ‘the end of time’. The other major faiths have their own concepts and their own unique plan for mankind’s salvation—which, presumably, satisfies their intellect.

The Way of Jehovah

The ‘book of beginnings’—

Genesis—records the origin of man’s present plight. Created by the one and only Deity, perfect man walked and talked with Him in perfect harmony, and willingly subject to His guidance. As a rational thinking being he was divinely endowed with freedom to choose—and was perfectly equipped to make sensible life choices.

Readers of Genesis will learn ‘what comes next’: wrong choices leading to death for all his progeny. After sixteen centuries wickedness became universal—even the animal kingdom had become irredeemably corrupted. The Creator had to intervene, saving the one remaining righteous family: *‘...[God] spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly’* (II Peter 2:5).

Around 1900BC God selected one man to further His plan, a man willing to walk in God’s unchanging way—Abraham: *‘...I have known him, so that whatever he may command his sons and his house after him, even they may keep the way of Jehovah, to do righteousness and justice’* (Genesis 18:19).

The awesome message of the reason for the great flood and the confusion of language (*ch 11*) resonated with mankind worldwide and down the centuries.

That ‘way’ was the pattern followed by the faithful from the beginning as exemplified by Abel, by Enoch, by Noah and by Abraham—and a host of other godly men and women (Hebrews 11).

What that entailed was explained to Abraham’s grandson Isaac as the reason his descendants would gain global influence: *‘...because that Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws’* (Genesis 26:5). This is four centuries before

these same laws were enshrined in Israel’s governing Constitution administered by Moses.

A contemporary of Abraham in Canaan, King Abimelech, also expresses an understanding of these laws (*ch 20*). Another two generations and we find Joseph adhering to these same laws (*ch 39:9*).

Neither did *sacrifice* originate with the Law of Moses but was a universal concept since the beginning, as was the distinction between ‘clean’ and ‘unclean’ animals (Genesis 7:2) and the prohibition of murder *etc* (*ch 9:6*). We learn (Genesis 4:1-5) that Adam’s sons brought offerings, and that God alone has the authority to say how and when we maintain our relationship with Him.

The concept of *religious assemblies*—though often distorted from the original—was universal right from man’s beginning, and *‘...in the end of days [an appointed time], it happened that Cain brought an offering to Jehovah’* (v.3). All ancient civilisations observed annual harvest festivals.

Moses, we note, went to Pharaoh requesting permission to observe one of God’s festivals—*before* they were defined in Israel’s worship: *‘...Let my people go, that they may hold a feast unto me in the wilderness’* (Exodus 5:1).

Indeed we find that God’s festivals (‘Heb. *moed*, *appointed times*) are rooted in the very structure of creation: *‘...God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons [Heb. *mo’ed*], and for days, and years’* (Genesis 1:14).

The father-in-law of Moses was *‘the priest of Midian’* (a son of Abraham) who administered these same divine precepts. Rulers (eg Abimelech) in those days understood their responsibility before God to rule in accord **cont’d p.8**

A CALL TO ACTION!

The *Outreach Ministries* is striving to reflect the pattern established by the New Testament church. A key element is the interdependence of local assemblies, and to that end we invite independent assemblies to associate with us in our outreach programme.

‘Independence’ allows each assembly to best reflect the culture in which it finds itself, wherever it may be in the world. It avoids the bureaucratic wastage associated with large integrated denominations. It encourages the personal involvement of each member. And finances are more effectively deployed locally. In cooperation with other independent assemblies each can enhance its effectiveness.

Gremlins

But there are pitfalls associated with independence—‘gremlins in the works’—which need to be addressed.

The early church had the benefit of inspired apostolic oversight - no longer an option. It is replaced by the willing submission of the brethren in each congregation to the authority of the Scriptures. That, however, may nourish the seed of dissension, for unsupervised isolation can encourage bizarre interpretations of the Word.

The positive flip side is that, in contrast to the multi-church denominations (where doctrine is imposed from the top) the independent local assembly limits the spread of divisive teachings. And communication with other like-minded assemblies acts as a spur to good governance.

There is, too, the danger of the blight of success. A congregation can be blessed with numerical growth and prosperity—and becomes ‘cosy’ and inwardly-focused to the neglect of struggling sister churches. The New Testament assemblies co-operated, looked out for one another, co-operated with one another.

Since our beginning in 1996 a number of congregations have voluntarily associated with the *Outreach Ministries* and readily support our joint projects—as, for example, this magazine and our website (*cgom.org*).

Along with our ‘sister’ churches (independents and denominations) we have a common goal as directed by our Saviour to lay before the world the true Gospel of salvation through Jesus in the context of God’s pattern for His worship—His holy day plan. It is our belief that independent assemblies working together in harmony is the most effective outreach tool.

A Missing Link

A ‘missing link’ in our project, however, is effective communication. Each assembly has a unique insight into the activities of the church which could well benefit others—if shared.

How, for example, does your congregation impact the local community—*your* plan may be welcomed in another assembly. What is your evangelism strategy. What are your *challenges*—another assembly may have the solution. Have you produced outreach material that has made a positive impact—and which could be beneficially shared through *CGOM*. Have you hosted any special local events.

READ:

The Small Church *Why be independent?*

available on-line at
cgom.org
or in printed format

Do you have suggestions—or concerns—regarding *CGOM* but lack the means to communicate them. What can talented individuals in your congregation contribute to our outreach.

Does anyone in your assembly, for example, have IT or writing or administrative skills we can harness to enhance and expand our impact. If you have a local website do you feature *CGOM*. There’s yet a whole world to be effectively reached! (How many in your locality have been exposed to the true faith?)

Fit to Print

Our unity of purpose is nourished through shared communication that reflects such questions. What is needed is a channel to share our experiences.

We welcome the participation of all our associated independent assemblies—perhaps by each nominating one of the brethren as a contact to provide local news for inclusion in our publications. If anyone has a gift for communication you are also invited to submit articles for publication.

Your views are important, and if you are in a position to contribute in any such manner please do contact us at

coguk@aol.com.

Enduring Faith...cont'd from p.6
these divinely revealed precepts though not all did so!).

Already in Abraham's day, however, corruption of the one true faith had begun to fester: '*...the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full*' (Genesis 15:16). Four generations later they had sunk into depravity and were expelled from the land of promise.

Birth of a Nation

The people of Israel exiting Egypt were not a disorganized rabble. During their captivity they maintained their tribal identities—the twelve tribes, the offspring of Jacob, and lived under a strict patriarchal structure with the oversight of elders. Familial ties and traditions were virtually unbreakable.

Even when under the heel of the Egyptians, they retained a knowledge of the promises to Abraham and to their obligations to follow that same way. The ancestral faith motivated many—even when pressured by Pharaoh—their midwives, for example, '*...feared God*' and disobeyed the Pharaoh (Exodus 1:17-21).

The rite of *circumcision* had been given to Abraham as a token of their covenant relationship with JHVH. It persisted throughout the centuries in Egypt and served to maintain their grasp on the religious practice of Abraham. The writer notes: '*...all the people that came out [of Egypt] were circumcised*' (Joshua 5:5) - evidence that the light of the true faith burned, however dimly, while they were under the Egyptian yoke.

Faith Abandoned

Israel occupied the Land, maintaining the ancestral faith: '*...Israel served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that overlived Joshua, and which had known all the works of the LORD, that he had done for Israel*' (Joshua 24:31). It didn't last.

Over the ensuing centuries their

loyalty to the LORD fluctuates widely, and in the eight century the northern tribes were deported from the Land, followed a century later by the tribe of Judah, as predicted: '*... it shall be, if you do at all forget the LORD your God, and walk after other gods, and serve them, and worship them, I testify against you this day that you shall surely perish. As the nations which the LORD destroys before your face, so shall you perish; because you would not be obedient unto the voice of the LORD your God*' (Deuteronomy 8:19-20). A remnant only remained loyal to the true faith of Abel and Abraham.

Judah learned her lesson, returning faithful after seven decades in captivity. (Israel didn't—and are still 'out there' among the nations.) To protect their heritage, however, the Jews added rules and regulations atop the Law of Moses which blinded their leadership and their religious teachers to the presence of the Messiah (Jesus) in their midst.

He was rejected and the torch of that same true faith passed to the followers of Jesus, the church of God which he, to this day, continues to build (Matthew 16:18).

Jesus foresaw the powerful forces that would seek to destroy this 'temple', noting that '*...narrow is the gate, and constricted is the way that leads away into life, and few are the ones finding it*' (Matthew 7:14).

Despite the corruption of the faith and the substitution of the pre-Christian observances and doctrines that have obscured the original true faith that torch has shone down the centuries, and the same original faith is observed to this day in numerous groups of believers worldwide. Ω

read the article:

The Faith Once Delivered
at cgom.org
or, request a print copy

The Kingdom...cont'd from p.3
of the Kingdom over the despondent remnant of mankind, emerging from the worst time of trouble ever.

These refugees from all earth's nations will begin to experience the joy of the divine rule of the Kingdom of God, the Family of God.

The prayer of Jesus will at last be fulfilled: '*...Your Kingdom come [and] Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven*'. The everlasting Kingdom of God, the divine Royal Family—at present reigning in heaven over the angelic hosts, and on earth in the saints—will reign supreme over all mankind.

When that thousand years of peace and perfect benign Government has come to a conclusion, all of mankind will return to physical life to their (first) opportunity for access to membership of the Family, the Kingdom, of God.

And Beyond...

That earthly Kingdom, of course, is by no means the end. For beyond lies an eternity of which we know little—yet.

Through the centuries of human existence God has gradually unveiled His magnificent plans for His beloved creation. Wrote the apostle Paul: '*...Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for them that love him*' (I Corinthians 2: 9). He continues: '*...For us, however, God has drawn aside the veil through the teaching of the Spirit*' (v. 10 *Weymouth NT*).

We do know that, after the Millennium '*...the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God*' Revelation 20:3). This planet will become the centre of all Creation, with God Himself, our Father, present with us.

Who knows what that future will hold! Ω

MiniStudy**Guard your Faith**

'...contend for the faith delivered once and for all to the saints' (Jude 3)

'...solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have trained their faculties for the distinguishing of both good and evil' (Hebrews 5:14)

Throughout the Christian centuries one topic has dominated—the acrimonious dispute over ‘doctrine’. Believers have championed one or other position, and often died horribly for their tenacity. Just how vital to our ultimate salvation is a correct understanding of ‘doctrine’?

- Doctrine (Gk *didache, didaskalia*—Romans 12:7) is, simply, teaching, instruction—the function of teaching or its content, and has reference to specific beliefs but also to the exposition of the whole Christian way of life. We are told in Hebrews: *'...leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection [completeness]; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment (Hebrews 6:1-2)*. These form the sure foundation upon which our faith is built, and upon them we are building our new life in Christ
- The religious teachers in Jesus’s day had the wrong focus. Said Jesus: *'...you [Scribes, Pharisees] neglect the more important matters of the Law, such as justice, mercy, and faithfulness. These are the important things you should have done, though you should not have left the others undone either. You blind leaders! You strain out a small fly but swallow a camel' (Matthew 23:23-24)*
- The church of God is portrayed as a living body, the head of which is Jesus Christ. He directs it, oversees it, equips it with the spiritual gifts essential to its well-being and its work. One function he has distributed is that of *teacher*, the gifted ability to explain the Scriptures—incorporated in the roles of *overseer* and *elder* (I Timothy 3:2, Titus 1:9). It’s a gift placed by him in each local fellowship, and each of the teachers—as with very spiritual gift—is responsible for how they develop and use the gift. It is, however, accompanied with severe warning: *'...not many of you should become teachers. As you know, we teachers will be judged with greater strictness than others' (James 3:1)*. As they minister each hearer is to carefully evaluate what is said: *'...Let two or three prophets speak, and the others evaluate' (I Corinthians 14:29)*
- Doctrine isn’t handed down by some remote committee: *'...no prophetic message ever came just from the human will, but people were under the control of the Holy Spirit as they spoke the message that came from God' (II Peter 1:21)*. Each of us is responsible to carefully separate the ‘wheat from the chaff’. If what is taught doesn’t gel with your understanding it should be courteously (and privately) challenged. Hence the importance of the message in Hebrews: *'...By now you should have been teachers, but once again you need to be taught the simplest things about what God has said. You need milk instead of solid food. People who live on milk are like babies who don’t really know what is right. Solid food is for mature people who have been trained to know right from wrong' (ch 5:12-14)*. The raw meat of the Word is instruction in righteousness
- These basic teachings, though, should be clear in the mind of each of us. Wrote the apostle Peter to scattered brethren: *'...Be ready at all times to answer anyone who asks you to explain the hope you have in you' (I Peter 3:15)*. But ‘doctrine’ has been squeezed in many church organizations into the narrow mould of their denominational interpretation. It is all too often used as a bludgeon to hammer opposing views and express their church’s distinctiveness, and too often becomes a source of division—and control: ‘believe this or go’. We do, of course, need to be fully assured of foundation truths—but then we go on to ‘perfection’
- What you hear from the pulpit is the *preacher’s* understanding of what God wants us to know about Him. It is fluid—somewhat different from what you heard years ago, or elsewhere—as we *'...grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ' (II Peter 3:18)*. But God’s Word, *His* teaching, *doesn’t* change: *'...the word of the Lord endures for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you' (I Peter 1:25)*. So—*be awake during the sermon!* Analyze what you hear and compare it with the Scriptures, for God also holds *you* responsible. Paul to the brethren in Rome: *'...We each should firmly make up our own minds' (ch 14:5)* Your relationship with our loving God is vastly more important than ‘doctrine’ **Ω**

Are you unable to attend Sabbath services in your area?

The following CGOM Associate Churches offer live streaming of their regular Sabbath services!

*Tulsa Church of God, Tulsa, OK — 1:00 p.m. CT
www.tulsachurchofgod.net*

*The above also offer online access to past sermon presentations
as do the following CGOM Associates.*

*Believers in Christ Church of God, CA — www.biccog.org
Church of God New Mexico — www.cognm.org*

request—no charge

The Small Church

The Law of Life

The Faith Once Delivered

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