

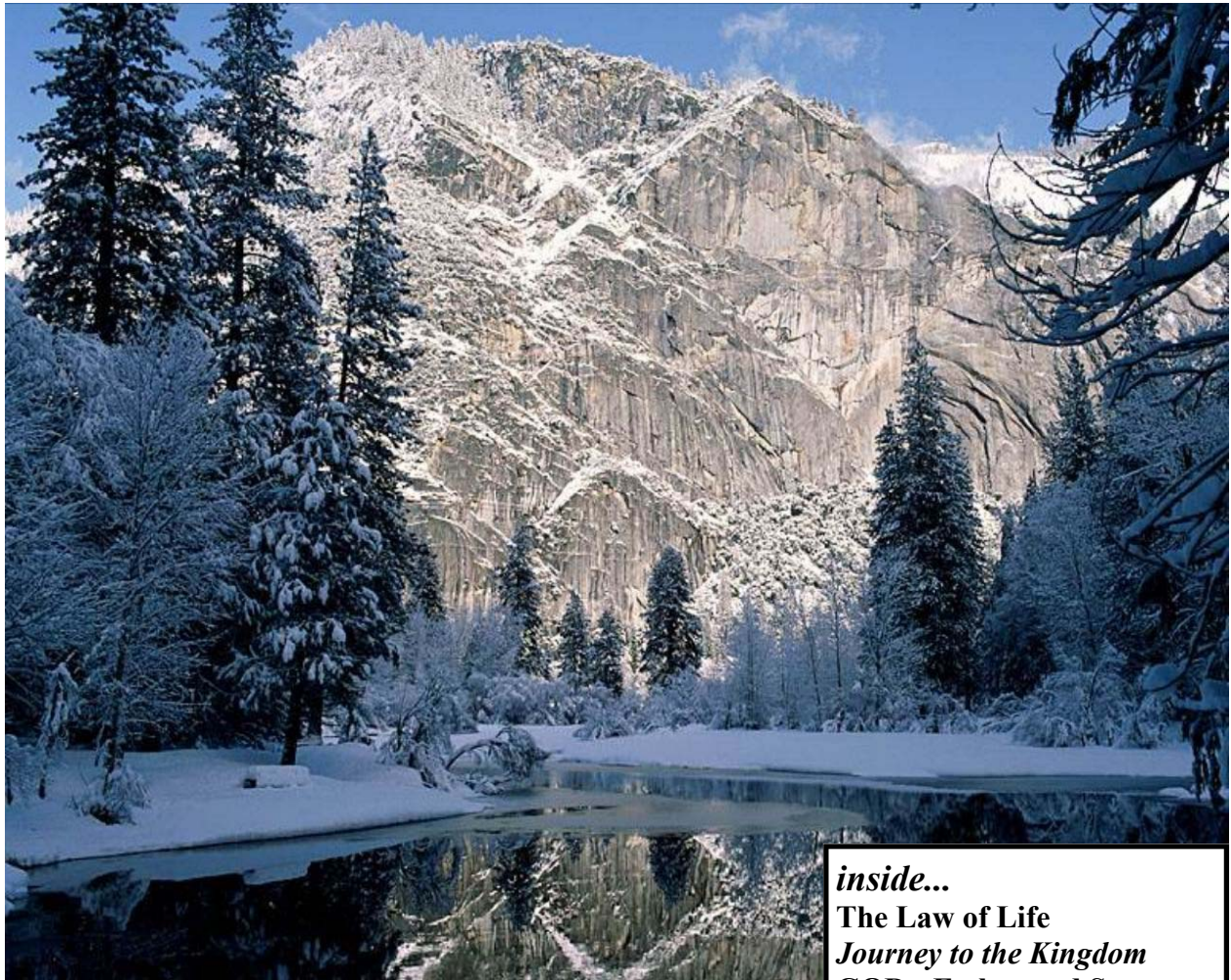
NEW

Horizons

Vol 8 No 4

July/August 2004

addressing the important issues for today and tomorrow



inside...

The Law of Life

Journey to the Kingdom

GOD - Father and Son

The Philadelphian Christian

Coming To Baptism

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**

New Horizons is published by the
Churches of God Outreach Ministries,
an association of independent
churches, to make known the good
news of the soon-coming
Kingdom of God

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

If you would like a copy of our *Statement of
Beliefs* please request it from any of
the addresses listed

**Churches of God Outreach Ministries
P O Box 54621 Tulsa
OK 74155-0621 USA
e-mail: information@cgom.org
1-800-611-8080
Editor: James McBride
e-mail: coguk@aol.com**

The Churches of God, UK
PO Box 2525
LINCOLN LN5 7PF United Kingdom
Regd Charity No 283358
e-mail: coguk@aol.com

The Churches of God Outreach Ministries
100 Northcote Street
Aberdare NSW 2325 Australia
e-mail: icg.aust@netcentral.com.au

The Churches of God Outreach Ministries
PO Box 476 Don Mills Station
Don Mills Ontario M3C 2T4 Canada
www.canadianchurchofgod.com

or from:

Tulsa, OK 2004

New Horizons is distributed without charge, and is financed by the gifts of associates and friends of the *Churches of God Outreach Ministries*. Readers are invited to obtain a free subscription by writing to any of the addresses listed. You are under no obligations, and no-one will call uninvited

new **Horizons**

Issue No 46

July/August 2004

A living stream connects all eras of human existence. There's a hidden continuity that makes history make sense

The course of history seems haphazard. Yet from a divine perspective man exists in five distinct - and connected - eras. We pass from *innocence* to *reason* to *Law* to *Christian liberty* - and, yet future, the *earthly reign of the Kingdom of God*. Underlying all is the same fundamental 'law of life'.

The Earliest Age

Human life began as a direct divine creation by the ever-living God. Mankind in all his complexity was created fully prepared and capable of controlling his environment. It was a time of innocence. The man and his wife were in perfect harmony with the Creator God, the Word - who had a close personal relationship with them. Along with the rest of creation '*God saw that all He had made was excellent indeed*'. Everything was in perfect harmony and environmentally balanced. Mankind, the pinnacle - and the purpose - of creation was 'perfect' and lived in harmony with the divine will.

Implicit in the divine instruction was the promise of unending life for our first parents. They had unfettered access to 'the Tree of Life'. Only by deliberate rejection - 'perfection' included freedom to choose - of God's revealed *Law of Life* would they taste death. There's no record of how long this 'innocence' lasted - some say a few hours, more likely a period of years -

seven, says some Jewish tradition. But innocence came to an end.

Paradise Lost

By choosing to reject the *Law of Life* Adam and Eve, goaded by Satan, lost their paradise and condemned themselves to a life of unnecessary toil - over and beyond what God had assigned to them. Because they chose to discard divine guidance in favour of human reason God predicted the consequences: earning a living would be unnecessarily difficult; children, despite the joy they bring, would cause sorrow in their rearing; Satan would continually try to make them stumble; no longer did they have direct access to the LORD - only through blood sacrifice. They had entered the era of *Reason*. Almost all mankind is there, still.

God, while retaining His Sovereign right to oversee His creation, left mankind to the consequence of his choices, while leaving on open door to Himself. As time rolled on the *Law of Life* was increasingly neglected. A few '*walked with God*', but after a mere sixteen centuries there was but one family - that of the patriarch Noah. Only Noah and his wife, sons and their wives walked in the divine pathway. But the pattern repeated. Over the next thousand years God had to intervene repeatedly to prevent human depravity leading to self-destruction - at Babel and at Sodom, the Amorites, the Egyptians, the Canaanites. And still does on occasion.

Neglect of the *Law of Life* inevita-

bly leads to destruction. - personally, nationally, globally. It's a lesson the modern world has yet to learn, for most of humanity still lives in that Age of Reason. Since Adam's choice of this way, the human race has a mind-set hostile to God. We can devise means to avoid the effects of gravity (*eg* the aeroplane) - but the *Law of Life* is a solid wall that cannot be breached without serious long and short-term damage. But it doesn't have to be that way.

A Beacon of Hope

In His mercy and compassion the Creator has throughout history provided for us a beacon of hope. Most of the race sank more deeply into the mire. But the light of divine truth was passed from generation to generation by men and women who resisted the pressures of society. They '*called on the name of the LORD*'. Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Gideon, David, the Prophets, numerous nameless men and women - all carried the torch of the true faith in their generation.

It's a matter of record that Abraham by faith '*...minded My voice, kept My charge, My orders, My rules and My laws*' (Genesis 26:5). Through the godly line of Abraham's firstborn, Isaac, God promised to raise up a model nation. Virtually overwhelmed by the heathen culture of their slave masters, his descendants - the children of Jacob-Israel - were spectacularly rescued (around 1500BC) in 'the exodus' from Egypt under the guidance of Moses.

The rest of the world continued their downward trek while Israel - the 'Twelve Tribes' - embraced a national Constitution which had the same *Law*

**THE LAW
OF LIFE**

of Life at its heart. Moses told the people: *'What great nation is there that possesses such righteous statutes and ordinances as this whole Law that I am setting before you?'* (Deuteronomy 4:8). Never since has any legal system surpassed it. As a model of good governance it ought, to be written into every national Constitution!

Fatal Flaw

Israel gladly embraced it. In a spectacular and emotional acceptance of the Covenant they called out: *'All that the LORD says we will do'*. Fine words - but God knew their hearts: *'O that there were such a heart in them'* He said to Moses, *'that they would fear [reverence] Me and keep all My commandments always that it might be well with them and their children for ever'* (Deuteronomy 5:29). Their adherence to the covenant - and its *Law of Life* - waxed and waned for a millennium. They had barely left Egypt when they slipped back into idolatry. It was a pattern to be repeated time and again. On the heels of idolatry came conflict - invasion by surrounding hostile nations. They then cried out to God for deliverance, and He heard.

But that wasn't God's fault. There was nothing wrong - and everything right - with His Law and Covenant. But: *'...finding fault with them [ie the people]'* (Hebrews 8:8). A covenant has two sides: *'I do this and you do that'*. The people dropped the ball and brought on themselves invasion and ultimately exile.

Israel had become - and continues to be - indistinguishable from the surrounding nations who were *'without God'*. Only the Tribe of Judah retains its Israelite identity.

So, *innocence* died. Mankind in general set about devising its own way of life derived from human *reason* contrary to the divine *Law of Life*. God's model nation, Israel, incorporated that *Law* into its national Con-

stitution but all too often set it aside with dire consequences. The stage was set for a new era.

Christian Liberty

The divine plan moved on, unchanged. Satan persuaded Eve - and Adam followed - that to ignore God's guidance would be without consequence: *'you shall not surely die'*, he told her. Disobey, but you can still live for ever. It's the ultimate lie that even now tangles mankind in its web. But God promised a champion who would *'bruise Satan's head'*. It's a blood-red thread that permeates all of history.

At the appropriate historical moment God stepped into our world in the person of Jesus. He lived as a man but without sin, being sacrificed for our sin at the hand of the religious and secular authorities.

The disciples were commissioned by Jesus to take his message to all the world - a task renewed generation by generation. But it is a tough message and few are ready to fully embrace it. Those who do and who remain faithful until death will be associated with Jesus in the next phase of his plan. [Request a reprint from the May/June issue of *New Horizons* of the article **God's Academy**]

In the age of *Law*, in the nation of Israel, the *Law of Life* was imposed as a legal system with just penalties administered with mercy by the Judiciary. Given human nature the 'Justice Department' of Israel's Government failed. As with all the faithful since Creation the *Law of Life* would now be imprinted in the human heart. Submission to it is not imposed by authority - secular or religious. On our willing change of spiritual direction and our baptism God implants His mind in us - the *'gift of the Holy Spirit'*. The Spirit prompts and energizes us - with our active co-operation - to submit to the divine will - to live by the same *Law of Life*.

Jesus, in the *Sermon on the Mount* (eg Matthew 5-7), made it clear that God's Law was not abolished but now pierces even to the human thoughts - no longer mere external obedience induced by penalties. As long as that Spirit dwells in us we are assured of eternal life. The degree to which we each voluntarily submit to the terms of the *Law of Life* determines our role in the Kingdom of God.

The Law of Life

Since mankind's beginning, then, this *Law of Life* has flowed through every age - a cleansing stream that can refresh every nation, every individual that drinks of it. God's Law - His instruction, His Manual for the conduct of life - is as vital to human well-being today as it has been since man first walked the Earth. Failure to heed it, failure to write it into national law, failure to voluntarily submit to its provisions will exclude us from God's richest temporal material and spiritual blessings.

At the heart of this Law lie the much maligned 'Ten Commandments'. All of its provisions may be traced scattered throughout the Bible - *before* Moses was handed them by God engraved in stone as the foundation document of Israel's Constitution. As wrote the apostle Paul: *'the law is holy, just and good...[and] spiritual'*

The story, however, doesn't end there. The God who instructed Adam, who taught and guided Abraham, who talked face-to-face with Moses, who became man to die for our sin and continues to walk in the midst of his church - this same will return to establish this Law over all mankind.

And yes - that same *Law of Life* will continue to be applied. How could it not when Jesus himself gave it such an accolade!

[cont'd p.8

JOURNEY TO THE KINGDOM

Conversion? What does that mean? Are you on the right track?

Every year many thousands around the world are 'born again'. (It could be you.) They are persuaded that - for whatever reason - they should commit themselves to Jesus Christ. It's the beginning of a journey that may take years before reaching the final destination, the Kingdom of God.

Anyone who surveys the Christian scene, however, must at times be confused. Presented is a whole supermarket of choice - spiritual products packaged to entice you into a particular path to the Kingdom. Can all be 'the way'?

Everyone On Board

Follow this analogy. Having wandered around town for X years you are drawn towards being a Christian. You know that it's possible only through Jesus Christ. He is, in our analogy, the 'Station'. So along with many others you go there and you purchase a ticket - 'single fare only' - for The Kingdom of God. "That's Platform 6 or Platform 7, sir" says the ticket clerk.

You pass the barrier and head for the adjacent Platforms 6 & 7 where each has a train ready to depart. The desti-

nation board informs you that each is destined for *The Kingdom of God*, and lists the stations at which each will call.

On the platform between the two trains, strangely, is a stand labelled *Direction Finder* containing a Bible. You are perhaps surprised that the train on Platform 6 is swarming with passengers while that on 7 is almost deserted. You also note that very few on Platform 6 are bothering to check the *Direction Finder*. Virtually none of these changes to Platform 7.

The Wrong Train?

While you are studying the *Direction Finder* another passenger joins you. He tells you that he has heard one of the Destination Boards is a con - that one of the trains is definitely *not* going to The Kingdom of God. But which? Only a close study of the *Direction Finder* will identify.

Clearly, the analogy isn't watertight. Although the two trains will, on leaving, diverge - one speeding to *The Kingdom*, the other en route to a quite different destination - yet it's always an option to transfer from one to the other. But the greater the divergence the more difficult that option becomes.

Doing the Journey

On each passenger seat on both trains, however, is a copy of the *Direction Finder*. Whichever train you choose you can study its pages for guidance. Be sure to choose well.

Don't assume, though, that the 'right' train is Pullman Class or that the journey will be smooth all the way. En route you will encounter 'officials' who misinform and who will encourage you to re-route, to change trains.

In that *Direction Finder*, the Station-master (Jesus) warns that you will meet opposition. Indeed some passengers, he says, may be taken hostage and be killed. (Yet they will, strangely, arrive safe and well at The Kingdom destination!)

Transformed

Visiting the right stations, however, isn't everything - although, just as in any journey new to you, passing through them indicates you are headed for the right destination.

But no passenger on this train arrives 'just as he was' on first boarding. Although the occasional squabble breaks out - indeed some will cosily segregate themselves into 'exclusive' carriages! - they begin to form a bond with one another. By continuing to study the *Finder* passengers are influenced to put away their previous behaviour pattern and to be transformed in character.

For His own reasons the Father is, for now, offering a 'ticket' to The Kingdom to a selection of mankind. Some will throw it in the waste bin. Some will join the crowd and jump aboard without first determining which is the hoax. Others board the right train but disembark before journey's end because the journey is tiring and takes too long or because it is uncomfortable or because they don't like or because they dispute with their fellow-passengers.

Don't be deceived as to your destination. □

Platform 6:

Destination: *Kingdom of God*
(Traditional Route)

Stopping at:

Sunday worship

Christmas

Easter

Saints Days

Immortal Soul

Heaven, at point of death

Fiery Hell, at point of death

Trinity

Platform 7:

Destination: *Kingdom of God*
(Direct Route)

Stopping at:

7th Day Sabbath

7 Bible Holy Days

Conditional immortality

Resurrection at Christ's coming

Reign with Christ on Earth

God - Father and Son

GOD - *Father and Son*

The ancestry of Jesus Christ has caused confusion. Who was he?

Though it's a matter of personal choice and commitment, the ultimate destiny of every human being is to *'come to the Father'*. The God known to Christians as *Father* is the all-powerful Creator of all, self-existent, eternal. He is revealed in the Scriptures as compassionate, loving, merciful. Mankind, of course, has invented his own gods: *'there are gods many and lords many. Yet for us there exists one God the Father from whom all things come and who is our goal, and one Lord Jesus Christ'* says the apostle Paul. History - and the modern world - is strewn with the destructive effects of these false gods made in man's image, made to satisfy his needs. But the Father is the sole reality.

There's mystery surrounding the 'immortal, invisible, God only wise': no human has spoken to Him or seen Him: *'No-one has ever seen God; the only begotten Son. has made Him known'*. And: *'His voice you never yet heard'*; said Jesus, *'neither have you seen His form'*. He does not converse with us face-to-face. Such is His majesty, His all-consuming power, His glory that any such direct contact would utterly destroy us. Yet we are encouraged to take to Him every need, every problem that besets us. And He answers (sometimes *yes*, sometimes *no*, sometimes *later!*), always out of love, with the reply best suited to our long-term interest.

The Father is surrounded by a multitude of created spirit advisors and helps - some able to wield incredible spiritual power. This angelic kingdom is created to carry out His will throughout the universe. But the Father desires more intimate fellow-

ship. Himself Spirit - *holy Spirit* - He planned to have that fellowship with beings made in His image. To this end He created a 'clay model' - man. Made from earth's elements we humans have in embryo form divine qualities: especially the ability - and the need - to communicate and to fellowship with Him. Hence the universal desire - so widely perverted - for some form of religion.

But how to communicate? Divine glory to be accessed by man had, in order to protect us, in some way to be tempered.

Logically, God must have had no beginning. (In the realm of pure Spirit, time doesn't exist, while in the material world it is determined by the planetary systems.) The ludicrous alternative is that matter - organic and inorganic - has always existed and has the capacity to evolve intelligent life. It cannot have suddenly or even gradually emerged from total nothingness. Only a unique God of infinite wisdom and power could create a material universe where none had existed.

The creation of the 'clay model' was God's reason for the creation of a material universe, for mankind is at the heart of the divine plan. To interact with man, however, an intermediary was necessary.

Divine Mystery

Herein lies a mystery - one that has occupied the reasoning powers of Christians down the centuries. On one hand there are New Testament texts which clearly state that Jesus the Messiah was instrumental in the whole of creation: *"without him was nothing made that was made"* and *'[there is] one Lord Jesus*

Christ through whom all things exist and through whom we are". In apparent contrast God is described as 'One': *"...the LORD our God is one LORD"*.

Alpha and Omega

Yet, there's no reason to assume that an all-powerful Being who has always existed and has no beginning and who could create the vastness of the Universe from nothing could not have eternally existed in dual form.

Alternatively, at some point in the divine existence the 'One God' could - just as with modern bio-technology - have from His own Spirit substance formed a Being equal to Himself, with whom He directly interfaced with man.

The two independent Spirit beings were *one* in every aspect: their plans, their thoughts, their actions, their abilities, their name. In the Scriptures He is known to us as YHVH - Jehovah, Yahweh - the self-existing One, the *'I AM'*. And - whichever option we favour - because both Beings are of the same holy and eternal Spirit substance they both have always existed. Note that Jesus claimed for himself complete unity in every way with the Father.

To Him the Father assigned the work of the creation of all that's physical, including mankind. Planet Earth was the stage for the outworking of the divine plan. Together with the Father He designed and created man, and instructed him - at times face-to-face - on how to best function in the flesh.

Down the ages He was - is - the overseer of all man does, intervening when necessary to keep the divine plan on track. He appeared in human form - for example to Adam and Eve, to Abraham, to Moses. He commanded Israel, extricating them from slavery in Egypt and entering into a covenant with them. By means of the holy Spirit He inspired the Old Testament prophets and psalmists and historians.

Son of God

The moment came for more *[cont'd p.8*

Are You a 'Philadelphian' Christian?

Some church administrations promote the notion that the 'Seven churches of Revelation' (Chapters 2-3) represent specific 'eras' of church history. The 'best' era and the one to which 'you must belong' is usually selected as that of 'Philadelphia'. By virtue of the promises Jesus gives the church in that town, they are the 'goodies'. As human nature will have it, such claims for a specific denomination tend to instil an aura of superiority - evident in some such groups.

Three such eras are considered to be current: Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea, and will be - according to this interpretation - in existence at Christ's return. Laodicea, especially, is singled out for special condemnation: *'lukewarm'*. Apparently because of their demeanour they are slated, by these groups, to experience the rigours of 'the Great Tribulation' in order to bring them up to spiritual speed.

As dates - contrary to Jesus' caution about setting them - are usually wrapped around each so-called era it's too bad if you were born at the wrong time, in the wrong century. This dating is itself fuzzy, and there isn't much consensus as to when each so-called 'era' begins - or ends. Also implied is the 'uncertain certainty' that we now live in the 'end-time'.

Not considered is the undoubted New Testament portrayal of the church of God not as a head-quartered denomination but as individual local assemblies united in spirit and holding generally to similar - sometimes plain wrong - beliefs. Just like the seven west Asian assemblies. You must, it's claimed, hold to a specified number of 'revealed truths' to be part of the true church. Competing churches squabble over what these are. Find yourself converted outside the 'right' church and your salvation isn't secure.

Save My Skin

The main thrust of the desire to be Philadelphian is that you will 'flee to the wilderness' protected by God from the predicted awesome end-time events.

Becoming a Christian since the 1930s qualifies you, it is said, for this special status. Unless, of course, you have gone off the boil - spiritually lukewarm. Or, you belong to the 'wrong' church. Or, like 'Sardis', you are stone cold dead.

It's clear from Scripture, however, that as the end draws near Christians will be persecuted - and some will die, martyrs for the faith. Referring to those times Jesus, addressing the faithful, said: *'Then they shall hand you over for persecution and they will kill you, and you will be hated of all nations on account of my name'* (Matthew 24:9). These must not have joined the 'right church' - though Jesus doesn't differentiate. He had words about this: *'Whoever seeks to conserve his life for himself shall lose it, and whoever loses it shall revitalize it'* (Luke 17:33).

God's Shield

This isn't a denial that some Christians may indeed receive divine protection. It happens all the time, even in our day. The Psalmist conveys God's promise: *'A thousand may fall right beside you and ten thousand at your right hand, but it shall not come near you'* (Psalm 97). The protection, note, is *where you happen to be* - not because you have been whisked away to a 'place of safety'. An example is the protection God afforded Israel while Egypt was being laid waste around them. Or, the protection of Daniel from the lions that were breathing down his neck. Or his contemporaries shielded from Nebuchadnezzar's furnace.

Indeed some Christians living in Jerusalem as 'Armageddon' approaches are urged by Jesus to instantly drop all and *'flee to the mountains'* (Matthew 24:16). A sensible precaution. Back in 70AD as the Romans attacked Jerusalem, the Judean brethren hot-footed to Pella in Transjordan.

You may consider it more a reflection of God's loving character that those thus protected - and not martyred - are the spiritually weak. Laodicean in their spiritual attitude, perhaps, but still considered by Jesus as part of his church (Revelation 3:14), and worth rescuing. Jesus, even now, is walking among his

brethren and grooming all of us for Kingdom glory.

Role of Law

There's a widely-held view - harking back to a misunderstanding of the role of law in the Scriptures - that salvation depends on how well we obey the Commandments. For those commands and their subsidiaries define sin.

When we 'repent' God grants His holy Spirit. The Spirit is 'a piece of His mind' implanted in us - and will prompt us to submit to His law. It's a Christian duty to comply, for our obedience is evidence of our conversion. Without the Spirit we *'are none of his'* and with it we willingly submit to God's instruction in His Word - all of it, as it applies.

Each of us is responsible for how we build on the Foundation - which is Jesus Christ who dwells in each of us after conversion. The quality of our 'construction' determines our *role* in God's Kingdom. If, however, we have God's Spirit - and persevere until death - yet fail to build with quality materials we will still be saved. Wrote Paul to the brethren in Corinth: *'Whatever quality each one's work may be, the fire will test it. If one's construction survives he will receive pay [reward]. If one's work burns down he will be the loser; though personally he will be saved, yet only as passing through fire'* (1 Cor 3:12-15).

Christians are being judged now - day by day, and our various trials - some tested 'as by fire' - are carefully monitored by our Father to ensure we are not overwhelmed by them. He always provides a way for us to shoulder them (1 Corinthians 10:11-14).

As is evident from how Jesus deals with each of the seven churches (Revelation 2-3), he is dedicated - in all ages - through instruction and correction to shepherd all his willing brothers and sisters safely into the fold of his Kingdom. That sometimes demands the fiery heat of persecution and trials - for any one of us, no matter to which 'era' or to which church we belong. At the same time, as in the church in Smyrna, fierce persecution comes even when the brethren are using spiritual 'gold' materials.

More important is that we take note of the spiritual and moral lessons Jesus highlights in his oversight of these seven assemblies. They apply in *all* ages, to all churches. □

You feel your life needs to change and that you need forgiveness. You are drawn to God's Word and want to be baptized. Are you ready?

When we reach the point of baptism each of us has faced a variety of life experiences. Some have a "record". Others have been "religious since mother's knee". Some were christened, or baptized as an adult. Some have never had any religious training or experience. Some have been associated with other churches and others have never darkened a church door. You then come to believe that change is needed. What do you do?

The Scriptures teach a twin action: Repent, and be baptized" (Acts 2:38). The baptism bit is usually easy. But - do we understand what's meant by "repentance"?

A New Beginning

Note first that baptism is "the bottom of the ladder" of the Christian life. It is a new beginning. When you step out of the water and have the laying-on of hands (to receive God's Spirit) you are a new life - a spiritual embryo, if you like. God's Spirit has united with your spirit to form a new creature. You are a "babe in Christ". And you have much to learn! You need to "grow".

So, what God will seek from you as a mature Christian after years of experience is not what He expects from you at baptism! Thankfully, God doesn't reveal the specific trials ahead of a new Christian. But the way He wants us to live as Christians - the evidence that we are truly converted - is clearly explained in Scripture!

Repentance

We can't be saved by any personal works of righteousness. It is of grace, of God's mercy, out of His love for us. So why echo the question of Acts

2:37: 'What must I do?' The key, as Peter answered, is - repent! Christianity is a way of life, and we are expected to "live by every Word of God" (Matthew 4:4), and that will mean a radical change in our daily walk.

Let's look at some of these changes.

God has called you to offer you His salvation. In His goodness He leads

Coming To Baptism

you to repentance. He uses the circumstances of your life to

induce a godly sorrow - a deep contrition for your sin and for your sinful nature. Such sorrow can be triggered by ill-health, by loss of someone close, by reverses, simply by a general dissatisfaction with your life. But whatever it is, you begin to seek, and follow, God's way. To seek and to follow is repentance. Repentance is not just a "feeling". It is action! It is a turning to God's "narrow way". It is willing obedience.

And you can't leave obedience till after your baptism! When God begins to call you, it is His Spirit that is working with you. You are not alone, for the holy Spirit is with you, prompting you to obedience. It is for you to turn those prompts into action! You show your submission to God by a changed lifestyle, by starting to produce good fruit. And you start before baptism.

Check List

This article is not meant to be a substitute for counsel with a competent counsellor of the Church. You ought to discuss baptism fully, and indeed baptism, for your sake, shouldn't be carried out unless you do! Here, however, is a "check list" to summarize key parts of what the counsellor wants you to understand.

Not surprisingly, there are ten areas of your life to make a start on before baptism. Unless you are committed to them God won't give you His Spirit. They are signposts to the life in Christ. God expects you to take your first steps of obedience before giving you His Spirit. Like any parent, He does not look for maturity from a babe - but you have to take those first steps as evidence of commitment! Let's look at them briefly.

Determine to put God, His Word and His work first in your life. Have you made this commitment?

Realize that true religion is of the spirit and not dependent on the physical - eg religious symbols, pictures, buildings. Are you looking to God for salvation and not to your deeds or religious trappings?

All our service to God ought to reflect His revealed Word. If it's contrary to Scripture, if it does not carry God's imprint - discard it. It is "vain worship", and idolatrous. This applies, for example, to many "Christian" traditions. It applies also to religious "holy days". Only those revealed in Scripture are acceptable to God - see Leviticus 23. Have you begun to observe God's holy days, and renounced traditional Christian holidays like Christmas, Easter, Saints' Days, All Souls?

God seeks positive worship from us each week on His (7th day) Sabbath - *not* Sunday - coupled with cessation of our normal business activity. Do you now observe God's weekly seventh-day Sabbath?

Our Christian life is marked by recognition of God's pattern of family life. Be on good terms with your family. Have you taken steps (eg forgiveness) to be reconciled to your parents and your children?

Be reconciled, also, to all those to whom you have any animosity. Failure to forgive means we inwardly

harbour murderous thoughts. Have you searched your heart for hatred, begun to control anger and to love even your enemies?

□ Determine to discipline yourself to purity of thought: check that what you read, what you view. Do what is godly, and according to God's Word. Adultery, fornication, homosexuality, transvestitism, lesbianism *etc* are sin. God requires His people to be chaste, and faithful within marriage. Have you abandoned all unlawful personal relationships?

□ Be industrious, respectful of the property of others, and generous in all your good deeds. Are you following only legal occupations, honest in your dealings - *eg* with your employer and the taxman - and God?

□ Honesty and compassion should become constant companions. Are you helpful and supportive to your neighbour, willing to overlook his faults and to serve him?

□ Be thankful for what you have, and don't desire what's not yours, nor what you can't afford (*eg* consumerism, gambling), nor what's harmful to your body (*eg* smoking, alcohol, drugs). All are forms of idolatry! If necessary get professional help to conquer such habits. If, however, you are actively trying to be rid of them, but have not yet succeeded, it need not stop you from being baptized. Are you actively trying to conquer harmful habits?

A False Conversion?

I repeat - you must be committed to this outline. But God knows our weakness, and does not expect maturity or perfection of a babe!

The above is a brief summary of how we should begin to live before baptism. Repentance means we voluntarily submit to this way of life. Unless committed to these ten commandments we are not truly repentant. They are "seeds" that we plant

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.

before baptism. As we mature in Christ they bring forth an abundance of godly fruit. If we are not so com-

Are you prepared to be baptized?

If you would like to counsel about baptism we will be happy to arrange to discuss this vital step with you. Please contact our offices

mitted our baptism is a sham.

It will result in a "false conversion" in which we worship Jesus Christ in vain (*see* Matthew 7:15-28 - especially vv.21-23). Dangerously, we will be lulled into a false security, assuming we are "saved".

Multiple millions follow this path of lawlessness, and led by false shepherds become blinded to the beautiful way of life revealed through God's Law. Such may indeed have sorrow for their sin. They see in Jesus Christ the forgiveness of that sin. But by false teachings they are then led to resist God's holy and perfect and righteous Law! That resistance is carnal, and spells death.

Obedience to God is not "salvation by works". It is an expression of our submission to His lordship and sovereignty. Joyful obedience to God's *torah* (*ie* instruction) - as expanded in all of Scripture - is one sign that we are truly being converted. No-one can expect to be converted, can expect God to give His holy Spirit, can be sure of salvation unless they first "bring forth fruit meet for repentance".

Can you be in the Kingdom, some ask, without keeping the Sabbath? Or if you are an adulterer? Or worshipping falsely? The wrong questions! Rather we ought to ask, Will God graciously and freely give His holy Spirit to someone who refuses to obey His revealed Word? Clearly - no!

Remember: God will give His holy Spirit - without which we are none of His, without which there is no salvation (Romans 8:9) - only to those who have become so truly sorry for their sin that they are changing their lifestyle according to the way of life revealed in His Word. Only then, and wholly by His grace and mercy, do we enter His Family as new-born babes in Christ. □

LAW OF LIFE...cont'd

A New Beginning: God Reigns

A period of 'shock and awe' is predicted for modern Israel - both Houses. The survivors, however, will have a new beginning initially in what is today known as 'Palestine' - but a territory enlarged to extend from the Nile to the Euphrates.

The Prophets give further insight. Ezekiel, for example. He passes on God's message that the LORD will one day re-unite both Houses of Israel - separated since the time of Solomon's successor, Rehoboam: *'Observe. I am taking the children of Israel from among the nations whither they are gone, and will gather them from every quarter and bring them into their own land. One king shall be king over them all. They shall no longer be two nations, and no longer divided into two kingdoms. Neither shall they defile themselves with their idols, their foul practices and all their other transgressions; for I will save them from all their sinful apostasies' (ch 37:21-23).*

But *change* is vital. There will, at long last, be perfect incorruptible Government, as the resurrected 'saints' reign alongside the Messiah. And the people, too, will be changed. Hear Jeremiah: *'See. The days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the House of Israel and the House of Judah; not like the covenant I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, which covenant of Mine they broke, although I was a husband to them' (ch 30:31-32).*

God 'married' Israel but, because of their infidelity, 'divorced' them. But He will re-marry! The first marriage covenant (Exodus 19-23) clearly demonstrated that man's - and not just Israel's - innate hostility to his Creator hindered sustained submission to the terms of the covenant, and

cut them off from its blessings.

In the 'new covenant': *'I will put My Law in their inward parts and upon their hearts will I write it' (v.33).* The *Law of Life* - just as with true Christians today and as with all God's faithful throughout the ages - will then be imprinted on the minds of all Israel and of all mankind. □

Bible Basics

The *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

God...cont'd

direct intervention. In the fullness of time and at the perfect moment of human history the Godhead determined to interface with mankind more intimately. The time came to make the divine plan universally available. God's holy Spirit by which He acted in the world was to be implanted in human minds.

Sin was delt with according to the pattern set since Adam sinned - by sacrifice: *'the life is in the blood'* and *'the blood through the life in it serves for expiation'*.

God entered the human realm through the impregnation by the holy Spirit, transformed into human seed,

unsigned articles are by the Editor

in the womb of a Jewish woman of the Tribe of Judah living in Israel, : *'...his mother Mary was found to be of child through the holy Spirit'*. Born to her was the Son of God, named Jesus, Saviour, *'Immanuel - God with us'*. He became that sacrifice.

For over three decades Jesus, empowered by the holy Spirit, lived the perfect sinless life - because of his divine ancestry qualifying to be the Saviour of mankind by the sacrifice of his own sinless life. Then he was *'declared to be the Son of God'* by his resurrection from among the dead. Because of his perfection death could not hold him.

Divine Fellowship

After his resurrection to Spirit life, Jesus imparted the holy Spirit to his disciples - 'begetting' them to the same Spirit life, and at the ensuing Pentecost empowering them to take his Gospel message to all of mankind. All who - through their calling, repentance and baptism - are thus begotten become *'a new creature'* in Christ. Over their remaining lifespan each is to grow spiritually into the likeness of the character of Christ. Each one who is faithful to death will be resurrected at Christ's return, having the same Spirit body as that of Jesus.

It is by virtue of that indwelling holy Spirit, the indwelling divine mind, that Jesus can claim: *'Before Abraham was, I am'* and *'I and my Father are one'*. By that same holy Spirit we will at our resurrection shed our flesh and rise from the dead as Spirit entities. The clay image is transformed as Spirit. All who have that Spirit at death will when resurrected enter into fellowship and service with the risen Christ. And in due course with our heavenly Father as His sons and daughters and as brothers and sisters of Jesus.

The Family of God will at that time become complete. □

Mini Study...**WHY WERE YOU BORN?**

"God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten son that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16)

When they at all give it a thought, most folk wonder why on earth we are here, why we were born. Surely there must be some purpose to our 'three score years and ten' - beyond survival, enjoyment, reproduction, perhaps leaving things better than when we arrived. If you have discarded the idea of a living God then that's life. But for the believer, God has better plans.

- the divine plan for mankind was conceived in eternity, before the creation of the physical universe. Indeed the universe is the stage on which God is enacting His purpose for mankind, His unique creation
- God created the human race on Planet Earth . We are made *'in his image, after his likeness'* - we bear His outward form - and also have the germ of His intellectual and emotional powers. God commissioned us to use these powers to maintain the physical creation (Genesis 1:26-27)

- but right now we are merely the 'clay model' (we are *'of the earth'*: Genesis 3:19). Our potential, however, is to be *'partakers of the divine nature'* (II Peter 1:4), to become a part of the Kingdom of God
- God is implementing His plan in stages. At this time - Stage 2 - He is selecting and training the personnel for the next stage. Addressing the apostles, for example, Jesus said *'...in the new age, when the Son of Man shall sit on the throne of his glory, you too shall sit on twelve thrones passing judgment on the twelve tribes of Israel'* (Matthew 19:28)
- and not just Israel but all mankind - and angelic beings - will come under the benign rule of the King of kings - assisted by the saints (Revelation 5:10)
- this process requires human response to the Father's invitation (John 6:44). Those who commit to Him receive the gift of the holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). Although we are still *'in the flesh'* the Spirit in us - with our co-operation - shapes us over time into the divine

Further reading:
**After the Resurrection
 Why Were You Born?**

character. Wrote Paul: *"He has chosen us in him before the world was founded to be holy and blameless in his presence"* (Ephesians 1:4)

- through a period of experience this clay model is transformed: *'...but we all are changed into [Christ's] likeness from one degree of glory to another, derived as it is from the Lord's Spirit'* (II Corinthians 3:18). Our active and willing submission to the promptings of the Spirit prepares us to serve as *'a kingdom of priests'* in God's Kingdom
- in a very real sense we will be *'sons of God'*; *'Because those whom He knew beforehand, those He appointed beforehand to share the likeness of His Son, so that he might be the firstborn among many brothers'* (Romans 8:29)
- we are born, in other words, to become a part of the divine Family, with the divine nature. We have but a glimpse, now, of what God has in store for those who fully commit to Him: *'What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, neither has it come up in the human heart, that has God made ready for those who love him. Through the Spirit, however, God has revealed it to us'* (I Corinthians 2:9,10) □

New Horizons may be viewed
on our web-site

www.cgom.org

e-mail: coguk@aol.com and
information@cgom.org

coming...

in New ***Horizons***

Divorce - Is It Biblical?

The Church in the Home

request—no charge

University of the Home

***Can You Believe
the Bible?***

God's Academy

Bible Basics

The Churches of God Outreach
Ministries publish an internet
Bible 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 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