

outreach

The Newsletter of the Churches of God, UK

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Matthew 28:19-20

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Who 'goes to church'?

Estimates vary, but it is suggested that only about six percent of the population are church goers - more in the United States. However, break that down into individual 'denominations' and that figure can soar, even to near enough everyone..

But should there be restrictions on who is allowed to attend?

There is, of course, ample evidence in the New Testament for excluding individuals from fellowship. Indeed no association - even secular - will long tolerate folk who flout the rules. All expect courtesy and have to deal with disruptive behaviour. Not least in a Christian assembly.

Not 'one of us'

On the other hand there are 'exclusive' groups. In them a tradition has evolved that unless you are 'one of us' you may not fellowship. It is not unknown for a spouse to be excluded from a service simply because not baptized within that denomination or perhaps one who usually fellowships elsewhere.

Others are hooked on a 'special doctrine' unique to that group and are hostile to individual Christians not in agreement. Some go to the extreme of 'condemning to hell-fire' those who are not thus persuaded.

Open House

The first Christian assemblies were not at all like that! While maintaining order yet they were open societies. Non believers were welcome. The apostle Paul makes that clear in writing to the brethren in Corinth: "Therefore if

OLD versus NEW

"Where the Old Testament God required punishment, Jesus preached forgiveness". That's a not unusual comment, though it derives from those who are not really familiar with the Scriptures.

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

the whole church comes together in one place and all speak with tongues, and there come in those who are uninformed or unbelievers will they not say that you are out of your mind? But if all prophesy and an unbeliever or an uninformed person comes in he is convicted by all, he is convicted by all " (ch 14:23-24).

Elsewhere Paul states that he preached repentance on his visits to the various house assemblies in Ephesus (Acts 20: 20-21). Surely an indication that non-believers were present. Church meetings were not a closed shop but an opportunity to reach out to family, friends and neighbours!

Jesus himself tolerated dissent. The 'seven churches' (Revelation 2-3) were recognized by him as a part of his body - the true church of God. But look at the variety of belief harboured within them!

Paul's letters were addressed largely to assemblies that were hornet's nests of dissent. Yet he accepted that all are welcome. Only where there was extreme and divisive beliefs or conduct did he advocate separation.

The 'Closed Shop Church of God' is not mirrored in the Scriptures - except in condemnation. The apostle John chided one assembly for this mentality. Diotrophes - seemingly their elder - sought to exclude outside influence by means of exclusion (III John 9-10).

Brethren - those in whom resides the Spirit of God - are to learn to reflect the mind of Christ. We are to express love for one another and for those unbelievers who assemble with us. That's how we can draw them to repentance. ﷻ

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

Wrote Paul to the evangelist Timothy: "...from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures which are able to make you wise to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, [cont'd over

New Horizons/Outreach

The November/December issue of *New Horizons* was delayed by the postal strike, and has just arrived from the printer.

Due to my surgery this issue of *OUTREACH* is for November and December.

CHRISTMAS CHEER?

Few of our readers will be ignorant of the facts in regard to 'Christmas'. They need not be repeated here. The non-Christian origin of this festival is well documented. When combined with many other doctrinal absurdities it is clear that it belongs to a *different religion* from that revealed in the Scriptures.

Most of our readers, however, have been called into God's religion later in life, so we have grown up with the 'Xmas spirit'. Familiar songs and hymns and sights - *eg* the twinkling lights - can evoke sentimental memories. These can be hard to kick!

Short of 'going away' for the festive season it is almost impossible to avoid the incessant tv ads, the heavily promoted 'top ten' Xmas songs, those irritating jingles, the hollow greetings. On the other hand, Christmas has become almost a universal world-wide festival - so 'going away' may not help!

Well ahead of the 25th we need to gently put down a marker to relatives, friends and colleagues that we 'don't do Christmas'. Any opposition we receive is as nothing compared with the persecution - even martyrdom - experienced by previous generations of Christians. We should not feel we are 'missing out' - just as Christians do not miss out by not observing a Muslim or Hindu festival.

Yet we should not, of course, be confrontational. Ways and means can be found of avoiding conflict in our own circumstances. Nor need we go overboard in our opposition. You can still accompany the family to see the often spectacular switch-on of Christmas town centre lights, or a pantomime. And you still have to eat on Christmas day! Nor, *given adequate sound Biblical teaching at home*, need you ban your children from every school Xmas activity (I Corinthians 8:4).

Our children, exposed as they are to their Christmas-observing peers, can find the season particularly upsetting. This can be eased by our whole-hearted observance of those holy days which God Himself gives His people. They are a joyous time of spiritual and material feasting - but sure in the knowledge we have His blessing. There is even provision in the Scriptures for exchanging gifts during the festivals!

[Request the free booklets *God's Holy Days* and *The Truth About Christmas*]

MIRACLES!

Brethren in southern California have reported miraculous escapes for their property from the recent fires. In one instance neighbours on either side lost all. In another, a last-minute wind change of direction saved another.

There were, too, signs of divine intervention in aspects of my heart surgery. And despite over a year's delay in scheduling the surgery, the date was fixed with little notice - yet long-time arrangements by all the family to be present with me fitted perfectly!

Thanks to all those who have sent get-well cards, letters and e-mails, and who phoned assuring me of their prayer support. They were very encouraging to me and to Sarah. All is going well and I'm recovering nicely. James

Old v. New *cont'd*

that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (II Timothy 3:15-17).

When he wrote this, Paul could be referring only to the writings of the *Old* Testament. True Christianity is founded on God's revelation through those 'old' writings of prophets and kings.

Secular Government

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

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

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

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

check out these excellent web-sites!

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