

NEW **Horizons**

Vol 24 No 5

September/October 2020

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 terms clear to those who have 'ears to hear' - 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 Newsletter **OUTREACH, NEW HORIZONS** magazine, the **BIBLE BASICS** on-line home study course, and a 32-lesson **STUDY COURSE**.

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

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

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

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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**

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new

HORIZONS

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The material universe functions in accord with inexorable law. So, too, the moral universe

Space photography has focused our attention on the awesome beauty of our universe, with its billions of stars and galaxies in fascinating variety and colours. Yet throughout the far reaches of space all are subject to the same physical laws.

Down on Earth the same fundamental laws of physics apply: Relativity, Thermodynamics, Motion, Mass and Energy, Light—a complex tapestry woven in perfect harmony. Even the mysterious Quantum Mechanics is subject to the same physical laws.

Scientists bow in awe before these interacting systems.

Every technological advance must conform, or failure ensues, to their cost

Living Law

Nor can we forget *life*—all of it subject to law governing our very existence, and all governed by universal laws.

The incredible complexity of a living cell—subject to inexorable chemical law. Our innumerable interactions with the physical world—all subject to law. And not just the laws of physics and chemistry, for mankind, created in the very image of the Creator, is also subject to the *moral* law.

Divine Image

The entire animate creation derives from God and is, too, sub-

ject to the physical laws. Mankind, however, is unique and functions in accord with a raft of *moral* laws—laws as inexorable as the physical.

Unlike the animal creation mankind is created in the very *image* of our Creator (Genesis 1:27). Every aspect of our physical and mental existence was perfectly designed to live harmoniously with God, with self and with neighbour. It could be called ‘the *Law of Love*’. And that’s how it continued—but only for a limited time.

Sin Enters

Our first parents severed their personal face-to-face relationship

with the Creator, who then provided mankind

with a pattern of behaviour that summarized (for unregenerate mankind) the underlying principles of the *Law of Love*. It was later summarized in the ‘Ten Commandments’.

This understanding of a spiritual and moral law of life prevailed universally in some degree since creation. The moral law was passed on from our first parents to succeeding generations, their substance reflected in the legal codes of nations—traceable through the historical records, notably the Hebrew Scriptures. The *Code of Hammurabi* is an early (c.1750BC—uncertain) written record.

Law of Man

Following Adam’s sin mankind was set on a trajectory of lawlessness and self-destruction. Not many centuries passed before God had to intervene: ‘...*God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually*’ (Genesis 6:5). Mankind was all but wiped out, but one family remaining: ‘...[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).

As human clan leaders soon discovered fallen mankind didn’t always live in harmony! Individual leaders devised their own legal systems—some draconian (eg Nimrod)—but all in some degree at their core reflected the original law of life.

It is recorded, for example, that the patriarch Abraham (c.2000BC) ‘...*obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws*’ (Genesis 26:5). A contemporary of his, the Canaanite king of Gerar was appalled that he was in danger of committing adultery with Abraham’s wife and therefore subject to the death penalty (ch 9:6, 20:6). This act breached the regulations God had placed on sexual relationships. A similar situation arose with both Abraham’s grandson and great grandson (Joseph in Egypt). The Scriptures name these breaches of the primeval law as *sin*: ‘...*how then can I [Joseph] do this great wicked-*

BEYOND LAW

ness, and *sin* against God? (Genesis 39:11ff).

When we transgress those laws there are inevitable negative consequences. The integrity of civilisation depends on man's willing submission to them.

The Law of Love

In the beginning and fresh from the hands of the Creator, however, man's inner driving force was *love*. His behaviour flowed from 'clean hands and a pure heart', with no need for an external code of law. By his (then) spiritual nature he acted in accord with the divine will.

In response to a question about the Law, Jesus referred to this law of love. He answered him: '*...You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets*' (Matthew 22:37-40).

When God established the tribes of Israel as a nation (c.1500BC) He codified these laws of life, summarized as the Ten Commandments, placing them at the heart of their national Constitution and legal system (Exodus 20). It is a model for all current legislators and far superior to, for example, the Code of Hammurabi. The prophet Moses describes it so: '*...what nation is there so great, that has statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day?*' (Deuteronomy 4:8).

The Law of Life, the Ten Commandments and the various

derived Statutes and Judgments, are not strictly 'religious', but the practical application of the *Law of Love* for unregenerate and sinful mankind—love for God (the first four commandments) and love for neighbour (the last six).

The empowering by the holy Spirit following our repentance and baptism begins to restore in us that Law of Love. As we actively allow the Spirit to increasingly influence our whole inner being and our behavior—and as we suppress the 'works of the flesh'—we grow the 'fruit of the Spirit': '*...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance [self-control]: against such there is no law*' (Galatians 5:22-23).

We won't, of course—in this life—attain to the perfection of our Saviour. But having covenanted our life to Jesus we become, there and then, a child of the Father: '*...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*' (I John 3:2). We seek to emulate the divine characteristics—the Law of Love.

So great salvation comes solely by His grace, and no amount of our law-keeping can earn that. As God's sons and daughters we willingly and joyfully are transformed by His Spirit to live in accord with His revealed way of life.

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

The Law Irrelevant?

Is the Law, then, irrelevant for the Christian? As 'new-born' of the Father we would expect Him to guide us—and He has not left us adrift on the rough seas of life, rudderless. Or Father has provided a manual for life—the Christian Bible, His inspired Word that encapsulates the perfect Law of Life. Ω

A Pearl of Great Price

It would come as a shock to the recipient of a 'precious stone' only to find that in reality it is jewellers' paste (glass).

Sadly, that's what too many sincere Christians have been given from their church pulpit. The precious truth of real Christianity is found in the Christian Scriptures, the Bible—but it is rarely heard in the catechisms of the various denominations.

Take, for example, the annual round of festivals: the joy of Easter or the glitter and glamour of Christmas or the weekly observance of Sunday. All are close to the heart of every believer. Some would say that failing to embrace these and the other festivals excludes you from the faith.

Search the Scriptures, however, and you will find that these observances are mere 'ground glass', paste, and not the precious jewels you expected.

But God has presented His people with a 'pearl of great price', indeed a string of such pearls. They are clearly presented in the Scriptures, and were observed both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament—in ancient Israel and in the young Church. Ω

These festivals are explored in our free literature:

**Why Do You Observe Sunday?
God's Holy Days**

Tabernacles—mankind in the flesh
available in print or on-line

**Our best efforts—our
'works'—will never 'save' us.
But they determine our role
throughout eternity**

The fact that any one of us can live for eternity is the sole result of the unparalleled love and mercy of the God of perfection. Wrote the apostle Paul to the Christians in Ephesus: '*...by grace are you saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast*' (ch 2:8-9).

Not by what we do or by our gifts, he writes. Indeed to the Corinthians (and to all of us) he states: '*...What if I could speak all languages of humans and of angels? If I did not love others, I would be nothing more than a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. What if I could prophesy and understand all secrets and all knowledge? And what if I had faith that moved mountains? I would be nothing, unless I loved others. What if I gave away all that I owned and let myself be burned alive? I would gain nothing, unless I loved others*' (I Corinthians 13:1-3).

Not even martyrdom or self-sacrifice counts unless motivated by the love that flows from our filial relationship with the Father! That results only from a supernatural change of heart when we turn from our natural ways to embrace God's ways. That is, a 'godly sorrow' that leads to a fundamental change of our life's direction.

Two Ways

'Love' [*Gk. agape*] is the way to live life that conforms to the standards set out by God in His Word, for '*...God is love*'. It encompasses every aspect of our daily life, and must have the infusion of God's Spirit following the

realization that we are cast adrift from Him by reason of our sinful ways.

['Love'—practical concern—was enjoined on Israel ('*...love your neighbour as yourself*'). Love in the Christian is motivated by God's Spirit and is the expression through us of the divine love.]

Our first parents set their descendants on a pathway of rebellion to the perfect way of life for which we were created, a way if followed that would lead us to individually become an integral part of the divine Family: '*...God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him*' (Genesis 1:27).

It wasn't to be. An alien influence manipulated our parents to follow *his* ways—a way of opposition to God's way, a way of deception. As Paul wrote to Ephesus: '*...You followed the ways of this world [Gk. kosmos] and obeyed the devil. He rules the world, and his spirit has power over everyone who doesn't obey God*' (ch 2:2).

Two ways, in effect, as John notes: '*...In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever does not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loves not his brother*' (I John 3:10).

Love, then, is the key to the value of our works. Outside of the 'bubble' of the 'children of God' our works—however helpful to mankind—are, in regard to our salvation (*ie* our relationship with God) of no

value.

Why Works?

We ask then, *why does Paul advocate works?* He writes: '*...we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God has before ordained that we should walk in them*' (Ephesians 2:10). And James, in his letter, states; '*...Yea, a man may say, You have faith, and I have works: shew me your faith without your works, and I will shew you my faith by my works*' (ch 2:18).

In his final direct communication with us (through John, c.90AD), Jesus had this to say: '*...I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be*' (Revelation 22: 12, Matthew 16:27). Works, good *or* bad—and each in its own order.

Works Defined

The Scriptures define what are clearly the 'bad' works. Paul, for example, spells it out to the Galatian church, labelling them as '*...the works of the flesh*' (ch 5: 19-21). Few with any degree of self-awareness would disagree with his list.

There is a general consensus as to the 'good' works. We usually think of them as our charitable activities—those activities the apostle says (I Corinthians 13) *won't* gain us salvation unless stemming from a regenerated mind.

Nor would many deny that the '*...fruits of the Spirit*' (vv.22-23) are 'good' for society—though largely missing. It is these that are

essential characteristics if we are to inherit God's Kingdom (v.21). And note that they stem from God's Spirit indwelling us, from a mind transformed.

True Worship

There's another strand to works that is often ignored. Paul, among other evil works, notes *idolatry*, the worship of foreign gods, named in Scripture as *service to the god*. It involved works: specific festive days, prescribed behaviour (often sexual), sacrifice (eg of infants), rituals (eg witchcraft). In the context of His holy days God advised Israel: '*...You shall not bow down to their gods, nor serve them, nor do after their works*' (Exodus 23:24). All contrary to the holiness that encompasses the service of the God of the Bible.

In contrast, the form of worship and way of life prescribed by God for His people is holy, in conformity with revelation. It, too, has (good!) works: special festive days (Leviticus 23), ethical behaviour (Exodus 20-23), weekly assemblies (on the seventh-day Sabbath), healing the sick, hygienic practice including food and drink, *etc.*

All of these 'good works' are the willing expression of the divine love in each repentant follower of Jesus Christ, a *doer* of the will of God. Wrote Paul to the Roman Christians: '*...I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service [worship]. And be not conformed to this world: but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God*' (ch 12:1-3).

Future Reward

Submission to God's revealed will is, as stated, a key to the door of God's Kingdom, His Family. When we are 'in Christ' and striving to conform to his way of life then, as wrote John, '*...now are we the sons of God, and it doesn't 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. And every man that has this hope in him purifies himself, even as he is pure*' (ch 3:1-3). We are already sons and daughters of that Kingdom for as long as we stay faithful. Paul, too: '*...If any man's work abide which he has built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire*' (I Corinthians 3:14-15).

Early in our era, faced by persecution from secular Rome and from Gentile believers, church leaders sought to distance Christianity from its Jewish roots. Prophecies concerning Israel were deemed to refer to the church. It is now known as 'Replacement Theology' or 'Secessionism'.

Thus prophecies of an earthly 'millennium' were referred to the present pre-return era and the 'reign' of the church.

So, what is that reward offered by Jesus upon his return?

Millennial Kingdom

He provides an indication in a discussion with the Twelve (Matthew 19:28): '*...Verily I say unto you, That you which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel*'. He refers to his coming thousand year reign when '*...the*

Israel Restored

Jesus (see Matthew 24) foresaw that after his ascension there would follow a time of continuous disruption on earth, culminating, v.30, in his return to reign and to resurrect the faithful. Through the prophets he had described the path his people Israel would follow—their moral decline and consequent servitude.

But through Jeremiah he explains, '*... the days come, says the LORD, that I will bring again the captivity of [rescue] my people Israel and Judah, says the LORD: and I will cause them to return to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall possess it*' (ch 30:3).

Notice—both kingdoms, Israel and Judah, will be restored to their ancestral land, an event yet future. The clear implication is that the House of Israel will exist at Messiah's return'.

Judge [Gk *krino*]

Implies a process of observation and assessment, comparison with a set of laws and standards, applied wisdom, determination of the appropriate penalty.

LORD shall be king over all the earth: in that day shall there be one LORD, and his name one' (Zechariah 14:9). Those words of Jesus ('*...judging the twelve tribes*') may surprise some readers, for it's widely believed that 'Israel' has disappeared leaving but one tribe—Judah. Yet here they are, being judged by The Twelve apostles as the twelve tribes continue through the thousand years of the coming reign of Jesus. The last two thousand years have *not* seen the fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy (ch 2:3)—it refers to the period following the return of Messiah.

cont'd p.8

**The Bible refers to a ‘millennium’.
Will it be spent in heaven or on
earth?**

Over half the world’s population believes in an unending afterlife spent in ‘heaven’. It’s viewed as a ‘place’ where there is pleasurable reward for our earthly deeds. It is, of course, the aspiration of almost every present-day Christian—no-one wishes for a fiery, eternal ‘hell’—or for oblivion!

That, however, wasn’t the belief of the first Christians whose faith was rooted in the Old Testament scriptures and the teachings of the Son of God, Jesus. They wanted nothing to do with the ‘immortality of the soul’—the almost universal belief underpinning the common view of heaven as the reward for faith in Jesus Christ. (Christians believed they ‘slept’ after death until the resurrection of the body at the return of Jesus.)

The Millennium

Those who in this life are in a filial relationship with the Father through Jesus Christ will be heirs of the Father and ‘joint heirs’ with Christ of the eternal divine Kingdom (Romans 8:17). Most may now be in their grave, but they will all be restored to life: ‘...*Blessed and holy is the one having part in the first resurrection. The second death has no authority over these, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and will reign with Him a thousand years*’ (Revelation 20:6). The Kingdom would be established by the return of Messiah. [‘*pre-millennialism*’].

This reign will be ‘...*on earth*’ (ch 5:10) and has become known as the ‘millennium’. That is the belief of the first Christians, and was based on both the Old Testament writings and on the teaching of Jesus.

As the centuries rolled by the church deviated from the apostolic teachings (Jude v.3) and, following Augustine [died 430AD], settled on the view that the *church* is the Kingdom [‘*amillennialism*’]. This is the Roman

(and, increasingly, the Evangelical), view. The mediaeval church usurped temporal authority and imposed itself on the known world as a restored Roman Empire—though far from ‘holy’.

Reward

Early mythology, notably Egyptian, had the god’s [Osiris] subject souls follow him to heaven for assessment of their deeds. Those who ‘failed’ were cast to ‘hell’. This—reward for good or evil works—is in some form the default view of most faiths to this day.

Created from the elements of the soil and infused with the ‘*spirit in man*’ [Heb.*ruach*] man became a mortal ‘living soul’ made in the image of our Creator.

When we die the spirit becomes dormant and awaits restoration to life.

Islamic thought is that those who have in this life done good deeds will be assigned to *Jannah*—heaven where there is eternal pleasure, and wrongdoers to hell—*Jahannah*—for punishment. The popular Hindu heaven and hell reflect similar rewards for good and evil deeds.

This is, of course, what most Christians aspire to. Catholicism especially promotes the same concept of a heavenly reward for merit, charitable deeds done during this physical life.

A Spiritual Kingdom

Jesus taught his disciples to pray ‘...*your Kingdom come*’. It is a summary of the divine plan of creation. ‘God’ is a Spirit Family that exists outside of time, without beginning, without end. The purpose He has in creating mankind is that we would have the opportunity to become part of that Family, His ‘sons and daughters’. But given free choice our first parents rejected the path to the fulfilment of our life’s purpose, and embarked on a downward spiral of re-

unsigned articles are by the Editor

Earth—or Heaven?

bellion to the divine way. All will face judgment.

Jesus explains: ‘...*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 first to be resurrected—the ‘good’—are raised in a spirit body and will, as noted ‘...*reign with Christ a thousand years*’ (Revelation 20:6), ‘...*on earth*’ (ch 5:10).

The Earthly Kingdom

The apostles, therefore, are assigned an earthly function. In harmony with the rest of the resurrected ‘saints’ they will, upon Christ’s return, be responsible under Christ to judge the remnant of Israel and of the Gentiles—the survivors from all nations out of the chaotic end times. Numerous prophecies recorded in the Old Testament fill in the details of this millennial period.

Jeremiah, for example, in the context of the return of Christ in ‘*the latter days*’ (ch 30:1-3, 24, 31:1), speaks of the restoration to their ancestral home (Palestine) of all twelve tribes of Israel and their integration as one nation: ‘...*He who scattered Israel will gather him and keep him, as a shepherd his flock*’ (vv.10-11). It follows a short period described as ‘Jacob’s trouble’ and by Jesus as the darkest period of Jacob’s—and the world’s—history (Mark 13:19).

Isaiah (ch 2) and Micah (ch 4) describe God’s legal, religious and economic plan. For the first time an era of permanent world peace for all mankind. The prophet Zechariah describes the return of Messiah (the LORD) to establish His Kingdom: ‘... *Jehovah [JHVH, the LORD] shall be King over all the earth. In that day there shall be one Jehovah, and His name one*’ (ch 14:9).

Our inheritance is *Earth!*

Ω

Is God Colour 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 created contemporaneously with

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 shade.

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 or lower 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*

Adam, and sharing his DNA.

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. That's why we were created!

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 or gender or class is unchanged when someone is baptized into Christ. The external differences remain. Males stay male, females stay female. Gentiles are still Gentile. Slaves remain in chains. (*cf* I Corinthians 7:20-21) 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, *must* 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, kind-*

ness, 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 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 today' (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 the penal system (*ch 24:16*), to their religious practices such as the weekly *Sabbath* (Exodus 20:10), the *holy days*—except *Passover* (Leviticus 16:29). Foreign religious practices were banned.

Success, of course, depended on the individual willingness to submit to these principles. But over time foreign influences—idoltrous practices—infiltrated the nation leading to its downfall. It's a salutary warning for any modern nation in which religious 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

Issues of 'Colour'

Increasingly in the modern world, 'colour' matters.

What can we do about it?

Any violent death is tragic, no matter what shade the skin. The world bubbled with anger (largely fomented by political activists) at the recent killing of George Floyd, a recently-released convicted career criminal while fleeing police custody for drug possession.

And it is a truism that 'black lives matter'—as do all lives as beings created in the image of God. As our gene profile indicates, under the skin we share almost all of our genes. The

apostle Paul sums up the discussion: '*...[God] has made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation' (Acts 17:24-26). We are, in effect, 'one race'.*

Life-style

Our visible lifestyle derives from our social status, our inherited culture and philosophical beliefs, our family life, our education *etc.* It is these factors that spark division. Mix varied cultures from diverse backgrounds (not just 'racial' but social, sexual *etc.*) and friction can—will—be generated. That is raw unrestrained human nature.

Our world improves by learning from history. Ancient Israel's constitution, is a template for harmonious racial relations. Not, of course, that such laws—as in today's world—were universally obeyed, for human nature doesn't change. A fundamental transformation of our nature alone moves us individually toward such perfection.

A World Transformed

But change *is* coming. The present defective world order is destined to be replaced by that perfect Constitution ministered to ancient Israel (*read Micah ch 4*)—coupled with a spiritual transformation as God's Spirit becomes freely available to all mankind. *Jesus Christ is coming*, accompanied by his prepared brothers and sisters, to establish the rule of the everlasting Kingdom of God.

Here and Now

But not yet. In Christ we are on a learning curve. We come to him with the baggage of ingrained prejudices—not least in regard to skin colour. Our mind-set has to change to conform with the perfect mind-set of Jesus. Let's each shine the blazing light of God's Word on our innermost thoughts as we seek daily to live by it. Distressing times lie ahead, and the faithful must bolster that faith by diligent observance of God's Way: '*...you shall love your neighbor as yourself'.* Ω

Works...cont'd from p.4

The apostles will judge Israel in accord with the divine Law, at that time the universal criterion for behaviour of all mankind.

Overseers

Given the predicted worldwide chaos as our human age gives way to the divine, such a mass movement of refugees demands oversight, organization. Israel's future return is described as a 'second exodus' (Isaiah 11:11), the first being under the skilled leadership of Moses when the twelve tribes exited slavery in Egypt in an organized manner. But the whole of the remnant of mankind will be scattered and in need of oversight.

Recall that when Jesus returns all the believers since man's beginning, now asleep in their graves, will be raised to spirit life' (I Thessalonians 4:13). They each have in their lifetime come to be in tune with Jesus and are prepared, under his guidance and empowered by his Spirit to oversee the mass of displaced Gentiles: ; '...[You] have redeemed us to God by your blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; And have made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth' (Revelation 5:9-10).

This is their 'reward', and their individual level of responsibility is the reflection of the change in their personal spiritual growth while 'in Christ'. Jesus used the analogy of an heir to a throne [himself] who required his servants to trade in his absence (Luke 19). Each was given the same seed money [the Spirit] and each was rewarded according to his 'fruit'.

To repeat Paul's words; '...Every man's work shall be made mani-

fest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire [life's experiences] shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he has built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire' (I Corinthians 3:13-15).

Our individual 'rewards' in the resurrection, that is, will be unique to each. In discussing the resurrection body the apostle adds, by analogy: '...There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for one star differs from another star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead' (ch 15:41-42).

What we do in this life, in sum, doesn't earn salvation. Salvation comes solely from the realization that we are cut off from our Creator, that we are not in a relationship with Him and that only the imputed righteousness of His Son, Jesus the Messiah, can restore it.

That relationship is restored only when we seek forgiveness of our sin through Jesus's sacrifice, and turn from that way to God's revealed way of life. Our role as joint-heirs with him in God's Kingdom depends on a life that's transforming into his image. Ω

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Saved—from what?

Mankind is not inherently immortal, despite the claims of all the major faiths. When we die we are just that—dead. Not alive in an alternative state of existence. Nor, as science may envisage, do we simply turn to dust and be eventually forever forgotten. So what's the point?

No—life has purpose. We were in the beginning created in God's own image with the potential to live forever in a perfect state. That image was marred through our own choices. And we died.

Only a divine act can change that, and whether we believe it or not we will each face judgment, we will each be restored to life to give account to Jesus Christ for our life's choices — the one who alone is perfect.

In your grave you will shake off the dust you may have become and will be given the opportunity to repair through the faith of Jesus that severed relationship with the Creator. And to live eternally in a renewed universe, serving the Creator as He continues to implement His plans.

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‘...you shall love Jehovah your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might’ (Deuteronomy 6:5, Luke 10:27)

This guidance given by God to Moses around 1500BC and confirmed to his hearers by Jesus is the everlasting flame that illuminates the entire history of true religion since time began. It is a reflection of the service paid to the Creator by true believers down the ages.

- Contrary to modern scepticism and pseudo-science mankind literally materialized *perfect*—physically and morally and psychologically—from the hand of our Creator. We were formed to be like God: ‘... *God created the man in His own image; in the image of God He created him*’. We are a perfect blending of male and female: ‘...*He created them male and female*’ (Genesis 1:27)
- In God’s image—but a proto-type, a ‘clay’ icon for the finished product: ‘...*Jehovah God formed the man out of dust from the ground, and blew into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul*’ (ch 2:7). We were destined in the hands of the master potter to become God’s off-spring, His children and joint-heirs with the Son of God of ‘all things’: ‘...*And if children, also heirs; truly heirs of God, and joint-heirs of Christ*’ (Romans 8:17). *But not yet*, for the father of our human race, Adam, chose a path that suppressed the in-built law of life which initially empowered him—a path which all his descendants (except Jesus Christ) have also followed
- That path was one of rebellion to the internal light shed by the uncorrupted human spirit that motivated Adam at his creation. By his choice his mind became darkened, excluding the light shed by God’s Spirit: ‘...*the mind of the flesh is enmity towards God; for it is not being subjected to the Law of God, for neither can it be*’ (Romans 8:7). The ‘spirit in man’ (Job 32:8) in each of us is corrupt through our enmity to God, our rejection of His law—our *sin*: ‘...*as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, so also death passed to all men, inasmuch as all sinned*’ (ch 5:12). Sin is a disregard for the law of life (I John 3:4) and because of it we all die
- Until the time of Moses (c.1500BC) all mankind were sinners and subject to death—but without a prescribed judicial penalty. Yet their life terminated, for Adam’s sin has left its mark on his posterity: ‘...*sin was in the world until Law, but sin is not charged where there is no law; but death reigned from Adam until Moses*’ (Romans 5:13-14)
- By the time Jesus delivered Israel from Egyptian bondage under Moses mankind had largely lost touch with the Law of Life, that internal light that God had set within us. He codified the principles of that Law in a series of ‘ten words’ and enshrined them at the heart of the Constitution of the new nation of Israel (Exodus 20). It was an educational tool to keep godless humanity in mind of the behaviour that should underpin life and provide a stable society, and as a pattern of good government for all mankind
- But obedience to that Law could never save mankind—*nor does it now*. No frenzy of ‘good works’ of any kind (charitable activity, obedience to the ‘letter of the Law’) can repair the yawning chasm between us and the Godhead. They cannot restore that broken relationship. The divine plan alone, settled in heaven before we existed will suffice: ‘...*[God] has saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began*’ (II Timothy 1:9)
- Only the perfect righteousness of Jesus imputed to the repentant believer will restore that relationship. And because of such an intimate relationship—we become His ‘...*sons and daughters*’ (II Corinthians 6:18)—we daily seek to align our whole being to the way of life He has graciously outlined for us in His inspired Word. We are, *even now*, ‘...*sons of God*’ (I John 3:2) Ω

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