

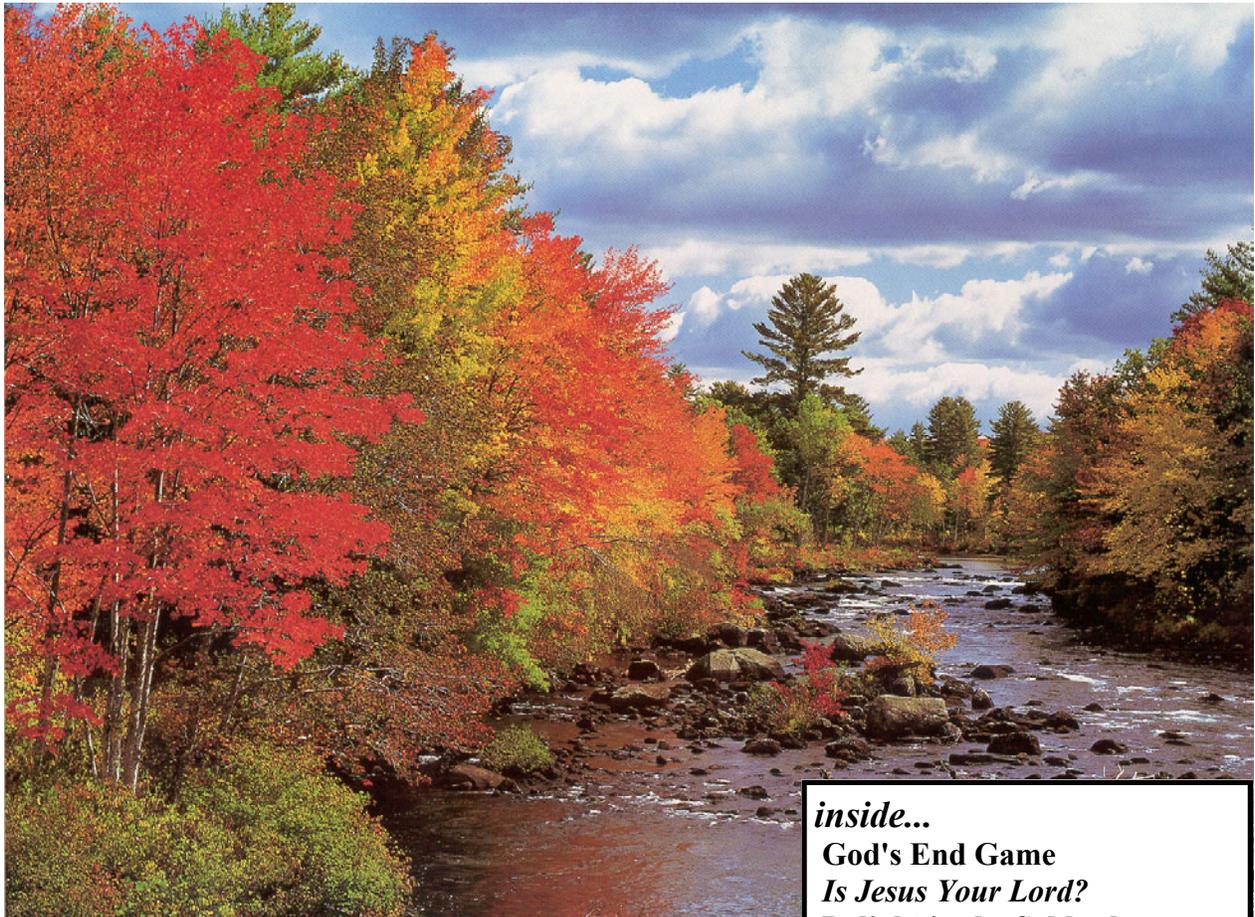
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Horizons

Vol 7 No 5

September/October 2003

addressing the important issues for today and tomorrow



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CGOM

Churches Of God Outreach Ministries

With around two thousand Christian denominations vying for your attention, it's easy to miss the important issues of life and religion. It's our hope that through *New Horizons* our readers will come to understand the true meaning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Gospel was proclaimed by Jesus and by his apostles in the clearest of terms - and recorded for us in the Scriptures. Over the centuries that truth has been buried, dug up, buried again. Our desire is to restore the simple apostolic message. We hope you will be excited by what the Scriptures reveal about life, and the horizons beyond

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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new Horizons

Issue No 41

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Are you among the millions who have an active belief in God but are confused as to His purpose? Indeed, has He a purpose?

Even a first grader can see that life couldn't suddenly spring from nothing or nowhere. A 'higher power' had to create it. What on earth was His reason? Having set human life in motion - did He simply trust to luck that something good might possibly come from it? Did He lose interest? Or, did God all along have a plan?

Almost all religions - including 'Christianity' - divide mankind into 'goodies and baddies'. The good go to heaven or its equivalent, the bad to hell. That's about the extent of any notion they may have of a divine plan. Do the Scriptures agree - or add anything - to this?

Heaven or Hell

Everyone wants to go to heaven. Yet that prospect, on scrutiny, doesn't exactly thrill. Endless eternity listening to organ music or strumming on a harp, the monotony punctuated only by the bliss of being in the presence of God. But would God waste all human experience for this?

Then there are those, weighed in the scales of divine judgment, who when they die find eternity a hell of a place. They somehow strayed from the grey area of human depravity in which mankind wallows and are pitchforked into a place of unending torment. To suffer for ever and ever - that's a very long time - because they 'didn't know Jesus'. That means perhaps five billion now alive, plus the billions through the ages who

have not known him. A very crowded place, hell. Perhaps it includes your uncle John or great aunt Mary, neither of whom 'knew Jesus' but who were loved and led a fairly exemplary life. Certainly not 'wicked'. And included may be that innocent baby cousin, 'died age three months from meningitis'. We might feel a twinge of sympathy for the notion that the evil sons of Saddam should burn - but not burn up - for all eternity. After all they personally made life on earth a hell for thousands of their own people.

But are these concepts of heaven and hell what God has revealed in His Word? Did you ever, even fleetingly, have your finger in a match flame? There are some who believe that's what God has in mind for 'the wicked'. That - and for endless billions of years?

God's End Game

The answer, emphatically, is *no*. God's purpose for us is much more dramatic. God's end game is, in contrast, an expression of His love for mankind. That new-born squalling wrinkled seven pound infant has a potential that is mind-blowing. He or she may one day share with Jesus Christ in *rulership of the universe*.

Here's how the apostle Paul explains: "*For God has allowed us to know the secret of his plan, and it is this: he purposes in his sovereign will that all human history shall be consummated in Christ, that everything that exists in heaven and earth shall find its perfection and fulfilment in him. And here is the staggering thing - that in all which will one day*

belong to him we have been promised a share, since we were long ago destined for this by the one who achieves his purposes by his sovereign will" (Ephesians 1:9-11 Phillips). God has a plan!

Outline Plan

For four millennia the divine plan was outlined in the Scriptures of the Old Testament - in Israel's 'harvest festivals'. Most Christians view them as an outmoded relic from which some spiritual lessons can be drawn. But they are more - much more. Paul, quoting Isaiah, wrote to the Corinthian brethren: "*As it is written, Eye has not seen nor ear heard, neither has entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for them that love him"* (I Corinthians 2:9). Then he concludes: "*But God has revealed them to us by his Spirit"* (v.10). And what the festivals mean can be derived from the writings of the New Testament.

Here we focus on God's end game, on eternity. But first a brief preview of the other festivals.

The 'Feasts of the LORD' are listed in Leviticus 23. (Note that the Scriptures call them *the LORD'S* feasts - not something dreamed up by Moses!) There are three clusters of festivals - in spring, summer and autumn, celebrating the three harvest seasons (barley, wheat, fruit). They begin each spring with the Passover in the middle of what was then the first month of the year (March/April) - at the end of the 14th day of that month. This was when the pass-over lamb was sacrificed. It was then eaten at the beginning of the first day of the first annual festival - known as *Unleavened Bread*. It was

a seven day festival. Fifty days later, in early summer, came *Pentecost* - the 'Feast of Firstfruits'. The festival season was concluded in autumn by *Trumpets, Atonement, Tabernacles* (also seven days) - followed immediately by an eighth '*closing day*'.

Let's focus for a moment on the 'Feast of Tabernacles.

The Feast of Tabernacles is complete in *seven* days (Leviticus 23:34). It is symbolic of mankind's sojourn as physical beings since Adam, and includes the one thousand year reign (the '*millennium*' - see sidebar) of Jesus the Messiah as King of kings, the subsequent release of Satan following his restraint during the reign of Messiah, the 'general resurrection', and the time of the 'second death' (Revelation 20).

The final day, the seventh, of the festival - called in John's Gospel (*ch* 7:37) the *Last Great Day* and '*the Great Day of the Feast*' - refers to this time of the general resurrection at the end of the millennium. It is celebrated within Judaism as *Hoshannah Rabbah*, the Great Hosannah ('Save us'). Writes Alfred Edersheim: "It points forward to that great yet unfulfilled hope of the church - the ingathering of Earth's nations to the Christ". [Our article **When Someone Dies** gives more detail on this. Request a free copy.]

During the Festival of Tabernacles the Israelites - and those Gentiles

Festival Sacrifices

During the Festival of Tabernacles seventy bullocks were sacrificed, beginning with thirteen on Day 1 and reducing daily to seven on Day 7. Traditionally this has reference to mankind's seventy nations as listed in Genesis 10. On the *Closing Day*, as a marked change, *one* bullock only was sacrificed (Numbers 29:13-40)

who wished to worship the LORD - dwelled in 'booths', temporary dwellings made from branches. Clear symbolism of man's frail and temporary life span (Psalm 90:10, II Chronicles 7:9)! On this 'Last Great Day' of the festival - *ie* the seventh day of the Festival - these temporary structures were dismantled (Leviticus 23:40-42). A new era was about to begin, symbolized by 'the eighth day'!

End Game

It is the symbolism of this eighth day that focuses on *eternity* - God's 'end game'.

The number 'eight' - mentioned eighty times in Scripture - is associated with new beginnings, a new order. Examples are the 'eighth day' - the first day of a new week. Jesus following his resurrection at the beginning of the eighth day, Sunday, presented himself before the Father on that day in his new spirit body. Eight persons survived the Great Flood to enter the new world. God's people were covenanted through circumcision on the eighth day of life. Even in physics - for the eighth note on a musical scale is the same as the first note, *etc.*

Within Judaism, this eighth day - following the seven days of Tabernacles - is 'a festival in itself'. It is a time of exuberant jubilation - a veritable marriage feast. "...it is this day which above all expresses the joy of the Jewish religion" (*Teach Yourself Judaism* p.188).

This eighth day is called 'a day of restraint' (*KJV* margin), but known as the 'closing day' (see *LXX*). It represents the culmination of God's plan for man. We begin, formed from earth's elements in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:26). as 'clay models' of what God wants us to become.

The Psalmist wrote: "*What is man*

The Millennium

The 'one thousand year' reign of the Messiah (*ie* Jesus) is represented by the seventh day of a prophetic week. Mankind has had six 'days' of testing self-rule - our performance demonstrating that we can't successfully rule ourselves for very long. Each of these 'days' lasts a notional thousand years. The Millennium - presided over by the Prince of Peace, Jesus - is represented by the weekly 'rest day', the seventh-day Sabbath

that you are mindful of him, or the son of man that you take care of him. You made him a little lower than the angels. You have crowned him with glory and honour and set him over the work of your hands. You have put all things in subjection under his feet (Psalm 8:4-6).

However, it doesn't look that way right now! So the writer of Hebrews comments on this passage:

We are '*to be brought to glory*'! That's God's end-game [*cont'd* p.9

For that He [the Lord] put all in subjection under him [ie mankind] He left nothing that is not put under him. But now do we not yet see all things put under him. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death,, crowned with glory and honour that he by the grace of God may taste death for everyone. For it was fitting for him for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings" (Hebrews 2:6-10). Paul adds: "*The Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are the 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* (Romans 8:16-17)

**You have seen the bumper stickers.
Is Jesus *your* Lord?**

So, if Jesus Christ is your Lord - how does that affect your behaviour? *Not just*, 'how does it affect your belief'. Belief is, of course, essential. To be saved you must believe. That is, trust God, trust Jesus Christ, believe Jesus is 'the way, the truth, the life', face up to your sin and your sinful nature. Many of those who heard Jesus in the flesh were believers, but not all became disciples never mind baptized members of the Body of Christ.

There's not much point in 'belief' if there isn't, first, a belief in the existence of God. In Hebrews we're told: "He that comes to God must believe that He is....". James, the brother of Jesus, addressed this in his letter preserved in our New Testament (*ch 2:19*): "*Do you believe there is one God? Very well. The demons believe, too, and they shudder*". So a certain fear of God is appropriate.

Jesus addressed God as 'Abba'. That's the intimate term used by a child of his father. And all those in whom is God's Spirit have that same relationship. There is, however, a tendency to flippancy toward God in some parts of modern Christianity. Too buddy-buddy. Largely ignored is His awesome majesty, glory and power - attributes now shared by His Son Jesus. Together they were the architects and builders of the vastness of our universe, created out of nothing. We ought to fear, to respect Him. If, therefore, we profess '*Jesus is LORD*' it's vital that we are ready to do as he says - to obey him.

You may recall the words of Jesus: "*Not everyone who says to me 'Lord, Lord' shall enter the Kingdom of Heaven*" Yet in Christian circles we hear it all the time. He continued: "*Many will say to me in that day 'Lord, Lord have we not prophesied in your name, cast out demons in your name and done many wonders*

i n y o u r name?'" (Matthew 7:21-23). There are hundreds - thousands - of sincere Christian workers worldwide who make those or similar claims. Note that they are claiming success in such enterprises. Yet some, at least, Jesus disowns.

On what grounds does Jesus disown these busy workers? He continues: "*And then I will declare to them 'I never knew you. Depart from me you who practice lawlessness'"* (v.23). Now there's a surprise, for isn't God's Law 'done away'? Yet in his discourse in Matthew 5 - 7 Jesus states: "*Do not think that I am come to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfil. For assuredly I say to you, Till heaven and earth pass away not one jot or tittle will pass from the Law till all is fulfilled*" (*ch 5:17-18*). He proceeds with some examples of what he means. *Murder* is still sin. So too is *adultery*. And *covetousness*. (Aren't those part of the derided Ten Commandments?) And not only such acts but the thinking that leads to them. Sadly, lawlessness - perhaps not murder, but adultery and covetousness - are rare among those who call Jesus 'Lord'!

Jesus was here addressing his disciples and 'a multitude' who joined them. All grew up with the Scriptures. He had no need to remind them of those commandments - the first four - that define God. They knew there was one God. Graven images, idols, were an abomination to Him. They would not 'take God's name in vain'. (That is, ascribe to God any practice He does not approve.) Nor would they desecrate the seventh-day Sabbath. These four commands were the very foundation and superstructure for their belief. In other words Jesus had no need to emphasize this, the very essence of God's Law, to his hearers.

Those who listened to Jesus knew all

Is Jesus *Your* Lord?

this in the letter, though surprised by the twist he put on the Law.. But, just like so much of Christendom, their practice lagged far behind. 'Lord' may have been on their lips - but they were not headed for the Kingdom of God. *Not until they did as he commanded*.

Tradition v. Scripture

You may not personally harbour hatred or anger or lust. You may not be a covetous shopaholic. But could you, have you, substituted human tradition for divine revelation?

Traditions are fine - but only as long as they are firmly embedded in the teachings of Jesus and the apostles as recorded in the Scriptures. Jude - he was a brother of Jesus and James - in his general letter to first-century Christians states: "*I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints*" (v.3). Notice - the faith, the unique body of distinguishing teaching - was given '*once for all*'.

In other words, any part of the Christian faith that you profess must not conflict with this body of teaching, the 'gold standard' of belief.

So, examine your beliefs. Can you find them in Scripture? How about this almost universal notion - and a false notion - of the '*immortal soul*'? Much modern Christian teaching hangs on this error: heaven, hell, prayers to and for the dead, All Souls, contact with the dead through mediums.

Then there is *how you worship*. Is that reflected in Scripture? From man's beginning God, who doesn't change on fundamentals, has revealed how He is to be worshiped. All through history *[cont'd p.8*

DELIGHT IN THE SABBATH

The weekly Sabbath is, for Christians, a day in which to delight in God's presence

“Sabbath rest” is a concept far removed from the hurly-burly of modern life. The day - Saturday - is, for most, consumed with a round of strenuous (or couch-potato) leisure activity or shopping or visiting - leaving no time for recovery from the weekly grind. Besides, the notion of a day set apart for religious purpose is simply old hat.

But what if you consider Sabbath observance important to your Christian walk? Is it a day to hibernate in gloomy solitude? A day crammed with restriction? What is a Sabbath rest?

The manner of observance of a weekly “holy day” varies from, Bible in hand, staying in bed all day - through to minor adjustments to the normal daily routine. What is a godly balance?

Brief History of Time

Health experts praise the benefits of a weekly time of rest. It's approximately twenty-four hours of physical recuperation. And certainly Sabbath observance provides that - a charging of our depleted batteries.

But there's more to it. For, apart from the physical benefit, Sabbath has no eternal value unless we are in a personal relationship with the Lord of the Sabbath.

Jesus Christ is that Lord: *“The Son of man is also Lord of the Sabbath”* (Luke 6:5). As the Father's representative and executive it was he who was instrumental in creating the material universe and the creation of time itself. Writing of Jesus, the apostle Paul told the Colossian Chris-

tians: *“...by him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible...and he is before all things and by him all things consist”*.

A Day of Joy

Certainly such a memorial must encourage a joyful response. Yet many believers dread the approach of the Day! It's traditionally dourly viewed as merely a time of boring inactivity punctuated by a church visit followed by the long-awaited end of the day. Others will invest the day with an endless round of “don't's” to the extent of suppressing the joy of Sabbath.

Whatever way observed it is a personal matter between each of us and our Creator. What guidance has He given us in the Scriptures as to its observance?

Sabbath is a day of God's appointment - a day He has set aside to meet with His people. It will be useful to note what God has said about this day. To Moses He said: *“...the seventh day is a sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation (Heb miqra)”* (Leviticus 23:3). That is, a separated day for assembling in His presence. And as the Almighty Creator He determines the time and the day! He tells us, too, the attitude we ought to have on Sabbath.

Following their seventy years of serfdom in Babylon (imposed by God for Sabbath neglect!) the Jews returned chastened to the land of Israel. The religious Jews protected the Sabbath by numerous regulations (included in their Oral Law), many of which went contrary to the divine intent of Sabbath observance. Joy was largely emptied from this special Day!

God set the Sabbath aside for rest: *“...in it you shall do no work”* (Exodus 20:10). To fulfill this, the Pharisees minutely defined “work”.

It was forbidden by them to pluck a head of grain, for example (Matthew 12:1ff) - that's harvesting. But it was permitted on the Sabbath to circumcise, which is work for someone (John 7:22). Permitted also to attend to distressed animals (Luke 13:15, 14:5) - a logical exception. For the Pharisees the day of joy had become a burdensome ball and chain - eased only by the addition of humanly-devised circumventions.

Made For Man

By contrast, how does the Creator of the Sabbath expect us to spend this precious twenty-four hours? Through the prophet Isaiah God makes it crystal clear: *“If you refrain from doing your own business on the Sabbath, on my sacred day, and hold the Sabbath a delight, and the Eternal's sacred day [the true "Lord's Day"!] an honour, not following your own wonted round, not doing business and not talking idly, then you shall have delight in the Eternal's favour”* (ch 58:13-14, Moffatt).

God wants us to enjoy His Day!

Jesus picked up on the same theme. He saw no conflict when the disciples plucked some grain on the Sabbath. (This wasn't theft but was permitted in the Law, though the Pharisees said ‘not on the Sabbath’! That would be work.) He accepted the Pharisees right to circumcise and to attend to the needs of livestock. In essence, Jesus made it clear that “the Sabbath was made [created] for man” - *ie*, for our benefit (Mark 2:27). He cited the fact that the divine Law permitted the priestly work to proceed on the Sabbath. He cites also the example of the starving David and his men. [NB This was a one-off emergency situation!] They ate the shewbread - **[cont'd p.9**

CAST OUT *FEAR*

Here's a way to enhance your ability to 'preach the Gospel'

Fear can be healthy - a response to a real threat. For most of us, however, our fear is of a threat that isn't real but merely perceived. Because your neighbour loses his job you imagine suffering the same. Or you may have a fear of the future - when you can't know what that holds for you personally in health, in security *etc.*

Fear paralyses. It can stop you taking simple steps to get out of debt, for example. Fear can hinder our entering a personal relationship. Or because of past experience we isolate ourselves for protection.

'Once Bitten...'

Fear can, too, freeze your spiritual relationships. Bad experience growing up can affect your view of God - in reality a loving Father who is totally dedicated to serving us. And *church*. Many Christians have been disillusioned by past association with a church in which they had felt secure - only to discover in it corruption both material and spiritual.

Naturally, then, fear - 'once bitten twice shy' - is a wedge that cuts off from the fellowship that is so essential to our spiritual well-being. Some 'time out' may of course be appropriate - a time to reassess our priorities, adjust our beliefs, recover our balance.

But Christianity is not just about me or about you. If truly converted, having received the precious gift of God's Spirit, *we are joined into a Body*. As such we have been given - by Jesus Christ - specific spiritual gifts that some local assembly desperately needs. By our isolation - or wanderlust! - that assembly suffers. Often through irrational fear we hinder the work of Jesus Christ. For

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.

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.

unsigned articles are by the Editor

each of us is needed for our talents and spiritual gifts.

Not only so, for we each also need other brethren. My absence from an available fellowship stunts my opportunity to be served, to be guided, to be encouraged by other brethren. And too often our absence stems from *fear*. Fear of 'being hurt again'. Fear of rejection - by brethren!.

There's no guarantee, though, that the assembly you might associate with is one hundred percent spiritual. That didn't even happen in apostolic times. The perfect assembly doesn't exist - or if it did my joining it would spoil that record!

The *Churches of God Outreach Ministries* (CGOM) is an association of independent local assemblies. Each assembly is self-governing - no Orwellian 'big brother' overseeing it. For the most part, we meet in small groups for worship, fellowship, and instruction by trusted 'shepherds' selected and accepted by the local brethren. Because of our structure the opportunity for negative behaviour is minimized.

Start-up

In apostolic times (and why not today?) a fellowship would often grow up around one individual Christian who witnessed locally to his faith. They met in homes and co-operated with other similar like-minded assemblies.

CGOM and the *Churches of God, UK* are available to support any such start-up fellowship with our many publications and out of our forty plus years experience in the church of God. There is no interference in the affairs of any fellowship or of any individual! □

Should you wish to associate with CGOM, feel free to contact us at any of our addresses - by mail, by phone or by e-mail

The Mystery of Human Sexuality

receive the full package of benefits available to married couples.

It's all in the genes. No, it is a lifestyle choice. Who's right?

How we live out our sexual lives increasingly preoccupies not just the media but also the armed forces, governments - and the church. Once upon a time an individual's sexstyle was personal. And if "aberrant" was swept into the closet.

Not any more. A debate now rages within the worldwide Anglican communion as to whether it is appropriate to appoint homosexual priests to the office of Bishop. A homosexual priest was recently approved for Bishop in New Hampshire. The Australian Uniting Church have voted to permit the ordination of practicing homosexuals.

We humans are intensely sexual - our survival depends on it! Whatever comparative statistical analysis may say about 'then and now', sex and all its beauty and all its abuse is now paraded in bold headlines.

Sexual Decay

A century ago statistics on marriage and divorce were not headline news. Or the level of sexually transmitted disease. Or the number of child abductions, cases of child abuse, rape, pornography. Such are now flaunted as if sex were a new discovery. Television is barely watchable, eyes are averted at the news-stands, certain newspapers avoided - at least by so-called 'moral prudes'. And hopefully by those who wish to follow the precepts of Jesus Christ.

The openness, however, certainly hasn't stemmed the tide of what used to be termed immorality and its sick-

ening consequences. Britain, according to a Parliamentary Committee, is in the middle of a 'sexual health crisis'. Rates of gonorrhoea and chlamydia have doubled in six years, syphilis has soared almost 500%. Over a million are being treated by sexual disease clinics. 'Sex' pervades our culture. What was once 'evil' is now 'good', and 'darkness' has become 'light' - just as the Old Testament prophets predicted (Isaiah 5:20).

Because of the abuse of human sexuality, sexually transmitted disease is almost epidemic, resulting in snowballing widespread infertility. (Health professionals firmly link much infertility with promiscuity - especially in the teen years.) AIDS is destroying millions worldwide, as is

the vile practice of abortion. Immature kids ignore or don't realize that sex leads to unwanted pregnancy with consequent burdens on themselves, families and society. And, encouraged by government and the media, the building block of a stable society, marriage, is in process of decay.

Sexual faithfulness excludes much heart-break. Infertility often results from 'sleeping around', especially among children - one in seven underage girls are infected with chlamydia ('the silent disease'). A new case every ten minutes! Disregard of this divine principle has serious consequences. Yet government agencies actively promote teen 'sexperimentation'.

Yet 'alternative lifestyles' are promoted as of equal value. The British Government has recently put forward a consultation paper proposing homosexual and lesbian liaisons should

Age-old Problem

Undoubtedly sexual dysfunction has plagued mankind since we were evicted from Paradise. There always was violent rape, infants were incinerated (not in a hospital as today, but inside an idol as a burnt offering), adultery, fornication, homosexuality. It was all there.

But it was in Eden that the guidelines for human sexuality were first set before mankind. By our Creator. And perfectly tailored to the beings He had just created to perfection. Any deviation from the divine guidelines for human sexuality will inevitably end in tears! We function best when we stick to those ground rules. Imagine a world where infidelity is unknown: no adultery or 'shacking up' or promiscuity. And no foul sexual disease, no divorce (or divorce lawyers), no pornography, no paedophiles.

Principles of Life

In respect of our sexuality God revealed vital fundamental principles, based on a single male-female partnership committed for life.

A man and a woman are to stay in partnership for life. Think of the grief avoided by this act of mutual self-discipline. Properly tended, a marriage can last until death, and can be joyous.

But the widespread notion that marriage is just a temporary convenience leads to easy divorce with consequent 'serial marriage'.

In homosexual relationships, however, 'monogamy' is rare. While a few such long-term partnerships exist, yet over forty percent of homosexual men have as many as five hundred partners during their - shortened - lifespan.

Request

*Spend A Lifetime - Together
Marriage - just a piece of paper?*

Covenant-bound couples were created to produce offspring. God issued the self-limiting instruction: *'Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth'*. The trauma and expense endured by naturally infertile married couples witnesses to this human desire to procreate. (Jesus recognized, of course, that some few individuals would correctly choose to remain single and celibate.) Same-sex liaisons no matter how loving or long-lasting frustrate this divine instruction. If homosexuality were universal - and an estimated one percent only of mankind is homosexual - it would end the human race in a generation.

Divine Image

Only heterosexual relationships align with the divine plan for mankind. Our physical time-limited human condition is merely the 'clay model' which the Creator is shaping into His divine image - individuals who will live forever as a part of the divine Family. God reveals Himself as 'Father'. Jesus is His first-born Son. Men and women can become His children, brothers and sisters of Jesus and joint-heirs with him of the created universe.

God, in other words, is a Family. This relationship is reflected in His church, which is 'the Bride of Christ' (Ephesians 5:25-32). We were created 'male and female' - perfectly designed only for a heterosexual relationship. The divine instruction was that each pair is to 'cleave to one another', partners - male and female - contributing to a unified whole, and neither complete without the other.

Battling Bishops

Debate over homosexuality has raged within the Anglican community worldwide for over a decade. A 1991 confusing statement made a distinction between homosexual practice in the general church populace and among the 'clergy'. It was deemed okay for the former, wrong

for the latter. A line was drawn: homosexuality is acceptable but its practice is sin - if you are a bishop.

Sparked by the proposed appointment of an openly homosexual priest as a bishop, big clerical guns have been placed in battle order to defend both abstinence (evangelicals) and practice (the 'liberal wing' of the church). Schism has been threatened, especially from overseas bishops (Nigeria, West Indies, Indian Ocean). Both claim Biblical authority for their position! A surface unity evolved only when the homosexual candidate for Bishop withdrew.

mankind is perfectly designed only for a heterosexual relationship The House of Bishops in the United States have now 'set the cat among the pigeons' by appointing an active homosexual priest as Bishop of New Hampshire. As of writing, the prospect of schism hovers.

But Is It Sin?

But however Paul's words (Romans 1:26-32) are interpreted by those who seek solace in an interpretation contrary to their face value, there can be no doubt about the original divine instruction in the Old Testament. Said God: *"When a man lies with a male as with a woman, both have committed something perverse; they will certainly be put to death"* (Leviticus 20:13). As Paul tells us: *"The wages of sin is death"*.

Remember - the only 'Bible' known to Paul and the first Christians was what we know as the *Old Testament*. The *New Testament* was yet to be written.

Indeed the foul diseases and curtailed lifespan (up to twenty years below average) of practicing homosexuals bears witness to the destructive perverseness of the practice.

Hence the apostle Paul's urgent

warnings that Christians must avoid such relationships - for their eternal salvation is at stake (I Corinthians 6:9 *KJV*).

Male and female homosexuality is *'contrary to nature'*, Paul asserts (Romans 1:26) and an *'error'* (v.27). It is *not* in our genetic inheritance, in other words, but is an acquired mindset. It is a thought pattern that becomes fixed habit, spilling over into practice. It is - like adultery - learned behaviour and equally sinful. Says James: *"Each person is tempted when he is drawn away and enticed by his own lusts. Then, when the passion has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and sin when it reaches maturity produces death"* (ch 1:13-15).

Homosexuality is, in the divine perspective, *sinful*. It is *not* to be contrasted with heterosexual behaviour but with defects in the latter - as, for example paedophilia, bestiality, narcissism, transvestism or promiscuity in and out of marriage. All are perversions of divinely intended sexual behaviour. There may be some individual predisposition to these - but they have to be conquered. And there is victory through the power of God's Spirit.

But that is why Jesus Christ came, that our sin, whether it is envy or greed or adultery or promiscuity - or homosexuality - can be repented of and forgiven through the love that God has for us - expressed in the awesome sacrifice of His Son.

With the indwelling Spirit of God to strengthen us, a new pattern of behaviour can take hold. Wrote the apostle John: *"If we confess our sins he is so faithful and just as to forgive us our sins - and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness"* (I John 1:8-10). There is hope for *all* sinners!

All of us have character defects. In general, homosexuals have since

childhood unfulfilled emotional needs, and life's circumstances may for some have shaped an irrational detachment from and distaste for the opposite sex. Jesus addressed in principle the heart of the issue of human sexuality: even harbouring *the thought* of adultery is sinful, he says Matthew 5:27-30). That applies, too, to homosexuality and all other human frailty.

Homosexual thought and practice can be - and has been - overcome. As with all sin, it can be forsaken and forgiven. There is hope.

Hope!

To enter that Family relationship with God is a matter of choice. God calls on all of mankind to choose the way of life He has revealed. It's time to resolve mankind's sexual enigma by a return to the basic principles of human relationships which are the foundation for life - for now, and for the endless ages of eternity.

But God requires holiness of life. Wrote the apostle Paul: *"Be not misled; neither profligates, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor partakers in homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the avaricious, nor drunkards, nor slanderers, nor robbers shall inherit God's Kingdom"* (I Corinthians 6:9-10).

The apostle doesn't stop there. He continues: *"And some of you were just that [including, he says, homosexuals]; but you were washed and you were made holy and you were made righteous by the power of the Lord Jesus [cont'd p.9 Christ and by the Spirit of our God" (v.11).*

All sin can - upon repentance - be forgiven through Jesus Christ. To make sense of this life and to live forever *everyone* must forsake what God says is sinful, and turn to what is pure and holy .

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Jesus - Lord?...cont'd

that pattern remains unchanged. Certainly a search of the New Testament makes it clear the first Christians followed it.

From the Beginning

Take, for example, the weekly day for worship. You probably think that's Sunday, the first day of the week. The Creator explained the Sabbath to Adam. It was the very first full day of his existence - the *seventh* day of the week. Clearly a matter of the spirit, for as yet he had done no work!

The seventh-day Sabbath was - with some distortions - widely observed by ancient civilisations. Around 1500BC God told the Israelites: *"Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy [ie separate, special]"* . So holy, so special to Him, indeed, that deliberate flouting of it merited the death penalty.

Fast forward to the eighth century before Christ. Sabbath observance by the people of Israel had become lax and near extinction. It was important to God that His people maintain Sabbath observance and to impress its importance on them He corrected them. He exiled Israel from their - God's - land. And the reason: *"...to fulfil the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah,, until the land had enjoyed her Sabbaths, for as long as she lay desolate she kept Sabbath"* (II Chronicles 36:21).

The northern ten nations (largely, today's Anglo-Saxon nations) have never yet returned to their God-given territory, while Judah was exiled from it for seventy years. On their release the Jews - even until Jesus' day - were careful not to tread on the holy day, and protectively hedged it around with numerous restrictive practices.

Identity Sign

Clearly the seventh day Sabbath is important to God. Why? Here's what God told Ezekiel: *"Moreover, I also gave them my Sabbaths [including all the annual holy days] to be a sign between them and me that they might know that I am the Eternal who sanctifies them"* (ch 20:12). God, in other words, is identified by His Sabbaths. And He doesn't change that for non-Israelites!

To observe Friday or Tuesday or Sunday - any day other than the seventh-day - then, is an aspect of idolatry. So, too, for those observances - Christmas, Easter, All Souls, Ramadan *etc* - substituted for God's annual holy days, as outlined in Leviticus 23.

Notice: *"...they rejected his statutes and his covenant [the Sabbath was part of that] that he had made with their fathers and his testimonies which he had testified against them; they followed idols, became idolaters...so they*

the God we worship is identified by the Sabbaths and festival days He has revealed to mankind

left all the commandments of the LORD their God " (II Kings 17:15-16).

You can see why Jesus, the apostles and the first Christians were careful to observe the seventh-day Sabbath and God's holy days! Indeed, the writers of the New Testament frequently echo Paul's words: *"Flee from idolatry"* (I Corinthians 10:14).

So, if you believe '*Jesus is LORD*' - do you follow church tradition - or do you bow before God's clearly revealed will

SABBATH... cont'd

forbidden to all but the priests. Jesus refers here to the Jewish oral tradition (based on Leviticus 24:8) that the loaves were baked on the Sabbath, and that it was on this day David ate it.

From this incident, Jesus draws the conclusion that "the son of man is lord of the Sabbath" (Mark 2:28). Sabbath is our servant - for physical re-creation, and above all to provide spiritual nourishment through our contact with its Creator. In a special sense, Jesus Christ is with each of his brethren on that appointed day.

Clear The Decks

Adam was created in the dying hours of the sixth day, and although he didn't need a physical rest, he stepped right into joyful Sabbath communion with his Creator. That's the fundamental purpose of Sabbath.

Sabbath, then, is indeed a time for physical rest. It's a day for joyful celebration. It's a day to spend extra time with the Saviour in prayer and in perusing God's Word. It's a time for fellowship, where possible, with brethren. It's even a time, following the example of Jesus, to "stroll through the corn-field". And to enjoy these benefits to the full we should "clear the decks" by preparing for it on the day before.

The vast majority of mankind, of course, treads all over God's holy day without a thought for their Creator. They will work in restaurants and power stations. They will serve in shops and deliver the milk and the newspapers. The Sabbath means nothing to them. In a sense that doesn't matter so long as they don't have a personal relationship with their Creator and Saviour. Are we not glad we can on the Sabbath switch on the power for heat and light and a cuppa! And if away from home can benefit from the services of transport and restaurants and service

stations? That we can rest assured the emergency services are at the other end of the 'phone link?

Balanced Choice

Wise King Solomon made a helpful statement which applies well to our keeping of the Sabbath. He wrote: "*Do not be overly righteous, nor overly wise. Why should you destroy yourself [ie be desolate, miserable]?"* (Ecclesiastes 7:16). As with life in general, our observance of the Sabbath is a matter of balanced choice. Each Christian must decide how he or she can in their situation best fulfill their weekly appointment with their Creator - in the liberated spirit of the example of Jesus.

The Colossian Christians had a thing about how to observe the weekly and annual Sabbaths. They had taken on board the then prevalent austere practices. Paul told them to lighten up! He wrote: "*So let no one judge you in food or in drink or regarding a festival or new moon or sabbaths... Therefore if you died, with Christ, from the basic principles of the world why as living in the world do you subject yourselves to regulations - 'do not touch, do not taste, do not handle' - which all concern things which perish with the using, according to the commandments and doctrines of men? These indeed have an*

appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh" (ch 2:16-23).

The apostle continues by focusing their minds (ch 3) on the important issue - through the risen Christ conquering our base human nature. It's largely through our Sabbath contact with the Saviour that we can so overcome!

Sabbath, then, is a day for the people of God to rejoice before Him, and a day in which to delight □

The Biblical day for observing the Sabbath is explained in our free article
The Day to Remember

END GAME...cont'd

for mankind. He gives us opportunity - and we must each one of us grasp it personally - to be transformed from dirt to glory. It is summed up by Hannah (I Samuel 2:8) "*He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the beggar from the ash heap, to set them among princes and make them inherit the throne of glory"*.

Interestingly, the context of her prayer was an annual sacrifice - likely, the autumn festival (ch 1:7).

Each of the 'holy days' God has revealed are an important guide to the divine plan for mankind - for now and for eternity. Not least is this closing day of the festival year, pointing us to the culmination of His magnificent plan. □

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