

**NEW**

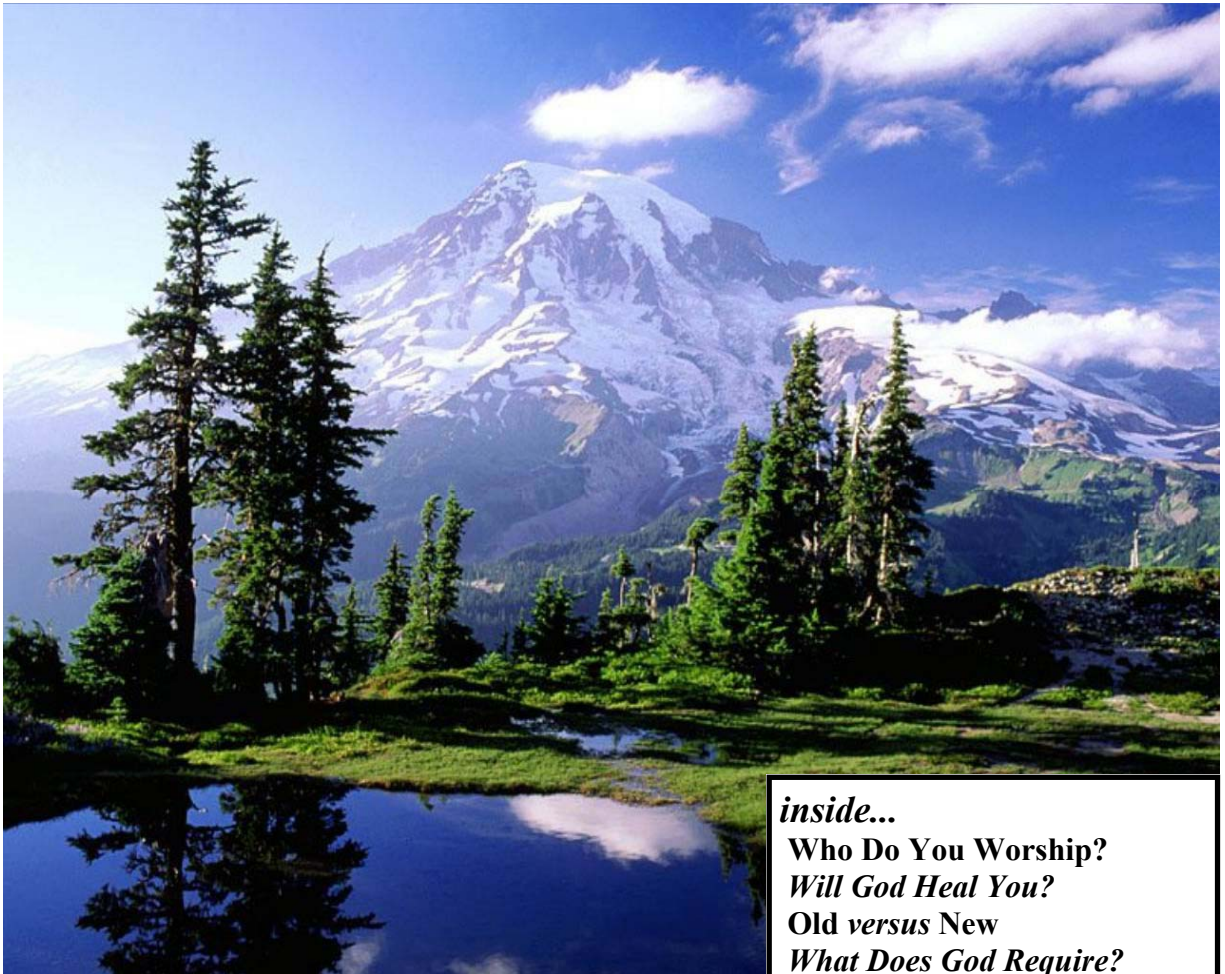
# **Horizons**

*Vol 8 No 1*

*January/February 2004*

*addressing the important issues for today and tomorrow*

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*inside...*

**Who Do You Worship?**

**Will God Heal You?**

**Old versus New**

**What Does God Require?**

**The Long Sleep**

**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 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**

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# new **Horizons**

Issue No 43

January/February 2004

## **The world is full of 'gods'. Which do you worship? And does it matter?**

'There are many roads to God' is a common enough idea. It underpins the various attempts not only to bring together all Christian churches - the 'Ecumenical Movement' - but also inter-faith dialogue. At the same time, all the major religions actively promote their vision of 'god'. Islam has *Allah*. Christians have the *Trinity*. Judaism holds to the God of the Torah. The major gods of Hinduism are *Shiva*, *Rama*, *Krishna*.

Yet the apostle Paul wrote, "We know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God but one. For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as there are many gods and many lords), yet for us there is one God, the Father" (I Corinthians 8:4-6). Just as today, there were in his time multitudes of 'idols' - false gods. Athens, for example, was 'given over to idols'. Christians, then, are obliged to reject the notion that we can pick and choose the god we worship without consequence: 'There is no other God but one'. But how can we identify that one God?

Every major religion is a patchwork of often conflicting interpretations of their underlying faith. *Islam* has its factions - often in mortal combat. *Judaism*, too, has its diversity. *Hinduism* is more an individually interpreted philosophy built around a kaleidoscope of festivals, and gods galore. And the variety of *Christian* belief is notorious. Even the appar-

ent unity of the Church of Rome is superficial.

### **Tangled Web**

Even in its early years - in New Testament times - Christianity had become a tangled web of conflicting doctrine. The apostles constantly battled an influx of perverse teachings and self-serving deceptive practice. But their bottom line was that there was a 'faith once for all delivered to the saints'. All else was a step farther away from 'the truth of the Gospel'. Two thousand years, near enough, of human thought have shunted that original truth into a theological graveyard. The faith once delivered is now widely viewed as heresy! The 'new Christianity' is alien to that portrayed in the Scriptures.

It is generally believed that the three great 'monotheistic' religions accept the same God. Yet that's not so! *Judaism*, certainly, derives from the Old Testament - as does Christianity. But it, too, has strayed from the *Torah*, having added doctrines and practices not in the Scriptures. Today's Judaism would barely be recognized by a resurrected Moses! Then there's *Islam*. Its theologians claim doctrinal descent from Abraham. In reality it is firmly rooted in an ancient moon cult. Nothing to do with the true God of the Old Testament.

At what point, then, does this 'new Christianity' become a *different religion*?

### **Diversity**

Undoubtedly, there's room for some diversity of teaching - especially now. Aspects of the Bible's teaching are open to some interpretation. We are twenty centuries removed from its culture, from its language, from its idiom. Yet its foundation teachings are 'plain as a pikestaff'. Insidiously over the centuries theologians have absorbed - and promoted - concepts totally foreign to the Scriptures, and derived from idolatry. These false teachings have all but strangled the pure religion of the Bible. Judge for yourself whether or not the 'new Christianity' has tipped over into a new religion. [You are invited to request the free article *Babylon - Fountain of Error* for a bird's eye view of this idolatry.]

Each religion has teachings that distinguish it from another. Perhaps the most obvious is the form of worship. You would not, for example, mistake Islam for Judaism or for the new Christianity. Muslims worship on Friday, Jews on Saturday, Christians on Sunday. And the rites performed on those weekly days of worship are obviously different. Each, too, has its own annual celebrations. Other visible differences - especially among the devout - are their attire or their daily observances. All such practices emphasize that each is a different religion - vigorously defended and often fought over to the death.

But probe further and we find surprising similarities.

### **More of the Same**

Each has its version of 'heaven and hell' - not markedly different from one another. The foundation for these

teachings is the age-old - but utterly false - notion that man has an 'immortal soul'. Death is not the end, but the beginning of eternity.

For Islamic martyrs this may be in 'paradise'. For new Christians it means heaven - or hell if you fail to measure up to divine standards. Judaism holds the conflicting doctrines of resurrection and the soul's immortality - with the 'disembodied bliss of the soul as the ultimate state to which the righteous will attain'. The Roman church - the largest new Christian denomination - encourages prayer to and for the 'souls of the departed'. After death the faithful are admitted to heaven, perhaps after a suitable purging of venal sin in Purgatory. Few of Protestant persuasion do not believe in 'heaven or hell'. The notion of an immortal soul is virtually universal. It is the original lie, subtly spoken by Satan: "*You will not surely die*" (Genesis 3:4).

### Bible Truth

Whatever you may think of the Bible, even a superficial reading sets the religion of Jesus apart from all other faiths. Remember that according to the Scriptures God does not change in His fundamentals. Consider the following:

- divinely revealed worship pinpoints the *seventh* day of the week - Saturday - as His weekly day of worship. Not Friday, not Sunday. The Sabbath, not Sunday, was observed by the New Testament church
- the Bible gives precise guidance as to when Christians meet for *annual* festivals: Leviticus 23 outlines the seven divinely-inspired annual festivals. There's evidence that these, based as they are on the harvest seasons, were observed from the beginning of human history. There is

also clear evidence that they were observed by Jesus, the apostles and by the early church. There is no instruction to observe Easter, Christmas, saints days *etc* - imports from idolatry. Indeed these are treated negatively in the Scriptures

there is no hint in the Scriptures of the concept of an 'immortal soul' except to brand it as a Satanic deception - a lie. The twisted doctrines of *heaven* and a *fiery hell* derive from this false notion. So, too, prayers to - and for - the dead, the assumption to heaven of Mary the mother of Jesus, the idea of purgatory, all contact with 'the other side' through mediums *etc*

the notion that everyone who isn't 'born again' will burn for eternity in hell-fire is negated by the sane Biblical teachings

the Christian Bible finds no room for the perception of God as a 'trinity' - a belief often considered as an identifying sign of a Christian, and one which derives from non-Biblical religions

So - a yawning chasm of differences. They place modern Christianity alongside all other non-Biblical faiths.

However, there is no doubt that the ethical teachings of the Bible have, through Christian influence, had a civilising effect on nations, on religions and on individuals. '*My Word*', says God, '*will not return to me void, but shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it*' (Isaiah 55:11). Christian missions have sent the Scriptures winging to nearly every corner of the world.

### The Great Deception

But there are also a mountain of similarities which brand the 'new Christianity' as part of Satan's great deception. From the earliest days of Christianity dark forces were at work to distort the true Gospel. The apostle Paul - and others - wrote about it: "*I marvel that you are turning away so soon from him who called you in the grace of Christ to a different gospel*" (Galatians 1:6). But it's not *obviously* different, he says: "*...which is not another*" (v.7). Twice he states that whoever preaches any deviation from the message Paul taught was '*accursed*' (vv.8, 9). It is perverted (v.7). And to the Corinthians he writes: "*If he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted - you may well put up with it...*" (II Corinthians 11:4). Another Gospel. Another Jesus. Another spirit.

Jesus, according to the apostle John (John 1:9), is '*the true Light that gives light to every man that comes into the world*'. These false apostles - preachers - bring a false Gospel. They use 'Christian' terms: Jesus, Spirit, Gospel, repentance, baptism, light. It is, in other words, a subtle deception. Paul again: "*For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works*" (II Corinthians 11:13-15).

It's only by an open-minded, prayerful and diligent study of the Scriptures that we can determine which God we worship. Accept the teachings of these false apostles and you may share their destiny. □

**Like everyone else, Christians are subject to illness, suffering, death. Need it be so?**

## WILL GOD HEAL YOU?

For most of mankind, there's one way to deal with illness. You go to the 'medicine man'. In most nations today that means a medical doctor who can call upon a range of medical and surgical specialists, impressive technology and an endless range of pharmaceutical products. Or you may choose from a variety of alternative treatments: herbal medicines, acupuncture, homeopathy etc. And indeed the line between them all is being increasingly blurred as doctors refer patients for these alternatives.

Medical practice, however, has its limitations. If you don't have an adequate health service or it simply is non-existent - where do you turn? Or what if the medical profession runs out of solutions?

Religion often promises relief. The answer for many may lie in the local voodoo practice or the 'witch-doctor' - in fact, often an expert in herbal medicine though embedded in a confusion of religious ceremony and hocus-pocus. In the West it may be the use of mystical crystals or healing pyramids.

Most Christians, too, will first turn to modern medicine when physical ailments strike. But many 'turn to God alone' for healing. They see in the Christian Scriptures that God is revealed as *Jahveh-Ropha* - God the Healer. They read that 'by *Jesus' stripes we are healed*'. Healing crusades attended by, in some nations, literally millions hold the promise of the restoration of sight, a cure for cancer, the ability to walk again - even restoration to life. Famous names like Benny Hinn or Reinhard Bonnke minister in this way to enthusiastic multitudes around the world.

### Biblical Healing

The ministry of the first Christian apostles was marked by such miraculous healings. The blind saw, the lame walked, the dead were raised. God did heal, and mightily. When a man lame from birth walked into the presence of the religious leadership there was no doubt it was authentic (Acts 3, 4:14). Unlike the efforts of modern Christian healers! (A recent examination of such 'crusades' found not one of seventy-eight officially claimed healings was proven.)

And God does heal today. Many Christians can testify to His healing power over physical and psychological illness. James, the brother of Jesus, instructed the church on how to set about this, and many Christians today follow that practice. [Request the free article *What To Do When You Are Ill*] But should Christians solely 'rely on God' for healing? Should they, as advocated by some church leaders, steer clear of *all* medical practice?

### Between Black and White

Some Christians whose desire is to trust God for healing face a dilemma. In what circumstances is it acceptable to have medical attention and when should we 'rely on

God alone'? On the one hand they understand the concept of personal responsibility in health matters. The Scriptures clearly give us some practical guidance: rules of physical and mental hygiene, dietary laws *etc.* Ignore them - as did most of the mediaeval world - and you suffer. But there are also Biblical examples of 'direct action': the use of antiseptic, anaesthesia, ointments, first aid, undisclosed methods of *'causing to be healed'* *etc.* Medicines *'did good'* (Proverbs 17:22). And Ezekiel

speaks well of them in a millennial setting (Ezekiel 47:12). A range of remedies were widely used.

On the other hand, the Scriptures teach that God is our Healer and we are to have faith. So 'where do we draw the line?' is a question they pose. They perceive 'grey areas', and confusion arises. Yet, logically, *any* human intervention - whether 'herbal' or 'normal' - negates the notion that we should rely solely on God for healing. No dentist, no headache remedies, no bone-setting, no alternative medicines!

Is there a difference between medical intervention for a tooth abscess and for an appendix abscess? Or between an aspirin and an antibiotic? Between major surgery to reconstruct a shattered pelvis and surgery for a blocked colon or heart by-pass or a cancer? The first option is by most who desire to 'trust God' considered acceptable, while the latter alternative has to be 'in God's hands'. Then there's the artificial distinction between 'natural' remedies and 'drugs'. In fact, most modern drugs are derived from 'natural remedies' and are concentrations of the active healing principle in plants *etc* - and therefore generally more effective and controlled.

### Balance of Risk

Archaeology unearths evidence of a range of ancient surgical procedures - even brain surgery! I imagine it was pretty risky. As were the various 'healing potions' gathered from nature. Because the 'cures' were dodgy they became linked with religious ritual to empower them. And the priests got involved. The healing arts became associated with magic

That's the source of much Christian superstition about healing. Some few Christians believe medicine - even

**should Christians steer clear of all medical practice?**

modern medicine - is somehow associated with the demonic, with Baal'Zebub, the 'god of Ekron' (II Kings 2:1ff). Yet in this incident King Azariah's sin was in seeking guidance about the outcome of his injury - not healing - from that 'no god' (I Corinthians 8:5f, 10:20).

Medicine has, today, grown up - though given the complexity of the human body it's still more art than science! But modern medicine is no longer associated with religion. Medical practice today is knowledge based. It is increasingly technological - and dedicated, skilled doctors and surgeons and nurses and researchers devote themselves to improved techniques of healing broken and sick bodies. Modern Western medicine isn't 'of the devil'!

'Health', however, is worshiped as a god - we all want to be vibrantly healthy, and as the 'people of God' Christians often feel they have a right to it. But *sin* has entered the world. The human body decays into deafness, poor sight, arthritis and all the ills to which mankind is - through Adam - heir (Ecclesiastes 12).

Who wouldn't avail themselves of a modern burns or spinal injury unit? Yet such treatments may be just as invasive as the removal of a tumour. Suffer a compound fracture and 'leave it to God' to heal and you may well experience gangrene or an incurable infection and certainly deformity. Not that God can't or won't heal but that He would expect you to get attention! And there's no logical - or spiritual - reason why that principle should not apply in every form of illness, major or minor.

Our choice of treatment is a balance of risk. Doctors will discuss that with you. There are competent surgeons and physicians and herbalists and acupuncturists - and there are incompetent practitioners and charlatans in every field. A drug or herbal remedy

may be effective in the hands of one prescriber and not with the next. I can but glean whatever knowledge I can, perhaps obtain 'a second opinion' - and then *I* must make the decision: get treatment, or suffer without treatment and 'let nature take its course' (it usually dies). And recover or die. Using honey or olive oil or wine and not an antibiotic may be more 'natural' (but less effective) - but both are an intervention whether or not we call on God to heal! Herbs won't set a compound fracture or repair an aneurysm or cure a cardiac arrest. In any illness we simply and wisely ask: which treatment poses less risk (and all drugs - even herbal - carry risk) and what will be most effective to restore health?

And underlying all is the matter of *faith*.

#### The Nature of Faith

No Christian will quarrel with the need for 'faith'! But the nature of faith is often misunderstood. Faith is *a way of life*: 'The just shall live by faith'. It's not a one-off injection of spiritual energy focused on a specific disease you have acquired. Faith is the principle that undergirds every aspect of our life in Christ. It is *trust* - trust in the all mighty God who rewards us when we seek Him with our whole being (Hebrews 11:6). None of the spiritual giants in the 'faith chapter' are praised for having faith to be healed! They all died '*not having received the promises*' (v.13).

Our faith becomes visible only through our submission to the will and word of God - it results in action: '*I show you my faith by what I do*', says James (ch 2:9-16). Should we become seriously ill or distressed we express our faith by calling for the church elders (James 5:14) - and

unsigned articles are by the Editor

by taking advantage of the best treatment at our disposal. In calling for the elders we publicly place the outcome of our illness in the hands of God. In seeking medical attention, *and* by taking sensible health precautions (*eg* stop smoking, curb our alcohol intake, improve our diet and hygiene, exercise *etc*) we are doing our part - showing our faith by our works. Even were the treatment to fail our trust, our faith in God, remains undiminished.

All too many Christians have a false expectation of divine healing. We all die! And none of us knows when that time may come. It may be through old age or by accident or by sudden or prolonged illness. Perfect health for all awaits our resurrection! Yet we all fight the decay. We eat sensibly, avoid noxious substances, bind up wounds, extract rotten teeth, surgically set broken bones. So where is the line between faith and works? Healing is an act of undeserved divine mercy. It is a sovereign act of God usually but not always dependent on faith. Through His Spirit is channelled the grace, the divine power, that sustains us in every trial.

In our day great miracles of healing have taken place. But very few. Most Christians with serious illness recover with or without medical treatment - or they die. Whatever the outcome, faith knows that God is with them, that He knows their every pain and every need, that in their suffering there is purpose. Indeed in our 'instant' age one of our greatest needs is to develop - *patience*. That's a quality that is hewn from suffering! Faith is maintained and strengthened by paying careful attention to the Word of God (Romans 10:17).

When illness strikes we do what God says: call for the elders and be anointed. That is placing the matter in God's hands - a [*cont'd p. 5*]

## 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.

### ARE YOU 'ON-LINE'?

If so, take a look at the  
CGOM web-site:

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## OLD versus NEW

### Are the two Bible Testaments all that different?

"Where the Old Testament God required punishment, Jesus preached forgiveness". That's a not unusual comment - and one that appeared recently in a British national daily. The idea does, however, derive from those who are not really familiar with the Scriptures.

Such a statement flies in the face of Jesus' assertion, "*I and my Father are one*". Everything he said and did was a perfect reflection of the will of the Father. It ignores, too, the fact that the 'God of the Old Testament' - who taught and dealt with Abraham and Moses and David and the prophets - was Jesus himself!

Such a statement also betrays ignorance of the very roots of the Christian faith. None of the New Testament brethren had any other text than the Old Testament, though a lucky few had access to the apostolic letters, and later to the four Gospels.

Wrote Paul to the evangelist Timothy: "*...from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures which are able to make you wise to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work*" (II Timothy 3:15-17).

When he wrote this, Paul could be referring only to the writings of the Old Testament. True Christianity is founded on God's revelation through those 'old' writings of prophets and kings. And they are a message not only to 'the religious' but to governments worldwide.

### Secular Government

A related misunderstanding equates the New Testament teachings with God's mandate for secular government. *The Ten Commandments*, for example, with their related penalties, are an expression of how a nation should most effectively govern itself. Protect the elderly. Cold-blooded killers should be executed and those who perpetrate violence should pay for the victim's recovery - no matter how inconvenient. Marriage and sexual relationships are sacrosanct, should be protected through secular laws, and are the foundation of society. Thieves are to restore the value of their loot with added compensation to the victim. Perjury must be severely punished. Consumerism is to be curbed.

The Law, as Paul notes, is for law-breakers! Christians - those with God's Spirit - will follow this code from the heart. We won't need the penalties but will be subject to 'the law of the land' if we do fail.

Jesus' instruction to '*turn the other cheek*' is not directed at secular justice - though in the divine Law there has always been room for mercy. Forgiveness is a personal matter extended by an offended individual. Indeed it is a quality promoted in the Old Testament Scriptures! It is not an instruction to the State to water down justice.

The degree to which a nation - any nation - deviates from the divine Law is another step towards anarchy and lawlessness. Let's not mix up the spirit of Christianity, which is for individuals, with the God-imposed responsibility of government to rule its people according to the revealed righteous law. □

**WILL GOD HEAL YOU?** *cont'd*  
public expression that we trust Him whatever befalls.

*Then we do our part!* □

## WHAT DOES GOD REQUIRE?

**Every Christian ministry needs support. Do they all deserve it? What principles should underlie your giving?**

Rarely does a Christian ministry fail to publicly request financial support. Virtually every magazine, every newsletter, asks its readers for more money. Not surprising, really. For the production of a magazine - or virtually any 'work for God' - apart from some personal evangelism - requires money! Fifty-pound notes don't often float from the sky when the invoices are stuffed through the door, or when wages have to be paid. Perusal of Christian newspapers confirms that many enterprises are crying out for funding, even going to the wall. Previously well-endowed ministries face a traumatic falling away of donations.

It's required of those behind any such work that they are responsible for the good stewardship of all donations - large or small. We need to question, for example, the structure of the organization. The pattern set by the early church didn't require a headquarters building stuffed with salaried staff. Nor was there an extensive network of district superintendents, area superintendents, national co-ordinators *etc.* All unnecessary when the Biblical pattern is in place. There was no 'corporate identity', but local assemblies were independent. Labour was volunteered.

Another factor is how the income is allocated. Donations are often channelled to a central headquarters where a seemingly endless tangle of committees vie for a piece of the pie. (*Yes* - this is Christianity today!) The current blue-eyed project sets about empire building, usually soaking up more administrative funding. Each empire remains and continues to gob-

ble up resources, even when the focus of attention has moved on to another project. It is not unknown for administration and salaries to consume half and even three-quarters of income. A paltry proportion of hard-earned cash goes to fund 'preaching the gospel'.

### Accountability

God requires of every ministry *accountability*. We are accountable, primarily, to the Head of the church - Jesus Christ. He is the overseer of every authentic work carried out in his name. He is always present, though our personal shortcomings too often blind us to that presence. An example of that divine oversight is the concern Jesus had for the 'seven churches' cited in Revelation chapters two and three.

Then there's the element of *fear*. Every ministry is accountable to those willing to part with their hard-earned resources in support. None would function at all were it not for an uninterrupted flow of finances. If you are locked into a system that believes it is 'the only one' and outside of it is eternal doom - then you will fear to stop your giving. The Biblical pattern for giving is set aside, with hints - even direct threats - if brethren do not 'tithe'. Failure to tithe will lead to being struck off the membership roll with the implication that you won't be in the Kingdom. A powerful pressure especially in those churches which consider themselves to be 'the one true church'. It happens, and in independent assemblies as well as in denominational churches.

Tithing to 'Headquarters' too often serves as a cover for gross misuse of donations. It's not unknown for the leaders of large income churches to 'live the life of Riley' off the backs of brethren and co-workers who can ill-afford what they give. Funds ear-

marked for orphanages and widows and the destitute are plundered to furnish leadership mansions and a royal lifestyle. There is, all too often, no financial transparency.

### Walk Free

And accountability to the Head of the church demands that its leadership - whether of a large denomination or an independent local assembly - is faithful to his Word. Too often, blinded by power or ignorance or vainglory, a remote corporate leadership or a headstrong local elder will blunder into a wilderness of false teachings. Each of us - each individual Christian - is personally responsible to be faithful to the Word of God. Walk blindly into that wilderness and you suffer the consequences. *Yet you can be free!* You are free to walk away. Free to fellowship where the Word of God is revered and taught. Indeed your departure might conceivably be a catalyst for change. No money, no work!

On the other hand, if you associate with an assembly that's faithful to the Scriptures, *stay loyal: "Never let go of loyalty and faithfulness"* (Proverbs 3:3). Too many Christians wander from assembly to assembly without being firmly rooted and supportive of one. Jesus places his spiritual gifts as he pleases in each assembly, or each association. All are essential to his purpose in that place. (The New Testament pattern was for a number of independent 'house churches' in each town or area, voluntarily working together in outreach. There were no denominations.) Your wandering undermines his work!

**you are free to fellowship where the Word of God is faithfully taught**

### How Much?

The Levitical priesthood was the cornerstone of Israel's religion. They were responsible for the maintenance and worship of the Tabernacle, and later, the Temple. To them fell the considerable physical effort of the



sacrificial system. The Temple music, too, was their responsibility. And throughout the land they taught God's Law. To maintain these responsibilities there was a system of tithing - the giving of a tenth of 'increase'. Along with offerings, the tithe was considered as the norm for most people. Unlike medieval Britain there was no coercion! Hence support for the priesthood waxed and waned - a mix of the quality of the priests' service to the people, and the spirituality of the people (*cp* Malachi 2:1-9, 3:6-10).

### Give Your All!

Is 'tithes and offerings' what God requires of Christians? If so, very few comply! For most, giving to the church isn't a priority, and only a minority of those labelled Christian tithe. And those who do tithe squabble over what it means - 'gross income, or net' *etc.*

The calculation, however, is simple. It is *total commitment*. Not just your increase, no matter how computed. But your all. *All* your resources - your spiritual gifts, your natural talents, your time, your money belong to God and to Jesus. You are their 'slave!' Simply direct-debiting your tithe to the church, yet failing to personally and wholeheartedly integrate in an available local assembly or ministry is not the way of the cross. Jesus demands all.

### Balanced Decisions

Of course, that's not a call to live in a tin hut and in poverty. There is no doubt that some early Christians were 'rich' (*eg* James 1:10), that some lived in substantial homes. And no indication that on becoming Christian they were encouraged to sell up and live on the street or in a hovel.

As with so much of our Christian walk we are faced with choice. Do I really need to replace working 'white goods' - with late model fridge, washing machine, dish-washer *etc*? Or purchase the latest hi-fi or a

plasma TV? What is an appropriate amount to spend on food and drink and restaurants? How many suits, dresses, shoes do I need? Do I really need to climb the property ladder? Those furnishings are 70s style - but do I need to 'keep up with the Joneses'? Your car still looks good and goes well, so need you invest in a BMW? How are you using your time? Do sporting and leisure activities devour large chunks of both time and money? Too much time in the pub? It's very much a matter of balance. Could your leisure time be better spent on encouraging other brethren by letter, by phone, by a visit?

If your income improves, however, and your accommodation is basic then it may be appropriate to climb another step up the property ladder, or to refurbish your home, or replace a rusting car.

But too many of our citizens - including Christians - live with a mountain of debt; in Britain nearly a billion pounds worth on loans and credit cards last year. The apostle Paul's admonition is apt: '*owe no man anything*' (Romans 13:8). He didn't depend on others for support (Acts 20: 33-34), but worked to earn a living - and to pay the rent: he '*dwelled two whole years in his own rented house*' (Acts 28:30). We live in a society bent on acquiring, and it's all too easy for followers of Jesus

to become entangled in the mad rush for the trappings of wealth. It is, says Paul, a form of idolatry (Colossians 3:5), from which we are to flee (I Corinthians 10:14). Especially in precarious times we ought to exert every effort to become solvent!

### Giving To God

Your financial status may be such that it is an affront to God that you give *only* a tenth. On the other hand, while God may applaud your attitude, it may be that in your poverty it is wrong to give *as much as* a tenth.

Anyway, whatever you give, what does it mean to 'give to God'? It is usually taken to mean that you give to humans! Your perception of a particular ministry may not be God's perception! Huge sums are funnelled annually into works which are promoting serious error. Or ministries that are fronts for enriching its leaders. Before being conned into supporting a ministry be sure to thoroughly check it out.

Ultimately, however, it's *you* that is responsible for how you use your resources. The principle applies: '*...while it remained was it not your own? And after it was sold was it not in your own power?*' (Acts 5:4). If you have a local assembly to attend then it is important that you support its activities - from your resources, including financial. If you are a 'wilderness Christian' you might support a carefully selected ministry that has transparent finances.

### Personal Evangelism

But it is you who should be wisely using your resources - *personally*. Can you imagine the impact if every Christian were to be an unashamed witness to Jesus Christ? That's what Jesus is looking for. There is a vital place for dedicated evangelists. But each of us has the responsibility to be a witness wherever we live, using all our resources appropriately.

*Are you?* □

### Bible Basics

The Churches of God publish an internet home Bible study course

If you would like to study with us check it out at [www.cgom.org](http://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*

# THE LONG SLEEP

## It's 'the cure for all diseases'. So why fear it?

"It's not that I'm afraid to die. It's just that I don't want to be there when it happens". So said Woody Allen. And probably most of us would echo that thought! But apart from that act of dying, what most people fear is what happens *after* death. Each of the main religions has its own take on it. For Christians there's heaven, hell, purgatory, limbo. In Islam there's hell - and paradise, often attained by embracing suicidal martyrdom. For atheists and agnostics there's emptiness, nothing. Most, however, can't believe that there's nothingness beyond the ups and downs of life.

It's the uncertainty that bothers us. Ideally we would settle for 'heaven'. We would have made it into an eternity of peace and tranquillity. Life, however, doesn't come with a guarantee that we will end up there. There is always the unsavoury alternative. In fact, the whole concept of death, dying and the after-life is for the most part grossly in error.

## Nearly Dead?

Widely publicized of late has been the notion of a 'near-death experience' - an idea sold as evidence for an after-life. During surgery the patient 'dies'. There's a journey down a long tunnel towards a bright white light, often with a welcoming figure at the end. Specialist Dr Sam Parnia has researched this for some seven years. He suggests three main explanations: the chemical changes in the brain during surgery, a projection of pleasant and comforting feelings of someone who thinks they are about to die - and "...a separation of human mind and consciousness at the point of death. In other words, a soul that lives on after death". He

claims that around five percent of the population have had such an experience - presumably those who have lived through it!

Those who died in surgery cannot of course recount such an experience. The vast majority of those who have died under the knife and been resuscitated, however, do not recall such an event. For those who have encountered it, all find it comforting. None have seen flames at the end of the tunnel! Yet there have been atheists and agnostics. There have been those who by no stretch of the imagination would merit 'heaven'.

## Blueprint

The human brain is the most complex of organs. We are born with an estimated hundred billion brain cells which during life make billions of interconnections - making each of us what we are. It's a 'mystery' that has not yet been fully unravelled. Indeed the brain's capabilities may never be fully understood. But we do have an authentic blue-print detailing what happens when we die - the Christian Bible.

The Bible includes writings penned over six thousand years. And it is totally consistent in its understanding of the after-life - from Genesis to Revelation. Whatever you think of it as divine revelation such a body of belief cannot be discounted.

In a nutshell, the message is: when we die we are just that - dead. Dead as a lifeless tree. There is no conscious existence. It's summed up by King Solomon: *"For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing. They have no more reward, for the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love and their hatred and their envy have now perished. Nevermore will they have a share in anything done under the sun"* (Ecclesiastes 9: 5-6). (Though

that's not the end of the story.)

The notion of an 'immortal soul' permeates human thought, and has given rise to the uncertainty about death and beyond. In Christianity it generates the horrific notion that a loving God will consign His creation to an eternity of torment in the flames of 'Hell'. But different faiths have different versions of Hell - though most subscribe to the notion of 'the great barbecue below'. Who merits Heaven, the alternative? That's tricky. You have to 'be good' in this life - a concept variously interpreted, and usually at odds with the teaching of the Christian Bible. Confusion reigns, in other words.

## Origins

When, then, did this notion of an 'immortal soul' begin? Early. At a time pre-dating the beginnings of religion, and influencing all of them. [Request the article *Babylon - Fountain of Error* for some insights.] It certainly wasn't God's idea. His view was: *"...out of [the ground] you were taken. For dust you are, and to dust you will return"* (Genesis 3:19). It's the view consistently held by all the Bible writers. Every atom of our bodies comes from the earthly elements. The 'soul' has proven to be elusive, despite intensive neurological probings.

## the idea of an immortal soul gives rise to uncertainty about death and beyond

When you die you are dead - just like any other creature. 'Soul' -Heb *nephesh* - is the term used in the Hebrew Scriptures for every breathing being, including animals.

And it is possible for the soul to die: *"The soul who sins shall die"* (Ezekiel 18:4, 20). Jesus said the same: *"God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life"* (John 3:16). Notice: *"...should not perish..."*. Jesus

contrast the two states - death *and put on immortality...*" (I Corinthians 15:50-54). This happens when Jesus Christ returns to reign on earth for a thousand years - the 'millennium'.

So where did the false notion of an 'immortal soul' come from? Again, The apostle John calls it 'the *first resurrection*' (Revelation 20:5). The apostle then addresses all those not in that resurrection: *"The rest of the dead lived not until the thousand years were finished"* (v.5a). Every human being that has drawn breath since man was created - and who is not in that first resurrection - will be restored to *physical* life. They will then be given opportunity - not previously available to them - to become a part of the spiritual Kingdom of God through Jesus Christ.

Not God's words - **no-one is excluded from God's plan of salvation** in that resurrection: *big lie* that undergirds every major religion - including Christianity, and that spawned a web of destructive teachings - including that of 'hell fire'. We should not be surprised at the source, for Jesus called him *'...the father of lies'* (John 8:44).

### Awake from Sleep

If you have had an anaesthetic you will know what death is like! You lie on the trolley chatting, perhaps. Then next you know, it may be the next day. No memory of rather traumatic events. You may even have died a couple of times as did an acquaintance of mine. (Incidentally, he never entered a tunnel nor was he bathed in white light.) It will be like that for you, just as it will be so for someone who died six thousand years ago. It is so for every member of the human race who has ever lived.

But that's not the end. For every one of us will be brought back to life: *"...it is appointed unto men [mankind] to die once, but after this the judgment"* (Hebrews 9:27). It's called resurrection. Job - one of the earliest writers in the Bible - understood the concept of resurrection: *"All the days of my hard service will I wait till my change comes. You will call and I will answer you. You shall desire the work of your hands"* (ch 14: 14-15).

Writing to Christians, the apostle Paul says: *"We shall not all sleep [ie die] but we shall all be changed - in a moment in the twinkling of an eye.... For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal shall*

*put on immortality...*" (I Corinthians 15:50-54). This happens when Jesus Christ returns to reign on earth for a thousand years - the 'millennium'. The apostle John calls it 'the *first resurrection*' (Revelation 20:5).

The apostle then addresses all those not in that resurrection: *"The rest of the dead lived not until the thousand years were finished"* (v.5a). Every human being that has drawn breath since man was created - and who is not in that first resurrection - will be restored to *physical* life. They will then be given opportunity - not previously available to them - to become a part of the spiritual Kingdom of God through Jesus Christ.

The divine plan holds no fear for anyone - unlike the twisted concepts purveyed by the all-encompassing false religions which reject the inspired writings of the Christian Bible. □

What happens after the resurrection is explored in the free articles  
***When Someone Dies***  
and  
***After the Resurrection***

### **CORRECTION:**

*A line was omitted from the previous issue of New Horizons. The last paragraph of the article **Going To Church** (p.9) should read:*

'Divine service' in many churches has departed from the simple assembly of the first century. The focus ought to revert to the original intent - the building up of the brethren through God speaking to us by means of His Word. As that Word impacts our lives we truly worship Him in spirit and in truth and in holiness.

## Outreach Europe

*Lincoln, England*

The *Churches of God, UK* (COGUK) at present has a relatively minor role in the work of the churches of God here in Europe. However, we are unusual among the churches here, in that we are not a 'denomination'. COGUK is a co-ordinating body for any like-minded Sabbatarian independent assemblies who wish to expand their outreach and to work together in outreach to our people.

Some brethren, of course, feel more comfortable in a denominational church - and are no less Christian for that. We are all one Body in Christ. Each in our own way seeks to live out the Bible teaching as we perceive it.

Through our association with the *Outreach Ministries* (CGOM), however, we have a wider impact worldwide:

- COGUK contributes to the content of the CGOM web site ([www.cgom.org](http://www.cgom.org))
- The flagship outreach magazine *New Horizons* is compiled here and sent to a sister church in the United States for printing. In return, they graciously send us, without charge, the copies we need for our UK mailing list. It is mainly through *New Horizons* that we seek to persuade towards Jesus Christ!
- *Bible Basics* study course is also prepared in the UK

However, our outreach is restricted within a very limited budget. Our plan is to expand the circulation over the next few years. Clearly, this means higher costs - postage, stationery, time, extra literature for those who respond *etc.* It also means we are dependent on our readers for support!

If you profit from our work and wish to see it expand we ask you to partner us by helping to provide the needed resources. We especially welcome the support of any small groups 'out there'. *"A three-fold cord is not quickly broken"* (Ecclesiastes 4:12)!

*We welcome questions and comments from our readers.*

*New Horizons* may be viewed  
on the web-site [www.cgom.org](http://www.cgom.org)  
e-mail: [coguk@aol.com](mailto:coguk@aol.com) and  
[information@cgom.org](mailto:information@cgom.org)

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study the Bible

*We are pleased to reply to any ques-  
tions arising from any of our publica-  
tions. However, we are not yet in a  
position to 'grade' your responses*

*all are available from any of the addresses listed inside*