

outreach

The Newsletter of the Churches of God, UK

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AUGUST 2002

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Matthew 28:19-20

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ARE YOU USING YOUR GIFTS?

The greatest characteristic of the Deity could be summed up as 'giving'. He gives us life. He gives us all we need to sustain that life. He gives us salvation through His only Son, Jesus. As God's representative and the perfect image of his Father, Jesus 'went about doing good'. His life was one of unwearied giving - even to the death. 'Love' is the Bible's word for it.

The Christian is motivated by the indwelling Holy Spirit along this same path. We are to 'be perfect like the Father', our lives expressing the same character. How do we measure up?

Our life in Christ has parallels with the human life. As babes we are 'all take' - 'carnal', Paul says. As squalling babes, new Christians suck mother - the church - dry! We need constant attention, protection, nourishment. But babes grow up.

In a well-ordered home the baby is over time taught to become civilised, to reflect the family's norms, to become a positive influence in society at large. Natural gifts are encouraged and lead to a career. Parental control is relinquished. Of course, some families are dysfunctional! The child emerges into society self-centred, often repressed - and remains 'carnal' for life, a receiver and not a giver.

Parallels

There are lessons here for the church of God. Many of us 'grew up' in a dysfunctional church. We were indeed cared for, spiritually fed, protected from the world. But we were not encouraged to test our wings! A selected few were schooled in the same dysfunctional family life-style, perpetuating the same destructive

pattern. It's a situation familiar to the early church. The Hebrew Christians were warned: "For by this time you ought to be teachers you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food" (Hebrews 5:12f).

Too many of us, in other words, are content to be 'breast-fed' and spoon-fed for a lifetime! It's because of the family upbringing. The pattern of leadership has been distorted to mean 'you pay and pray and obey and I will do'. Leave the big stuff for the minister. And so we sit in the pew, meuling, for twenty or thirty years - or more!

Where are *your* spiritual gifts? Are they locked in a treasure chest, and withering? Each of us has been gifted in a special way by none other than Jesus Christ. And he wants us to wear our jewellery! And to strive to excel in the exercise of our gifts and natural talents.

Chiefs and Indians

All too many Christians see the church in terms of 'chiefs and indians': popes, apostles, bishops, ministers, elders - and the 'indian' in the pew. But we are all one Body! We each need one another. Some are indeed gifted by Jesus in such a way that they could be a leader - *elder* - in their local church. [See our article *Leadership in the Church of God*]

Others - not necessarily 'ordained' as ministers - may be gifted as evangelists. *And all of us are witnesses*. Persecuted by Saul (Paul), the brethren in Jerusalem (except the apostles) 'went everywhere preaching [the *Gk* means *evangelizing*] the word' (Acts 8:1-4).

ChurchLink

Do please pray for **Flora Steinfort** (of the Netherlands). She is in a coma following a serious stroke. Also pray for the encouragement and support of Adrian, her husband, in his long vigils by her side. They have been together for some fifty years.

Apologies that you have not seen much activity from us of late. Our work has been suspended due to a drastic fall in financial support. Once the bank balance is 'out of the red' (-£2500) we can resume our work. Your prayers will be greatly appreciated.

Alpha - is it the right address?

Just under four million men and women worldwide have attended the '*Alpha Course*'. If you are not familiar with it, the fourteen-week course is a series of talks on the basics of the Christian faith - described as a mix of 'mind and experience'. Its format includes supper, a talk and small-group discussion - followed by a 'Holy Spirit Week-end'. It has proven to be an effective outreach method: "more effective than any Christian ministry in the last fifty years" says George Gallup Jr.

Clearly, *Alpha* is attractive - and attracts across the age divide (though perhaps most who attend are in their twenties). An underlying principle is the building of relationships within each group and with its leader in a relaxed and convivial manner. It appeals in an age in which - in the West - all too many live in isolation.

As yet the jury is out as to whether the course results in permanent conversion to the Christian faith. Critics observe in it an element of emotional hype. We might also enquire, Is the Biblical faith properly presented? Are Jesus Christ's demanding challenges powerfully aired? Given the deep doctrinal divide between churches can 'one faith fits all' be truly effective? (As with the Graham crusades, those who attend are often directed back to nests of heresy.)

Further, Are such unbiblical - and heretical - concepts as Sunday, Christmas, Easter, the immortal soul, the Mass, heaven and hell, sin and repentance *etc* properly addressed in *Alpha* courses? Jesus strongly warned us about falsely believing 'the traditions of men' as opposed to the true Biblical faith. Given that those who attend are to a degree sensitized to the Bible it's vital that each 'graduate' goes on to take seriously the core Bible teachings.

Alpha may present an open door to the house of faith. *But is it the right address?* All serious Bible students need to move from the basics on to maturity - to serious engagement with what the Bible really says. ﷻ

GIFTS?... cont'd

Come Out!

We Christians are not called to stay in our cots! All of us are to grow up, to mature, to contribute (give) ourselves - all we are in our entirety - to the work of God in accord with our gifts and talents. "The manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all" (Romans 12:7). Paul lists some of these expressions of the Holy Spirit in us in various of his letters to the churches (*eg* I Corinthians 12, Romans 12).

For too long brethren have, to the detriment of the work of the church, wasted years in 'receiving'. Shackled by the chains - and fear - of their church hierarchy they have withered to a shadow of the image Christ has for them.

If you are spiritually equipped and have the faith - then *be* an evangelist. Or teach, write, give, extend hospitality, exercise faith - in accordance with your gifts. *You don't need 'permission'!* We ought not to depend on others to change our diapers and feed us all our days! Let's grow up. Let's all contribute positively to the well-being of 'the family'.

Jesus gave a dire warning to the stewards of his household: *don't bury your talents* (Matthew 25:14-30). Each of us is an essential part in the exercise of his plans. Failure to develop and exercise our gifts hinders Christ's work, and can lead to our having no part in his future plans. ﷻ

FESTIVAL JOY!

Christianity is a matter of the spirit. But we are still very much human! As such it is helpful to have physical reminders of important events and to have times when like-minded Christians can assemble to worship and rejoice together. *God has provided us with a pattern for this.*

We thus recall His creative work - and the marvels of creation - weekly on the Sabbath, the 7th day of the week. God has also appointed seven special annually recurring festivals which help us to understand and to celebrate His plan of salvation. They are a framework that enables us to properly evaluate what He is doing - and will do - for mankind.

For a short introduction to these special days, request the free booklets *God's Holy Days* and *Why Do You Observe Sunday?*

Note dates for the Autumn Festivals:

Trumpets.....September 7

Atonement.....September 16

Tabernacles.....September 21-28