

NEW

Horizons

Vol 9 No 1 *January/February 2005*
addressing the important issues for today and tomorrow



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CGOM

Churches Of God Outreach Ministries

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

**The Gospel was proclaimed
by Jesus and by his apostles
in the clearest of terms - and
recorded for us in the 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 49

January/February 2005

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

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

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

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

Brief History of Time

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

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

Jesus Christ is that Lord: "*The Son of man is also Lord of the Sab-*

bath" (Luke 6:5). As the Father's representative and executive it was he who was instrumental in creating the material universe and the creation of time itself. Writing of Jesus, the apostle Paul told the Colossian Christians: "...*by him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible...and he is before all things and by him all things consist*".

A Day of Joy

Certainly such a memorial must encourage a joyful response. Yet many believers dread the approach of the Day! It's traditionally dourly viewed as merely a time of boring inactivity punctuated by a church visit followed by the long-awaited end of the day. Others will invest the day with an endless round of "don'ts" to the extent of suppressing the joy of Sabbath.

Delight in the Sabbath

guidance has He given us in the Scriptures as to its observance?

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

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

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

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

Made For Man

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

God wants us to enjoy His Day!

on the day before.

Jesus picked up on the same theme. He saw no conflict when the disciples plucked some grain on the Sabbath. (This wasn't theft but was permitted in the Law, though the Pharisees said '*not on the Sabbath*'! That would be work.) He accepted the Pharisees right to circumcise and to attend to the needs of livestock. In essence, Jesus made it clear that "*the Sabbath was made [created] for man*" - i.e., for our benefit (Mark 2:27). He cited the fact that the divine Law permitted the priestly work to proceed on the Sabbath. He cites also the example of the starving David and his men. [NB This was a one-off emergency situation!] They ate the shewbread - forbidden to all but the priests. Jesus refers here to the Jewish oral tradition (based on Leviticus 24:8) that the loaves were baked on the Sabbath, and that it was on this day David ate it.

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

Clear The Decks

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

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

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

Balanced Choice

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

The Colossian Christians had a thing about how to observe the weekly and

annual Sabbaths. They had taken on board the then prevalent austere practices. Paul told them to lighten up! He wrote: "So let no one judge you in food or in drink or regarding a festival or new moon or sabbaths... Therefore if you died, with Christ, from the basic principles of the world why as living in the world do you subject yourselves to regulations - 'do not touch, do not taste, do not handle' - which all concern things which perish with the using, according to the commandments and doctrines of men? These indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh" (ch 2:16-23).

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

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

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

**The Day to Remember
and the booklet
Why Observe Sunday?**

If you would like to counsel about any matter related to your Bible studies or to your personal challenges our elders are eager to be of service. They may be contacted through any of our offices

Enquire, too, about places to fellowship in strict confidence

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coguk@aol.com or at **cgom@cox.net**

Just what is 'that old-time religion'? The Bible exhorts us to 'contend for the faith once delivered to the saints'. What was that faith? When was it delivered? Who delivered it?

Do you agree with some Christians that the teachings expressed by the founder of their Church are unchangeable? The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints ("Mormons"), for example, faced this challenge many years ago. So too did the Seventh Day Adventist church. And the Jehovah's Witnesses. Right now, indeed, the Church of England is torn by similar challenges. And even within the Roman Church there are still rumblings from the changes instigated by Vatican II!

However, simple analysis surely dispels this notion.

Why, for example, so many denominations? Were all these leaders "inspired" in widely different - and conflicting - doctrinal directions by the same Holy Spirit of truth? And if they claim inspiration *why do a few sometimes admit error* - evidenced by a doctrinal change? Isn't it just possible, therefore, that the "great teacher" simply got it wrong - or only partially right? Was he (or she) infallible? He may have claimed divine inspiration. But could his view perhaps be coloured by background, by prejudice, by limited scholarship or simple lack of access to all the facts? Could he even have *deliberately set out to deceive*?

Few Christians would quarrel with Jude's exhortation to "carry on a vigorous defence of the faith that was once for all entrusted to God's people" (Jude 3, *Williams trans*). It's surely a praiseworthy goal to which all of us should aspire. But we must be quite clear what it means!

We are exhorted in Scripture to "grow

in knowledge". Doesn't this imply that we may have *imperfect* knowledge of "truth"? That perhaps truth garnered in one generation can be buried through persecution, martyrdom, deception - and lost to the next generation? And later be rediscovered? No church can remain as some kind of doctrinal fossil!

In fact, the questions as to what was that faith, when was it delivered, and who delivered it are at the very heart of the matter. Let's consider them.

Who Is Right?

What specific "doctrines" the Bible teaches is largely irrelevant in this study. [An outline of the *Churches of God* beliefs is available in our *Statement of Beliefs*] The central fact is: there is a single, specific body of belief, of teaching (doctrine), that is original Christianity. A study of the twentieth century's some two thousand plus Christian denominations might appear to give the lie to this! Can the Holy Spirit be guiding both Pope John Paul and his implacable foe Dr Ian Paisley? The Church of England and the Brethren Church and the Mormons and the Jehovah's Witnesses - and The Churches of God? And guiding them into different and opposing teachings?

no church proudly proclaims itself to be in error!

Do the Scriptures - which are "given by inspiration of God" (II Timothy 3:16) - teach one group to baptize infants, and another to immerse only adults? Or one to insist on salvation by faith alone while another demands "works" also? One to venerate images or the crucifix, another to abhor them? One to speak in tongues, another to regard this as demonic? One to celebrate the Mass and another to consider it pagan?

Notice these examples are of *main-*

stream Christianity. Include other groups claiming to be Christian and we could also contrast those who observe Sunday with those who consider the seventh day as the Sabbath (many millions of Christians, in fact!), those who keep Christmas and Easter with those who consider these festivals 'pagan', Trinitarians with non-trinitarians, the immortal soul concept with "soul sleep" - almost *ad infinitum*!

With such variation - who is right? *Is anyone?* And if *all* represent "the truth" (and do any proudly proclaim themselves to be teaching error?) where does that place the Holy Spirit? Is the Spirit perhaps confused? Clearly not. There is only one expression of the truth, of the mind of God. Wrote the apostle Paul, "There is ... *one Spirit, one faith...*" (Ephesians 4:5).

The challenge, surely, is for the church of God to extract the nuggets of truth from the Scriptures! That is where truth lies. Not from added traditions, not from the ravings of some prophet or prophetess, not from long-hidden plates dug from a mountain-side, nor from hoary traditions of "the Fathers".

Sanity and stability can return only when we recognize that we dare not add to - nor detract from - the Word of God as expressed in the Old and New Testaments! *There* lies "the faith once delivered"!

The Holy Scriptures

First, let's look at the writings of our "Old Testament".

Few Christians would challenge the idea that these writings represent the foundation of New Testament teachings. For example, there are in the New Testament (NT) over six hundred direct quotations and references to the Old Testament (OT). And there's little teaching in the NT that is not securely rooted in the "Holy

The Faith Once Delivered

Scriptures” - that is, the thirty-nine books into which modern versions of the OT are divided. Even such an “advanced” and Christian teaching as “love your neighbour as yourself” first found written expression by the pen of Moses - Leviticus 19:18 - some fifteen hundred years before Jesus quoted it!

Indeed, the apostle Paul wrote to his “pupil” Timothy that these same Holy Scriptures (what we call the Old Testament) are “inspired by God, and useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in doing what is right” (II Timothy 3:16). The first Christians initially had no other writings from which to learn the truth! At Thessalonica they were commended by Paul for “carrying on a daily study of the Scriptures [*i.e.*, the Old Testament]” to see if Paul’s message were true (Acts 17:11). This is hardly the view of most twentieth century Christians!

Jesus himself identified these Scriptures as “the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms” (Luke 24:44-45). In the language of those times, he thus described the entirety of what Protestants today call “The Old Testament” and which the Jews term “The Holy Scriptures”.

The Old Testament, then, is certainly a reliable source for discovering “the faith once delivered to the saints”. Without it the writings of the New Testament would be largely gobbledygook - incomprehensible! Yet most Christians all but ignore it, relegate it to history’s dust-bin.

Inspired New Testament

The primitive Church of God relied on the Old Testament writings, but supplemented by the words - through letters and sermons - of the apostles and prophets. At that time God was directly inspiring these men to lay the foundation of Christianity. Wrote Paul to the Ephesian Christians: “...for you are built upon the foundation of the apostles and

prophets, with Christ Jesus himself the cornerstone” (*ch* 2:20). Indeed Paul claims that the words he spoke were “in words taught by the Holy Spirit” (1 Corinthians 2:13).

All this was, of course, predicted by Jesus himself.

In his final counsel to the disciples prior to his death, Jesus told them: “...when the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into the whole truth” (John 16:13). He also told them, “But the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you” (14:26). This enabled them to preach and teach - and later to have written down - the whole counsel of God. They were inspired to perfectly recall all Jesus taught them during their three and a half years in his company before his death. And also that burning instruction he imparted to them in the nearly six weeks following his resurrection (Luke 24:32, Acts 1:3). Indeed throughout their lives the Holy Spirit guided them into all truth.

It was therefore to these men and by these means and at that time that the entire structure of Christian belief was laid! Paul urged the young evangelist Timothy to entrust to reliable men *the same teachings* Paul had imparted (II Timothy 2:2). There was no room for variety of belief in the fundamentals of the faith!

Do you want to know what Jesus taught? Look to these Scriptures! Ought you to accept a “new” teaching? Only if it is perfectly in harmony with the writings of the Old and New Testaments! And should you abandon a traditional teaching or doctrine of your church? Only when the change is clearly proven *without shadow of doubt* from the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments.

No Infallible Teachers

In our day we need both the Old Testament *and* the New Testament.

For there are no living witnesses to the life and words of Jesus. Not since the death of the apostle John at the end of the first Christian century have there been living apostles whose words are directly inspired by God. The leaders of the churches of God are “inspired” in their words and teachings only as they reflect the written Word of God—though God gives insights in regard to the application of His Word for our times. There are, today, no infallible teachers! Sadly, though, there are many who assume such a role. And many thousands—even millions—who willingly and gullibly are deceived by their claims!

Too often Christians will flit to a new but powerfully-presented doctrine without thorough examination of the Bible texts! Paul urged: “Prove all things. Hold fast to what is good” (I Thessalonians 5:21). Elsewhere he says: “For a time is coming when men will not tolerate wholesome instruction, but, wanting to have their ears tickled, they will find a multitude of teachers to satisfy their own fancies, and will close their ears to the truth and will turn away to fables” (I Timothy 4:3). Quite an indictment!

Could You Believe A Lie?

The apostle Paul gave a solemn warning that’s of special application today. Writing to the church at Thessalonica about the crisis at the close of this age - our day - he warned of a coming time of worldwide deception perpetrated by a “lawless man”. This wretched being “is produced by the spirit of evil and armed with all the force, wonders and signs that falsehood can devise. To those involved in this dying world he will come with evil’s undiluted power to deceive, *for they have refused to love the truth* which could have saved them” (II Thessalonians 2:9-10).

I need but remind you that Jesus said “*Your Word is truth*” (John 17:17)!

If we fail to measure our beliefs against the yardstick of the divinely inspired Word of the Living God then we could be in deep trouble. For the apostle Paul went on to tell the Thessalonian Christians that for those who *don't* love the truth “*God sends upon them, therefore, the full force of evil's delusion so that they put their faith in an utter fraud*”!

A fearful warning indeed. Failure to love God's Word leads to a fatal dementia in which we end up believing downright lies.

Do you “love the truth”? Are you willing to compare your beliefs with the inspired Word of God? When you hear “new doctrine” - from whatever source - are you, like the Bereans (Acts 17:11), eager to search the Scriptures [for the Bereans this meant the *Old Testament!*] to see if these things were so”? Or do you simply accept your church's teachings without question?

In the Scriptures God has given us all we need to know about himself, about the way of salvation, about how we ought to behave. Admittedly there are areas where the fine details are cause for legitimate debate. But the broad brushstrokes of vital truth are clear for all who have the spiri-

Strange Beliefs!

We have passed the season of ‘hobgoblins and foul fiends’, witches on broomsticks, evil-looking lanterns and ‘trick or treat’—also known as *Hallowe'en*.

Also behind us is the season of over-spending, over-indulgence, candles, large fierce men with flowing beards and in red suits stained with chimney soot. We have swept away the pine needles from the carpet, packed away the baubles till next year and recovered from the hangovers. We shudder at sight of the new credit card account. That was the *Christmas* that was.

Around the corner is another strange custom: an anonymous greetings card ‘from a secret

tual eye to see. It is there for us to prove - *personally!*

Yet virtually the whole of Christian-

INVITATION TO HELP!

New Horizons is a major evangelism tool of the *Outreach Ministries*, distributed free to all who request it. It isn't for sale! But it needs a wider distribution, and our readers can help. Here's how.

Individuals as well as local fellowships are invited to regularly distribute a specific number of copies of each bi-monthly issue - how many is up to you.

You could, for example, pass on copies to friends and relatives. Or leave a copy in the doctor's or dentist's office. Even mail it.

Expansion, however, costs! We therefore invite you to pledge the cost of your copies. So a pledge of \$10 (£5) will provide the *CGOM* message to a further 10 readers - potential sons and daughters of God. Your pledge will enable us to print the appropriate number of extra copies. You may, of course, cancel your pledge at any time.

All we need is a note from you with your mailing address and the number of copies you wish to distribute. Should you decide to advance our outreach efforts in this way, please donate to your local office of the *Outreach Ministries*.

Should you wish to help distribute *New Horizons* but are unable to contribute financially we are still happy to welcome you as a distributor
Everything helps!

Your prayerful consideration

admirer’. That will be *St Valentine's Day*.

Then in a couple of months, come spring, we deck ourselves in new frocks and hats, get up before dawn to watch the sun rise, dye and paint eggs and hide them, then ask the kids to hunt for them, and we buy chocolate eggs decorated with chicks and bunnies. We call it *Easter*.

Odd customs indeed. Yet the celebrations are twisted by vicars, priests and other clergy to pretend they have something to do with Christianity! The religion of truth is framed by lies. And the people love to have it so.

ity, while faithfully applying the Bible principle of service to others, feeds off traditional teachings that are unadulterated pre-Christian beliefs gift-wrapped in Christian clothing. Both Old and New Testament are relegated to the dustbin!

Where do you get your beliefs? How do they compare with the Scriptures? Are you certain your view of Christian doctrine isn't just a veneer of Bible-sounding words that hide ancient lies? Let *all* of us who claim to be Christ's fine tune our love for the truth, and earnestly contend for the faith once delivered to the church in the Scriptures!

And if you are not yet committed to Jesus Christ and to his teachings, you are invited to investigate further. True faith is built on the foundation of sound Bible knowledge. Without this knowledge you could “believe” - but be deceived. Just like “the demons” (James 2:19)! **Ω**

The Churches of God Outreach Ministries publish a range of titles in article and booklet form which highlight the core teachings of Scripture - as free from faulty human tradition as we know how!

Write now for our list of free publications and a copy of *Coming To Baptism*

Strangely, all these have echoes in pre-Christian celebrations. Our forefathers of four thousand years past would recognize them as the form of worship roundly condemned by the Creator—a form of worship that hides His awesome purpose.

Not that God has left us without opportunity to celebrate. Each *Sabbath* day is a chance to rejoice in His presence and with the blessing of Jesus ‘the Lord of the Sabbath’. Then there are seven seasons of ‘*holy convocations*’ in all but one of which we re invited to celebrate joyfully. And every one of them has beautiful significance that reflects the divine plan. **Ω**

Find out more in our free booklet *God's Holy Days*

HOOKED!

Millions are addicted. Is there a way out?

Around the world a billion or so of our fellows struggle for survival. They lack drinkable water, enough food, clean environment, adequate housing. Contrast that with 'the West'. Here, such poverty for the most part is self-inflicted, and comparative affluence 'infects' almost everyone. And for those unable - or unwilling - to support themselves there is 'bread and circuses', financed by the productive in society.

The 'bread' is supplied by profligate Governments hooked on spending: take from those who have diligently earned and lavishly heap welfare on those considered 'needy'. Whether needy or affluent, however, 'circuses' - entertainment - devours time and resources. And, like ancient Sodom, the nations are satiated with 'fullness of bread'. And fast catching up with Sodom and Gomorrah in perverse sexual practices.

We are hooked on every style of diversion. Name it, and someone is hopelessly addicted. In the recent European Cup (soccer), for example, millions went hoarse cheering for one team or another. Success was greeted by exuberant excitement, but the failure of the national team evoked hate-filled riots—even heart attacks.

Egged on by the desire to 'liberalize' - *i.e.*, destroy - society and to raise taxes, national leadership promotes gambling—casinos, horses, slot machines, football. Almost anything! And over a quarter million in Britain are pathologically addicted to the tune of an estimated £40 billion a year. Desperate for extra tax income, the UK Government promotes—complete

with bribery—the proliferation of mega-casinos.

But not just 'watching sports' or punting on the horses or playing Lotto. *Alcohol* claims a couple of million addicts in the UK—and multiple millions throughout the West. In Britain around a third are in some degree hooked on *tobacco*. Headlines have highlighted, of late, the addiction to *fast foods* with resultant destructive obesity—described as 'epidemic'. ["America—the only nation where the poor people are fat" *NYT*] Then there's the *internet*, with millions seriously hooked on all its sordid wares. Mind-bending *drugs* remove another slice of humanity from productive activity.

Fashion, 'beauty', *health fads*, *clubbing*—all kinds of personal vanities—occupy the waking thoughts of millions. There is, too, the nationwide addiction to *television* and 'the silver screen'. And given the awesome fact that average expenditure outstrips income by a third, it appears that *shopping*, too, has become an addiction.

Harmless fun? Mere diversion? Legitimate entertainment? Perhaps it's time to take a closer look.

Consequences

There are shocking personal consequences of all this 'diversion', but few consider. Families are disrupted and impoverished. The poor, especially, are hooked on the national Lottery—sinking further into despair and poverty and with constantly dashed expectations. Countless out-of-control young folk defile themselves and lose all self-respect through wild indulgence: the 'Bridget Jones generation'. [see Panel] Heart disease, strokes, lung cancer, diabetes—all are contributed to by addiction to alcohol or smoking. Cannabis users reap an increasing toll of mental dysfunction. And

with several Government ministers admitting to its use is it any wonder their decision-making skills are so appalling!

Perhaps worse is the deflection of precious human intellect and energy into such vain pursuits. We do need some form of diversion from the serious side of life. But a healthy body, a healthy mind is not served by obsessive devotion to some form of 'entertainment'. A healthy economy is not served by addictions that drain the national purse through illness and lost productivity.

Cause and Cure

Addiction is a many-stranded rope that strangles all it affects. One core strand is *money*—the desire for wealth and possessions. To the uninitiated a 'flutter' may appear to give easy access to realizing a dream. The innocent flutter, however, too often leads the unwary into the 'heavy stuff'. God had something to say: "*You must not covet*". Like all His guidance to mankind it cuts to the root of the problem. The apostle Paul adds: "*The love of money is a root of every evil*". And the sagacious King Solomon: "*Wealth acquired in haste soon flies*".

Another deadly strand is *peer pressure*: 'Everybody does it'. Wise words from God again: "*Don't follow the crowd*". That's a message to drive home to our children from their earliest days. And did *you* join the impetuous Gadarene shopping rush to financial destruction at Christmas past?

Then there's *human nature*. All of us have become programmed, from birth, to satisfy our innermost desires. Fuelled by the example of those around us—and also insidiously promoted *via* the media—restraint and personal responsibility for our choices is cast aside. Our lust for self-satisfaction spills over into

there are shocking personal consequences of addiction

addiction is a many-stranded rope strangling all it affects

the pap of passive and often mind-numbing entertainment

It has been said that in each of us is a 'God-shaped hole' which only our Creator can satisfyingly fill. We try, though. Into it we pour every conceivable distraction from that usually unrecognized spiritual ache. And it doesn't work.

We were created according to a divine plan. Life has a *purpose*—for this life, and reaching into eternity. Find it in truth and you can get off the hook of addiction.

Make a Change

You may not be in a position (but

Decline... *cont'd from p.8*

with one another. They listened to respected leaders of other congregations. They helped struggling churches materially. They co-operated in the exciting task of sharing the Gospel.

The *Outreach Ministries* is an informal association of independent assemblies focused on such principles. We work with any group that in general shares our *Statement of Beliefs*—an agenda generated over decades.

Anyone in Charge?

An insidious danger resulting from isolation and from independence is the wholesale rejection of all religious oversight. That, as stated, lies *within the local church* and not in a distant headquarters which collects—and too often misuses—'tithes', tightly controls doctrine, stifles the Spirit in each Christian.

We would therefore urge all brethren who formally meet together in appropriate numbers to prayerfully select a Spirit-led, trusted and Biblically-literate guide to *cont'd col 3*

unsigned articles are by the Editor

you could try) to influence Government—a prime contributor to the problem through its own obsessive efforts to raise taxes and cultivate a docile populace. By applying these pointers in your personal life, how-

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 (e.g. our quarterly *Newsletter*, this 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

ever, with God's help you can break the chains of devotion to any form of addiction. You can, too, by your example influence your family, your circle of friends, your community. Ω

- In the UK, each day over 400 children start smoking
- *Marriages with alcohol problems are twice as likely to end in divorce*
- There are over 300,000 children of problem drug users

request a copy of the articles

**Why Were You Born?
Reap a Destiny**

Decline... *cont'd*

oversee them. And then to submit to that man's oversight. The holy Spirit will, over adequate time, make clear the right person by means of the individual's tried and tested spiritual fruit.

Our article *Guidelines for Leadership No 3* gives Biblical criteria to help you make the right choice of leadership. The *Outreach Ministries* is happy to share our experience with you.

We may be contacted at any of our addresses Ω

Bible Basics

The *Churches of God Outreach Ministries* publish a home study course on the internet. You are invited to 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

Portrait of Decline?

Churches come—and go. Can we stop the rot?

It's reported that the Methodist Church is in decline. That the Church of England—at least in the West—is in decline. And sliding down the numbers scale, so too many others, among them the *Worldwide Church of God* (WCG) and many of its numerous 'offspring'.

For those of our readers unfamiliar with the WCG, a brief portrait. This church group once commanded the religious airways, notably in the USA. It gleaned donations annually of over \$150 million and around the world had local churches with a total membership of some one-fifty thousand, and influential in some national government circles. It once posed as 'the one true church'. Now it is a shrunken shell with a vastly reduced income, has abandoned its palatial headquarters and has little influence beyond its membership.

Following the death of the denomination's founder in 1986 many members—unhappy with the new leadership and their imposed doctrinal changes—left to form 'sub-denominations' presided over by disaffected former leaders. Over the years some of these have in turn divided into ever smaller groups. Many such divisions, however, have resulted in the formation of independent local congregations. That process continues.

Death of Unity?

These splits are seen by many as unacceptable, doomed to shatter 'church unity'. Which is understandable from the viewpoint of 'one true church' - a single organized named body inclusive of 'all true Christians' on earth at one time. (And there are some of WCG's offspring who believe this of themselves.)

Most Christians, however, who have resigned from the 'one church'—for whatever good reason—do *not* consider that they have abandoned the Body of Christ, the true church. They join another group (denomination or independent) or they live as a solitary Christian dependent for spiritual nourishment on literature and taped messages. Likely, there are now more of these brethren scattered around the world than are in association with an organized group of this tradition.

Back to Basics

The *Outreach Ministries*, however, see this separation into independent local assemblies as a step towards true unity. The independent church stands between the powerful denomination and the lone Christian—neither of which reflects the pattern established in the New Testament church.

The mid-first century church was indeed organized. But it was organized within the *local* assembly - each with its own local leadership primarily answerable, scarily, to the Head of the Church, Jesus. [see our article *What is an Elder?*]

Each of the brethren wherever they fellowshiped, whenever they lived, was a part of the organism that is the true church of God. All were bound together by the same indwelling Spirit. Others may attend the various fellowships—but only the Spirit-begotten were part of that spiritual organism. Each brother, each sister, was under the direct tutelage and care of the Father. Each assembly was overseen by Jesus Christ (*cp* Revelation 2 & 3).

Why?

The twenty-first century churches are being nudged in that same direction. The larger denominations are haemorrhaging members. A lone member here, a family there, some-

times an entire congregation. Some exit for doctrinal—often petty—reasons. Or because of tyrannical and overbearing leadership or, sadly, because of unresolved personal conflict.

Schooled in the *Worldwide Church* culture of subservient obedience to an all-powerful ministry, the heady taste of 'freedom' has led many to rightly question that culture. It may take years in a personal wilderness for some to adjust. Too easily many become lost in that wilderness.

Healing Recipe

It's a challenge to grow spiritually when in isolation. That is recognized in Scripture. Circumstances of health, distance *etc* can, of course, limit access to an appropriate assembly. (So why not work to start your own!) But each Christian is spiritually gifted to build up the brethren in a distinct way—most effective in the context of a community of brethren. *Gifts are two-way—we need each other.*

And not only individuals. For independent congregations, too, cannot long survive in splendid isolation. Both in doctrine and in practice it is all too easy to go off the rails. While not all beliefs are 'essential for salvation' (and most such 'deviations' not widely contrary to clear Scripture should be tolerated) yet isolation—whether as an individual or as an assembly—can lead even to distortion of core Bible teaching, to weird practices and to unnecessary division.

In contrast, the large mega church organization tends to suppress personal spiritual gifts. Doctrine—truth or error—is set in stone and 'handed down' to be blindly obeyed by 'the flock'. False teaching becomes orthodoxy. There is no space for growth nor for developing understanding.

A tried and tested remedy is *communication*. Many early church assemblies were in contact *cont'd p.7*

Mini-study

Is Co-habitation a Sin?

"Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband" (1 Corinthians 7:2)

This and many other verses imply marriage as "possessing" or having joint ownership of one another. Even the betrothal was a very serious and binding agreement or contract, with witnesses, naturally designed to protect and provide for the intended spouse. Marriage was - and still is - intended to be an enforceable agreement with penalties for breaching. Deuteronomy 24:1 indicates a bill (written notice) of divorce must be given, indicating a reversal of a previous bill (of marriage).

- there are various motives for cohabitation. Marriage looks like a losing proposition to the young given the high divorce rate so they resist commitment. Seniors add financial concerns. Their pensions, medical insurance and Social Security may be affected. "Convenience" is another reason given
- the latest statistics indicate almost ten million people are 'shacking-up'

in the U.S.; well over a quarter-million of those are senior citizens.. Co-habitation has become socially acceptable. Sixty-one percent of Americans now view it as "morally acceptable" according to a recent George Barna poll.

- ***there are principles and rules:***

1. *faithfulness, loyalty, and honour* are important. character matters! If there is no contract to marriage, then to whom must you be faithful?
2. Morality: Israel committed spiritual adultery and it produced pain, mistrust, and divorce
3. God roundly condemns unfaithfulness, calling it treachery (Malachi 2:10-16)

- an important scripture, speaking of the "latter times" says that people will be *"Forbidding to marry..."* (I Timothy 4:3). This sounds as though marriage will be disallowed in the "latter" days and that we will be required to be celibate. It makes

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much more sense if we see it as: "in the end times people will deny the necessity of marriage. They will believe and teach that it is all right to 'shack-up'

- what other commandment of God could we justify breaking using the rational for cohabitation? Is it okay to lie, steal, kill, or any number of sins, reasoning that it is not convenient, or that it would place me at an economic disadvantage? One might say I have no other alternative. The answer to that is too obvious - and correct: one may continue to live unmarried, alone, and celibate. Maybe it's not desirable but it is not impossible and it is not living in sin

- the Biblical instruction therefore remains: *"That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour;"* (1 Thessalonians 4:4). *"Should know how"* indicates an effort must be put forth to understand the purpose of marriage and the rules thereof. Would anyone enter into such an important contract without good advice, counsel, knowledge and wisdom?

Steve Kieler

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viewed on our web-site
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God's Grand Design

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*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

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