

NEW *Horizons*

Vol 25 No 1

January/February 2021

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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Stress. It's the new buzz word. But how do we cope?

Virtually every ill to which man is heir sooner or later gets labelled as 'stress-induced'. Failure to deal with it adequately is known to be a major factor in the genesis of heart attacks, of gastrointestinal problems, of 'nerve' conditions.

The popular press abounds with tips on how to cope—so is it worth the paper this article is written on to address it again? Is there more to say?

Start with a definition. It is *'the state which is seen in response to internal or external stressors'*. Note—stress is a *response*, the response within your body adversely affecting you.

Flight Mode

We are, of course, designed by the Creator to have a stress response. When we perceive danger our body instantly rushes into 'flight mode', and various physiological changes occur to enable a helpful response, for example—*flight* or *fight*. (The mind decides which!) The body supplies the necessary ingredients.

A degree of stress is necessary for our well-being, as the body must respond to calls on its resources. Quick action may be needed to 'catch a bus', or to deal with an emergency (the chip pan ignites!), or to deal with a caller, and our internal hormonal mechanisms react immediately in support. It's our built-in biological system that maintains our physical body in equilibrium.

Self-image

We are, however, much more than physical, for there are other elements to what makes me 'me'—the emotional side, and the spiritual.

As we mature we become subject to myriad influences—influences that shape what we are: our family, our environment, our education, our religion, our experiences. They combine to build in us a unique (to each) image of self. That image can become set in concrete, and is the key to how we react to an external stimulus, the source of our distress (job, spouse, child, money, illness, computer *etc*).

A work colleague may plague your life and you go home upset, head-achy, grumpy—yet apparently others

'Stress... the state which is seen in response to internal and external stressors'
The Psychology Dictionary

Living With Stress?

are unaffected. Why? Because they have a self-image that can accommodate the 'enemy's' foibles. Their *perception* of the individual is different, and they do not have your painful stress reaction.

Self Assessment

Stress—the natural response of the body—is always within *you* and not directly caused by the external source. (Which usually can't be changed!) 'Stress' is loosely viewed today as a cause. *It isn't*. Stress is not a cause, but the effect of the disturbance of our equilibrium, our internal balance. It is the result of our faulty response to our perception of the causal source. It is a cluster of discomforts such as headache, 'nerves', depression, irritability, sleeplessness, anxiety, upset digestion.

How, then, do we avoid a faulty stress response? Can we change that

unique self-image? All those lifetime influences have contributed to what we now are. They have instilled in us a set of beliefs, principles by which we live. If they are inflexible ('That's just me!', 'I'm right') we will assuredly encounter internal conflict. Result—stress and its unpleasant consequences.

Something has to give—and it won't be that external event perceived as a 'stressor'. Your colleague goes on her merry way, oblivious to your reaction! The computer is still an inanimate machine that has probably been mishandled. The missed deadline is perhaps because you didn't deal with it earlier enough.

Clearly, *you* have to make an adjustment in who you think you are, and self-examination is needed. Uncontrolled emotions—jealousy, anger, shame, fear *etc*—can make our self-image unstable, and generate that unpleasant stress response and even lead to various debilitating illnesses.

Are you, for example, deep-down jealous of your colleague or angry at his or her success? If so, why? Do you lack the necessary self-confidence or skills? What steps can you take to develop them?

A Matter of Faith

Christians (and all of us!) have a ready role model, a living example of the perfectly balanced mature personality—Jesus Christ our Saviour. He was the full expression of God our Father who is perfect love, and he has hewn a pathway for us to follow. The apostle Paul expressed it this way: *'...Be imitators of me, as I am also of Christ'* (I Corinthians 11:1).

Jesus had 'all his ducks in a row'. Nailed to a stake he had the inner grace to seek forgiveness for his torturers. In a fierce storm he stayed in control. In face of religious persecu-

tion he reacted calmly and appropriately. His walk matched his talk.

Christians—those in whom dwells the Spirit of God (Romans 8:9)—have an advantage. As the children of God, ‘...if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new!’ (II Corinthians 5:17). As spiritual ‘embryos’ we have implanted in us the seeds of perfection—seeds which we must each cultivate.

The ‘S’ Word

Underlying much of our illness and our so-called stress is that now old-fashioned concept ‘sin’. All of mankind is out of kilter with what makes for abundant health, and it has repercussions within our body.

Our equilibrium is based on God’s revelation for how we should behave for optimum health of body and mind—His ‘Law’, His guidance, our ‘operating system’: ‘...forget not my law [Heb. *torah*—precepts] but let your heart keep my commandments: For length of days, and long life, and peace [Heb. *shalom* - favour, prosperity, health], shall they add to you (Proverbs 3:1-2).

[Note: We experience the effects of going contrary to these precepts even if we are unaware of the Law (Romans 2:15). We are ‘coded’ from conception to live in accordance with it.]

Israel’s King David well understood the link between sin (which originates in the mind) and its effect on health: When we fail to properly deal with sin or with what we perceive as ‘an enemy’ (a colleague, a deadline, a house move, money, the weather, a missed bus, divorce *etc*) then the body responds with those familiar reactions we call ‘stress’.

What steps can we take towards Christ-like equilibrium?

Spiritual Armoury

As Christians we inherit an extensive armoury of spiritual weapons:

- *Faith* certainly—belief, trust in a loving Father in face of every challenge we encounter, confidence that we are individually created in God’s image, and personally known to Him, and that He cares
- *God’s Word*, the Bible, as an encyclopaedia of guidance on principles for daily living
- *Prayer and supplication* and *fasting* for divine intervention and support, knowing ‘...all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose’ (Romans 8:28)
- *Truth* concerning the nature of God and man and His plan for us, thus removing destructive and confusing—and stress-inducing—traditions such as a false notion of the after-life
- *Confession* of sin to God and to those against whom we have transgressed, and the certainty of God’s full forgiveness (Psalm 103:10-12)
- Take *personal responsibility* for our short-comings. We alone can transform our attitude
- And above all, *God’s Spirit* implanted in us upon our re-

pentance and baptism, the fruits of which, as we actively co-operate, mature in us during our lifetime in Christ (Galatians 5:22-23).

When experiencing stress—that is, all those ugly reactions in your body—examine the external source on which you are pinning blame. *It’s not the cause!* The bus is gone (you were late), the chip pan is still blazing (you forgot about it), the computer has crashed (you didn’t ‘save’).

Because we are imperfect beings, because of our ill-formed and inflexible mental structures, because of our mal-formed emotions (anger, envy *etc*), because of unconfessed sin, because we are deficient in our trust in our heavenly Father (faith)—because of such factors we will continue to have a faulty response to what we perceive as a threat.

The apostle Paul had this to say:

‘...Don’t worry about anything, but in all your prayers ask God for what you need, always asking him with a thankful heart. And God’s peace, which is far beyond human understanding, will keep your hearts and minds safe in union with Christ Jesus’ (Philippians 4:6-67). Ω

Global Plans

‘We are determined to end poverty and hunger, in all their forms and dimensions, and to ensure that all human beings can fulfil their potential in dignity and equality and in a healthy environment’

(UK Government response to UN-Global Development Goals)

They are sentiments that all of us, surely, will applaud and will, when Jesus reigns, be the ‘new normal’. They are in fact a summary of the United Nation *Sustainable Development* plan—also known as *Agenda21*, now updated to *Agenda30* (the projected date for completion).

This plan, formulated with papal support, envisions a world without national borders and can be realized only under the umbrella of a

single overarching authority—a ‘world government’ no less. It is the new ‘faith’ of *globalism*—a utopian world in which all of us accept the diktats of the elite ruling class.

Agenda30 has three elements—*social equity, economy, environment* and assumes willing compliance by all. Unlikely, given human nature! Few will willingly relinquish their ancestral faith (part of the equity element). Nor will they relish the redistribution of wealth (economy) nor the appropriation of private property (environment).

Inherent in this long-cherished plan, therefore, is the need for coercive enforcement and the elimination of all opposition.

This destructive global kingdom will be short-lived. It will be speedily replaced by the Kingdom of God and the benign reign of Christ. Ω

INTO ALL THE WORLD

The Christian's commission couldn't be clearer. So why do so many remain beyond the sound of the Gospel?

It has been estimated that two-thirds of mankind since the Gospel was first preached have never heard Jesus's name and that 30 million will die this year 'unreached'—despite the current 430,000 missionaries!

Christians contribute over \$200 billion yearly to the 'cause' but only 5% to foreign missions, of which 87% is for work among Christians. Yet it has been estimated that just 1% is spent on the unevangelized.

Crank in the undoubted fact that the 'gospel' preached is a distorted version of the message Jesus proclaimed (Galatians 1:6-7). The church, then, has not yet reached 'all the world' with that message!

Obstacles

The modern age has witnessed a variety of facilitators for communication. As in Roman times transport has aided opportunity to proclaim the Gospel. Then came radio, then television—and now the internet. And various organizations have taken advantage. Why, then, have so few responded with a life-long commitment?

The apostle Paul in writing to the Corinthian brethren provides insight, : *'...if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world has blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them'* (II Corinthians 4:4). Mankind's adversary, the Devil and Satan, has influenced the

minds of the opinion formers of the world. Educationalists, economists, scientists, religious leaders have lent their ears to his whispers, mediated through men and women who have 'sold their soul' to him.

Jesus, in the parable of the sower (Matthew 13), addressed his hearers: *'... When any one hears the word of the kingdom, and understands it not, then comes the wicked one, and catches away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side'* (v. 19). This appears to be the largest category!

Then there are those—perhaps emotionally stirred or scared into 'conversion' by a hell-fire preacher—who simply don't last. Others commit but, said Jesus, *'... Yet has he not root in himself, but endures for a while: for when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, by and by he is offended. He also that received seed among the thorns is he that hears the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful'* (vv.21-22).

Not a surprise that true believers are few! What is surprising is that we are not talking about a new job or a holiday—but *eternal life* as a joint- heir of God, of the universe with Jesus Christ, our Creator—for ever. And the alternative—oblivion.

Jesus, in this context, uttered these stern words: *'...the gate to life is very narrow. The road that leads there is so hard to follow that only a few people find it'* (Matthew 7:14). How might this background affect our mode of 'preaching'?

In the parable 'the seed', said Jesus, *'is the word of God'*, and that must be the focus of our message—the whole word of God, the totality of God's revelation in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments.

The seventh day Sabbath and the holy days of Scripture set apart the 'Israel of God' from the almost universal worship of false gods.

The weekly sabbath bears the imprint of God as Creator of all (Exodus 20:8-11) and in observing it we honour Him. It is truly the 'LORD's day': *'...my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the LORD'* (Isaiah 58:13). Recall that God tells us *'...I don't change'* (Malachi 3:6).

The holy days (Leviticus 23) highlight various aspects of the life and mission of Jesus. They are a prophetic outline of the divine plan for mankind. They will, too, be universally observed during Christ's millennial reign. see Colossians 2:16

[Most Christians, in common with ancient pagan observance, are scrupulous in observing non-Biblical festivals –Christmas, Easter, Lent, Jubilee years etc.]

Notice that we are not out to 'convert' our hearers. The word 'preach' [Gk *kerusso*] simply means to 'be a herald', to 'announce, proclaim'. He gave the example: *'... From that time Jesus began to preach [kerusso], and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand'* (Matthew 4:17).

The hearers are not coerced into acceptance but must make a choice. Those who do listen, who respond positively, have 'repented' and been baptized, are then nourished to *cont'd p.8*

The Universe, the Soil, the Man

It's a mystery—even to scientists. Where did our existence materialize? And when? And how did 'something' arise from 'nothing'? What's the origin of all those vital physical laws?

With the theory of evolution science believes it is on firm ground. But as with the other questions, life's origin remains for them a matter of faith. *'Don't worry, we will get the facts later. There's plenty of time'*. For Christians, too, it is a matter of faith, for we start with the assumption that the all-powerful God is there, here and now—and always has been: *'...without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that comes to God must believe that he is [he exists], and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him'* (Hebrews 11:6). Of course, when we do 'diligently seek' we find abundant evidence to prove His reality.

'Did dark matter always exist in the Universe, or was it created at some later time? This is one of the deepest questions we know how to ask, and we [scientists] do not know the answer'

Bible Insight

Outreach takes the Bible seriously. It isn't a mere book of stories and it reflects modern physics without the benefit of current scientific experiment. There is a curious statement in the book of Hebrews (written before 70AD) which gels with today's science: *'...Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear'* (Hebrews 11:3). These invisible particles are an aspect of the mysterious 'dark matter' that still puzzles science.

The whole of creation was formed by the Word of God (Jesus Christ): *'...by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: and he is before all things, and by him all things consist'* (Colossians 1:16-17). The physical creation and the (usually) invisible spirit creation—all were created by him. And it was founded on divinely-devised laws—laws slowly being uncovered by science.

Diversity of Spirit

According to NASA *'...[Dark matter] is still one of the great mysteries of science'*. They add: *'...Dark matter may not be made up of the matter we are familiar with at all. The matter that makes up dark matter could be different. It may be filled with particles predicted by theory but that scientists have yet to observe'*. These particles permeate space and are the ultimate building blocks of all matter. It's still one of the great mysteries of science.

God reveals Himself as 'spirit' [Gk. *pneuma*] (John 4:24) and he is everywhere and always present. By means of His spirit power, *and from His own substance* God—who alone is *immortal* spirit (I Timothy 6:16)—has created these particles. They are the building-blocks of all life and permeate the entire universe.

As spoke Ezra: *'...you [LORD] quicken [give life to] all things'* (Nehemiah 9:6). The Psalmist adds: *'...Whither shall I go from your spirit? or whither shall I flee from your presence? (ch 139:7-13).'* And said Jesus: *'It is the spirit that quickens; the flesh profits nothing: the words that I speak to you, they are spirit, and they are*

life' (John 6:63)

The Creator formulates this mysterious substance in a variety of ways to create angelic substance and matter (the universe), to give life-giving energy to the soil, to animals—and to humanity, the pinnacle: *'... Who knows the spirit of man that goes upward, and the spirit of the beast that goes downward to the earth?'* (Ecclesiastes 3:21).

The apostle John (*ch 1:14*) explains that immortal Spirit [Gk. *pneuma*] can be transformed into physical reality: *'...the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us'*. And he opens

Without the spirit the material creation could not interact in living harmony (see Genesis 1:2): soil→vegetation→ animal→human	his first letter <i>'...that which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life [ie Jesus]; For the life was manifested, and we have seen it'</i> (<i>ch 1:1-2</i>).
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Jesus became human, touchable—just like us. Notice also that the holy Spirit manifested as a dove at the baptism of Jesus. The multiplication p.8

This same fate awaits man's adversary, the Devil and his retinue of unclean spirits—also created beings, (v.10, Romans 16:20, Genesis 3:15).

The 'torment' of the Devil and his angels is their anticipation of their coming everlasting destruction and permanent loss. The 'lake of fire' is the 'second death' (Revelation 21:8). He knows he has but a 'short time' (*ch 12:12*).

A HEALTHY MIND

We crave a life that's under control. Productive. Harmonious. Enjoyable. And at peace with ourselves and the world at large. What's wrong?

Even at the best of times, for too many life is far from tranquil. The on-going worldwide health crisis has, in addition, driven increasing numbers to despair—and ultimately, to suicide. Is there anywhere a healing balm?

Isolation, loss of employment and consequent curtailed income, uncertainty about the future, physical ill-health, grief—all contribute to impaired mental health, a public health crisis that has largely been ignored.

Why such an epidemic of distress? The medical profession devises various strategies (CBT *etc*) and con-

cocts a range of chemicals and surgical interventions in an effort to bring peace to those afflicted, but with limited success. There isn't a panacea, given the vast range of human emotional challenges.

Changed World

We have come a long way from the use of strait-jackets, padded cells, lobotomy and bromides. But effective treatments remain a challenge.

Mental disorders have plagued mankind from antiquity (Hippocrates identifies mania, paranoia, *etc*). It has been misunderstood—eg 'shell-shock', Recent decades have witnessed a surge in the incidence of such disorders. The main underlying causes are now identified as poverty, unemployment and trauma,

though in reality it is a failure to react properly to such causes (*ie* stressors) that hinders recovery. External pressures are stressors unless we have the internal resources to properly deal with them. Failure adversely impacts our mental and physical health.

Waymarks

When, for whatever reason, we don't address those underlying causes we are not drawing on our inner resources. As wrote King Solomon: '*...If you faint in the day of adversity, your strength is small*' (Proverbs 24:10). In other words, it is vital that we nourish our inner resources in anticipation of life's inevitable pressures.

The apostle Paul has this to say: '*...we know that all things work together for good to them that love God*' (Romans 8:28). The essential core of that statement is '*...love God*'. But how?: '*...this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments*' (I John 5:3).

These 'commandments' are the waymarks pointing us to the behaviours that counteract life's pressures. (Read—and *apply*—the Scriptures!).

From our beginning man has had an understanding, however vague, of these commandments which represent for fallen mankind the core values of the great 'Law of Love' which was in our first parents at their creation. They were passed on in the godly line of Shem, and it is recorded that Abraham '*...obeyed my*

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voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws' Genesis 26:5).

'what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day?'
Deuteronomy 4:8

As the other nations developed and expanded they conceived their own legal systems around (and often contrary to!) these divine principles, the Law of Life.

Law of Love

We have—even in the Christian world—largely abandoned this perfect Law, and in doing so the modern world has, as did Israel, lost the keys to true *shalom*, true peace of mind.

There is, however, an obstacle—human nature: '*...Our desires fight against God, because they do not and cannot obey God's laws*' (Romans 8:7 CEV). That nature must be transformed, transformed by '*...the renewing of your mind*' (Romans 12:2).

As long as we resist God's laws we show that by definition we don't 'love' Him: '*...We show our love for God by obeying his commandments, and they are not hard to follow*' (I John 5:3). But that is *not* salvation.

To be saved—*ie* to live eternally as joint-heirs with Christ and be part of God's Family—we need a *changed heart*. The *Law of Love* has to be written inwardly, our life from the heart aligned with God's Word. We become a new person, being transformed daily by God's indwelling Spirit:

'...Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit'
(Acts 2:38) Ω

The Enduring Poor

A hall-mark characteristic of Jesus Christ and etched in gold is his *compassion*. Wherever he encountered need he met it with all the resources at his command, or as with feeding the crowds, he enrolled the co-operation of others. It's a sterling example for all who profess to follow him—and indeed for everyone, as Jesus encouraged the rich young man who sought his guidance (Matthew 19:16-22).

Such need is endemic in every nation, in every generation. As said Jesus: '*...you have the poor with you always, and whensoever you will you may do them good*' (Mark 14:7, Deuteronomy 15:11). It was a message picked up, whatever the motives, by nineteenth century philanthropists.

In the modern world, the welfare burden has been assumed by the State. Inevitably, that burden has become heavier, the definition of 'poor' stretched ever broader, the demands on the public purse (taxes) ever more demanding.

The Victorian benefactors, however, had a guiding principle, almost forgotten by today's governments: *the universal right to relief undermines the incentive to work and tends to turn the poor into dependants*.

Poor Defined

The 'poor' were deemed to be those who were diligent *and in work* but had legitimate needs beyond their income and needed temporary support. They benefited from targeted charitable giving. Indeed this could be the Bible definition: '*... You shall not oppress a hired servant*

[employee] that is poor and needy, whether he be of your brethren, or of your strangers that are in your land within your gates' (Deuteronomy 24:14).

Paupers

By contrast there are those who simply won't take responsibility for their own welfare. They are well described by King Solomon: '*...A slothful man hides his hand in his bosom, and will not so much as bring it to his mouth again*' (Proverbs: 19:24). He adds: '*...Laziness leads to poverty; hard work makes you rich*' (*ch* 10:4).

The apostle Paul adds another dimension with the same conclusion: '*... We also gave you the rule that if you don't work, you don't eat. Now we learn that some of you just loaf around and won't do any work, except the work of a busybody. So, for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ, we ask and beg these people to settle down and start working for a living*' (II Thessalonians 3:10-12 *CEV*).

The Way

Paul, in addition, urge his hearers to '*...as we have opportunity do good to everyone*' (Galatians 6:10). He instructs them to teach new brethren, in this context, this fundamental of the faith: personal responsibility: '*...let the one being taught in the Word share with the one teaching, in all good things* (v.6)'

The purpose of welfare, as noted by the philanthropists, must be to improve the lot of the worker—for family support in a crisis, for education *etc.* A 'reward' for their own efforts.

Simply shovelling cash at the indigent, by contrast, can fuel a downward spiral into criminality,

illegitimate children and abortion, single parenthood, addiction. It fosters an attitude of dependence and a loss of their personal contribution to society. There is, too often, a loss of self-respect.

Divine Image

Whatever the reason for an individual's descent into pauperism—culture, inadequate education, disability *etc*—it can detract from the divine image that is inherent in every one of us. We are each extraordinary, with unique characteristics awaiting awakening. (*see* Genesis 1:26-27)

There is, however, a better way than reliance on state handouts welcome as they are in times of crisis. The LORD set out guidelines that are the foundation of a successful society. Ignoring these guidelines leads to a nation in chaos and poverty. Central to this is the *stable family*:

- Be faithful in marriage (Exodus 20:14)
- Confine births within marriage (Deuteronomy 23:2)
- Take care of your own children (II Corinthians 12:14)
- Work hard (Proverbs 10:4). Laziness ends in dependence (*ch* 12:24)
- Be responsible for your own life (Galatians 6:4)
- Live debt free (Romans 13:8, Exodus 20: 17)

None of this negates the obligation of others, where possible, to relieve distress when encountered: '*...Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ*' (Galatians 6:2). Everyone is responsible to assist '*the fatherless and widows*' in times of crisis by providing work opportunities (Deuteronomy 24:19).

'The poor are ruled by the rich, and those who borrow are slaves of the lender' Ω

Is doctrine cast in stone? Is it wrong to examine our beliefs?

The brother of Jesus, Jude, urges the church to ‘...earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints’ (v.3). It is, surely, sound teaching! What—or who—could improve on what Jesus taught personally and has recorded through his chosen apostles and prophets.

Identify and follow his teachings and we would all be one big happy church family. As Paul wrote: ‘...I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you’ (I Corinthians 1:10). *I wish!*

That didn’t happen, for human ambition and pride assumed they knew better—at least, better than they had been taught. The foundation faith was embellished, gradually emerging as the patch-work of denominational diversity and false teaching that blights the modern church scene.

The Dawning

During the ‘dark age’ of Christianity the crystal clear teachings of Jesus became lost in a fog of ancient idolatrous fable. The candle of truth flickered dimly, often brutally suppressed by church-inspired pogroms. It’s legacy is the sanitized and distorted version of the faith of modern Christendom.

The darkness slowly became illuminated by pin-points of light as God—who is sovereign—influenced often imperfect individuals to see elements of truth previously submerged. Not ‘all’ the truth, but glimpses suitable to their situation—just

as in the conquest of Canaan by Israel the ‘inhabitants of the land’ were driven out slowly: ‘... the LORD your God will put out those nations before you by little and little: you may not consume them at once, lest the beasts of the field increase on you’ (Deuteronomy 7:22).

And as told to Daniel: ‘...shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased’ (ch 12:4). The angel adds: ‘... Go your way, Daniel: for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end’ (v.9).

We can only take so much ‘new truth’ at a time! Or, as the apostle Peter wrote: ‘...grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ’ (II Peter 3:18). And Paul: ‘...unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ; In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge’ (Colossians 2:2-3).

In other words, true knowledge is unveiled little by little—we grow into it, both individually and corporately. When we first covenant with Christ our knowledge may be quite incomplete. We learn. We grow—especially in our understanding of our Saviour and his plan for our life.

Trouble often arises, however, in the corporate’ sphere, in an established denomination. A ‘new truth’ is discovered and becomes the hallmark of that denomination. For them, they now have ‘the faith once delivered’. Their beliefs are now

The Growth Factor

‘written in stone’, embedded in catechisms and doctrinal statements, immutable. Deviate (as a member) and you may be excluded from fellowship.

Time for Change?

It’s a time of danger. Lacking an outlet, frustration arises in the members (whose input is generally deemed unworthy) and among the leadership, and what might be additional enlightenment is suppressed. Dissent, as Paul noted, spreads—with perhaps a new denomination formed!

Too often the core values of Jesus’s teaching (eg the ‘sermon on the mount’) are submerged in sterile doctrinal disputes over what are often inconsequential.

Doctrinal change is a serious matter, demanding prayerful research and co-operation with other assemblies—and time. It mustn’t be stifled but explored, for unchanging truth is a treasure house far from being exhausted.

‘We are urged to: ‘...Prove all things; hold fast that which is good’ (I Thessalonians 5:21). But also, as noted, to recall always those words of the brother of Jesus: ‘...it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that you should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints’ (Jude 3).

That body of belief, the ‘faith’ was finalized as recorded by the apostles and prophets and available for us in the Scriptures. Much was lost during the dark days of the middle ages as the church sank in depravity, but is being unveiled in these last days Ω

All the World...cont'd from p.4
maturity within 'mother church':
'...teaching them to observe all
things whatsoever I have com-
manded you' (Matthew 28:20).

Grow in Christ

When you encounter Jesus 's
message God is inviting you to
become part of His Family. That
message is that we are, from con-
ception, alienated from the God-
head and reconciliation is possi-
ble only through the shed blood
of Jesus—God become man, sacri-
ficed to give us eternal life.

Embrace that awesome concept
and having been baptized and
received God's indwelling Spirit
you take on the righteousness of
Jesus, your sin forgiven—and you
there and then become a 'new
creature'.

God's *Law of Love* is implanted
inwardly through His indwelling
Spirit. A whole new way of life
gradually unfolds as you come to
learn, through His Word and
through competent teachers, what
His way of life entails.

Our salvation is *by God's grace*—
not dependant on our actions, our
works. If we have truly repented
we are in Christ': '*...There is
therefore now no condemnation
to them which are in Christ who
walk not after the flesh, but after
the Spirit*' Romans 8:1.

God's Spirit will—in His time—
lead us to conform to His will—
expressed for us through the au-
thentic divinely-inspired Scrip-
tures and as explained by compe-
tent teachers (Acts 8:31) and
through fellowship (Hebrews 23-
25).

*Stay on that learning path and
your eternal life is assured.* Ω

Universe...cont'd from p.3

by Jesus of the loaves and fish
may also exemplify this, or the
restoration of a withered hand.

Humanity

Out of the earth (*ie* its elements)
God created the 'clay model' of
the first human, animating him
and by the '*spirit in man*' (Job
32:8) providing God-like quali-
ties by which we could have a
relationship with Him. It sets us
apart from the lower creation
(though they, too, have spectac-
ular qualities!).

Life passes for all of us, but the
'spirit in man' retains all there is
to know about us, and goes into
a state of 'hibernation' in *sheol*
(the grave) until re-animated by
Christ—in either a spirit or a
physical body. Those raised
physically will face a period of
judgment at the end of the thou-
sand year earthly reign of
Christ. Should they reject the
salvation offered they will die
and be burned, their spirit ab-
sorbed into the universal sub-
stance that permeates the uni-
verse. This is the 'second death'
(Revelation 20:11-15).

This same fate awaits man's
adversary, the Devil and his
retinue of unclean spirits—also
created beings, (v.10, Romans
16:20, Genesis 3:15). Ω

*The major faiths—Hindu, Judaism,
Islam, Christianity—claim they
worship the true God. In fact, He
has left us His 'identity tag'. Read:*

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are from translations which clearly
express the meaning
in modern terms*

Immutable

Jesus makes clear the veracity
of God's Word: '*...Your word
is truth*' he asserts (John
17:17). It's a theme that per-
vades the Scriptures'. Jesus
himself is described as 'the
Word [Gk *logos*, Hebrew
dabar]' (John 1:1).

Moses relayed this instruction
to Israel: '*...You shall not add
unto the word [Heb. *dabar*]
which I command you, neither
shall you diminish ought from
it, that you may keep the com-
mandments of the LORD your
God which I command you*'
(Deuteronomy 4:2).

And John, at the close of the
apostolic era, spoke this of the
revelation Jesus had given him:
'*...if any man shall take away
from the words of the book of
this prophecy, God shall take
away his part out of the book of
life, and out of the holy city*
(Revelation 22:19). It surely
applies to all of Scripture.

*'We have also a more sure
word of prophecy; whereunto
you do well that you take heed,
as unto a light that shines in a
dark place'*
II Peter 1:19

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MiniStudy*The Christian's Rights*

'...Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city. Without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and makes a lie' (Revelation 22:14-15)

Our society is awash with demands for the 'rights' of individuals and religions and numerous pressure groups, each with its own peculiar agenda. What is lost is a sense of personal responsibility, the obligation for *quid pro quo*. The State—and God—expect something in return.

- Whether its *Black lives* or *Islamists* or *LGBT* a plethora of pressure groups invade the media outlets and our streets with loud demands for their 'rights'. 'Peaceful' demonstrations all too often end in violent confrontation with police and with opposing groups
- Lost in the melee is the voice of the Christian community who confine their protests to open-air prayers and vigils, and whose attempts to publicly pass on the Christian message are often subject to arrest and vocal opposition. They are constrained by the words of Jesus: *'...My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight'* (John 18:36). And, as wrote Paul to Rome: *'... Obey the [secular] rulers who have authority over you. Only God can give authority to anyone, and he puts these rulers in their places of power. People who oppose the authorities are opposing what God has done, and they will be punished [by the authorities]'* (ch 13:1-2 CEV)
- This command, however, is modified by another principle. The apostles were imprisoned and arraigned before the Sanhedrin for publicly preaching Christ's message. Their response: *'... We don't obey people. We obey God'* (Acts 5:29 CEV). (They were whipped and released.) They claimed the right to obey God. This stance was embraced by those persecuted by the Roman church in the mediaeval era. It is also written in the future script for God's faithful as the climax of man's rule approaches
- What of another 'right' of believers mentioned by the apostle John (Revelation 22)—the right to the Tree of Life, the right to enter the city and palace of the Father? It is the 'right', the reward, of those who are clothed with Christ's righteousness and have remained faithful to him whatever their circumstances—to the point, even, of martyrdom. To repeat: *'...they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city'*. They will be children of the eternal Father. They will be *'...joint heirs with Christ'* of the entirety of the universe: *'...if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together'* (Romans 8:17). They will have *'...put on immortality'* and will no longer be corruptible flesh (I Corinthians 15:54). Now weak, they will then be powerful, dynamic (v.43)
- Notice, though, that John says there is a cost: *'...Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life'*. No longer through Christ condemned with the world, they are living by the light of God's commandments, the key that opens the way to such great salvation
- His commandments are a package—all ten. They were written by God in stone, and He had them placed inside the ark of the covenant over which He stood guard. *How* we 'love God' (the first four) is the foundation—as defined throughout the Scriptures. The pivotal command is the *fourth*—the seventh-day Sabbath which defines the one true God as the Creator of all: *'... For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it'* (Exodus 29:11). All other observance is a form of idolatry. Adds the prophet Ezekiel: *'...I gave them my sabbaths, to be a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am the LORD that sanctify them'* (ch 20:12). Nor is it confined to the people of Israel. It is for all of mankind: *'...God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made.'* (Genesis 2:3) Ω

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