

NEW **Horizons**

Vol 23 No 1

January/February 2019

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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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 **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.

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new Horizons

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Many 'errors' in the Scriptures result from our failure to understand the existing culture. It's helpful for us to enter their world

Our Western world is obsessed with *time*—not many of us don't have a watch, or half a dozen clocks scattered around our home. Can you imagine living in a world without them? Yet millions in Bible lands did, until the twentieth century when we began to export our culture into the 'middle east'. (The indigent population were adept at judging the hour by the length of their shadow!)

Day and Night

But it is no trivial matter for the serious Bible student. For example, we are used to the 'Roman' time keeping—with the 'new day' starting at midnight. Anciently and throughout the middle east the 'day' began *at sunset*—the method used throughout the Scriptures.

When, then, we learn that while Jesus was on the cross, '*...it was about the sixth hour; and darkness was over all the land, until the ninth hour*' (Luke 23:44). That was from around noon until 3pm to 4pm in our terms. (The sun at that Passover season in Palestine sets around 7pm. At earliest it sets around 4:30pm in late December. There's a very short 'dusk'.) The 'day' was divided into twelve hours (John 11:9), so each 'hour' varied in length. Days, apart from the seventh, Sabbath, were numbered (first, second, third *etc*)—not named.

To understand these differences helps unravel a puzzle regarding the apostle Paul (Acts 20:7). He is recorded, in Troas, as speaking to them on 'the first day of the week'. But this wasn't our 'Sunday', for '*...upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread [ie, for a meal] Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight*'. That was on *Saturday evening*—the dark part of the 'first day'.) He had been with them for the Sabbath assembly.

Law and Order

God gave Israel some apparently quite 'harsh' responses to

provision He had made for a society at peace with itself. The devotion to Allah offered by Muslims is, perhaps, an example of this. It is also exemplified by the attitude of Jesus towards his parents: '*... he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them*' (Luke 2:51). All of life revolved around a religious centre.

Although the law, as given at Sinai, prescribed penalties, the moral climate ensured there was little need to exercise them. When laws were breached the penalty was swiftly applied, as implied by Solomon: '*...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).

It's a lesson yet to be learned by our governments.

A Return to their World

breaches of their Law - punishments that have been roundly condemned in our era as barbaric. They must, however, be viewed in the context of the contemporary culture, so different from ours in the West.

Villages were populated almost entirely by 'family'—related members of the clan. The ancient guidance (passed down since mankind's beginning) was their behavioural foundation, supervised within the patriarchal system. From birth, children were taught to be respectful of their elders, respectful of the established faith, respectful of the governing laws.

Especially, there was a deep respect for their God and all the

Home and Away

It's fashionable to deride ancient family practice and to laud our modern cool attitude toward the 'weaker' sex. The 'women's rights' advocates are two—*five!*—millennia behind the times.

In fact almost every female was a 'career woman'! An enlightening portrait of one is provided by King Solomon. *Read Proverbs 31*. Constantly at work. Diligent. Resourcing the family's needs. An astute business woman who buys land and 'plants a vineyard'. Highly respected by husband, children and neighbour. Her price is indeed 'far above rubies'.

Our Western culture balks at the

ancients' style of language used to express their emotions—the 'imprecatory' psalms, for example. They envisioned themselves as being on God's side—on the side of law and order, on courteous behaviour, on submission to the authorities as constituted by God.

All who deviated from that standard were viewed as God's enemies and therefore fit for destruction. The Psalmist summarizes this attitude: '*...Do not I hate them, O LORD, that hate you? and am not I grieved with those that rise up against you? I hate them with perfect hatred: I count them mine enemies*' (139:21-22).

The apostle Paul expresses it thus: '*...the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness [unlawful behaviour]*' Romans 1:18).

He adds: '*...the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord*' (II Thessalonians 1:7-9).

Motivated by the indwelling Spirit, Christians hold such sentiments in tension and commit our horror of sinful behaviour to God for Him to deal with: '*...avenge not your-*

The language of the day filed all levels of emotion under two words: *love* and *hate*, all gradations between being implied. '*Love your enemies*' simply implies goodwill towards them.

John 3:16

God loves all of mankind [Gk.kosmos] as a unit—and His love for us urged Him to accept the willing sacrifice of His Son to save us. His love extends to every individual who willingly enters a filial relationship with Him through Jesus. (cp. Exodus 20:5-6)

selves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, says the Lord' (Romans 12:19).

Over the Top

In our world, precision of language is expected. We can become obsessed with colons and commas and the position of a preposition or misuse of the subjunctive or an apostrophe. Our word is our bond. *Not so* in eastern speech.

Exaggeration is the norm but often today decried as lies. Language is for them graphic and making a point is paramount, and never mind accuracy of expression. Thus passages of these eastern scriptures are all too often branded as barbaric: '*...if your right eye offends you, take it out and throw it from you...And if your right hand causes you to offend, cut it off and throw it from you*' (Matthew 5:29-30).

Some Islamic nations apply these punishments literally, drawing on ancient pre-Islamic tribal practice. Most nations—especially those influenced by Christianity—have discarded them, recognizing their true significance.

This language is the common currency of the Hebrew Scriptures. The Greek New Testament reflects the Hebrew background of the writers. Similar passages—the camel and the needle's eye, forgive seventy times seven, swallowing a camel *etc*—are also exaggerations for emphasis. A bit like our 'storm in a tea-cup'!

They inhabited a different world. Ω

Foundation Document

In the absence of inspired-by-God leaders (like the twelve apostles and Paul) the foundation of our Christian belief system is 'the Word of God'—the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament. And paramount is the statement of Jesus: '*...Man shall not live by bread alone, but on every Word going out of the mouth of God*' (Matthew 4:4). On the face of it, dilemma! Islamic nations apply strict Sharia law—should Christians follow suit?

We have never, in fact, been a 'Christian nation' but our laws have reflected much that is Christian—until recent decades. Britain, especially, has espoused secularism and abandoned tried and tested principles based on the Scriptures. And the leadership whether blue, red or yellow is held responsible by God to govern wisely and for the national good (see Romans 13).

A Better Way

But a higher law applies to those claiming to be Christian. As Jesus pointed out in the matter of adultery, the sin lies in the heart, in the mind—in the mental process that *leads* to theft or lust or murder or adultery. For, said Jesus, '*...out of the heart come forth reasonings, evil things, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, lies, blasphemies*' (Matthew 15:19). Forgiveness with repentance—*change*—is the desired action. As wrote Paul: '*...Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour*' (Ephesians 4:28).

To the Corinthian church, involved in law-suits brethren against brethren he proposes a better way: '*...Why do you not rather take wrong? why do you not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded?*' (mn 6:7)

God's Word is indeed '*...true from the beginning*'. But from our distant perspective of time, culture and language it must be cautiously interpreted in context of the times in which it was written. Ω

A living stream connects all eras of human existence. There's a hidden continuity that makes history make sense

The course of history seems haphazard. Yet from a divine perspective man exists in five distinct - and connected - eras. We pass from *innocence* to *reason* to *Law* to *Christian liberty* - and, yet future, the earthly *reign of the Kingdom of God*. Underlying all is the same fundamental 'law of life'.

The Earliest Age

Human life began as a direct divine creation by the ever-living God. Mankind in all his complexity was created fully prepared and capable of controlling his environment. It was a time of innocence. The man and his wife were in perfect harmony with the Creator God, the Word - who had a close personal relationship with them. Along with the rest of creation '*...God saw that all He had made was excellent indeed*'. Everything was in perfect harmony and environmentally balanced. Mankind, the pinnacle - and the purpose - of creation was 'perfect' and lived in harmony with the divine will.

Implicit in the divine instruction was the promise of unending life for our first parents. They had unfettered access to 'the Tree of Life'. Only by deliberate rejection - 'perfection' included freedom to choose - of God's revealed *Law of Life* would they taste death. There's no record of how long this 'innocence' lasted - some say a few hours, more likely a period of years - seven, says some Jewish tradition. But innocence came to an end, for they broke the covenant with the Creator: '*...The earth also is defiled under the inhabitants thereof; because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant*' (Isaiah 24:5).

Paradise Lost

By choosing to reject the *Law of Life* Adam and Eve, goaded by Satan, lost their paradise and condemned themselves to a life of un-

necessary toil - over and beyond what God had assigned to them.

Because they chose to discard divine guidance in favour of human reason God predicted the consequences: earning a living would be unnecessarily difficult; children, despite the joy they bring, would cause sorrow in their rearing; Satan would continually try to make them stumble; no longer did they have direct access to the LORD - only through blood sacrifice. They had entered the era of *Reason*. Almost all mankind is there, still.

Consequences

God, while retaining His Sovereign right to oversee His creation, left mankind to the consequence of his choices, while leaving an open door to Himself. As time rolled on the *Law of Life* was increasingly neglected. A few '*walked with God*', but after a mere sixteen centuries there was but one godly family - that of the patriarch Noah. Only Noah and his wife, sons and their wives walked in the divine pathway.

But the pattern repeated. Over the next thousand years God had to intervene repeatedly to prevent human depravity leading to self-destruction - at Babel and at Sodom, the Amorites, the Egyptians, the Canaanites. And still does on occasion.

Neglect of the *Law of Life* inevitably leads to destruction. - personally, nationally, globally. It's a lesson the modern world has yet to learn, for most of humanity still lives in that Age of Reason. Since Adam's choice of this way, the human race has a mind-set hostile to God. We can devise means to avoid the effects of gravity (eg the aeroplane) - but the *Law of Life* is a solid wall that cannot be breached without

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

The Law of Life

serious long and short-term damage. But it doesn't have to be that way.

A Beacon of Hope

In His mercy and compassion the Creator has throughout history provided for us a beacon of hope. Most of the race sank more deeply into the mire. But the light of divine truth was passed from generation to generation by men and women who resisted the pressures of society. They '*called on the name of the LORD*'. Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Gideon, David, the Prophets, numerous nameless men and women - all carried the torch of the true faith in their generation.

It's a matter of record that Abraham by faith '*...minded My voice, kept My charge, My orders, My rules and My laws*' (Genesis 26:5). Through the godly line of Abraham's firstborn, Isaac, God promised to raise up a model nation. Virtually overwhelmed by the heathen culture of their slave masters, his descendants - the children of Jacob-Israel - were spectacularly rescued (around 1500BC) in 'the exodus' from Egypt under the guidance of Moses.

The rest of the world continued their downward trek while Israel - the 'Twelve Tribes' - embraced a national Constitution which had the same *Law of Life* at its heart, but now coded for a physical nation. Moses told the people: '*...What great nation is there that possesses such righteous statutes and ordinances as this whole Law that I am setting before you?*' (Deuteronomy 4:8). Never since has any legal system surpassed it. As a model of good governance, it ought to be written into every national Constitution!

Fatal Flaw

Israel gladly embraced it. In a spectacular and emotional acceptance of the Covenant they called out: '*All*

that the LORD says we will do'.

Fine words - but God knew their hearts: '...O that there were such a heart in them' He said to Moses, 'that they would fear [reverence] Me and keep all My commandments always that it might be well with them and their children for ever' (Deuteronomy 5:29). Their adherence to the covenant - and its *Law of Life* - waxed and waned for a millennium.

They had barely left Egypt when they slipped back into idolatry. It was a pattern to be repeated time and again. On the heels of idolatry came conflict - invasion by surrounding hostile nations. They then cried out to God for deliverance, and He heard.

But that wasn't God's fault. There was nothing wrong - and everything right - with His Law and Covenant. But: '...finding fault with them [ie the people]' (Hebrews 8:8). A covenant has two sides : 'I do this and you do that'. The people dropped the ball and brought on themselves invasion and ultimately exile.

Israel had become - and continues to be - indistinguishable from the surrounding nations who were 'without God'. Only the Tribe of Judah retains its Israelite identity.

So, *innocence* died. Mankind in general set about devising its own way of life derived from human *reason* contrary to the divine *Law of Life*. God's model nation, Israel, incorporated that *Law* into its national Constitution but all too often set it aside with dire consequences. The stage was set for a new era.

Christian Liberty

The divine plan moved on, unchanged. Satan had persuaded Eve - and Adam followed - that to ignore God's guidance would be without consequence: 'you shall not surely die', he told her. Disobey, but you can still live for ever. It's the ultimate lie that even now tangles mankind in its web. But God promised a champion who would 'bruise Satan's head'. It's a blood-red thread that permeates

all of history.

At the appropriate historical moment God stepped into our world in the person of Jesus: '...For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly (Romans 5:6). He lived as a man but without sin, being sacrificed for our sin at the hand of the religious and secular authorities.

The disciples were commissioned by Jesus to take his message to all the world - a task renewed generation by generation. But it is a tough message and few are ready to fully embrace it. Those who do and who remain faithful until death will be associated with Jesus in the next phase of his plan.

In the age of *Law*, in the nation of Israel, the *Law of Life* was imposed as a legal system with just penalties administered with mercy by the Judiciary. Given human nature the 'Justice Department' of Israel's Government failed. As with all the faithful since Creation the *Law of Life* would now be imprinted in the human heart. Submission to it is not imposed by authority - secular or religious.

On our willing change of spiritual direction and our baptism God implants His mind in us - the 'gift of the Holy Spirit'. The Spirit prompts and, with our active cooperation, energizes us to submit to the divine will - to live by the same *Law of Life*.

Jesus, in the *Sermon on the Mount* (eg Matthew 5-7), made it clear that God's Law was not abolished but now pierces even to the human thoughts - no longer mere external obedience enforced by penalties. As long as that Spirit dwells in us we are assured of eternal life. The degree to which we each voluntarily submit to the terms of the *Law of*

Life determines our role in the earthly domain of the Kingdom of God.

The Law of Life

Since mankind's beginning, then, this *Law of Life* has flowed through every age - a cleansing stream that can refresh every nation, every individual that drinks of it. God's Law - His instruction, His Manual for the conduct of life - is as vital to human well-being today as it has been since man first walked the Earth. Failure to heed it, failure to write it into national law, failure to voluntarily submit to its provisions will exclude us from God's richest temporal material and spiritual blessings.

At the heart of this Law lie the much maligned 'Ten Commandments'. All of its provisions may be traced scattered throughout the Bible - *before* Moses was handed them by God engraved in stone as the foundation document of Israel's Constitution. As wrote the apostle Paul: 'the law is holy, just and good...[and] spiritual'

The story, however, doesn't end there. The God who instructed Adam, who taught and guided Abraham, who talked face-to-face with Moses, who became man to die for our sin and continues to walk in the midst of His church - this same will return to establish this Law for all mankind.

And yes - that same *Law of Life* will continue to be applied. How could it not when Jesus himself gave it such an accolade!

A New Beginning: God Reigns

A period of 'shock and awe' is predicted for modern Israel - both Houses. The survivors, however, will have a new beginning initially in what is today known as 'Palestine' - but a territory enlarged to extend from the Nile to the Euphrates.

The Prophets give further insight. Ezekiel, for example. He passes on God's message that the LORD will one day re-unite both Houses of Israel - separated *cont'd p.8*

The promises to Abraham are twofold. The *material* promises are to his physical descendants, while the *spiritual* are to the true 'seed of Abraham', the *Israel of God* (Romans 4:13).

A Vital Union

The Christian Bible emphatically portrays the first humans as wise, sentient, rational beings capable of harnessing their environment—far from the comic-cut picture sketched by much of modern science, so-called.

Science struggles to account for the birth of that first human; how, for example, did two such complex organisms appear and mature in tandem? The Bible is clear: ‘...the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul’ (Genesis 2:7)

Man, thus created in God’s image (ch 1:27), the image of a ‘family’ (ch 1:26 ‘...let us make man...), was also a social being as God noted: ‘...The LORD God said, “It isn’t good for the man to live alone. I need to make a suitable partner for him’ (ch 2:18). Necessary, for he had been instructed to ‘...be fruitful’ (ch 1:28). None of the lower creatures God had created were of social interest to Adam, and God created a counterpart from Adam’s own modified DNA, from his side (KJV: rib).

One Flesh

The record tells us that Adam saw Eve as a suitable—and equal—companion: ‘...Adam said, This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. She shall be called Woman because she was taken out of man’ (Genesis 2:23). God instructs them further: ‘...Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave [Heb. *dabaq*] to his wife and they shall be one flesh’ (v.24).

Eve would become his life companion: ‘... she is your companion

and your covenant wife. And has He not made you one? (Malachi 2:14-15).

It was presented as the beginning of an indissoluble bond, the perfect environment for them to fulfill their mission of providing ‘a godly seed’: ‘...Didn’t God create you to become like one person with your wife? And why did he do this? It was so you would have children, and then lead them to become God’s people [KJV ‘...a godly seed’]. Don’t ever be unfaithful to your wife’ (Malachi 2:15 CEV).

Divine Purpose

That is why we are here. Human sexuality is a fundamental attribute created in us but it is not a play thing. It is hedged around by a framework of regulating principles. God made us male and female with the intention of a faithful life-long union. Ignore this and—just like ignoring gravity—there are adverse consequences.

In the ‘timeless past’ the LORD God had planned this expansion of His Family: ‘...according to His own purpose and grace given to us in Christ Jesus before eternal times [KJV. ‘...before the world began’], but now revealed through the appearance of our Saviour, Jesus Christ, (II Timothy 1:10).

Given that man is no automaton but created in God’s image and created with the capacity to choose his own way the Godhead had agreed this plan of redemp-

tion. The completed mission of Jesus is the sole means by which sinning mankind can be restored, for his perfect righteousness covers all our failures.

‘Salvation’ is none other than the opportunity to be adopted into the Family of God, to become spirit entities. It is the divine plan that all of mankind may, through Jesus—and through him alone—have access to God’s act of grace and mercy.

He is, ‘... not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance’ (II Peter 3:9). When we do turn our life around we receive the Spirit into our mind, giving us access to divine help: ‘...the Spirit also helps our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered’ (Romans 8:26).

Corrupted by our habitual sin mankind has, however, abandoned this divine fundamental injunction, abandoned the righteous pathway and defiled the land with our promiscuity.

Our ‘shepherds’—those charged with leadership—constantly undermine the divine law with a blind eye turned to this laxity, and divorce seen as ‘normal’ and of no consequence—and thus undermining that bedrock of a civilized society, the family unit.

Toleration of minor sexual offences and destructive pornography, faulty sex education, unrestrained promiscuity, ‘snowflake’ attitude to marital disagreements, easy divorce—all play havoc with God’s grand design for humanity. The consequences, however, have yet to be fully experienced. Ω

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unsigned articles are by the Editor

A Broken Covenant

The harmonious union of a man and a woman in a lifetime partnership is a concept as old as mankind. It was the essence of the divine plan to create a race of beings who would willingly live in partnership with Him and with one another. By conforming to His perfect standards they would qualify to become part of the divine Family.

Success, however, was dependent on an on-going perfect relationship with the Father—as existed in the beginning. Mankind (male and female) were created in the divine image and conversed freely with the Creator, and were instructed by Him in the law of life. To transgress that law had inevitable consequences if ignored.

Broken Bonds

Our first parents transgressed that law, losing direct contact with the Godhead as they chose to reject His rules. No longer was their life supported as before by the empowerment and guidance of God's Spirit as when they were first created and covenanted with God to follow His guidance.

the earth is profaned under those living in it, because they transgress laws and violate a statute, and break the everlasting covenant.
(Isaiah 24:5)

The marriage bond began to break down before the great flood. Lamech (a descendant of Cain) is the first recorded polygamist (Genesis 4:19). By the time of the Flood, apostasy gripped mankind: '*...The sons of God [“Sethites”] saw the daughters of men, that they were good, and they took wives for themselves from all those whom they chose*' (Genesis 6:2). The prohi-

bition of marriage with the ungodly had broken down. Alongside the prevailing violence the LORD brands this as '*...evil*'. (vv.5-7).

Inevitably their original perfect union became impaired. Human behaviour drifted further and further from the perfect way, and by the time of Moses the marriage bond—much like in the West today!—was largely treated with contempt in all nations. Even in Israel, God's select nation, legislation to restrict divorce became necessary.

God Rejected

Israel had, at Sinai, willingly pledged to follow God's direct rule: '*...all the people answered together and said, All which Jehovah has spoken we will do*' (Exodus 19:8). They soon tired of His guidance and demanded of Samuel, God's ambassador: '*...appoint a king to us, to judge us, like all the nations*' (I Samuel 8:5).

Just as in today's world, they rejected the perfect system of governance—divine instructions and laws given for our good—in favour of what then seemed best.

Having warned them of the consequences God complied, and Israel became subject to fallible (as always!) human rule, responsible to govern wisely in accordance with natural law: '*...Let every soul be subject to higher au-*

'...God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. Gen 1:28 And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it'
(Genesis 1:27-28).
'...Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh'
(ch 2:24).

thorities [respect the office], for there is no authority except from God, but the existing authorities have been ordained by God' (Romans 13:1).

Divorce Curbed

Israel were fully subject to normal human desires and had for centuries been immersed in vile Egyptian sexual and religious practices. Under the LORD's instruction Moses introduced to the new nation a range of restrictions to curb this destructive practice (Deuteronomy 24:1-5).

As a result promiscuity was curbed and the rights of women were protected—at least in law if not in practice!

A New Commandment

Fifteen hundred years later Jesus was accosted by the Pharisees on the matter. Having referred them to the Genesis account Jesus said: '*...In view of your hardheartedness, Moses allowed you to put away your wives. But from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you, Whoever shall put away his wife, if not for fornication, and shall marry another, that one commits adultery. And the one who marries her who was put away commits adultery*' (Matthew 19:8,9). He adds '*...what God has joined together, let not man separate*' (Matthew 19:5).

In other words, with the support of the indwelling Spirit of God, Christians can weather the storms of marriage despite the 'baggage' each brings to it. But our *sin* still gets in the way of perfection (I John 1:8. As we honour our covenant with God and with our spouse we are empowered to

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Insight from Paul

The apostle Paul's letters shed a bright light on our walk with God

All Christians, surely, will agree that Jesus wasn't double-minded, did not hold two opposing opinions, nor proclaim different theologies. He was consistent, steadfast, unchanging. Indeed he is '*...the same yesterday, today and for ever*'. Why, then, such a variety of doctrinal positions? Why Orthodox, Roman, Baptist, Adventist, Presbyterian *etc*—and all their subjects?

The apostle addressed this with the Christians in Rome: '*...may the God of patience and encouragement give to you to mind the same thing among one another according to Christ Jesus, that with one accord and with one mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 15:5-6)*. His desire, his hope, was for unity of purpose. And he did have a position on the matter, just expressed in that same letter to the Roman brethren: '*...Welcome all the Lord's followers, even those whose faith is weak. Don't criticize them for having beliefs that are different from yours*' (ch 14:1).

He understood, of course, that there is '*...only one Lord, one faith, and one baptism. There is one God who is the Father of all people*' (Ephesians 4:6). His faith was firmly rooted in the Scriptures which are, he tells Timothy '*...able to make you wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus*' (I Timothy 2:16).

There may indeed be a single Bible position on any one doctrine, but the apostle desires that we be tolerant of those who hold any position, with few exceptions, (see below), that's different from our own. So he reminds the brethren of the underlying principle: '*...you yourselves are taught by God to love one another*' (I Thessalonians 4:9). After all, we are each a branch of that one true vine. And we are each at a different stage of maturity in the faith—learning, discarding, growing. Paul adds, '*...none of us lives to himself*', and '*...everyone will give account of himself to God*'.

As new infant members of God's Family we have much to learn. One purpose of the church fellowship is for the more mature members to tenderly nourish the 'newbies' to a fuller understanding of the faith. And we all grow, we all learn, at a varied pace.

The church of God fellowship is designed to be a nourishing environment. Jesus made plain that the leadership must not be overbearing but to be servants of the brethren: '*... the rulers of the nations exercise lordship over them, and the great ones exercise authority over them. But it will not be so among you. But whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant*'.

Once we have been reconciled to the Father through Christ Jesus and received the Spirit of God we are a part of His Family. It is the image of Christ in us, however poorly it may be reflected in our lives, that the Father sees in us. He thus accepts us with all our flaws—while actively working to bring us to the full image of our Saviour.

But there is a limit to tolerance! The apostle, for example, recounts that two of the brethren '*... have wandered from the truth...and they subvert the faith of some. But the firm foundation of God stands; and it has this seal, The Lord knows them who are his*' (II Timothy 2:19). In another of his letters the apostle Paul had removed one of them from the fellowship ('*...delivered to Satan*').

We must each examine ourselves to identify all the obstacles to that Godly love that underpins our calling, that mars our relationship with *all* our brethren, that separates us from those 'not like us'.

That 'love', that toleration of brethren with as yet defective understanding is the 'tie that binds' us in outward unity. The apostle Peter, as does Paul,

Festivals 2019

Lord's Supper	April 18 Thurs evg
Unleavened Bread	April 20-26
Pentecost	June 9
Trumpets	Septemb 30
Atonement	October 9
Tabernacles	Octob 14-20
Eighth Day	October 21

A Minute to Twelve?

A new year and we are all faced with increasing uncertainty—no least in Britain but also worldwide. 'Prophets' (secular and religious) abound with a confusing cacophony of conflicting predictions.

The Biblical festivals (listed above) provide a sound and sure foundation to understanding the future. *Request our booklet:*

God's Holy Days

<http://www.cgom.org/Publications/Booklets/HolyDays.htm>

from previous column:

urges us to '*...grow in the knowledge of Christ*': in his character, his relationship with the Father we have in common. As we meditate on the many names and functions of our Saviour we come closer to understanding the depths of his abiding love for us—all of us.

When we have laid the foundation of the basic teachings which support the edifice of the true faith we are urged by Paul: '*...Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; 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).

Theologians argue over the minutiae of doctrine, but without the love of God and true knowledge of Christ mere doctrinal knowledge is divisive—and deadly.

United by his love for us we are better placed to be a worldwide witness of living faith. Ω

Law of Life...cont'd from p.4

since the time of Solomon's successor, Rehoboam.

But *change* is vital. There will, at long last, be perfect incorruptible Government, as the resurrected 'saints' reign alongside the Messiah.

And the people, too, will be changed. Hear Jeremiah: *'See. The days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the House of Israel and the House of Judah; not like the covenant I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, which covenant of Mine they broke, although I was a husband to them' (ch 30:31-32).*

God 'married' Israel but, because of their infidelity, 'divorced' them. But He will re-marry! The first marriage covenant (Exodus 19-23) clearly demonstrated that man's - and not just Israel's - innate hostility to his Creator hindered sustained submission to the terms of the covenant, and cut them off from its blessings.

In the 'new covenant': *'...I will put My Law in their inward parts and upon their hearts will I write it' (v.33).* The Law of Life - just as true for Christians today, and as with all God's faithful throughout the ages - will then be imprinted on the minds of all Israel and of all mankind who embrace it. 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*

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

A Family Project

The 'family' is, today, under threat—from government policy, from immorality, from pressures by the so-called intelligentsia, from the homosexual lobby. Yet it is perhaps mankind's oldest institution.

Delve deep into anthropological history and *there is family*—perhaps different in style in each people group but still a group of individuals related by genetic ties. *Family* was a source of strength, of mutual support, of the transmission of skills and values. And fiercely defended.

The earliest Bible reference describes the criteria: *'...By these [Noah's sons] were the isles of the Gentiles [Heb. Goy] divided in their lands; every one after his tongue, after their families, in their nations [Heb.goy]' (Genesis 10:5).* A family had territory, a common language (or dialect), they became, as they expanded numerically, a nation.

Sifting of Nations

As centuries passed (since creation) mankind forsook the Creator's guidance, and after a millennium and a half their perverse lifestyle and behaviour demanded direct intervention by Him (Genesis 6). Only one family—that of Noah—remained faithful and were protected from the worldwide destruction of the Flood.

Human aggression escalated, leading to the confusion of languages and dispersal of the various people groups. *Abraham* for his perceived qualities was God's choice to forward

His plan. His faithfulness led God to promise

that through him and his progeny He would become a blessing to all nations, all earth's families: *'...I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless you, and curse him that curses you: and in you shall all families of the earth be blessed' (Genesis 12:2-3).* The promise was passed through Isaac to Abraham's offspring through Isaac: *'...in your seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because you have obeyed my voice' (ch 22:18, 21:12).*

The promise was realized through Israel *'...You [Israel] only have I known of all the families of the earth' (Amos 3:2).* It was two-fold—a promise of material blessing, and then, through Jesus Christ: *'...to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He said not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to your seed, which is Christ' (Galatians 3:16, Genesis 3:15,16).*

The nation of Israel received unprecedented *material* blessing—but through Jesus the entire world would have access to salvation, to becoming part of the Kingdom of God, and a filial relationship with the Father.

The church Jesus founded is the *'...Israel of God' (Galatians 6:16),* spiritual Israel. The opportunity to become part of it is open equally to both 'Jew' and to 'Gentile' and under the same terms. Neither is excluded, neither has priority. All must submit to Jesus Christ through a change of heart and baptism. He alone is the Saviour for all of mankind.

Life's purpose is to become part of that divine Family. Ω

MiniStudy**A Unique Message**

‘...Go and make disciples of all the nations... teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you’ (Matthew 28:19)
‘...this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed in the whole inhabited earth for a testimony to all the nations’ (Matthew 24:14)

The *Churches of God*, for over a century and a half, have sought by varied means to fulfill this parting end-time commission of Jesus. Many thousands have down the years embraced the message, been baptized and been begotten by the Spirit of God, and it has indeed reached virtually every corner of the planet. Generations have come and gone, though but a tiny minority have—as predicted—committed fully to this Gospel.

- Jesus had this to say to his hearers: *‘...narrow is the gate and constricted is the road that leads to life, and there are few who find it! (Matthew 7:14). On another occasion he says: ‘...For many are called but few are chosen’ (Matthew 22:14). So, while we enthusiastically and by every means proclaim this ‘gospel of the Kingdom’ to the world we realize that its demands mean that few stay the course. For those who ‘overcome to the end’ the reward is beyond full human understanding (I Corinth 2:9-10)*
- Life’ is what God offers—eternal and unending life as spirit members of the divine Family: *‘...The Spirit himself confirms to our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, also heirs--heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer together with him so that we may also be glorified together with him’ (Romans 8:16-17). The apostle John tells us: ‘... Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it does not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is’ (I John 3:2). The Scriptures vividly describe that future state*
- The apostle Paul clarifies this post-resurrection bodily state of Christians: *‘...It is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruptibility. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a natural [psuchikos] body, it is raised a spiritual [pneumatikos] body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body’ (I Corinthians 15:42-44). We have examples of the latter as Jesus appeared following his resurrection to the disciples. It is also our destiny*
- Jesus, after his resurrection, appeared to two disciples who suddenly recognized him: *‘...their eyes were opened, and they knew Him. And He became invisible from them [literal translation]’ (Luke 24:31). Later that day he appeared to the assembled disciples. Not only did he suddenly appear among them despite locked doors but he ate and made this statement: ‘...They were frightened and terrified because they thought they were seeing a ghost [Gk.pneuma—a disembodied spirit]. But Jesus said, “Why are you so frightened? Why do you doubt? Look at my hands and my feet and see who I am! Touch me and find out for yourselves. Ghosts don’t have flesh and bones as you see I have’ (vv.37-39)*
- It’s an almost universal belief—even beyond Christianity—that after death the human spirit (‘soul’) is transported to some nebulous eternal state. In Christianity it is ‘heaven’. In truth the ‘gospel of the Kingdom’ far transcends this limited view. The Kingdom is *eternal*. It is the Family of God—without beginning, without end. It has since man’s beginning controlled our affairs, behind the scenes setting up human kingdoms and empires, eliminating others while respecting human choice: *‘...know that the most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomsoever he will’ (Daniel 4:32). Its work is as yet unfinished*
- Mankind has from the beginning failed in its God-given responsibility to rule wisely. The Messiah, Jesus, together with the resurrected saints (I Thessalonians 4:16-17) will set about the task of applying the benign rule of the Kingdom of God, the divine *torah*, to the remnant of mankind (Isaiah 24:6), the survivors of the end-time destruction (*ch.* 2:2-4). They will have opportunity to become members of the divine Family. This is the unique message that we proclaim—the Gospel of the Kingdom. **Ω**

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www.tulsachurchofgod.net — www.tulsachurchofgod.org*

*Church of God, New Mexico, — 1:30 p.m. MST
www.cognm.org*

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