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Horizons

Vol 9 No 3 *May/June 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 51

May/June 2005

Governments focus on 'the economy' as the measure of national prosperity. Are they right?

Famously, the battle cry for an American election was '*It's the economy, stupid*'. It won the vote. And, of course, the 'pound in your pocket' is a high priority for most. Yet in the West, at least, we enjoy greater material prosperity than previous generations. Earth has yielded vast resources that have more than compensated for our burgeoning population growth, while ingenuity has figured how to increase productivity. We all benefit materially.

Much of our 'prosperity' derives from reliance on the usurious banking industry. In Britain, for example, the private debt burden is estimated at over a *trillion* pounds. That's £1,000,000,000,000 \$1.8trillion! The US national debt is officially four trillion dollars but the true figure has been estimated at five times that. And war doesn't help.

National debt can be absorbed—for a time. But it will in the end catch up with us, and financial experts are already screaming warnings. Personal debt bites more quickly. Overspend and the bankruptcy court with all its painful consequences looms. Your home may be re-possessed and you are out on the street. Your family and business ruined. Friendships severed.

Who's To Blame?

To seek improved quality of life is praiseworthy and to be considered by all. And indeed given human

ingenuity and the products of nature's bounty it is disgraceful if such improvement stalls. Government—ignoring personal responsibility—seeks to re-distribute national income, to grab from the productive to help, often, the feckless and thus provoking tax-dodging, the black economy and other illegality.

We can pin blame for excessive national debt, at least in part—and especially but not exclusively in 'third world' nations—on corruption and profligacy at the top of government and business. Failed technology drains the national coffers—for example Government computer systems. And the arms industry absorbs vast sums. Unnecessary bureauc-

**'It's the economy'
...are you stupid?**

racy, too, with multiple thousands of useless jobs financed from the public (taxpayers) purse. And then there's the huge 'welfare' drain. No wonder national debt soars.

What of personal debt? The Christmas season gives a clue, for that's when most debt accumulates around the neck of unbelievers and believers alike. It's the time for perhaps a third of retail sales—also a clue.

There's a malaise in the human heart that wants to spend, spend, spend. Possessions—we want them. A more luxurious home, more exotic holidays, nicer designer clothes, better furnishings, well-turned-out children, treasured *objects d'art*. And if the factor that underpins

these—a sufficient income—can't be achieved by legal pursuits then there's always the illegal, the 'black economy'.

National Prosperity

We may, in general, be more prosperous than before, have more 'goods', more leisure, live longer. Is a strong economy, though, *real* prosperity?

The downside, what we all live with, is neglect of the sick and the elderly, widespread violence, broken dysfunctional families and gross immorality in high places, fraudulent practices and corruption, a lack of integrity and the grasping for possessions.

Government—they bear some responsibility for all this—has failed to curb such excesses. Indeed, "*The whole head is sick and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot to the head there is no soundness in it*". There are clear reasons.

Imagine a society in which there is the mirror image of this 'downside': the elderly and the disadvantaged are respected and cherished, intolerance of every form of violence, minimal divorce, adultery and 'co-habitation' marginalized, sound transparent practice in government and business, justice upheld, honesty everywhere, and contentment.

Burdensome pressures and finances would be minimized as exorbitant taxation is rolled away. But, did you notice anything? Such good practice is age-old.

Such practices are the public face of the divine pattern for a prosperous society. Paint in one more brush

stroke and the picture is clear, for there is still a missing ingredient.

Through Moses and confirmed by Jesus and his apostles God tells us: *“Take heed lest you forget the LORD your God by not keeping His commandments and His ordinances and His statutes, lest when you have eaten and are full, and have built goodly houses and live in them, and your herds and flocks multiply, and your silver and gold is multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied, then your heart be lifted up and you forget the LORD your God”* (Deuteronomy 8:11-14)

This solemn warning was delivered to ancient Israel upon their inheritance of the Land of Canaan. But doesn't it ring true to our twenty-first century Western nations? What prosperity is ours. Haven't we *'eaten and are full'*? Don't we have *'goodly houses'*? Isn't there abundance of agricultural products? Only at the margins of society are these benefits scarce. And haven't we *'forgotten the LORD our God'*?

The Pay-off

But are not such benefits the product of our ingenuity, our relentless effort, our industry? Hear the Creator: *“Beware lest you say in your heart, ‘My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth’. You*

shall remember the LORD your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth” (v. 18). We don't remember Him. We have forgotten. We neglect the spirit.

That's why the economy bumps along. Why nationally and as families and individuals our resources are *'a bag with holes'*. Why hard cash is poured by the billion into public services only to dissipate without effect. Half the year, near enough, we work to pay our burden of taxation.

Individually, we waste resources on unnecessary possessions, time-wasting entertainment. Billions poured away into often useless public service 'jobs', into the deep trough of self indulgence, into a perverted justice system, into the destruction of national sovereignty. *That's* what keeps the economy afloat. But it floats on a candy-floss foundation.

First Cause

At the mere mention of 'God', of course, the scoffers swarm in droves. We have long, in government and in our personal lives, forsaken Him.

The clear logic of a super-intelligent First Cause is ignored along with the knowledge that He remains sover-

eign—and intimately interested in His *kosmos*, His creation.

It's *'the fool'* who has said in his heart *'there is no God'*. The lesson of history is that nations rise—and catastrophically fall. *Here's why:*

And it shall be that if you do forget the LORD your God and walk after other gods and serve them and worship them I testify against you this day that you shall surely perish, as the nations which the LORD destroyed before your face [and we have the histories!] because you would not be obedient to the voice of the LORD your God (vv.19-20)

That voice is a clarion call from the pages of the Scriptures.

Is it already too late? Can government, can individuals, acknowledge the real source of prosperity? That it is the sovereign Creator who gives us wealth-giving power? That if He is to install that programme He requires obedience—obedience to His revealed plan for all mankind? That any other 'programme' we run will cause our system to crash?

It's *not* the economy. It's you. **Ω**

Unsigned articles are by the editor

Spirit ...cont'd from p.6

Look at Christians in general and it is obvious that the fruits are not dished out automatically on conversion. Simply saying 'I'm a Christian' or 'I'm born again' does not, like an automaton, bear spiritual fruit.

The fruits have to be 'worked at', and result from our conscious effort to conform to God's character. They are not simply funnelled into our character without our active co-operation. The Father, through His Spirit, acts on us through circumstances to change our outlook and behaviour, allowing life's tribulations to shape us. That work may be painful—a long hard road! The degree we change depends on how actively we respond.

Put off—and on

This is a matter the apostle Paul made clear. He tells us to

'put off' certain behaviours and to *'put on'* others. A personal choice. And perhaps demanding intense and concentrated effort. He wrote to the Colossian Christians: *“Put to death therefore, what is earthly in you.... put them all away: anger wrath, malice, slander, foul talk. Lie not one to another [this to Christians!...]”* (ch 3:5-11). To the Ephesians he adds *“...let the thief no longer steal”*, adding: *“Put on, then, as God's chosen ones...kindness, lowliness, meekness and patience, forbearing one another, and if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other as the Lord has forgiven you (vv.12-17).*

If we *'hide God's word in our heart'*—memorize it—we have the godly guidepost. God's Spirit in the believer motivates and leads us to Christ-like behaviour. The Spirit doesn't coerce. Let's co-operate. **Ω**

A great lie undergirds all the world's major religions. It could just ensnare you into idolatry - and death

Religion appears as a confused jumble of sometimes weird and wonderful ideas, a hodgepodge of strange notions, a witch's brew of exotic doctrine. Yet there's a surprising unity of belief underlying all the great world religions. On close examination it's clear that the fabric of the world's varied and conflicting religions is formed of the same warp and weft, the same materials!

And - perhaps most shocking of all in our culture - the same threads are woven into *Christianity!*

Ever since the idea was publicized by Alexander Hislop in his densely researched and thoroughly documented book *The Two Babylons*, most informed Protestants have clearly seen the relationship between ancient Babylonian religion and the doctrines of Roman Christianity. What's devastating is that these same teachings are by no means confined to the Roman Catholic Church. The same fundamental precepts pervade all main-stream Christianity!

An Unfinished Revolution

Of course there are differences. The Protestant Reformation - that unfinished revolution - swept away the more obvious abuses of Bible teachings. Gone was the notion of salvation by works. Gone was the error of the "unbloody sacrifice", the Mass. Gone was much of the rank pagan superstition. Gone, too, were indulgences and adoration of images and priestcraft, and the Mariolatry so beloved of the late Pope John Paul II. Martin Luther and his followers succeeded in "cleansing the temple" of 16th century Christendom of its more overt abuses of Bible teachings.

Their efforts - often resulting horrifically in the blood of martyrdom - ensured the survival of the Christian religion before it could be swept away by demonic forces. We can't but be grateful for their dedication, their response to the call of God, and their love for His Word.

But did the Reformers go far enough? Were the changes they instituted more

than superficial? Did they plumb the depths of the Babylonian conspiracy designed to enslave mankind in *one world religion?*

The fact is, there remain substantial doctrinal abuses in mainstream Christianity which paved the way for the fruition of that conspiracy in our day. The Bible clearly reveals that just prior to the return of Jesus Christ to our planet as King of kings, "all the world" - except God's faithful elect - will unite in the worship of the arch-conspirator, Satan.

Billions Deceived

Can you conceive what that means? Already there are six billion human lives eating and breathing and surviving on Earth. Perhaps one in three claim to be Christian - near enough two thousand million souls! Will they worship Satan? There will be a choice. But the unsavoury alternative will be exile or martyrdom. How many will choose to resist Satan's wily designs? Will you?

Most Christians, of course, are "nominal" - they simply don't think to take a stand against error. Especially when the alternative is unemployment, starvation, torture or death! They will - without too many qualms and perhaps at first unknowingly - "worship the Beast" and his mentor, Satan.

But there are other millions of men and women who profess Jesus Christ and who are strong in their belief. What of them? It's clear from Scripture that God promises at least some of his elect a measure of protection from the coming holocaust. The question is, will you - if you class yourself as one of God's elect - recognize the false world religion when you see it? Or will you fall for it? *Have* you fallen for it?

Satan is the arch-deceiver! We're told in Scripture that he deceives the whole world (Revelation 12:9). That he blinds men to the truth of the Gospel (II Corinthians 4:4). That *the whole world* "lies in the Wicked One" (I John 5:19). That there's a spiritual veil over all nations only to be removed after the return of the Messiah (Isaiah 25:7).

And that many believers in Jesus will come to embrace "strong delusion" (II Thessalonians 2:11).

Babylon...fountain of error

How can this come about? How can even Christians embrace Satanic worship? What is there about the new satanic world religion that will attract the worship of all mankind?

Let's look at some aspects of this "new" religion.

A New Religion?

The new religion that will bind all mankind in its deadly embrace is here - *now!*

Around the world millions are - usually unknowingly - turning to a counterfeit religion. And they are not all from LaVey's 'church of Satan'. They come from all world religions. They are Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist. *And they are from Christian roots, too.*

A few wear outward regalia but most are just like the average John and Mary Doe next door. And probably are! And, likely, they sit next to you in the pew on Sundays.

But however sincere in their belief they may be, however ignorant of its source, the devotees of this religion are participating in the final grand-slam attempt by Satan to dethrone God and to revel in the adulation of all mankind. Mankind's arch rival will stop at nothing to achieve his ends!

In the next few years all he has worked and plotted to achieve for six thousand years will come within his grasp. He will all but succeed!

The lies he expressed in the Garden of Eden, and the teachings built on them, have now become the building blocks of virtually every form of religion. His takeover of mankind is - but for one factor - ascertained.

An Old Religion

The "new" religion is in fact the same religion Satan taught Mother Eve in Eden - and spread throughout the world from Nimrod's kingdom in ancient Babylon. For centuries ancient Babylon was its headquarters, gushing its foul stream worldwide - westwards to Europe, and eastward to India, to

China. Its capital moved to Pergamos in Asia Minor in the 2nd century BC. And then was transplanted to the city on seven hills - Rome. Soon it will be on the move again, this time to Jerusalem!

The Reformers rightly identified Rome and its religion as deeply scarred with error. But they missed a fundamental point. The religion of Rome is merely one outlet pouring out a catechism of error mixed with truth into the mind of man! For the great underlying fountain of error flows through myriad openings.

Wherever the lies are taught - there is Satan's religion. And no great world religion is uncontaminated!

The multitudes of humanity have indeed been deceived into rejecting the truth of God and accepting the lies of the evil adversary of all that's holy and good. Hindu, Muslim, animist, Buddhist, Confucian, Shintoist - and, let it be said, Christian - have all drunk deeply from the "golden cup" of error poured out from ancient Babylon.

And soon the "god" who authored the error will demand open worship from all mankind!

Do You Believe...?

Let's examine one error common to all mainstream religions. It's a Satanic lie, and underpins all false religion from the beginning! From it stems evil teachings that blind mankind to truth, and chain him to error.

Do you as a Christian believe there is a *hell fire*? That - with "refinements" to cater for the innocence of childhood or other exceptions - unrepentant men, women and children will at death for ever be tormented in a fiery pit totally subservient to the whims of the Devil and his demonic hordes? However avoided in "polite" Christian circles and conversation,

this is a basic teaching of the Christian faith. Yet it stems from the great lie taught to our first parents in Eden!

Do you believe that billions now dead are forever lost and being tormented in a fiery hell - because the missionary didn't reach them in time, because they never had opportunity to accept Jesus Christ? This, too, stems from the same lie.

Do you believe that your departed loved ones are now in *heaven* "enjoying" the presence of God? Billions do - and not only Christians! The idea comes from that lie.

Do you believe in *re-incarnation* - the idea that each of us has had a succession of lives in order to become "good"? Most of mankind believes it, including increasing numbers of professing Christians. That, too, comes from the lie!

Do you believe that man's *soul* (or spirit) can after death freely roam around, haunt its former residence or friends, make contact with the living directly or through a medium or a Ouija board or other device? *That same lie!*

Do you believe that you are, now, 'god'? That all men have in them the 'divine spark'? *That same lie.*

What was the lie taught by Satan to our first parents?

"You Won't Die"

Simply - "you shall not surely die". When Mother Eve rehearsed to Satan what God had told Adam about the awful effects of eating from the forbidden tree, he assured her "You shall not surely die. Eat of this and you will live for ever - just like a god". Billions have believed him - including virtually all of mankind now alive.

It has caused millions of tortured deaths in the name of religion since it was first uttered. In a sense, it has been responsible for every human death since creation! For in believing the satanic lie death passed on all mankind. And this false notion has been responsible for uncounted - except by God! - deaths of the people of God throughout the ages.

It simply isn't true! In this teaching of the *immortality of the soul*, Satan forged iron chains of the spirit that bind mankind to a lifetime of superstition.

Evil Power

The stark fact is that through six millennia Satan has prepared the minds of all mankind to give him the worship he craves.

Satan is an incredibly intelligent spirit entity - but an intelligence that is

warped, confused, incredibly evil, and implacably opposed to the Creator God. His is a mind that is dedicated to overthrowing God from His heavenly throne. A mind that will do everything in his power to replace the Almighty Creator! That uses every person or organization or religion or government or philosophy to further his evil ends. Who appears as "an angel of light" promising eternal life, if necessary, to ensnare and deceive.

Will you be deceived into his worship? Will you believe the great signs and wonders he - and his ministers - will use to gain your allegiance? Virtually every person on earth will believe them, will literally begin to worship the Devil. Only God's elect will not be taken in—if they tremble at God's Word, stand in awe of Him and submit to His revelation in the Scriptures.

You can resist the wiles of Satan - *if you learn to love the truth.*

Love the Truth!

The Bible - the written Word of God - has been delivered to us across a sea of the blood of those who preserved it, translated it, published it, defended it. It represents 'the faith once delivered to the saints' (Jude 3). It contains the divine truth.

The Scriptures teach that many who become Christian will indeed be deceived. For 'God will send them strong delusion that they will believe that lie' (II Thessalonians 2:11). And why will they be so deluded? 'Because - v.10 - they received not a love of the truth'.

Every truly converted man or woman will longingly desire to seek out the truths of the Bible. They will, as Jesus himself said and did, want to live "*by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God*" (Matt 4:4). They will diligently pore over God's Word to confirm what their preacher tells them (Acts 17:11)! And they will refuse to believe what they cannot find there.

It is *urgent* that all of who desire to faithfully serve the Creator God disentangle themselves from the web of Satan's insidious lies. **Ω**

To our Readers

We need your prayers in support for the *Churches of God Outreach Ministries!*

Individuals from around the world are asking us for help in their studies into the Word of God and in their searching for Christ as their Saviour. We are receiving more such requests for literature every day. However, our resources fall short of the demand!

In this first quarter of 2005 our literature requests from the website alone have increased almost 30% over this time last year, but our income doesn't match

CGOM has always been run lean and we have concentrated on using every penny in the effort of providing free booklets, articles, Bible Correspondence Courses, and *New Horizons* magazine subscriptions. We do everything we can to streamline our operations and to maximize our efforts.

We feel that God has blessed our efforts to reach out to those who are seeking—as demonstrated by the fact that we continue to have an increase in the numbers of requests for the litera-

ture that we offer. And God has always provided what was needed to honour those requests. But we need your continued heart-felt prayers on behalf of *CGOM* that we will receive the support and funds needed to continue to expand our outreach efforts.

Take a look at some of our figures below for 2004. The efforts of all the individuals and churches working together in association as *CGOM* is having an impact and is reaching out to individuals all around the world! We're not a big centralized organization with a large tithing base to draw on for our expenses, but are a small group of independent churches and individuals who, working together, are accomplishing more than we could individually.

Thank you for your continued support and prayers.
Richard Gawith

Here are some facts and figures:

Distributed in 2004:

- Bible Correspondence Course - 5,000+ lessons
- New Horizons - 13,000+ issues
- booklets, articles etc. - 16,950+
- Total pieces of literature and mail distributed: 41,838+

- 555 brand new names on the mailing lists
- 178 new subscribers to *New Horizons* magazine
- 235 new subscribers to *Bible Correspondence Course*
- 2,751 pieces of mail received and processed
- 616 requests for literature from the *CGOM* website
- *CGOM* website - 79% increase over last year and we're on track for at least another 30%+ increase this year
- website requests are generally for four or more booklets or articles per request. Initial requests usually lead to additional requests for articles and booklets, plus Bible and personal questions that need a reply etc
- since 1998 we have distributed over 265,500 pieces of literature, magazines and mailings from Tulsa, plus an uncounted quantity from Lincoln Ω

Request the article *CGOM in Perspective*. It explains what we are about

INVITATION TO HELP!

New Horizons is a major resource for all associates of the *Outreach Ministries*—both groups and individuals—to use in their evangelistic outreach. It is 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, with permission, leave a copy in the doctor's or dentist's office. Even mail it around the world!

Expansion, however, costs! We therefore invite you to voluntarily pledge the cost of the copies you would like to distribute. *This does not, of course, affect your personal copy*, which will continue to be mailed without charge even if it isn't convenient for you to distribute extra copies.

So a pledge of \$10 (£5) per bi-monthly issue will provide the good news of salvation 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 be in a position 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. Just tell us how many copies you can pass on. Everything helps!

Your prayerful consideration of this request will be appreciated Ω

Check out the *CGOM* website:
www.cgom.org

Make the Most of God's Spirit

You cannot be a Christian without having the holy Spirit. It's precious. So how does it help us?

'Without the Spirit of Christ' writes the apostle Paul, 'you are none of his'. That's what sets apart the Christian from the rest of mankind. The holy Spirit - the very mind of God - at baptism, through the laying on of hands, unites with our human spirit. That's conversion, though the process continues for the remainder of the Christian's life. That's the bottom line if we are to have eternal life.

If we have the divine Spirit in us at the point of our death we will be 'in the Kingdom'. But to 'gain entrance' just 'how much' of the Spirit must you have? Is there advantage in having 'more'? Can you have 'more'?

Principles of Change

God's Spirit - the 'substance' of which His being is formed (John 4:24) - is described as flowing like water (John 7:37); or in another analogy, it is like electricity. The Spirit flows into us from its divine power source, acting through the power outlet that He implants in our human spirit when we convert. It can be 'quenched' - turned off. Or we can be 'filled' with the Spirit. Through the Spirit's action we can be transformed in character to become Christ-like, to more perfectly do God's will (Romans 12:1f).

Humans, of course, can modify character without God's Spirit. We can apply psychological principles to life's situations, and indeed many have done just that. Solomon's proverbs are divine life-changing principles that can be applied without the

indwelling Spirit. They were penned to include 'the man in the street' devoid of God's Spirit. Countless books have been written in modern times, too, which give guidance on successfully changing our behaviour.

The Spirit helps us

Christians, in common with all mankind, are continually faced with choices. Our moral failures are rooted in our fallen nature. They flow from inside us. Said Jesus Christ: "...out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a man..." (Matthew 15:19).

Once your home is connected to the utility company's electricity supply, power is available to the plugged-in appliance—eg a light bulb. Switch on and the bulb and the room are filled with light. The level of entering power and the degree of illumination depends on the wattage of the bulb.

Most civilised folk have a general awareness that such practices are plain wrong—though that doesn't often stop us doing them when we think we can get away with it, or through moral weakness. The 'good angel on our shoulder' whispers that it's wrong. Not everyone, though, has such a

conscience, and much depends on our early childhood training and on our national and local culture, though conscience is, too often, fuelled by error. Most major religions will instil morality, though perhaps none so clearly as in the Judaeo-Christian faith. The latter is rooted in the 'Holy Bible'. The rise and fall of moral sensitivity in the Anglo-Saxon nations, for example, mirrors the level of Bible teaching in the previous and current generations.

Paternal Guidance

With the indwelling Spirit of God, there's added guidance. The Scrip-

tures express the mind of God, His Spirit. The indwelling Spirit helps us by recalling to mind the Word of God that we have absorbed. 'Conscience' is sharpened and aligned with the mindset of our Creator, and the more we are in tune with Him and His Word the clearer will be the message. *But the Spirit will never force us to act on the prompt.* We are led by the Spirit, not driven.

Any naughty child in a well-adjusted family has experienced mother's warning, 'Just you wait till your father comes home'. He could be miles away—but the thought of his presence quells any thoughts of disobedience. His 'spirit' reaches out to influence us.

When we have His Spirit, our heavenly Father similarly influences us through His Spirit. Even to the point of chastening us (Hebrews 12)!

In a dysfunctional family, of course, father—if there's one around—holds no such influence. The 'word of advice' has never been imparted.

Spirit Fruitfulness

Our lives as Christians is to be modelled on the life of Jesus. He lived the framework of the true Christian faith as well as the substance, setting us an example. That is, Jesus followed the external pattern of the divinely revealed faith. His custom was to observe the seventh-day *Sabbath*, and the *Passover* and seven *Days of Unleavened Bread*, and all the worship days. [They are outlined in Leviticus 23.] Beyond those externals he lived the life of the Spirit. As he informed the Samaritan woman: "*those who worship God must worship Him in spirit and in truth*" (John 4:24)

Spiritual Fruits:

Love
Joy
Peace
Longsuffering
Gentleness
Goodness
Faithfulness
Meekness
Self-control

The nine-fold 'fruits of the Spirit' are fundamental character traits of the Father and Christ. *cont'd p.2*

The varieties of Christian belief suggest that ‘anything goes’. How do you define a ‘Christian’?

Around one third of the world’s population classify themselves as ‘Christian’ - about two billion. They range from near voodoo groups through Baptists, Mormon, Scientology, Methodists, Sabatarian to High Church Anglican and Roman Catholic. There’s a kaleidoscope of beliefs.

For many (and perhaps most), the Christian label is accepted by reason of birth—with little commitment to the principles of the faith, and no ‘searching of the Scriptures’ to find evidence for what they believe.

The apostle Paul gives us a definition: “without the Spirit of Christ you are none of his”. To be a true Christian means you must have God’s Spirit. *What is that?* If you do have that Spirit what effect does it have on your behaviour?

Surely one assumption would be that—with perhaps some unimportant variation—the Spirit would bring everyone to the same general pattern of belief. Indeed Jesus himself tells us “*the Spirit will guide you into all truth*”. From this we could also assume that those who have the Spirit of Christ for a longish time will converge in their understanding of the core teachings of Scripture. After all, the God ‘who changes not’, who is ‘*the same yesterday, today and forever*’ was quite adamant that we ‘*tremble at his Word*’.

Although there remain some ‘*hard things to understand*’ in the Scriptures concerning which there can—and should—be open discussion, yet the core teachings of the Word of God are abundantly clear. Sadly, this doesn’t stop some folk going off the doctrinal rails. There have always been false teachers, there are now and there always will be in this era. And not least in the matter of ‘who is a Christian’.

Externals

The true faith is like a dwelling. The ‘walls’ are the protective framework for the inner furnishings. That essential framework, for the Christian, is the pattern, the blueprint, for how and when the Creator requires His children to approach Him. In essence, He hasn’t changed on this since time began. His

What Makes a ‘Christian’?

teachings are ‘*the same yesterday and tomorrow*’. He warns us not to add to or take away from His eternal teachings.

God is carefully selecting who enters the dwelling. The framework identifies Him, and His plan for them. To be given the door key, says the apostle Peter, each must ‘*repent and be immersed and you will receive the gift of the holy Spirit*’. He adds that God gives His Spirit to “...*those who obey him*”.

Unless your public life is one of submission to God in observing His identifying sign—the weekly and annual holy days—then self-examination regarding your conversion is vital. The first Christians were aware of this. During the first century of Christianity they faithfully continued the pattern of life followed by the people of God through time, and by Jesus and the apostles. Indeed they were seen by the authorities as a sect of Judaism. Only later did their successors begin the observance of the days imported from the non-Biblical religions—such as Christmas and Easter.

From House to Home

However, walls are not enough. No-one wants to live in an empty house devoid of furnishings. As the teachings of Jesus emphasize, outward observance of the Law of God isn’t enough. And as Benjamin Franklin reportedly said: “A house is not a home unless it contains food and fire for the mind as well as the body”. Once you ‘enter the house’—*ie*, approach God as He has prescribed—you then set about to furnish it with divine character.

God’s way is different. It transforms every aspect of daily life—and not least the human spirit. The heart of the Christian faith is ‘love’. The Scriptures encourage us to ‘*love God*’ (primarily) and to ‘*love neighbour*’. But do we have the right definition of ‘love’?

‘Love’ defined

Love, usually, is seen as a mushy sentimental attachment to something—chocolate, maybe, or sport. It’s a sentiment that can readily be cast aside to be replaced by a ‘new love’. Relationships based on it are just as easily discarded—as witnessed by the volume of divorces and other broken relationships. Even, sadly, among Christians.

In fact, the definition of true Christian love is simple—but difficult for morally weak humanity to implement. It applies in the secular and in the religious life.

Simply, love is *total commitment—materially, emotionally, spiritually*. That’s the meaning of *agape*. That is at the heart of the Christian faith. Total commitment both to, in the first place, God, and then to neighbour, defined as anyone we encounter who needs our help. That, said Jesus, is what is required for eternal life. The indwelling Spirit of God in the Christian enables it.

What normally passes for ‘*Christian love*’ is construed, usually, as ‘doing good’ - though this is shared by devotees of all faiths. But the apostle Paul—in the ‘love chapter’, I Corinthians 13—scuppered the notion that *agape* love is equated with simply doing ‘good works’. Not even martyrdom, he says, or feeding the poor, is ‘good’ without this kind of total commitment. For Christians, ‘good works’ stems from and accompanies this kind of love.

It’s the same in personal relationships. Romantic love is important, but it isn’t *agape*. Love for a husband or wife, whether among church brethren or in the secular world, demands total lifetime commitment—‘*for better or worse, in sickness and in health, till death parts*’. Failure to recognize this results in our spiralling divorce rate, unhappy relationships and dysfunctional family life.

To be recognized by the Creator and our Saviour as a true Christian, then, there has to be a life-change. Enter His ‘dwelling’ as He has prescribed from the beginning. And furnish it with true love.

Two of our free articles explain further:

**What Do You Mean—‘Repent’?
Coming to Baptism
The Faith Once Delivered**

BIRTH PANGS—the beginning?

Bill Faith

With the December '04 *tsunami* which killed an estimated three hundred thousand people, the memory of the terrorist bombing of the World Trade Center in 2001, and the war on terrorism that appears to have no end, our attention is easily drawn to a prophecy of Jesus in the New Testament, in Matthew chapter 24.

In this chapter we find Jesus answering the disciples' question as to what sign would be given to herald his coming and the end of this age. After mentioning that many would come in his name deceiving many, and that there would be wars and rumors of wars, he said: *"For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of sorrows"* (Matthew 24:7-8).

An Analogy

If we look at the meaning of the word "sorrows" in this verse, it helps us to more fully understand Christ's answer. According to Strong's Exhaustive Concordance the word "sorrows" as used in this verse is defined as, "a pang or throe, especially of childbirth." So basically verse eight is saying that, "All these are like the beginning of the labor pains of childbirth."

Could it be that the *tsunami* disaster was a part of what could be referred to as the beginning of the labor pains, a prelude to the end time destruction we find mentioned in I Thessalonians 5:3. *"For when they say, 'Peace and safety!' then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape."*

Many of the 300,000 people killed by the surprise *tsunami* were enjoying the beautiful sandy beaches in some of the most spectacular vacation spots in the world. They were enjoying the beaches in peace and safety when sudden destruction came—and they didn't escape.

Likewise in the World Trade Center, it was just another day at the office. No one could have expected the destruction that was to befall them.

Troubled Times

The Bible tells us there will be a time of trouble at the close of this age and just prior to the return of Christ. It will be the worst time this world has ever seen since there was a nation (Daniel 12:1). In Matthew 24:29 Jesus was talking about this same time of trouble and is quoted as saying, *"Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken."*

It will be a terribly frightening time. We are told that, *"They shall go into the holes of the rocks. And into the caves of the earth, From the terror of the Lord and the glory of His majesty, when He arises to shake the earth mightily"* (Isaiah 2:19).

The pain that mankind will experience in those days is sometimes compared with the pain of childbirth. This is brought out in Isaiah 13:6-9 where we read, *"Wail, for the day of the Lord is at hand! It will come as destruction from the almighty. Therefore all hands will be limp,*

request, free:

The World Tomorrow
...a message of hope

Every man's heart will melt, And they will be afraid. Pangs and sorrows will take hold of them; They will be in pain as a woman in childbirth; They will be amazed at one another; their faces will be like flames. Behold, the day of the Lord comes..."

Knowing that God uses the example of the pain during childbirth to illustrate the pain of those just prior to Christ's return, then we may safely assume that the frequency and the magnitude of the pain will increase as we get nearer to the end of this age.

Good News

The good news is that the entire earth and the entire universe is looking forward to that new birth. It is looking forward to the time when the children of God will be born into the family of God.

The Apostle Paul writing about this future time said:

"The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God...because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now (Rom. 8:18-22).

Even though a pregnant woman must experience the increasingly intense pains of childbirth and sometimes excruciating pain during delivery, nevertheless, as a mother can attest to, once the baby is born and she holds it in her hands it overshadows all the previous pain that she had experienced. And so it will be for this world and everyone in it when the kingdom of God is finally established. Ω

MiniStudy**IS THE OLD TESTAMENT RELEVANT?**

...not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law till all is accomplished (Matthew 5:17)

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God (II Timothy 3:16)

Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word from the mouth of God (Matthew 4:4)

Among believers it is widely considered that the Old Testament has little relevance to Christianity. Jesus, many say, began a new religion which cut its ties with the ancient text. Yes, there are New Testament references to the Old but, it's claimed, it is just a legalistic document with little relevance to Christianity. Does this stand scrutiny?

- there's no debating the fact that Jesus in his ministry—and indeed throughout his life—lived by and quoted as foundation truth *'every word of God'*, as did the apostles
- when the apostles refer to *'the Scriptures'* they refer to the *Old* Testament. The New Testament *Gospels* and *Letters etc* were not yet written
- he also elevated to a new level the partially obscured spiritual significance of the Old Testament. He added a clearer spiritual understanding to the foundation truths divinely-revealed from Creation
- in truth, Jesus did not 'start a new religion' but cleansed of its accumulated error the accretions to the then contemporary Judaism
- 'the Law of Moses' was Israel's national Constitution and its divinely inspired principles are universal and everlasting
- The *Torah* [instruction law] is a blueprint even for modern government
- the first Christians, because of their practices and teachings and submission to the Law, were considered to be a sect of Judaism
- Although saying the Law is 'done away' few Christians believe the last six of the Ten Commandments of the Law are, in Christ, abolished: theft, adultery, murder *etc*
- at least lip service is paid by Christians to three of the first four of these Commandments, omitting only the Sabbath command— also appointed for mankind since Creation
- willing Spirit-driven submission to God's revealed will in the Scriptures is not 'legalism'
- the apostle John—'apostle of love'—defines sin as *'...the transgression of the law'* or *'lawlessness'* (I John 3:4)
- he adds: *'this is the love of God—that we keep His commandments'* (I John 5:3), and writing of the end times says: *"...the dragon [Satan, the Devil] was angry with the woman [Israel and the church] and went to make war with the remnant of her seed which keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ"* (Revelation 12:17)
- these signify, clearly, that if we don't submit to the divine Law we are yet in our sins and not fit for the Kingdom

request the associated literature (there is no charge to you):

**The Law of Life
Coming To Baptism
What Do You Mean—'Repent'?**

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