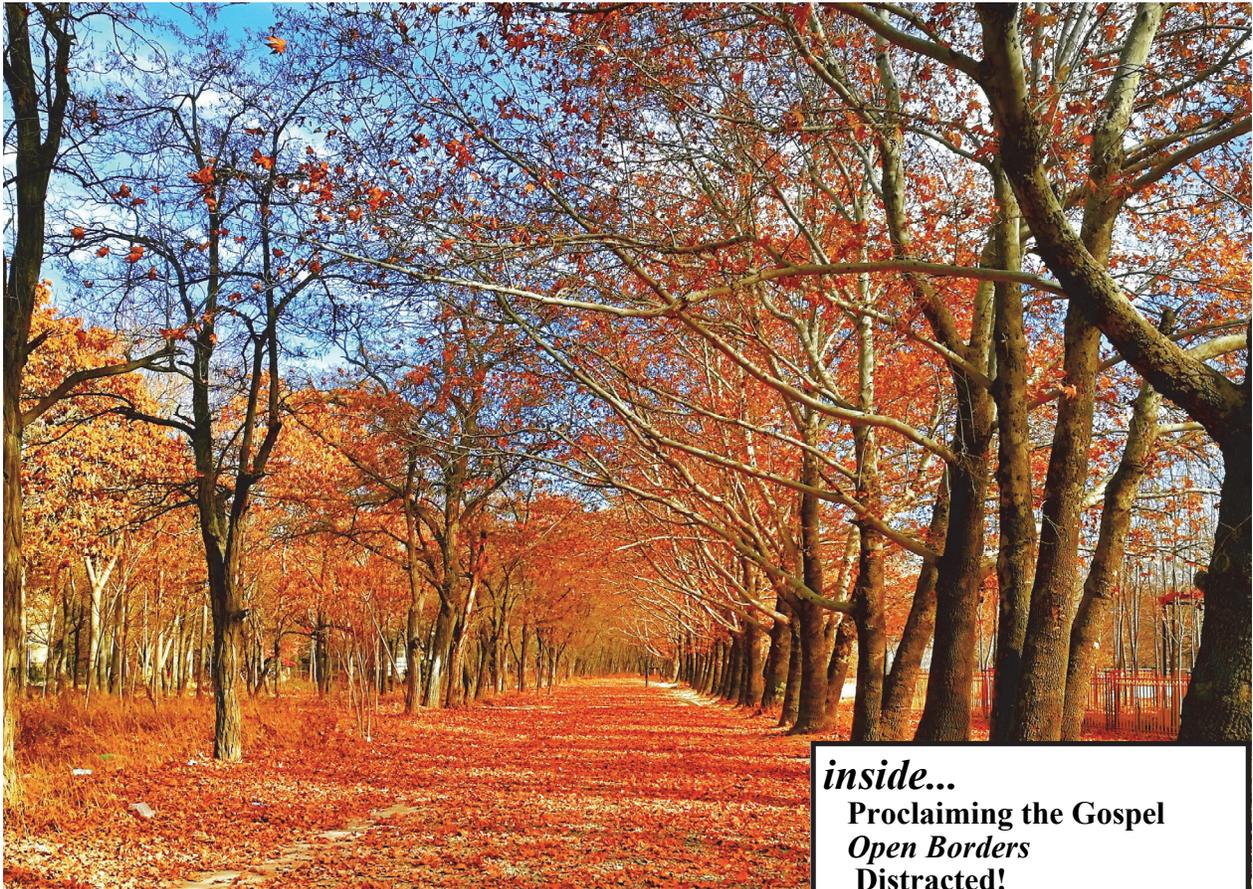


new **Horizons**

Vol 26 No 5

September/October 2022

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

It is distributed free on request, being a co-operative voluntary effort financed by the members and friends of the *Churches of God*. We also welcome the financial support of all who benefit from our publications and who wish to labour with us.

If you would like a copy of our *Statement of Beliefs* or a *Publications List* please request it from any of the addresses listed or go to our website: www.cgom.org

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The church has a divine commission—but it is much misunderstood

The message preached by Jesus has sounded around the world. Sadly, it is largely ignored and misunderstood. In the days of the apostles, Paul—echoing Psalm 19:4—could say ‘... their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world’ (Romans 10:18). Jesus’ commission had been completed.

Mission accomplished? Of course not. Generation succeeded generation and billions more must be ‘evangelized’. For God the Father has set a fixed period of time—symbolized by the seven day week—during which He selects those whom He wants for His growing Family.

But as Jesus and his apostles predicted, his message became distorted, and few respond to the true Gospel he taught, and fewer still commit long-term to the challenge. Today, relatively few of earth’s six billion plus inhabitants are dedicated believers—often considered by ‘mainstream’ Christians as fanatics, and to be outside the Christian pale.

Much of missionary effort, however, fails to reflect the fullness of the Christian Scriptures. Kingdom Message That message is unique—though some denominations claim to be ‘more unique’ than the others!

Their distinctiveness focuses on the significance of ‘the gospel of the kingdom’ (Matthew 24:14). This is assumed to have the narrow meaning of a reference to the earthly kingdom that Jesus will return to rule for a thousand years—the ‘Millennium’.

On this presumption vast resources are dedicated to preaching this message, inducing a ‘ghetto-style’ view of the church—‘us and no other’. It’s worthwhile examining this presumption.

The Millennium, it should be noted, is a mere blip on the timeline of eternity. God is King of His creation (Psalm 47:2 etc), and has existed ‘...from everlasting to everlasting’ (Psalm 90:2). Certainly the coming earthly reign of Jesus Christ must be part of the message proclaimed by the church. But the ‘Kingdom message’ is much more.

Jesus asserted ‘...I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it’ (Matthew 16:18). It is alive today—though perhaps not so well!—testimony to his insight

the dead (I Corinthians 15:13-14)—no Christianity. Indeed the message of the Scriptures, Old Testament and New, focuses on Jesus—his life, his death, his resurrection and his continued presence on earth in his church. That was the message of the ‘...feasts of the LORD’ (Leviticus 23).

That was the message of the prophets. That was the message of the apostles as recorded in the New Testament.

A Spirit Kingdom

While on earth Jesus stated to questioning Pharisees who were expectant of an earthly kingdom ruled over by the Messiah: ‘...*the kingdom of God is within you*’ (Luke 17:21). That is, it is a ‘heart thing’, and represented by him standing before them in their presence.

The Kingdom with its eternal King, its Laws, its whole ethos is the realm of the transformed mind. As the LORD spoke through Jeremiah: ‘...*I will write my laws on their hearts and minds. I will be their God, and they will be my people*’ (ch 31:33).

Applied to all human life and politics that transformation will—at the return of Christ—usher in an earthly Kingdom overseen by the King of ages together with his people gathered from all ages—to prepare a people for eternity.

And Now? The church of God must focus on proclaiming the true Gospel of salvation through Jesus—not just on a tunnel vision focus on a relatively brief earthly Kingdom ‘coming soon’. Throughout the millennia few have embraced Christ’s message fully. But the Father continues to invite all who will to become part of His Kingdom to repent—to live a life transformed—through a new covenant with Him, His laws embedded in our thoughts and actions. Those

Proclaiming the Gospel of the Kingdom

and authority. Only a blind church leader would claim that all who say they are Christian are true believers. It’s a label loosely worn.

Yet there are millions of sincere believers who heard the Gospel message. For the most part, however, they have boarded a Christian ‘train’—that is, committed their life to Christ—but the train has headed along a variety of different tracks. The message of salvation was distorted—not wrong. They began with alpha (the misnamed ‘new birth’) but didn’t move on to omega (the fullness of the Gospel message).

Gospel of the Kingdom

Central to the message of Jesus is Jesus himself. Without him, without his death and his resurrection from

Open Borders

'Red and yellow, black and white; all are precious in His sight'. The children's hymn is a window through which we may view race relations. In our troubled world, however, that ideal is obscured by an all-pervasive major factor—*human nature*.

Each of us is a 'little empire' constantly bumping against all other little empires, with the inevitable clashes. Of necessity we blend our belief system with

those closest to us (*eg* our spouse), and a nation is born. Each has its culture, its language, its laws, its territory—all closely and proudly protected. Hence the vast sums expended on armaments and a standing army. And so, individually and nationally—and globally—from time to time we clash.

Such clashes manifest as neighbourly disputes, family arguments—and wars. They arise when there are *differences*: culture, lifestyle, colour for example. (Hence the challenges facing

a multicultural society.) At all levels of human society they are suppressed by learned self-discipline—and contentment. Hence the scriptural admonition to *'...love your neighbour as yourself'*. It's an attitude urged on both Christian and non-Christian.

Such 'love', however, is integral to the Spirit that was in Jesus—and is in the Christian. It empowers us—with our co-operation!—to suppress the universal inborn antipathy to those who differ from ourselves. We all are from the same root, as said the apostle Paul, *'...[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 17:20).

Yet though God wisely separated and dispersed the nations, His purpose was, as Paul adds, : *'...that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us: For in him we live, and move, and have our being'*. It is only *'in the Lord'* that harmonious relations can fully develop between individuals and between nations.

Peruse the record of the infant first century church, however, and it's clear what a mountain there is to climb—notably in 'race relations'. Tensions simmered between Jewish brethren and the varied gentile Christians. Yet Paul emphasised that we are now, in Christ, different—a new spiritual nation, begotten of one Spirit. As such we share the same values as Jesus.

And our responsibility, following our conversion, is to grow into those values—values he describes in the famous *'love chapter'*—I Corinthians 13. Ω

Gospel...cont'd

who respond—of whatever nation, whatever faith— He draws towards Jesus Christ

Eternity

The church is commissioned to proclaim this message *'...in all the world' - as a witness'*. Beyond that coming earthly Kingdom lies an eternity of the expansion of the Kingdom of God throughout the universe—an experience beyond our wildest imaginings *'...Eye has not seen, and ear has not heard, nor has it risen up into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for those that love Him'* (I Corinthians 2:9). Spirit as guide we snatch a glimpse (v.10).

Truly follow Jesus Christ and you may be part of it. Kingdomw, will begin to establish the rule of the Kingdom over the despondent remnant of mankind, emerging from the worst time of trouble ever. These refugees from all earth's nations will begin to experience the joy of the divine rule of the Kingdom of God, the Family of God. The prayer of Jesus will at last be fulfilled: *'...Your Kingdom come [and] Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven'*.

The everlasting Kingdom of God, the divine Royal Family—at present reigning in heaven over the angelic hosts, and on earth in the saints—

will reign supreme over all mankind. When that thousand years of peace and perfect benign Government has come to a conclusion, all who have died in ignorance of the true Gospel will return to physical life for their (first) opportunity to access membership of the Family, the Kingdom, of God.

And Beyond...

That earthly Kingdom, of course, is by no means the end. For beyond lies an eternity of which we know little—yet. Through the centuries of human existence God has gradually unveiled His magnificent plans for His beloved creation. Wrote the apostle Paul: *'...Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for them that love him'* (I Corinthians 2: 9). He continues: *'...For us, however, God has drawn aside the veil through the teaching of the Spirit'* (v. 10 *Weymouth NT*). We do know that, after the Millennium *'...the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God'* Revelation 20:3). This planet will become the centre of all Creation, with God Himself, our Father, present with us.

Who knows what that glorious future may hold! Ω

Distracted!

Our daily routines are too often plagued by distractions. Working from home? The fridge and the coffee pot fill our horizon. Cooking? There goes the smoke alarm. On the phone? I didn't see that kerb. It can, however be life-changing

As Christians we have embarked on a journey—a journey to eternity. Having 'bought the ticket' we are on the right train, the destination certain—*for as long as we stay on board.* Those attractive locations viewed along the route are alluring, inviting us to disembark, to linger.

God Himself plucked ancient Israel out of obscurity, ensuring they were on the correct scheduled service. Despite travelling first class they became distracted by the passing culture and were mired in idolatry (see Ezekiel ch 16). They didn't reach the scheduled destination.

Jesus, in the parable of the 'sower', warned about distractions: *'...some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them'* (Matthew 13:7), explaining this as *'...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'* (v.22).

Our world is dominated, saturated, by a culture spawned by the devil. He has infiltrated every institution from education, entertainment, finance and even religion. There is an array of philosophies to distract, an endless selection of faiths to choose from and embrace, depraved entertainment available at a click.

Jesus, having just warned us to beware deception, says: *'... because iniquity [lawless behaviour] shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. But he that shall endure unto the end, the*

same shall be saved' (Matthew 24:12-13).

Wherever you are - *there* is Satan. As a Christian he is intent on diverting you from the true faith: *'...Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walks about, seeking whom he may devour: Whom resist steadfast in the faith'* (I Peter 5:8).

In this battle, however, we are not on our own, for *'...You are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world'* (I John 4:4). The apostle Paul notes: *'...There has no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that you are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that you may be able to bear it'* (I Corinthians 10:13).

The apostle then adds by way of warning: *'...Wherefore, my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry'* (v.14). He echoes Joshua's dying admonition to Israel warning against fraternizing intimately with the idolatrous Canaanites (Joshua 23:12) - for His protection depended on their following His loving guidance.

Our Armoury

But we are well-armed, with an endless supply of the heavy-duty spiritual weaponry essential to the battle: Writes Paul: *'...For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds'* (II Corinthians 10:4).

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

The brethren in Ephesus had been apprised of the dangers from these spirit opponents. The apostle details the weapons available to each Christian: *'...Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places'* (ch 6:11-12).

Acting through the institutions of this world—governments, education, finance, entertainment media—the devil deploys his deceptive weaponry: *lies* (can you believe the media?), *deceit* (what we are fed by the authorities, by formal education), *opposition* (from family, neighbours, colleagues, the churches and even well-meaning friends).

But we have God's weapons: truth, right behaviour, the gospel, the 'shield of faith' *'...'* (Ephesians 6:14-17). He concludes: *'...And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints'*.

Now, in these volatile times, we must learn to deploy these weapons on a daily basis, knowing He that is in us is greater than all the devil can throw at us. **Ω**

Festivals

2022

| | |
|-------------|-----------|
| Trumpets | Sept 26 |
| Atonement | Oct 5 |
| Tabernacles | Oct 10-17 |

2023

| | |
|--------------------------|-------------------|
| Lord's Supper Unleavened | April 4evg " 6-12 |
| Pentecost | May 28 |
| Trumpets | Sept 16 |
| Atonement | Sept 25 |
| Tabernacles | " 30-Oct 7 |

Civilisation was in the beginning built on a sure foundation, principles that if overturned would lead to chaos.
Go compare!

Mankind struggles to build a better society. We have a utopian dream—but never seem able to achieve it, despite our best efforts. Our boundless humanitarian effort, our individual generosity, our science and technology, our religions, our service to fellow-man can't eradicate poverty or squalor. Like a house built on sand our best-laid plans crumble to dust. Even the natural world conspires to undermine us—earthquakes, hurricanes, climate change, disease.

Then there's man himself: in

FOUNDATIONS

our drive to acquire—individually or collectively—we rob, we cheat, we fight, we murder, we invade, we go to war— even to the brink of self-destruction. *Why?* Why can't we 'get a grip'? Why can't we build on rock, on sure foundations, on sound principles?

Sound Principles

Those principles are not 'unknowns'. When man first set foot on the planet he had them clearly explained—by his Creator. And that's where we start: *God*, a concept shared in some form by the vast majority of mankind.

But, of course, we have virtually abandoned Him. The faint remnants of His guidance that once graced our law-books are being quashed by arrogant law-makers who think they know better than their Creator. Ancient Israel also experienced this: '*...You are confused by leaders who guide you down the wrong path*' (Isaiah 3:12).

God Is

The key-stone of the foundation, then, must be... *God is*. As Creator He is sovereign. He designed the millions of interacting physical and chemical processes that make the human body. He wove the intricate mesh of billions of inter-connected neurones that is our brain. He who has life inherent breathed into it *life*. He prepared a universe, an earth, perfectly designed to sustain that body. He created mankind uniquely capable of interfacing with Himself, and with the spiritual qualities that enable us to admire beauty, to be creative, to love, to choose, to worship. God knows us. He knows what 'makes us tick'. All we are operates in accord with in-built

physical and spiritual law.

A Complete Creation

Having created the universe, and having created man as a 'clay' image (made from earth's elements) of Himself, God acknowledged His work as 'very good'. He then ceased from His creative activities.

The man He had created was immediately introduced to an institution essential for his well-being—one that commemorates the awesome power and majesty of God by weekly worship on the ensuing seventh day of the creation week, and focuses our minds on the one true God. The seventh-day Sabbath identifies Him.

This 'sabbath' was set aside by God as 'holy'—a day given for all mankind to be refreshed physically and spiritually. It is a day jealously guarded by God,, the observance of which underpins our relationship with Him.

Our observance of the seventh-day Sabbath is a 'sign' by which we recognize the one and only creator God. [Other religions worship a different 'god' on a different day.]

Divine Plan

The creation of humanity was not a whim, not a divine afterthought. Planned in the timeless spiritual realm, man was created with purpose, for God in a sense was, in mankind, reproducing Himself. This is the next layer of the foundation.

God created the 'clay model', made from earth's elements—'dust', and with all faculties perfectly equipped for rational, independent existence, with communication skills and capable of an endless life. And, crucially and essentially, with the ability to reproduce, to provide godly offspring, to be fruitful, providing potential children for His Family, His Kingdom. Every life would be precious to Him.

Unity by Design

'...*It's not good for man to be alone*', said God. He created a companion for him from his own flesh—but necessarily different in function. With complementary anatomy and physiology the couple, necessarily male and female, were to become one—as 'father' and 'mother'—but each with a clearly assigned role. a role supported by their physical and emotional make-up.

As man was designed to be a social being, God created a partner, one that would complement his personality—but yet be of equal status before Him. ('man', 'mankind' is inclusive of male and female.) The female was perfectly designed to bear children (Genesis 3:20). *cont'd p.7*

From time immemorial mankind has observed 'religious festivals'. What do the Christian scriptures tell us?

Most people in the western world are familiar with the festivals conducted annually in Christendom. Who doesn't know about Christmas, Easter *etc.* Indeed many beyond the Christian faith, happily join in—*eg* with Christmas celebrations. It is almost a universal observance. And not just Christmas, as Sunday—also a Christian festival—is now all but universal, with much of business and the Unions supportive.

All the major faiths, of course, have their special round of festivals. They are prolific and joyfully observed in *Hinduism*. In *Islam* there is, among others, Ramadan.— a daily partial fast lasting a month.

Sunday is touted by the influential papacy as a worldwide day of rest and family time

Origins

Mankind has never fully distanced himself from his origin as the direct creation of God. (We still call on him when in deep trouble!) In our beginning we held Him in awe, conscious of our ejection from Eden, but understanding our need to be reconciled to Him.

The Creator had a plan to remedy this; He revealed a worship pattern and invited us to freely choose it as a mark of our allegiance to Him. Inevitably some of us rejected it and, like Cain, chose their own path in life—the self-serving '*way of Cain*' (Jude 1:11).

Shamed by the willing submission to God by his brother Abel, in a fit of anger he murdered him and, having rejected forgiveness upon repentance, was banished from access to the altar of the LORD

(Genesis 4:12). Righteous Abel followed God's instruction as to worship, in faith sacrificing a lamb, and undoubtedly observing God's holy seventh-day Sabbath (Genesis 2:3).

That sacrifice echoes the Hebrew *Passover* representative of the one perfect sacrifice, Jesus, through whom alone our sin is wiped clean and we are reconciled to God.

Changed Times

The violent 'way of Cain' (Genesis 6:13) began to dominate mankind, and by the time of Noah one family alone maintained the true worship resulting in the great flood and the utter destruction of mankind. Noah's family alone survived.

Over the next millennium populations increased, with some people groups and individuals heeding the lesson of the Flood. Abraham and his offspring remained faithful: '*...Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws*' (ch 26:5). Joseph, a great grandson, maintained the faith in face of temptation: '*...how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against od?*' (ch 39:9). They inherited the true worship pattern and abhorrence of sin.

At this time even the Canaanites, too, had a grasp of the true way as instanced by Abraham's encounter with a Canaanite city king. He understood the horror of adultery, that it was sinful deserving capital punishment (Genesis 20). When, four hundred years later, Israel entered Canaan they merited expulsion for their abominations (ch 15:16). The myriad Canaanite gods each had their festivals.

God's Festival Calendar

A New Phase

Five centuries later God, in due time honoured His promises to Abraham by organizing his descendants, twelve tribes, into a new nation, named *Israel*. He gave them the substance of their national Constitution, the 'Ten Commandments' (Exodus 20) with their explanatory laws.

Until banned by the King of Egypt Israel observed the Sabbath and festivals: '*...Pharaoh said, Behold, the people of the land now are many, and you make them rest [Heb. shabath] from their burdens*' (Exodus 5:4). They were beaten by 'taskmasters and officers' for non-compliance (v. 10-13), and the King refused permission to observe a festival (vv 1-2).

Festival Calendar

Knowing Israel's tendency to 'go with the (idolatrous) flow' God hedged His festivals by regulating them with sanctions and writing them into their Constitution. He describes them as 'My feasts' and sets them out clearly in an annual structure (Leviticus 23).

Given Israel's idolatrous tendency the festivals (including the seventh-day Sabbath) were observed

intermittently down the centuries, periods of observance usually following a national disaster and their subsequent repentance. It was mandatory in first century Israel, and used in the early church.

Christian Festivals

These festivals are the divinely-

Annual Festivals
(Passover)
Unleavened Bread
Pentecost
Trumpets
Atonement
Tabernacles
Eighth Day

Origins

The pattern of festivals—designed by our Creator to keep us in mind of His plan—are prefigured in the Biblical account of creation.

These annual assemblies of the people of God are, in the Hebrew, *mo'ed*, appointments (to meet in worship at specific seasons: Leviticus 23:2). They are structured in a pattern of *sevens*: *seven-thousand year plan, jubiles, seven year agricultural cycle, seven days in the week, the weekly Sabbath,—and seven annual holy days.*

The holy days are timed by the movements of the heavenly bodies and assigned to specific calendar dates related to the agricultural seasons. Note this creation document: ‘...*God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons (Heb. mo'ed), and for days, and years.*’ (Genesis 1:14).

[*Note*: the *Passover* lamb was sacrificed in the afternoon just before the first holy day of *Unleavened Bread*, of which it was a part (Luke 22:1)]

[*Note*: The calendar in use in the Bible was widely used anciently. It has been replaced and amended by Roman emperors and by the Papacy. A table linking the Biblical and the current calendar is available from our offices.]

appointed times for His followers to meet with Him in worship. They have existed as a standard of truth for six millennia.

No surprise, then, that the early church—at first mostly Jews—continued to observe both the weekly seventh-day Sabbath and the festivals—both observances were in their spiritual DNA, a rock-solid belief and practice.

Gentiles, too

None was more dedicated to the instructions of Scripture than the apostle Paul. He was ‘... *Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee*’ (Philippians 3:5).

In his guidance to the maverick Corinthian church he, writing from Ephesus (also largely non-Jewish), addressed the observance of these festivals. Writing during the *Unleavened Bread* festival he admonished them on their lax observance of *Passover* (*ch* 11), and in the context of their tolerance of gross immorality (symbolized by leavened bread, he says: ‘... *Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven [sin], neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth*’ (*ch* 5:8).

Having himself observed *Passover* in Ephesus he determined to stay there until the next festival, *Pentecost* (I Corinthians 16:8). His travels took him to Philippi for the next *Passover* season, where he expressed a wish to be in Jerusalem for the following *Pentecost* (Acts 20:16). He also noted that he had experienced the *Day of Atonement* while at sea (Acts 27:9).

It is noteworthy that the apostle successfully defended his record for allegiance to God’s laws before the Jewish leaders in Rome and before King Agrippa: ‘...*this I confess unto you, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets*’ (Acts 24:14).

Dissension

This respect for God’s self-

revelation in the Scriptures was the philosophic foundation for the apostles and the early church as a whole: ‘...*you should*’, writes Jude, ‘*earnestly contend for the faith which was once [once for all] delivered unto the saints*’ (Jude v.3).

Fast forward a couple of centuries and, inevitably, dissension arose under the leadership of Victor, bishop of the Roman church who succumbed to the prevailing heathen culture and promoted what became the *Easter* tradition. Polycrates, bishop of Ephesus—representing the teaching of the apostle John—resisted strongly, advocating the *Passover* festival on the (scriptural) Nisan 14—the standard handed on from the apostles and observed by the eastern assemblies.

‘Easter’ gradually gained the ascendancy, but as late as 400AD the Bible date (Nisan 14) was still widely observed—but opposed by the established orthodoxy as ‘heresy’ (Bishop Epiphanius).

Also ascendant was the observance in late December of what we know as *Christmas*—the christianizing of the heathen Roman *Saturnalia*. God’s seventh-day *Sabbath*, of course, had long been replaced by the heathen *Sunday*—by law, under the emperor Constantine.

Through the centuries and to this day many Christians still observe the *Passover* as prescribed in scripture, together with the other divinely appointed festivals—a practice maintained by the *Church of God*. Ω

Foundations...cont'd from p4

Each unique couple was created to become a unity, each harmoniously fulfilling their assigned role. As stated by the apostle Paul, the male (Adam) was created first, with the divine mandate to head the family—and to be responsible for its guidance in accord with the covenant between him and the Creator. Of necessity the family is patriarchal. (cf Isaiah 3:12)

Deadly Choice

This divine scenario was shattered by sin, by the wilful breaking of that covenant. God warned that if the covenant were abused man would come to dominate rather than serve his wife, that child-bearing would be fraught with challenges, that their relationship with God would dramatically change as we lost direct contact with Him.

By no means was this a divinely-imposed punishment. Such effects were a consequence of broken law, principles that underpin our behaviour, our attitudes, our spirit. They are as inevitable as transgressing the laws of physics or chemistry.

Eve, the *'mother of all living'*, came to recognize she had been deceived (Genesis 3:13), her *'repentance'*. She represents those of her descendants who similarly repent and who oppose and resist Satan and his *'children'* - those who embrace an ungodly life-style: *'...You [Satan] and this woman will hate each other; your descendants and hers will always be enemies. One of hers will strike you on the head, and you will strike him on the heel'* (v.15). One of her *'children'*—Jesus—struck a deadly blow on Satan.

World Today

Today our world has lost sight of that first principle—that we are individuals *created in the image of God*. Since earliest history we have manufactured from our debased minds a multitude of *'gods'* and ignored the rightful demands of the one true God—demands that are solely for our own well-being and which restore the balance in our life.

That *'deadly blow'* assures us that sin is conquered, that through the sinless life of Jesus Christ, God become flesh—and through him alone—we gain access to the very Family of God. Ω

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A New Creation

The *'right to life'* lies at the heart of every national constitution

That right is reflected in earliest records: *'...Whoso sheds man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed'*. Every human life is of the highest value to our Creator. Yet, in the realms of human justice the blood of millions in

the womb is shed every year.

The Beginning

That precious life, of course, begins long before birth—not even at conception but is a *gift* inherited from our first parents in Eden, a gift from God: *'...the LORD God formed man [Heb. 'adam] of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living person'* (Genesis 2:7). A *gift with purpose*. A new being - physical, but with the potential to become eternal spirit.

We were created male and female purposed to become *'...one flesh'*, a man and a woman joined in a harmonious liaison. In placing us in families God's purpose is *'... That he might seek a godly seed'* (Malachi 2:15). The family is the *'university* where godly principles are to be instilled in each child from birth—preparation (*'geststion'*) for our re-birth into the Family of God.

Although now despoiled by our sin, God's plan is for each of us to attain to a place at His side in the Family of God—to join our Father and our elder brother Jesus: *'...we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is'* (1 John 3:2).

To protect the integrity of His plan, the Creator hedged that relationship with wise guidance. There are boundaries to our free-will. Marriage should be a life-long commitment between two equal parents. Sexual relations are solely between male and female, and are to be confined to the marital bed. All relationships outside marriage are *porneia* (Gk) and sinful, excluding (unless repented of) from God's Family (1 Corinthians 6).

Follow this guidance and the health and welfare of all, including the unborn, is preserved.

Life—the 'right to life'—is indeed precious. Ω

Our planned Future

Armed conflict disrupts the lives of millions of earth's populace—though 'the West' has been blessed with more than half a century of relative tranquillity, with a welcome rise in living standards. But inequalities persist, and world leaders are behind the scenes planning radical change, change that will affect all of mankind.

Our track record down the centuries, however, raises a red warning flag. After six millennia of civilisation governments have utterly failed to implement utopia; '*...the way of peace they have not known*'. For every 'solution' is undermined by human nature and scorn for foundation principles.

Right v. Wrong

Civilisation—and its governing laws—is formulated on the basis of majority opinion driven (despite democratic elections!) by those who wield power—overtly or from behind the scenes. Their agenda, however, sprouts from fallen human nature—which cannot discern right from wrong. To discern *right* from *wrong* demands a recognizable universal standard based on the divine '*law of love*' as summarized in the Decalogue—all ten of God's guiding principles.

The imposition of the humanly devised standards has now devolved to a global level, with the 'United Nations' and its covert sponsors dictating the agenda for all nations from behind closed doors, with national governments, local councils—and the public—as enforcement pawns.

Future Shock

Our new rulers present their agen-

da as benign paternal leadership dedicated to the welfare of all mankind. Their clearly stated plan can be summed up as 'net zero by 2050', with implementation of most measures by 2030: A laudable end to destructive air and water and agricultural pollution. An end to poverty and recurring pandemics and to the housing shortage. Sounds good!

The shock comes, as always, in the detail. Public transport replaces cars. Air and sea travel curtailed. Food and water rationed. Meat banned. Animal husbandry eliminated. Hi-tech GM food. 'Smart' cities. Reliance on (fragile) internet technology. A cashless society. Behavioural monitoring *via* intrusive surveillance on our smartphones and TVs, Alexa, CCTV *etc.*

But such aims can be achieved only by *coercion*. Indeed plans for this are well advanced as digital IDs are being imposed and an army of 'hit squads' recruited to monitor our spending, behaviour, our recycling, our eating habits, our travel.

Christian Values

Such humanist attempts to solve man's challenges are the focus of Isaiah's analysis (as quoted earlier). That is, the rejection of our Creator and His guidance. Man was created as a perfect, rational, sentient being created from earth's elements but with an in-built guiding spirit (the '*spirit in*

man') and described as being '*...in the image of God*' (Genesis 1:27). His purpose is we become, through our life experiences, restored to that character image.

Our 'operating system' was *ahab, agape*—love, defined as total harmony with the divine mind, the force that maintains our relationship with the Father and keeps us on the straight and narrow. Our rejection of that pathway ('sin') and our dependence on distorted human reasoning required the direct intervention of the Godhead: '*...God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that everyone believing into Him should not perish, but have everlasting life*' (John 3:16).

It is 'the way of the world'—a world rejected by those who are 'in Christ: '*...Who but the man that believes that Jesus is the Son of God overcomes the world?*' (I John 5:5). Our mission as Christians is to 'walk as Jesus walked'—to overcome the world and its ways, as did our Saviour: '*...I have spoken these things to you that you may have peace in Me. You have distress in the world; but be encouraged, I have overcome the world*' (John 16:33).

Much of society presently stumbles through a fog of fear—fear of a virus, fear of hospitals, fear of touching something, fear of being locked up for a so-called 'violation' of an edict, fear of climate change.

But that's not for us, for '*...There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear: because fear has torment. He that fears is not made perfect in love*'. Paul adds: '*...So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me*' (Hebrews 13:6). Ω

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MiniStudy**Sin—not just a word**

For most of us in modern society the concept of ‘sin’ is far from our daily thoughts. Indeed the word is rarely heard even in our churches! It is in marked contrast to the world of the Christian Bible.

- Asked to define sin, the response is too often trivial: indulge in an extra slice of cake, a game of cards, a flutter on the horses (though all, for some, can indeed be sinful). Consciousness of sinful behaviour has varied widely. In ancient Israel, for example, daily life was hedged around by their national legislation and an educational programme that instilled the principles of righteous behaviour. (Not that everyone followed the guidance.)
- Centuries earlier the Canaanite king Abimelech in an incident involving Abraham’s wife notes: ‘*You have brought on me and on my kingdom a great sin? You have done deeds unto me that ought not to be done*’ (Genesis 20:9). Abraham’s great grandson Joseph was accosted by his employer’s wife and responded: ‘*...how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?*’ (ch 39:9). Of Abraham himself it is recorded: ‘*...Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws*’ (ch.26:5). All were sensitive to—and feared—what God called *sin*
- The apostle John, at the end of the first century of our era defined sin as ‘*...transgression of the law*’ [Gk *anomia*] - illegality, iniquity (I John 3:4). Adam had a ‘contract’ with God—in essence, ‘follow my guidance and your relationship with Me and your eternal future are secure’. That guidance, was summed up by Jesus as *love* (service) for God and for neighbour, and summarized by the ‘ten commandments’ and their supporting laws (Matthew 12:30-31). Adam chose a different path, and shattered that relationship with its awesome lasting consequences that persist today. He chose *death over life* (Genesis 3:3, 6)
- God’s purpose in creating humanity in His image (Genesis 1:26-28) and as sexual beings is that He desires to add ‘sons and daughters’ to His Family—and that means reproduction (Malachi2:14-15). Hence the hedge he built around sexual relationships, a hedge man has torn down in an abhorrent cascade of misbehaviour: co-habitation, adultery (Leviticus 20:10), same-sex liaisons. The horror of sin is addressed by the apostle Paul; it results in *death* (Romans 6:23), it is *deceitful* (Hebrews 3:13). His attitude reflects God’s own approach to sexual sin (Genesis 19:24)
- Ancient Israel’s intimate relationship with the Creator plunged downward to the point they were blatant about their sin. Witnesses the prophet Isaiah: ‘*...The expression of their faces witnesses against them; they have declared their sin like Sodom; they do not hide it. Woe to their soul! For they have dealt evil to themselves*’ (ch 3:9). The ambient culture spread nationally with the consequence of invasion and ‘ethnic cleansing’ by foreigners. It is a state reflected on the streets of our own world as great pride is taken in displaying total disregard for the Creator and His magnificent design for us. They openly ‘declare their sin’ as they parade in celebration
- But *porneia*, sexual sin, is but one element of society’s demonstration of their disregard for our Creator and His foundation principles for a successful society. Ezekiel addresses a later generation of Israelites: ‘*...this was the iniquity of your sister Sodom, pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness was in her and in her daughters, neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. And they were haughty, and committed abomination [sexual sin] before me: therefore I took them away as I saw good.*’ (ch 16:49-50). Judah, too, was in consequence taken captive, and exiled from their land for seventy years
- Our modern world is fast melding into that same ant-God culture. The underlying sin will with certainty attract the wrath of our loving Creator. *The time for change is running out* Ω

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