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Horizons

Vol 7 No 2

March/April 2003

addressing the important issues for today and tomorrow



inside...

Marriage - a piece of paper?

Passover - a double celebration

A Hard Saying

Born with a Purpose

How To Ruin a Church

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.**

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by Jesus and by his apostles
in the clearest of terms - and
recorded for us in the Scrip-
tures. Over the centuries
that truth has been buried,
dug up, buried again. Our
desire is to restore the sim-
ple apostolic message. We
hope you will be excited
by what the Scriptures re-
veal about life, and the
horizons beyond**

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
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It is distributed free on request, being a co-
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Tulsa, OK 2003

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new **Horizons**

Issue 38

March /April 2003

For Christians, marriage transcends the mere physical and material. It has spiritual implications that extend beyond this life into the world to come. But what about the rest of mankind? Is marriage 'just a piece of paper'?

It's unnecessary to repeat here the statistics regarding marriage breakdown. Few of us are unacquainted with divorce - first or second hand. It results in much distress and in the disruption of lives beyond those of the immediate involved family. *Children* don't escape the pain - pain that stretches beyond the emotional disturbance caused by what is often a long drawn-out war of attrition leading to the break-up of a home that was established in the warm glow of love and service. Behaviour, education, peer relationships, career are all affected.

Husband and wife, too, suffer. The material break-up of the family home carries severe financial penalty. The comfort of beloved established family traditions is swallowed in the loneliness of separation. Disputes over custody and property blight the family, with mutual recrimination and even a hatred that gnaws for years at the human spirit. Then there's the distress inflicted on *grandparents* and other relatives of both families, on friends, on colleagues.

Clearly divorce is not - usually - a happy situation.. Yet it is, too often, the first resort in foundering relationships. [Request the free articles *Spend a Lifetime - Together and The Edge of Divorce*]

A Valued Institution

No longer in Western society is marriage highly valued - by individuals, by government. In the United Kingdom, for example, financial incentives to encourage marriage have been whittled away to almost zero, while co-habitation and homosexual relationships are being given equal status with marriage.

Yet marriage is a universal cultural institution, though differing in form from society to society. Since the dawn of history the family grouping has been instinctive, and essential to an ordered society - it has provided the foundations for the social order in every known society".

Marriage is recognized and highly prized by all the major religions. Among the billion strong Hindu people the family is central, and that religion as such does not approve divorce. According to *Hinduism* marriage is a sacred relationship, a divine covenant and a sacrament - and lasts through several lifetimes! In *Judaism*, there is an elaborate marriage ceremony, and again - divorce is reluctantly permitted through the religious courts. In *Islam*, marriages are usually 'arranged' and are effected by a contract, confirmed by a bride dowry and by her consent in the presence of witnesses. In most Islamic societies, though, the divorce court is restricted to men.

Marriage is highly valued - at least, outside Western 'civilised' societies. Yet even today our society seeks to limit its breakdown. Divorce is not a complete free-for-all.

Given the problems and tensions that can arise in marriage, there must be strong reason for such an institution to have been adopted universally - even in primitive tribal systems. Clearly, alternatives are unacceptable. Mere co-habitation is a fragile substitute, with such relationships disintegrating on small pretext, and especially when a child comes along. The homosexual relationship, while satisfying to a very few individuals, yet is a blind ally which would if universally adopted spell the death knell of humanity - by definition, there would be no offspring. Perhaps worse is the ally-cat mentality of rampant sexual permissiveness, with its legacy of broken lives, sexually transmitted diseases and superficial and transient relationships.

How, then, did the concept of marriage come about?

Origins

Evolutionists may say marriage developed as a convenience, the first identifiable humans taking the idea from parings noted among some primates from which they themselves supposedly derived.

Yet the notion of 'family' is deeply imbedded in the human psyche. Indeed it's the building block of civilisation - discounted only by the academic ravings of an elite totally out of touch with reality, and intent on justification of their own permissive philandering.

The origin of marriage is much more simple: *God created man and woman within days of one another*. The first man didn't have to wait a zillion years for the first woman to catch up with his evolutionary advance (or

MARRIAGE... just a piece of paper?

vice versa). The idea that two incredibly complex individuals who are so perfectly complementary could 'evolve' within a single life-time is the stuff of comic books.

No. *God created* mankind - the pinnacle of His creation: "God created man in his own image...male and female created he them" (Genesis 1:27).

Vital Lessons

Consider ancient Israel - the divine pattern for every sovereign nation. Although never fully embraced by them, God's instructions to Israel - based on His divine purpose for mankind revealed at creation - are a guide to the purpose of marriage. However much society has changed, there are vital lessons for our age. These fundamentals of marriage are the essential social adhesive designed to protect and maintain society. Jesus himself referred his opponents to this creation guidance (Matthew 19:8).

First, the man is to separate from his parents and 'cleave [be 'welded'] to his woman' - his equal, his complement, his counterpart. The pair would become 'one flesh' - physically (through their offspring), emotionally and in their life-style and aspirations. Each couple would establish a new dynasty. It was designed by the Creator to be a lifetime partnership. Adam and Eve (the 'mother of all living') were, said God, to *'be fruitful; multiply; fill the earth and subdue it'* (Genesis 1:28).

Constraints

God 'who inhabits eternity' - Himself a Family - shared life with models of Himself made from the physical elements. To protect and preserve such families God revealed some necessary constraints.

Marriage was a coming together of two 'clans' - it was not a whim, but carefully planned and bound by an agreed legal contract fair to both parties. Because of this, divorce was - originally - rare.

The law protected both children and property, and cared for both orphans and widows. That 'piece of paper' was essential to the stability of society. *It still is.*

Romance was certainly part of marriage, but the framework for stability was the marriage covenant and written contract.

No-go Areas

Sexual activity that would frustrate the bearing of children was prohibited.

The people of Israel were warned to remove themselves from the practices of surrounding nations - nations which had abandoned the divine way. They had descended into practices God termed 'detestable': *"Do not lie with a male as with a woman; it is detestable; you shall lie with no animal whatever and defile yourself with it; neither shall a woman stand before an animal to commit lewdness with it; it is perversion. Do not defile yourself in any of these ways, for by all these practices the nations whom I am driving out before you are defiled"* (Leviticus 18:22-24).

The terrible pain inflicted on chil-

dren coupled with the rising tide of sexually transmitted disease in our day should confirm the wisdom of this. Trampling over God's protective laws - which are *'for our good that he may preserve us alive'* (Deuteronomy 6:24) - always has adverse consequences.

Property rights, too, were among the various constraints on marriage. It's in our nature to be protective of what we have laboured for, and marriage laws in Israel were designed to uphold this. The heart-break of broken marriage with its often unfair division of property is a scourge of our time and a drain on personal and community resources.

Maybe worse is the abandonment of children and the chaotic outcome that results from feckless co-habitation.

Children thrive best when settled in a stable home in which they are lovingly nourished and educated in true family values. The life-time commitment of a man and a woman provides the ideal environment for this. Sadly, many of today's parents are in ignorance of the principles that promote a successful life. Easy access to divorce undercuts commitment.

And co-habitation provides an easy escape hatch when faced with the inevitable adjustments within formal marriage. 'Marriage for life' is a challenge. But within its constraints there is the will to work out problems rather than the convenience of an open 'back door'.

Marriage, then, is much more than 'a piece of paper'. Enter it as a commitment for life - a covenant freely agreed between a man and a woman and made formal in the presence of witnesses. That's the divine way. □

For further reading, request the free articles:

Spend a Lifetime - Together and The Edge of Divorce

Bible Basics

The Churches of God Outreach Ministries publish an internet home study course

If you would like to study with us check it out at www.cgom.org

The introductory lesson gives some hints about how to study your Bible.

We are pleased to reply to any questions you may have arising from any of our publications. However, at this time we are not in a position to 'grade' your studies in Bible Basics

Lesson 9 is now available

Many Christians observe the Lord's Supper annually in memory of the death of our Saviour. What does the observance symbolize?

Man's 'inhumanity' has generated a constant stream of refugees fleeing terror and war and persecution. TV images of fleeing victims abandoning their homes and heading, literally, for the hills horrified all of us. Or that terrible refugee problem in Rwanda. It's an experience repeated time and again in our modern world. A figure of some one hundred and twenty million refugees worldwide has been cited. Uprooted, they suffer intense privation - without shelter, often without food or warmth. And with nowhere to go. And still the desperate and degrading trade in 'the souls of men' continues unabated.

When we approach "the Passover season" we can, therefore, appreciate the contrast with the Israelites as they fled the oppression of Egypt - headed for freedom. Four hundred long years in exile, laterally as abject slaves! What joy must there have been as they headed into the wilderness having witnessed all those tokens of God's power. With, ahead, a Land of Promise.

What a night of mixed emotions! Fear at what they had just witnessed: intense plagues on their slave-masters, the final horror of the dying firstborn, a certain trepidation that all would go terribly wrong. But joy, too: that they were survivors, that they were at last free, that the yoke of bondage was removed. Also praise to God for such a mighty deliverance. And comfort as they gazed in amazement at that swirling pillar of fire protecting them from the advancing Egyptian army.

Christian Deliverance

We can draw parallels with our own "escape"! Whether young or older all of us have spent time in "Egypt". We

PASSOVER ...a double celebration

all have been slaves to sin - and it has left its mark. We have absorbed the attitudes of the world through our education and the civilisation in which we live. We were, too, loaded with the excess baggage of false religion. But, thankfully, we are released from our "Egypt".

Through our "Passover lamb", Jesus Christ, we have escaped the corruption in the world. A loving Father has placed over us in protection and at great price the blood of our Saviour. (No need, now, for the sacrifice of a lamb!) And has set us on course for the true Land of Promise of which ancient Palestine was but a type.

What cause for rejoicing! And what cause, too, for sober reflection!

The Lord's Supper

On the evening of *Nisan* 14th* on the sacred calendar, God's people observe the Lord's Supper - "Communion" or "Christian Passover" if you will. We mark this solemn remembrance of our Saviour's death by meeting with our brethren to share the symbols of the bread and the wine. And as Paul reminds us, we do this "*on the night on which he was betrayed*" (1 Corinthians 11:23) - at the beginning of the 14th of the Bible month *Nisan* or *Adar*, the first month of the "sacred year". It was during this evening and most of the following day that Jesus suffered horrendously - and then died, nailed to a stake on our behalf, for our sin.

This year the Lord's Supper will be observed on Tuesday evening, April 15th

Therefore for Christians the 14th is highly significant, and appropriate as a day of remembrance of his total life of suffering (Exodus 12:6, Numbers 9:11).

If you can arrange to meet with other

brethren on this important occasion you are urged to do so. It is more appropriately observed as a *shared* remembrance.

However, if this isn't possible you can observe the Lord's Supper at home alone or with your family. [*A leaflet is available from our various addresses - or on the CGOM web-site - which explains how best to do this.*] Remember that while the Supper is for brethren - that is, those who are baptized - yet those who are not baptized but sympathetic are welcome to be present and to take part in the foot-washing part of the observance.

Humility

None of us can stand before God unless covered by the righteousness of our Saviour. Jesus, when he met with the disciples for what has become known as his 'last supper', expressed his willingness to serve, his humility, in setting an example of 'foot-washing' - symbolic of our service to one another and to the world at large..

You can read the account in John 13:3-17. He said: "*If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet you ought also to wash one another's feet.... If you know these things, happy are you if you do them*".

This is a part of the Lord's Supper as observed by the brethren in association with the *Outreach Ministries*.

Include your older children in the service - of an age to remain quiet and respectful. (Young children should be safely tucked in bed, or with a safe baby-sitter.) Older children, too, can take part in the foot-washing, and perhaps read one of the passages of Scripture. In the Lord's

Supper we “*proclaim the Lord’s death till he come*”. He is “*our Pass-over [lamb] sacrificed for us*”, fulfilling the type by dying as the Pass-over lambs were being sacrificed that Wednesday afternoon in the Temple (I Corinthians 5:7). No longer is an animal sacrifice required (*see Hebrews ch 10*).

Prepare Now

The Lord’s Supper is a solemn observance. It is an occasion for which we need to prepare ourselves. Paul wrote: “*whosoever shall eat this bread and drink of this cup of the Lord unworthily shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup. For he that eats and drinks unworthily eats and drinks judgment to himself*” (I Corinthians 11:27-29).

In the weeks leading to this annual remembrance it is time to carefully assess how we stand before God. As Paul also wrote in this context, “*let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall*”. From one year to the next it’s an easy matter to slip into habits that corrode our relationship with our Father! Christianity is joyful. But this one time of year merits a degree of healthy introspection!

A Time To Rejoice

It won’t have escaped your notice, though, that the Jews had not yet observed their observance of the Passover (John 18:28). Jesus was crucified on the afternoon of the 14th - a Wednesday that year. The Jew’s killed the Passover lamb as the sun was declining (between 2 and 3pm) on that day, just before the 15th *Nisan* began. They were to eat the lamb before “midnight”. It marks the night in Egypt that Israel put the lamb’s blood over their homes, the night that Death struck the firstborn of Egypt, the night that they left Goshen and headed out of slavery.

And because of all these momentous events - which mirror our own spiri-

tual deliverance - God said that this night (of the 15th) is “*a night to be much observed*”. A night to be carefully noted, to be “protected”, not to be overlooked.

Clearly, as the Israelites in later years recalled that evening, it was a time of great celebration and rejoicing! What a deliverance! And thereafter it was a “feast day”. As Ezra notes: “*The children of Israel...kept the feast of Unleavened Bread seven days with joy*” (*ch 6:22*), and “*with great gladness*” (II Chronicles 30:21). Not just the night of the Passover, but the whole seven days! As the latter passage continues: “*they did eat throughout the feast seven days*” (v.22). It was a week of material feasting. The sole restrictions were that no leavened bread was to be seen anywhere in Israel throughout the seven days. And *unleavened bread*** was to be eaten each day - for Christians a reminder that we are to consciously “put on” Jesus Christ.

[Note that the Jews in their *seder* - their modern successor to Passover - have added numerous, yet unbiblical, traditions which are not incumbent on the Christian.]

But it was also a week of praise, of sacrifices, of teaching “*the good knowledge of the Lord*”, of making confession (*read vv.15-22*). A week, therefore, of spiritual feasting, too!

Two Observances

In all, the Festival was in marked contrast to the solemnity enjoined on us for our observance of “The Lord’s Supper”. The latter observance was, as Paul instructs in I Corinthians 11 (vv.19-22), to be separated from any ordinary (or even special) meal.

Both evenings therefore have considerable significance for the Christian! On the evening of the

“14th” we observe the solemnity of the remembrance of our Saviour’s suffering and death. And on the “15th” we begin the *Feast* - a time of gladness and rejoicing both physically and spiritually.

The first day of *Unleavened Bread* is, of course, one of the annual holy days. It’s a day to “*have a holy convocation [a service]; you shall do no work*” (Leviticus 23:7) - as, too, is the last day (*Nisan 21* - Exodus 12:18) of the *Unleavened Bread Festival*.

But the *first Day of Unleavened Bread* is special - “*a night of observations*” (Exodus 12:42) marking the departure from Egypt - sin.

During this evening we have a special festive meal - with the family (if they can be persuaded!), and with nearby brethren and their families where this is feasible. The host should structure the evening with prayer, appropriate Bible readings reflecting deliverance from spiritual Egypt and celebrating our freedoms in the resurrected Christ, and with hymns and spiritual songs *etc.* How much better than the pagan ‘Lent’!

[Of course, where brethren are “scattered” or where your family is resistant this family festive meal may have to remain “the ideal”. But let’s strive to attain to it if at all possible. There is great blessing in honouring the Godhead as the Bible guides!]

Let’s therefore honour our great Deliverer by heartily observing both aspects of this celebratory Festival!

* NOTE: The 14th *Nisan* varies from year to year on our present Roman calendar. A calendar card is available giving the modern dates of all God’s Festivals for several years

** *Unleavened*: this is bread made without any raising agent. It was the practice of the first Christians to use this as they observed the Festival *See I Corinthians 5: 6-8* □

Why were you born? It's a question may ask, sometimes in despair. Yet every human life has a purpose that transcends all life's challenges

Bill Faith

"What is the purpose of life?" It's a question that has perplexed many people over the years. Most everyone has either experienced or witnessed health and financial hardships, not to mention many insidious crimes committed by evil people throughout the world. Often these various problems lead us to question what life is all about.

For those that believe that life just evolved from a lower life form rather than having been created by a creator God, perhaps this question concerning the purpose of life is even more difficult to answer. And, unfortunately, evolution is the accepted teaching in most schools.

This question is by no means a new one. In fact, it was asked long before the birth of Christ. In Psalms 8:4 we read, *"What is man that you are mindful of him, And the son of man that you visit him?"* Again in Job 7:17-18 the same question is asked, but with a slightly different twist to it. It reads, *"What is man, that you should magnify him, That you should set your heart on him, That you should visit him every morning, And test him every moment?"*

In the Bible, we not only find the question concerning the purpose of life being asked but we also find the answer. Quoting from the *New Living Translation* we read, *"His (God's) unchanging plan has always been to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ"* (Ephesians 1:5).

This scripture tells us that God has determined before hand that those who believe in Him and His Son Je-

sus Christ will be adopted into His family. Verse four of the same chapter states that, *"He (God) chose us in him (Christ) before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love."* (NKJV used except where noted).

So before the world was created it was determined that God would create a family and that He would do this through Jesus Christ. In Revelation 13:8, it also mentions that the Lamb (Jesus Christ) was slain from the foundation of the world. Meaning that it was God's plan from the beginning that He would adopt us to Himself through Christ.

The purpose of life is far greater than anything we could imagine. The Bible informs us that if we repent of our sins and accept Jesus Christ to be our Savior that God will give us His Holy Spirit as a downpayment for eternal life and that He will adopt us to Himself (Ephesians 1:13-14, 4-5) even allowing us to be co-inheritors with Christ. Romans

Born with a Purpose

8:15-17 tells us: *"...You receive the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, 'Abba, Father'. The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs-heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together"*.

John, the beloved apostle of Jesus, wrote, *"Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called the children of God!...Beloved, now are we children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him..."* (I John 3:1-3). We are

promised that we will share in the likeness of Christ. What was he like after his resurrection?

After Jesus was resurrected from the dead, he could pass through walls and appear or disappear at will. He was as he described to Nicodemus about those who are born again. *"Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit"* (John 3:7-8).

Jesus was born of the Spirit at the time of his resurrection. We are told not only that he is, *"The firstborn from the dead"*, but also that he was, *"The firstborn among many brethren"* (Colossians 1:18, Romans 8:29).

The Apostle Paul wrote: *"For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruit (firstborn), afterward those whose are Christ's at His coming"* (I Corinthians 15:22-23).

When Christ returns to this earth, those who have repented of their sins and have received the Spirit of God, both living and dead, will receive the reward of eternal life and be born into God's own family! *"For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep [dead]. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air"* (I Thessalonians. 4:15-17). [cont'd p.7

Why Born?....cont'd from p.5

Yes, there is purpose for life. God created mankind for the ultimate pur-

What does it mean to 'live in Christ' and for him to live in you?

John Morton

When Jesus said "I am in the Father and the Father in me," he was describing a relationship that was unique. He mentioned it on several occasions, even extending it to include his followers, "I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you" (John 14:10-11, 20). Do you understand what this means? Do you appreciate the implications of such a relationship?

Who Can Understand?

At a Passover during his ministry, Christ said to his audience, "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him". Many disputed amongst themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" (John 6:56 and 52). They did not understand the symbolic significance of Christ's flesh and blood, nor did they appreciate how Christ would live in

them, and conversely, how they would live in him. As a consequence many said, "This is a hard saying; who can understand it?" and they "went back, and walked with him no more" (John 6:60, 66).

Believing

Do you believe Christ when he said that you can be part of that unique relationship? Or, is it a hard saying for you as well?

Many think the phrase 'living in Christ' is merely about submission and dependence on him. Naturally these are part of the Christian way of life, but there is a deeper and more profound concept being revealed that many of his followers did not perceive. Comprehending spiritual concepts does not come naturally. It requires God's help to understand the things of God.

Understanding

Later Jesus promised his followers that after his death he would send the Holy Spirit to help them understand. And the book of *Acts* records that he did indeed keep that promise (John 14:16-17, 26 and Acts 2:1-4).

The Apostle Paul explains how the Holy Spirit helps us to understand, "For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no-one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God," (I Corinthians 2:11-12).

A Mind Like God's

The spirit of man that Paul mentioned imparts intellect that enables man to understand the things of this world. It is our conscious awareness, our individual persona, the very essence of who we are. It enables us to process and store knowledge, to reason and make choices, form opinions, attitudes and to experience emotion.

Similarly the Spirit of God is the intellect, mind and persona of God. God is spirit and He is Holy (John 4:24, Psalm 111:9). The Holy Spirit is not a third person – but the Spirit of God. The Spirit is His very mind and essence - the same mind and spiritual essence that is in Jesus Christ (John 14:11). Christ is Holy and is Spirit – "now the Lord is the Spirit," - the spirit of the living God (II Corinthians 3:17).

Although Christ and the Father have the same Spirit they are separate beings. At baptism a small portion of the same Holy Spirit is placed within us, not only to give understanding of things spiritual, but also to develop a mind like God's (II Corinthians 1:22,

5:5 and Philippians 2:5). It is through His (God's) Spirit that He dwells in us (Romans 8:11, I Corinthians 6:19, II Corinthians 13:5).

Nowadays we understand how genes from both human parents combine to produce a child. A likeness to the parents is often apparent in the physical characteristics and nature of their children as they grow. We can see the characteristic of the parents in the child and conversely we can see the same characteristics the child has in the parents. Sometimes the likeness is so profound that having seen the son one has seen his father, which is exactly what Christ said of himself and his Father (John 14:7-10). Jesus was talking about the spiritual nature of his Father reflected in himself. Eventually that same nature will be reflected in us.

Renewing

The spirit received from God combines with the spirit of man renewing the mind to form a new person (II Corinthians 5:17, Galatians 6:15). Paul talked about the 'old man' prior to baptism and the 'new man' afterwards. The old man with his worldly ways is symbolically crucified, or put to death, with Christ at baptism (Galatians 2:20).

From that point on we "walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:4). We "put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man, who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of him who created him" (Colossians 3:9-10). Equipped now with a new spiritual perspective that is aligned with God's, we can "be renewed by the spirit of your mind and that you put on the new man, which was created according to God, in righteousness and true Holiness" (Ephesians 4:17-24). We take on the same nature that can be found in both Christ and the Father. As the 'old man' diminishes, day by day the nature of God increases (II Corinthians 4:16).

Answering a question from Nicodemus, Christ said, "Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (John 3:5). Baptism is the birth by water. By complete immersion the old man is committed to the depths from which the new man arises. The spiritual birth takes place at the resurrection when the individual is raised as a spirit being. He went on to say, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you 'You must be born again,'" (vv 6-7).

Having already developed a mind like God's, the body will be resurrected as spirit in an instant at a specific time (I Corinthians 15:52). But the mind needs to be prepared beforehand because that is not something that can occur instantaneously. It takes a lifetime of careful preparation to bring the mind to spiritual maturity. The process is much like

that of a child developing in its mother's womb until ready to be born. Between baptism and resurrection is the time when crucial changes need to take place to prepare the mind (Romans 12:2). At the time of Christ's return we will be ready for our spiritual birth, to be resurrected complete with a spirit body (Mathew 24:30-31).

Growing

Over time we grow in grace and knowledge toward the fullness of the stature of Christ as he is formed in us (Ephesians 4:13, Galatians 4:19). This is what God proposes for all of mankind – it is the purpose of our existence here on earth. He is preparing us for His kingdom. It is through the Holy Spirit that both the Father and Christ live in us. We remain as physical human beings, but we share the same spiritual nature of mind as both Christ and the Father. God can recognise that nature, or likeness of mind in us. That is why He refers to us as 'sons and daughters' (II Corin-

thians 6:18, Ephesians 2:19).

Meaning Revealed

Those called by God, who are willing to repent, submit to and depend on him for every need will be given His Holy Spirit upon baptism (Acts 2:38). With the help of that Spirit the true meaning of Christ's teaching will be revealed to us. The Spirit not only gives us understanding, it is the very mind and essence of God Himself that converts our mind to become like His. Both the Father and Christ are Holy Spirit and it is through that Holy Spirit that they dwell in us.

Do you now understand what Christ was revealing to his followers when he said, "I am in my father and he in me and I in you"? It is very encouraging if we find the words that confused so many of Christ's audience are no longer a hard saying. Having a mind that comprehends true spiritual concepts is sure evidence of Christ in us. □

pose of creating a family for Himself. God the Father used Jesus to reveal the way. And as we read in I Cor. 15:49, "As we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man" (Christ).

Christians are now adopted by the Father through Jesus Christ into His family as sons and daughters. And at the return of Christ to this earth we will be finally born into His family.

May we be thankful to God for the great opportunity that He has offered each of us and to be as thankful as Paul was when he wrote, "For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named" (Ephesians 3:14-15). □

CGOM - 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 quarterly *Newsletter*, *Fountain of Life*, a bi-monthly outreach magazine *New Horizons*, the *Bible Basics* home study course). The *Outreach Ministries* also supports a network of independent fellowships and scattered brethren. Let us know your needs.

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

Be sure to look anew at our improved web-site: www.cgom.org

IS GRACE ENOUGH?

Many Christians - perhaps most - believe there's nothing more to salvation than to 'just believe'. But this might prompt the question, Why does God ask obedience from His people?

You can't read far in the Scriptures without stumbling on such texts as, addressing Isaac: *"through your offspring all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because Abraham minded my voice and kept my charge, my orders, my rules and my are worldly-minded.... Because laws"* (Genesis 26:5). Or, New Testament: *"And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring - who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ"* (Revelation 12:17).

Throughout history the sovereign God has required obedience and imposed severe penalties for disobedience. Until Jesus?

Well then, why did Jesus say, *"Do not suppose I am come to annul the Law and the Prophets. I did not come to abolish but to complete.. For I assure you while heaven and earth endure not one iota or one sign shall drop from the Law until all is finished"* (Matthew 5:17-18). And there's no point to law if it isn't to be obeyed!

But didn't it all end at the cross? Well, Paul writing some years after Jesus 'nailed the law to the cross' (as some suggest) wrote: *"...the Law is holy, and so is the command holy and just and good"* (Romans 7:12). At the end of the first century John adds *'transgression of the Law is sin'* (I John 3:4) and *"...for true love of God means this, that we observe his commands"* (ch 5:3).

Anyway, what's wrong for example

with avoiding sexual sin - one of the 'terrible Ten'? You will escape a range of sexually transmitted diseases - including AIDS, perhaps the trauma of divorce, the death of true love. Or, what about honouring your elders, avoiding violence and theft and perjury? All divine commands! And all very worthy.

The people of God - in both the Old and the New Testament times - have acknowledged the relevance of the divine Law. It is the bed-rock of our relationship with Him. Paul again: *"For those under control of the flesh are worldly-minded.... Because Law; in fact it cannot be"* (Romans 8:5-7).

So - are you hostile to God? Or are you obeying Him? That's the choice.

Is Grace Enough?

As a Christian you will have repented, been baptized and received the Spirit of God. The Spirit? *"...which God bestows on those who obey him"*. That's New Testament -

Acts 5:32. And it is vital: *"For if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ he does not belong to free articles What Do You Mean - 'Repent'? and Coming To Baptism]*

But does your willing submission to the divine Law earn you brownie points with God? Before his conversion, Paul was as righteous - as Law-abiding - as anyone (Philippians 3:4-6). Nor did his conversion change that. But did his law-keeping bring him salvation?

You probably observe Christmas and Easter and Sunday church because you think God requires it. But does your salvation depend on it? No - salvation is an effect of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus our

Saviour. Only through him can our sins be forgiven. Only by his Spirit will we inherit the Kingdom of God. *Not* by our 'works of righteousness'. Some of God's Law may be obscure to us. But does disobedience through ignorance of the Law bar you from the Kingdom? No - it's the righteousness of Jesus Christ - through repentance - that covers us. *Yet God asks us to obey Him.*

So the answer to the question: *Is grace enough?* is quite clear.

You see, through Jesus we become children of the Father. And we are to become *'as obedient children'* (I Peter 1:14). We demonstrate who our Father is by reflecting His behaviour - by our obedience to Him (*cp* John 8:41-42). If we love Him we will keep His commandments! From the heart. As we discover them in His Word. To the best of our ability. It's unlikely, however, that any Christian would quarrel with the Ten Commandments - except maybe the fourth! (But why *that* one?) And our failures are covered by Christ.

Much of the divine Law is civil stuff. It's for our rulers to implement them (Proverbs 29:18) and individual Christians really don't have much say beyond applying the underlying principle. Are they good laws? Said Moses: *"Observe and practice [these laws] for they will show how wise and intelligent a nation you are.... And what great nation is there that possesses such righteous statutes and ordinances as this whole Law which I am now setting before you?"* (Deuteronomy 4:1-8). And: *"The Lord commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God for our good always"* (ch 6:24).

As Paul wrote, God's Laws *are* 'good'. Willing obedience shows who is our spiritual Father. And His Laws are a protective encircling wall set by a loving God, accessible only through His unbounded grace. □

unsigned articles are by the Editor

Virtually any form of church organization will get the job done - somehow. Are there basic principles that will improve our efforts?

The Roman Church, with its tight hierarchical structure, has been 'successful' for nearly two thousand years. Dozens of other organizational forms have come and gone and been used to 'preach the Gospel' and care for the church. There have been successes, and failures.

Given the persistence of the Roman Church down the centuries, is that the well-trying way to go? Well, that 'from-the-top-down' structure causes misgivings. For example, when a doctrine is passed down with authority from a revered leadership it may indeed be accepted by the masses. But what if it is *error*? Error that blocks salvation - *heresy*? That's how so much error became deeply rooted in the visible church.

How To Build the Church?

More, such a structure, with many steps on the career ladder, leads - given human nature - to corruption. Finances are fiddled. Money is funnelled to private accounts. Embarrassing secret sin is covered over by the church authorities.

Then, of course, there's all that bureaucracy. There's an increasingly luxurious and expensive headquarters (and its 'regional offices') to build. And to staff and maintain. Empires, seminaries and private fiefdoms are founded and ever expanded. It doesn't end there. A hierarchy employs 'field staff' - priests, ministers *etc* - and an army of support staff, all dependent for employment on the beneficence of the leadership. Doesn't that lead to dangerous subservience?

Resources

So where does the funding for all that come from? *Surprise* - from the 'little people'. Donations and tithes are for them (only) considered mandatory (a real 'membership fee') to

support the hierarchy. And the members are required to dig ever deeper when a financial crisis arises (*read*: 'too much money centrally misappropriated', or law-suits to fund).

Them and Us

To ensure that proper distance and respect is observed, there's a further division of the hierarchy. There's *them* and there's *us*. There is the *laity*

comment...

HOW TO RUIN A CHURCH

and there is the *clergy*. (That idea, though, certainly didn't come from the New Testament!) This neatly divides the church into *haves* and *have-nots*. The *wise* and the *ignorant*. The clergy are at the sharp end, the laity listen or sleep in the pew.

But isn't all this structure necessary to 'preach the Gospel to all nations'? *Maybe not*.

Another Way

Just look at the above. In the business world, government and shareholders - and customers - would scream blue murder at such profligacy, inefficiency and mismanagement. But this is 'God's Work' - therefore unrestrained by common sense?

Isn't there an alternative? Can the Gospel be effectively proclaimed without all that waste - waste of manpower, waste of non-human resources? Are we left to devise our own way, or does the New Testament church provide such an alternative pattern? Indeed it does.

First-century Christians weren't part of a 'mega-church'. All one Body, of course, but not subject to a central

authority other than Christ. They met in small groups, in homes. Their shepherd - pastor, elder - had responsibility (to Jesus Christ) to serve, to teach pure doctrine, to encourage the brethren to use their spiritual gifts, to oversee the spiritual growth and material well-being of each member of his small flock. But he was no overlord - just gifted to serve in that capacity. He suffered with his flock. Like the apostle Paul, he followed a secular occupation.

Each individually gifted by Jesus Christ, the brethren served one another, grew in grace, witnessed - sometimes with their lives - to the saving power from sin of their Saviour. The Gospel prospered.

There were, too, gifted evangelists who, by faith and supported by one or more assemblies, took the message far and wide, even overseas. From their knowledge of the truth and out of their experience they taught and encouraged the brethren, and appointed qualified leaders. No headquarters, no certain income, no career but the service of Christ.

Of course there was abuse. Some teachers became isolated, self-serving, heretical. But it was, unlike in a hierarchy, limited in scope. Confined to the few. Brethren felt free to ignore false teaching, to move elsewhere. After all, each was - *is* - answerable primarily to our Head, to Jesus and to the Word of God. They were not - *we* are not - constrained to put up with heresy, corruption, spiritual abuse or extortion.

Sadly, the first Christians sank into the arms of a secular Roman hierarchical structure. Heresy followed. Corruption. Division. Ruin.

But no twenty-first century Church of God would fall into that vicious trap. *Would they?* □

Request the article CGOM in Perspective for an action snapshot of a non-hierarchical approach to church

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