

NEW **Horizons**

Vol 22 No 2

March/April 2018

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 STUDY COURSE**.

The *Outreach Ministries* also supports a network of Independent fellowships and scattered brethren.

We cordially invite all independent fellowships of whatever size - and individuals - to associate with us in this worldwide ministry. Our *Statement of Beliefs* and a *Publications Catalogue* is available from any of our addresses or from our web site **www.cgom.org**. We are pleased to offer you, without charge, any of our publications.

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

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* or a *Publications List* please request it from any of the addresses listed or go to our website: **www.cgom.org**

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

e-mail: information@cgom.org
phone: 1-800-611-8080

Editor:
James McBride
e-mail: coguk@aol.com

England:
The Churches of God, UK
Unit 14356, PO Box 4336
Manchester M61 0BW
England
e-mail: coguk@aol.com

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

or from:

Tulsa, OK 2018

New Horizons is distributed without charge, and is financed by the gifts of associates and friends of the *Churches of God Outreach Ministries*. Readers are invited to obtain a free subscription by writing to any of the addresses listed. You are under no obligations, and no-one will call uninvited.

new Horizons

Issue No 128

March/April 2018

Without the concept of a divine Being, a Creator, we struggle to account for evil. In Scripture 'sin' means 'to miss the mark' and without a supreme God there is no 'mark' other than what *we* decide is 'evil'. Hence the widespread confusion between *right* and *wrong*.

From the divine view, the prophet Isaiah had this to say of the contemporary leadership: '*...You call evil good and call good evil. You turn darkness into light and light into darkness*' (ch 5:20).

Unless, in other words, there is a known and universally recognized 'mark' we simply make our own. Governments, for example, overturn long-standing traditional practices using their own marks often pushed through on personal prejudice by powerful individuals or institutions. Too often their *mark* is contrary to the divine—and has adverse unforeseen consequences. (We could cite, for starters, *abortion*, or *family relations*, or *soft justice*, or *multiculturalism*, *corruption*.) Individually we set our own personal standards.

Divine Mark

In creating mankind God made us to function optimally in accord with built-in (created) principles. Our *physical* state is governed by myriad essential chemical interactions – still largely a mystery to science. Our *social* state is governed by family law. Our *psychological* state is governed by principles laid out in Scripture and

Call it what you will—sin, evil, badness - it is acknowledged as everywhere present, and underlying every human challenge. It manifests in every social and physical ill and affects all of us from conception to death. How did 'sin' enter humanity?

now slowly being unraveled by psychologists.

Direct from the creative hand of God, mankind was 'perfect', a logical and rational being with the capacity to positively dominate all earth's bounty, to '*...dress and keep*' it. He had unending life in the flesh in a perfect environment. He had the mental capacity to

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unravel the secrets of the universe. He reflected God's creativity. He was gifted with language. He walked and talked and was instructed by the Creator in those in-built principles. And he perfectly understood that all this depended on his continuing companionship with and submission to his Creator.

Our Choice

The prophet Isaiah tell us the reason for our present plight: '*...the earth is polluted because its people disobeyed the laws of God, breaking their agreement [covenant] that was to last forever. The earth is under a curse; its*

people are dying out because of their sins' (ch 24:5).

Our forerunner, that is, entered a binding covenant with the Creator to maintain these principles in return for being appointed lord of the planet—the role coveted by Lucifer.

Perfect Adam may have been, but he was in no way an automaton. To maintain his commitment to that covenant he had to make choices, to choose his own desires (he had 'human nature', though at that time unsullied by sin)—or to choose to live by the terms of the covenant made with our Creator. It is a covenant echoed later under Moses: '*...I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing. Therefore, choose life, so that both you and your seed may live*' (Deuteronomy 30:19).

Adam's choice

There's no record as to how long he lived in harmony with the covenant. He had to name the inferior creatures perhaps spending time observing their habits to name them appropriately. Nor do we know how long he spent bonding with Eve and tending to Eden. Perhaps he was often tempted by that special tree—after all, it was forbidden!

Then he, knowing the consequences, chose to accept his wife's invitation to eat its fruit. He was not deceived (by Lucifer), as was Eve: '*...Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression*' (I Timothy 2:14) - it was

his deliberate choice.

And the dire consequences began to set in that day—physical death, earth’s bounty withheld, distorted family relationship, loss of his sovereignty over Earth which was now under the jurisdiction of Satan. Above all, no longer direct access to the Creator, except through an intermediary and the shedding of the blood of an innocent victim.

Radical Change

Contrary to previous opinion, it is now understood that our actions during our life-span can materially affect our genes. Adam’s internal and external environment was overturned through his catastrophic breaking of the covenant. He from that moment began to die, as his original strong constitution—created to live endlessly—would begin to deteriorate. His relationship with Eve became confused, their God-appointed roles disrupted. His thought processes no longer reflected the mind of God—perhaps leading to failed and destructive environmental practices. And the Adversary assumed the role of ‘*the god of this world*’.

We are Adam’s heirs. As God said: ‘...*I bring punishment on those who hate me [don’t heed my laws] and on their descend-*

ants down to the third and fourth generation. But I show my love to thousands of generations of those who love me and obey my laws’ (Exodus 20:5-6).

That is, our behaviour, whether law-abiding or lawless, carries automatic rewards and penalties—the latter described here as God’s ‘punishment’. The adverse inherited effects vary uniquely from person to person and is reinforced from generation to generation for ‘...*all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God*’ (Romans 3:23).

Every human being since Adam has, ultimately, inherited death, for all have sinned in him as the fountain-head of the human race. We inherited *physical* death because of the genetic mutations resulting from sin, and we remain *spiritually* dead because only through Christ and his shed blood is there access to forgiveness. Paul again: ‘...*sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, so also death passed to all men, inasmuch as all sinned*’.

Adam’s sin, then, was no trivial ‘bite of an apple’. His sin was the fundamental challenge he mounted to God’s way, God’s authority, God’s covenant with His new creation. **Ω**

Color Blind...cont’d from p.3
them as well as you treat citizens and love them as much as you love yourself’ (Leviticus 19:33-34).

Such was the unique God-written Constitution of ancient Israel: ‘...*No other nation, no matter how great, has laws so just as those that I have taught you to-day*’ (Deuteronomy 4:8).

Ancient Israel, in accord with divine law, holds a salutary lesson for the modern world. All strangers were welcome (still a practice in modern Israel) but were expected, under Israel’s Constitution, to assimilate to Israel’s established culture. They were subject to the same laws as the Israelites: ‘...*You shall have one manner of law, as well for the stranger, as for the homeborn: for I am the LORD your God*’ (Leviticus 24:22).

They were also subject to the same penalties for law-breaking. Settle in Israel as an ‘alien’ and you were subject to their religious practices—as the weekly *Sabbath* (Exodus 20:10), the *holy days*—except *Passover* (Leviticus 16:29), the death penalty for *blasphemy* (ch 24:16), *foreign faiths* etc.

Success, of course, depended on the individual willingness to submit to these principles. But over time foreign influences—idolatrous practices—infilted the nation leading to its downfall. It’s a salutary warning for any modern nation in which diversity is encouraged.

In sum, God has enabled a variety of varied ‘people groups’ to populate His special planet. The reality is that we are all different. By accident of our birth we become part of an established nation in which a specific skin colour and culture predominates; by in-born nature we are loyal to it, patriotic, submit to its laws and culture.

Christians are ‘...*strangers and pilgrims*’. As such we, too, are to emulate the Father and to be ‘colour blind’—in and out of ‘church’. **Ω**

Festivals 2018

Lord’s Supper	29 March (Thurs evg)
Unleavened Bread	31 March-April 6
Pentecost	May 20
Trumpets	September 10
Atonement	September 19
Tabernacles	September 24–30
Eighth Day	October 1

If you have questions or comments about these festivals we will be pleased to discuss them with you

Is God Color Blind?

Dare to touch the hot topic of 'race' and likely you will get burned! Given its prominence as a factor in human relationships, however, it does need to be addressed. Too often it is the 'elephant in the room'

Does God see us in colour? After all, He created us with the in-built potential through our genes to be born in a variety of 'colours'. So that's what we must discuss.

Difference

Variation in appearance is deceptive. The apostle Paul notes that '... [God] has made all nations of men of one blood

[DNA] to dwell on all the face of the earth, ordaining fore-appointed seasons and boundaries of their dwelling' (Acts 17:26) - a position backed by biology. (For example, 'black' and 'white' can exchange blood, given the usual medical precautions.)

Despite skin shading from albino white to purple-black, analysis determines that there is less than 0.012% difference genetically between any of us. And there is one major pigment to determine our skin shade. It is *melanin*, and the amount present in each of us provides our colour. The level present is genetically determined by a cluster of genes. It's the same for our other features.

Science no longer believes that each 'race' derives from a different animal forebear but that all of us are from a single stock (dubbed 'mitochondrial Eve'). Bible believers ascribe this to the creation of 'man', Adam—in whom was created the complete gene pool. Necessarily 'Eve' was made contemporaneously with Adam, and sharing his DNA.

Division

While not explicitly stated it is most likely that our first parents, median between 'black' and 'white' range, were of a mid-brown skin colour.

As the DNA in Adam's offspring became randomly mixed down the generations there was potential, through natural selection, for a range of skin pigment and other features to manifest in populations. Over the centuries relationships between the like-minded would tend to form specific macro people groups and, ultimately, nations—Caucasoid (Semitic), Mongoloid, Hamitic and many other sub-groups, as indeed exist today. (The terms derive from Noah's sons Shem, Japheth and Ham.)

Post-flood, Noah and his family carried the complete gene pool of three billion human genes into our present world system. The scattering by language subsequent to Babel coupled with environmental factors (eg light skinned occupying higher latitudes) would reinforce familial characteristics. These characteristics are stated in the Scriptures to continue throughout the millennial reign of Jesus (Rev 20:8, Isaiah 19:23).

It is noteworthy that although we all share the same DNA yet God has also set—and controls—boundaries for our various geographical settlements (Acts 17:26).

Salvation

Each 'people group', as noted the apostle Paul, is equal before God—as is each and every individual: '...for the LORD sees not as man sees; for man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart' (I Samuel 16:7). Mankind isn't a random species blown in from space or formed in a pool of methane. We are *created* beings and created with *purpose*—that we will be 'saved' (become joint heirs with Christ of the Family of God).

In the Kingdom of God, His spirit Family, skin colour and social status is irrelevant. Paul again: '...there is

no difference between Jews and Greeks, between slaves and free people, between men and women; you are all one in union with Christ Jesus' (Galatians 3:28). And to the Colossian brethren he writes: '... there is no longer any distinction between Gentiles and Jews, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarians, savages, slaves, and free, but Christ is all, Christ is in all. You are the people of God' (ch 3:11-12 GNB). [In Judaism every people group was welcome.]

Clearly, social status is unchanged when someone is baptize into Christ. The external differences remain. Males stay male, females stay female. Gentiles are still Gentile. Slaves remain in chains. Nor does skin colour change (Jeremiah 13:23). The Father sees only Christ in each Christian, sees only the transformed heart. The community of those who are 'in Christ' is, along with the Father, colour blind. All strive towards the goal of Christ-like compassion and acceptance of difference.

The apostle, as his remedy for addressing these real differences continued his discourse to the Colossians: '...Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, 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 you' (vv.12:13).

A Model Nation

Ancient Israel was established by God as an example of right governance. Socially foreigners were to be treated as a home-born citizen: '... Do not deprive foreigners and orphans of their rights' (Deuteronomy 24:17). And, '...The LORD defends the rights of orphans and widows. He cares for foreigners and gives them food and clothing. And you should also care for them' (Deuteronomy 10:18-19).

They were instructed: '...Don't mistreat any foreigners who live in your land. Instead, treat *cont'd p.2*

We assume our readers believe, with 95% of the world's populace, that there is a divine being, and that you believe also that the Christian Bible is His Word.

Who Is on the LORD's Side?

Increasingly so-called civilized society has ousted God from our laws and our lives. So who is on the LORD's side?

Nations tend to be dominated by the precepts of one or other major religion: in India it is *Hinduism*, in the Arab nations it is *Islam*, in the West it is *Christianity*. In the latter case those precepts are a reflection of the Christian Scriptures, the 'Bible', in *Islam* it is the Koran.

Indeed those Bible precepts are written in stone—literally—on many public buildings in, for example, the United States, whose founding Fathers were clear in their respect for the Bible. England's ninth century King Alfred based much of his famed legal system on the Ten Commandments—the foundation of Great Britain's legal system through the ages (until recently!).

Turmoil

But look around the world! India and Pakistan—Hindu and Islamic—nervously confront one another each backed by nuclear weapons. Islamic states host rival factions set, seemingly, on self-destruction—Saudi destroying Yemeni, confronting Iran, Shia v. Wahabi—and intent on spreading mayhem worldwide. Buddhist Myanmar guilty of genocide against Muslim.

History is no better, with continental Europe crushed for centuries under the despotic control of the Catholic church with its cruel crusade against all opposition and dissent ('heresy'), and its murderous Inquisition, its genocide of Waldenses, Cathars, Albigenses and Jews—and others.

Citizens lived in abject fear of being burnt at the stake by the Inquisition, feared life eternally in the pagan false concept of 'hell fire'.

Those who chose the way of dissent from the established (Catholic) faith, who rejected the false teachings emanating from the Vatican, were 'on the LORD's side'. They opted for torture and death rather than idolatry.

The 16th century Reformation helped curb the excesses of papal Rome. But—old habits die hard—Protestant leaders (eg Elizabeth in England) were not averse to violence against dissent.

'Christianity', then, has left a blood-stained trail following its absorption by Babylonian paganism.

The LORD's Side

The vast super-market of available religious beliefs is confusing—even within Christianity, though all 'Christian' groups claim some relationship with the Bible. Indeed there are thousands of denominations, large and small.

Is there one faith? Can we identify 'the LORD's side'? The start-

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

ing point surely has to be the source—the Bible, for so many centuries forbidden by the mediaeval church.

'the high priest asked him, and said unto him, Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed? And Jesus said, I am'. Mark 14:62

The foundation principle is clearly stated by the apostle Peter with reference to Jesus: '... **Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved**' (Acts 4:12). Not Buddha or Confucius or Mary—and certainly not Allah.

In Islamic theology, Jesus is merely a human being created from dust, a messenger of Allah, and not God's Son. It is, says the Koran, 'monstrous' to suggest Allah [he is falsely equated with YHVH] has a son! Jesus was, they claim, *not* crucified, *not* resurrected—and certainly *not* the Saviour of the world.

One God

The relationship between the three 'people of the Book' is tenuous. Christianity shares the Scriptures with both Judaism and Islam—though Islam is selective. *Allah*, however, is a different god with roots in worship of sun and moon—a practice condemned in the Scriptures. And, of course, *Judaism* rejects Jesus as Messiah and Saviour.

It would be remiss not to note that Christianity has lost touch with its true roots and has taken on board practices and symbolism related to ancient sun worship: Easter and Christmas are examples. The one true God is worshipped but in name only. Ancient symbols are rife within 'Christianity'. As God warned His people, Israel: *cont'd p.7*

Governments do it. So, too, the Press. And the entertainment industry, business, education. Even religion. Every individual daily faces a battle - for influence, for our attention, the battle for our mind

Psychological techniques are deployed to induce change. Advertising seeks by variety of means to manipulate us to 'buy ours'. Psychiatrists seek to change attitudes in the disturbed. Governments pressure suspected terrorists to 'confess' or indeed labour to change the mind-set of a whole population (think 'global warming'). The forces of law and order induce by various techniques an admission of guilt. In our schools, colleges and universities there's an ongoing battle to alter what we think. And be it said, evangelists employ similar techniques to induce 'conversion'.

Clearly, with so many weird notions in circulation, so many myths, so many false ideas - not least in religion - influence of a positive nature is essential for a sound society. Given the foundation of a reliable standard, education to achieve that standard is a praiseworthy goal. But to identify that standard is mankind's challenge. Ignored is the Author of that standard.

Mankind is designed to function according to the 'Maker's Manual'. [Request the free article *The Law of Life*.] Tear up the Manual - 'I can do it my way' - and the problem cannot be fixed. States the Creator: *'For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says Jehovah'* (Isaiah 55:8). The human mind apart from divine wisdom (best expressed in the Christian Scriptures) is not on God's wavelength. And He, too, seeks to influence us: *'...so shall My Word be, which goes out of My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in what I sent it to do'* (Isaiah 55:10-11).

Look at how Government deals with government. Says God:

Battle for the Mind

'Heterosexual marriage - or, alternatively, celibacy - is the norm for human relationships': *'And you shall not lie with a male as one lies with a woman; it is a perversion'* (Leviticus 18:22 etc). No, say Government Ministers - all relationships are 'normal'. Says God: *'All children are foolish, but firm correction will make them change'* (Proverbs 22:15 CEV). Don't lay a finger on the little darlings, says Government. Cold-blooded murder, says God, deserves death: *'Whoever sheds man's blood, his blood shall be shed by man. For He made man in the image of God'* (Genesis 9:6). Oh no, say Government; impose a sentence - and wait. Says God: *'Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil'* (Ecclesiastes 8:11). (Ever wonder why the death penalty doesn't deter?)

God's ways - the standards He has set - are, of course, the 'wisdom of the ages'. They are principles of living tried and tested and proven through time and in all nations. Until now. So what has changed? Ever wonder why those in Government can't govern? Says God: *'...I will proceed to do a marvellous work among this people, even a marvellous work and a wonder: for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid'* (Isaiah 29:14). Ignore God's way and another force steps in.

Unseen Power

The battle for the mind of all mankind is hotting up. Writes the apostle Paul: *'...in later times some shall fall away from the faith, giving heed to seducing [ie deceiving] spirits and doctrines of demons, through the hypocrisy of men that speak lies, branded in their own conscience as with a hot iron'* (I

Timothy 4:1-2). Decisions taken by Government are not mere stupidity, not ignorance, not simply gross error. Not all their decisions are self-serving, not all are pork-barrel politics. Like most of mankind, our leaders are duped, deceived. They have bought into the false notion that what God says doesn't matter. Despite the incontrovertible evidence that His ways make perfect sense. Despite the lessons of history. Why should smart men and women be so blind?

The answer? There's an unseen - and unrecognized - power that's dedicated to subverting mankind. It inhabits a 'parallel universe' yet manipulates our material world and all its institutions. It undermines the sound foundations of society, influencing every phase of human endeavour: education, government, psychology, entertainment, religion. Its natural realm is the world of spirit. The apostle Paul identifies it as *'...the god of this world'* which has *'blinded the minds of them which believe not'* (II Corinthians 4:4). And *'...the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience'* (Ephesians 2:2).

He is, said Jesus, *'the prince of this world'* (John 12:31). Put to the test by this evil adversary, he recognized this territorial claim over mankind's governments: *'...the Devil said to Him, I will give all this authority and their glory to You, because it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whomever I wish'* (Luke 4:6). The existence of that 'spirit' - Satan - is denied, sometimes even in the religious community.

Stage evangelists boast of 'twisting the devil's tail'. In reality Satan the Devil is a powerful force in the Universe, beside which mankind - unaided - is but a puppet. Since man's beginning the Devil has wielded a - usually subtle - influence on us. Jesus Christ alone of mankind has

perfectly resisted his wiles.

The Scriptures reveal Satan as a powerful angel-spirit being. These were created by God as '*...ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation*' (Hebrews 1:14). Under the guise of a 'dragon' Satan is portrayed as '*...that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan*' (Revelation 12:9).

Since the Serpent (Satan) deceived mother Eve he has been active in the world. At the head of a third of the angelic beings (v.4) he has been delegated restricted authority to test mankind - Eve, Cain, Job, David, Joshua (a High priest), Paul, and of course Jesus experienced Satan's interest.

At some moment, the archangel Michael (Jude 1:8) has, at the head of a host of loyal angels, fought with him and his fallen angels, forever excluding them from Heaven. [When Satan was excluded from access to Heaven is disputed. Some believe it was before Adam, others that there was a dual exclusion.]

The Art of Deception

Deception - when deceived you don't know it! It affects secular leadership and it affects religious leadership. It affects all people everywhere, whether they recognize or not. And through the apostle John, Jesus warns that the Devil, Satan '*...deceives the whole world*' (Revelation 12:9). He adds, '*...the whole world lies in the evil one*' (I John 5:19).

To be deceived you must be fed false information. The masters of propaganda say: 'Tell a lie big enough and often enough and it will be believed'. Pound into the collective mind, for example, that God doesn't exist, that the material world 'evolved' from nothing - and even the 'wise' will come to believe it. Deceived.

Our world is warming up, but a campaign of invective is projected against anyone - no matter how

eminent in a relevant scientific field - who won't accept that the warming is wholly man-made but is a natural climatic cycle. *Someone* is deceived.

Then there's the concerted attempt to brainwash us to accept homosexuality as a 'normal human activity', merely one lifestyle choice among many. Or, the prevailing culture of so-called 'free sex without consequence'. Again - deception.

Deliberate deception is always based on a lie or a half-truth. The perpetrators may themselves be deceived! Not surprising, for the Devil is '*the father of lies*' (John 8:44). He sows worldwide his brand of distorted philosophy, perverse psychology, religious confusion, ignorance in place of education, unwholesome 'entertainment'.

The devil - himself the first rebel - foments rebellion. Satan (LXX *diabulos*) - the adversary of all God's works: '*...your adversary the devil*' (I Peter 5:8). Satan - '*...the accuser of the brethren*' (Revelation 12:9). He is real. He's not a 'social/cultural construct', not a figment of tortured imagination.

Heart of the Matter

Deny Satan exists and you won't fear his power, won't comprehend his influence over your thought processes. You won't pray for deliverance from his clutches. You won't '*...resist the devil*' so that '*...he will flee from you*' (James 4:7). You won't see the necessity to '*...put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles [trickery] of the devil*' (Ephesians 6:11).

Why should we be prey to these devilish influences?

Through his malign influence on all of man's institutions the Devil has undermined the principles of Godly

Request the free article:
Would You Recognize Satan?

government. We tend to passively accept the culture in which we are born, so all these institutions - social, religious, the prevailing culture, education - for the most part go unchallenged. But there's more.

As our accuser, Satan weighs us individually, discerning our character weaknesses and our vulnerabilities. He seeks to ensnare us (II Timothy 2:26), to trap us into sin. Better than ourselves he understands the human heart. And because of our alienation from God - indeed our hostility to Him: '*...the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be*' (Romans 8:7) - because we are physically-minded we are vulnerable.

As the prophet Jeremiah exclaimed: '*...The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?*' (ch 17:9). Well, not men - but Satan does! And he exploits our every weakness.

Cosmic Battle

The apostles of Jesus were opposed and obstructed in their ministry. Not just persecution by man - but, worse, from spiritual forces: '*For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against [the] principalities, against [the] powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places*' (Ephesians 6:12).

There's an unseen world of darkness, a 'government in waiting' ready to take control should Christ fail. (He won't!) The frustrated Devil (knowing his time is short) and his - now demonic - angels are at war: '*...the dragon was enraged over the woman, and went away to make war with the rest of her seed, those keeping the commandments of God, and having the testimony of Jesus Christ*' (Revelation 12: 17).

In the end-time an all-powerful religious/political power (portrayed as a 'Beast') - a front for Satan - will indeed establish a short-lived world government: '*...it was given to it to war with the saints, and to overcome them. And authority was given to it*

over every tribe and tongue and nation' (ch 13:7).

Satan, it seems, will have won. He will indeed have deceived the hearts and minds the world's small and great: '*...And all those dwelling in the earth will worship it*' (v.8). Those who refuse will be hunted down.

His victory, however, his dominance of mankind, will continue but three and a half years. (v.5). For the one he, Satan, sought to replace - Jesus the Christ - will, in an explosion of spiritual power, leave His heavenly throne to unseat the Devil, restraining him for a thousand years. He will dispatch a powerful angel to '*... [lay] hold of the dragon, the old serpent who is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, and threw him into the abyss, and shut him up, and sealed over him, that he should not still lead astray the nations, until the thousand years are fulfilled*' (Revelation 20:2-3).

Strategy for Victory

How then can we - Christians - avoid being led astray - deceived - by man's arch-enemy?

Christians live in the real world; but our transformed way of life in Christ makes us target practice - for man and for Satan. Jesus warned: '*Don't think that I came to bring peace to the earth! I came to bring trouble, not peace*' (CEV) (Matthew 10:34).

We can enjoy what the world offers within the bounds of righteousness '*...and those that use the world, as not using it to the full: for the fashion [culture, mode] of this world is passing away*' (I Corinthians 7:31).

The apostolic strategy for victory is an example. Paul told the Corinthian brethren: '*For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh (for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but mighty before God to the casting down of strongholds), casting down imaginations, and every high thing that is exalted against the knowledge of God, and bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ*' (II Corinthians 10:3-5).

The LORD's Side... cont'd

'*...Don't try to find out how they worship their gods, so that you can worship in the same way*' (Deuteronomy 12:30). An admonition ignored by the 'church Fathers' of the third and fourth century! *And since.*

The simple teachings of Jesus ('the LORD's side') were—as he predicted—submerged in a deluge of false teachings:

- man's mortality was replaced by the 'immortal soul'
- the spirit Kingdom of God became 'the church'
- believers were shackled by the fear of punishment for sin in an 'everlasting fiery hell', and the false promise of 'heaven'
- the church assumed secular authority over empires and nations
- dissent was punished by death
- Sunday was enforced in place of the seventh-day Sabbath
- the Biblical holy days were abandoned and pagan festivals substituted—Christmas, Easter etc

Thousands of believers resisted these changes, but as the church in Rome, boosted by the emperor Constantine, increased its authority they were driven to the margins and spiritual darkness descended on the so-called 'Holy Roman Empire' for over a thousand years.

Century Twenty-one

In our day the church—Catholic

Paul adds (Ephesians 6:11-18): '*Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil*'. Ω

Reprinted from New Horizons 2007

unsigned articles are by the Editor

and Protestant—has almost universally inherited these same teachings. Secular humanism and reformed teachings may have curbed the excesses of the mediaeval church—for now!—and martyrdom of Christian believers is in the blood-stained hands of other faiths.

Our list of 'false teachings' will not strike most Christians as heretical—for that is what they—Protestant and Catholic—largely believe.

Red Alert

Anciently, the Israelites were exiled from their homeland for embracing idolatrous practices and for abandoning God's revealed pathway. They were replaced by others who imported their own (idolatrous) faith. It is recorded that '*...They feared Jehovah, and served [worshipped] their own gods, according to the custom of the nations from where they exiled them*' (II Kings 17:33).

This syncretism was echoed by Jesus when speaking to the Pharisees and Scribes: '*...well did Isaiah prophesy concerning you, hypocrites; as it has been written: "This people honors Me with the lips, but their heart is far away from Me; and in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men*' (Mark 7:6-7).

Each 'god' has his or her unique mode of worship, its own worship festivals, its own traditions. The God of the Christian Scriptures—the one and only Creator—has there stated clearly how He wants to be 'served'. That is the 'LORD's side'. It is for each believer to carefully examine their beliefs in the light of God's revealed ways. Ω

Will You Be There?

We know life ends. But most of us believe there is a future, some form of reward, beyond the grave

What that reward is perceived to be or when we inherit it or how we qualify varies from faith to faith. The *Hindu* believer expects to return in another form dependant on his present deeds. The observant *Islamic* male aspires to heaven (*janna*, paradise) with its pure water and endless pleasures. The *Buddhist* heaven (*nirvana*) means for the righteous, extinction, while the imperfect experience rebirth for another life cycle.

Christianity also sports a variety of interpretations, but generally the hope is 'heaven'. For most *Protestant* denominations that's the reward for being 'good' or 'born again'. No longer is the alternative—'hell'—addressed except in extreme fundamentalist sects. What awaits us in 'heaven' is a rather fuzzy concept usually involving harps and angels.

Mediaeval Christianity

In *Catholicism* it's a more complex story, and a bit scary—especially when the practice of the medieval church is considered. When a person dies judgment immediately takes place to determine his or her eternal destiny. Some (*eg* popes, canonized saints) then join God in heaven—a place of bliss. Those burdened by mortal sin are assigned to hell—a state of eternal irreversible separation from God which incurs temporal and eternal punishment.

Purgatory is '...an intermediate state after physical death in which some of those ultimately destined for heaven must first undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven'. It is considered by theologians to be associated with 'pain of the senses' - ie painful punishment in hell's fires. It is, in Catholic theology, a necessary part of the process of 'deification (*theosis*)' whereby the 'soul' comes to be in harmony with the divine nature.

None of these scenarios adequately reflects the teaching of the Christian Scriptures. What, then, is *your* destiny?

Preserved Pattern

There's an almost universal belief that each of us has an 'immortal soul' - a part of our being that survives death. But in reality death is a 'sleep' and we have no sense of our environment: '*...the grave cannot praise you, death can not celebrate you: they that go down into the pit cannot hope for your truth*' (Isaiah 38:18). Once you are buried you remain so, 'moldering in the grave' - until God awakens you from that sleep.

Mankind is body, soul and spirit (I Thessalonians 5:23), the 'soul' being our life-force, the interaction between our physical body and our human spirit. Job tells us '*...there is a spirit in man*' (ch 32:8), and James adds '*...the body without the spirit is dead*' (James 2:26). When we die '*...the spirit shall return unto God who gave it*' (Ecclesiastes 12:7). Our spirit does indeed return to God's care. But note the word of the Psalmist: '*...the dead are silent and cannot praise the LORD*' (Psalm 115:17). We all thus 'rest in peace' when we die - *not* experiencing the bliss of heaven and *not* suffering the fires of 'hell'. We remain in this state of 'suspension' until our resurrection.

Destiny

For the vast majority of mankind that resurrection day lies in the distant future. God has scheduled that moment for the end of the thousand year reign of Jesus (the Millennium). All will then be raised in a physical body formed from the pattern preserved in our human spirit.

At *this* time, however, the Father is selecting a relatively few individuals whom He is training for His coming government of our planet under the leadership of Jesus Christ. His choice doesn't depend on anything we have done, for '*...by grace you are saved, through faith, and this not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; not of works, that not anyone should boast*' (Ephesians 2:9).

When one responds to God's invitation issued through His servants by determining to walk His way ('repentance') and is baptized, and should they remain faithful to Jesus, they will be resurrected at his return: '*...the Lord Himself shall come down from Heaven with a commanding shout of an archangel's voice, and with God's trumpet. And the dead in Christ will rise again first*' (I Thessalonians 4:16).

Should *you* encounter God's calling, and respond through repentance and baptism, He is preparing a place for you in His earthly Kingdom. **Ω**

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Hell

'The teaching of the [ed Roman] Church affirms the existence of **hell** and its eternity. Immediately after death the souls of those who die in a state of mortal sin descend into hell, where they suffer the punishments of hell, 'eternal fire.' The chief punishment of hell is eternal separation from God'.

(Catholic Church Catechism 1035)

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MiniStudy**False News**

‘A reliable messenger is refreshing to the one who sends him, like cold water in the heat of harvest time’ (Proverbs 25:13)

‘A lie has a short life, but truth lives on forever’ (Proverbs 12:19)

‘Your Word is truth’ (John 17:17)

Tune into the media and we find it increasingly difficult to discern truth from fiction—and not just on April 1. The concept of ‘false news’ floods the airwaves fueled by the social media. It even seeps into the higher reaches of government and big business as attempts are made to minimize or cover up error and incompetence—and corrupt practice. And believe me, false news also festers inside religion—not excluding Christianity.

Famously, the Roman Governor Pilate, during the kangaroo court ‘trial’ of Jesus, fired the question, ‘...*What is truth?*’ The answer has ever since escaped the musings of philosophers, and has come to be understood as ‘truth is what you make it’

- God, however, sees it differently! Jesus, surely, is the authority for its definition. He tells his disciples: ‘...*Your Word is truth*’ (John 17:17). That ‘Word’ is defined by Jesus as: ‘...*all the things must be fulfilled having been written in the Law of Moses, and the Prophets, and the Psalms, concerning Me. Then He opened up their mind to understand the Scriptures*’ (Luke 24:44-45) The Psalmist declares ‘...*Your righteousness is forever, and Your Law is truth*’ (Psalm 119:142)
- The proclamation and preservation of that message was delegated to the apostles. The apostle Paul wrote to the young Timothy: ‘...*All Scripture is God-breathed and profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness*’ (II Timothy 3:16). The brother of Jesus (Jude) emphasizes the uniqueness of their role in preserving this precious truth: ‘...*I considered it a necessity to write to you to encourage you to contend for the faith delivered once and for all to the saints*’ (Jude.v.3). Paul adds: ‘...*the things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these things to faithful people who will be competent to teach others also*’ (II Timothy 2:2)
- The integrity of the Scriptures didn’t long survive the birth of the church, as ‘...*many have attempted to compile an account concerning the events that have been fulfilled among us*’ (Luke 1:1) - many spurious. The true good news—‘...*the truth of the Gospel*’ (Galatians 2:5)—became distorted, in many of these, as ‘false news’. Like early rebels they ‘...*changed the truth of God into a lie*’ (Romans 1:25). To the Thessalonians he writes: ‘...*when you received the word of God which you heard of us, you received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God*’ (2:13)
- Even before the death of the apostles a false Gospel was taking hold: ‘...*I am astonished*’, wrote Paul, ‘*that you are turning away so quickly from the one who called you by the grace of Christ to a different gospel, not that there is a different gospel, except there are some who are disturbing you and wanting to distort the gospel of Christ*’ (Galatians 1:6-7). Jesus himself, speaking of events just before his return, warned of such: ‘...*false christs and false prophets will rise up. And they will give great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect*’ (Matthew 24:24)
- How then can we identify this false news, how do we avoid deception? The apostle John has an answer: ‘...*by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. The one who says "I have come to know him," and does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in this person. But whoever keeps his word, truly in this person the love of God has been perfected. By this we know that we are in him*’ (I John 2:4). The Father sees in each of His children the righteousness and faith of Christ imputed to us—not our own. It is false news to claim that His Law—His commandments—are obsolete; our observance is evidence that Jesus and the Father live in us
- Paul, to the Romans, advises the church: ‘...*watch [note] those making divisions and causes of stumbling contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and turn away from them*’ (ch 16:17). His warning applies not only to professing Christians but to the false news imbedded in all other faiths, the teachings of which are tissues of lies laced with false claims, and contrary to ‘...*the truth of the Gospel*’. Notice the apostle Paul’s words: ‘...*God’s anger is revealed from heaven against all the sin and evil of the people whose evil ways prevent the truth from being known [ie, suppress the truth]*’ (Romans 1:18) Ω

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