

outreach

The Newsletter of the Churches of God, UK

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Matthew 28:19-20*

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The Barnabas Syndrome

Who was right - Paul or Barnabas? Or were they both wrong? Did they do the Christian thing by breaking up and going their own ways?

These two men - key players in the propagation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ (and previously close friends) - may not have come to blows. But there was 'sharp contention' (Gk. *paroxysm*) and they parted company.

Here it was a personnel problem - the cousin (*KJV*: nephew) of Barnabas was still in Paul's bad books following an earlier let-down. And Paul and Barnabas had already crossed swords over a doctrinal dispute.

The apostle Peter, too, experienced the sharp edge of Paul's tongue, though there is no evidence that they parted company.

Today's Challenge

The situation isn't just two thousand years old. It is with us today. The Christian media not infrequently highlights similar disputes. The result sometimes enhances the work of the Church - Cyprus benefited from Barnabas' run-in with Paul. More often it hinders.

The Bible account of Paul and Barnabas may indicate a shift in seniority from Barnabas to Paul. Perhaps Barnabas was happy to work in a subordinate position. Or, was there a lingering resentment that led to their separation?

Personality and doctrine may be reasonable excuses for division - provided they have been properly discussed in the light of Scripture.

Perhaps more serious is the problem highlighted by Jesus: *who is the greatest?* Someone can attain 'high

office' in an organization by virtue of their attained skills and long service. If, for whatever reason, they left the organization, they are faced with the need to use their talents elsewhere.

In church matters they may feel driven by their calling to 'carry on'. But where? Their support system has gone. So, too, has their income. And the top slots in other churches have all been taken.

One option would be to take on board the apostle Peter's advice: '*Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time*'. Offer, in other words, to serve under another. Talent is always at a premium in church life, and your skills could enhance the organization.

Divide!

Another option is to follow the well-trodden path - and start your own organization. Maybe that will spread the Word in a new direction.

Or maybe - more likely - it will divert resources from successful operations elsewhere. The result? Just another series of initials to add to the growing number of churches. Another potential empire to build. Another nail in the coffin of unity in Christ.

Ask yourself:

- is my own new organization just an ego trip?
- are my differences of sufficient strength that I must go it alone? Are they eternal-life threatening?
- could my talents and skills be used serving *** church?
- do I have the humility to work under or alongside another?

The Barnabas Syndrome applies to all of us, whatever our position - however lowly - in our local assembly or church organization. Learn from it. **Q**

STRETCH TO MATURITY

'Be perfect' said Jesus. That's the goal set before each one of his followers. Our goal is to become exactly like the Father. But how?

We can't do that without massive help. And from the moment of our 'conversion' that power is implanted in us. It is, of course, the holy Spirit of God.

The exercise of the human will can - and does - enable change. By it we can stop smoking, come off drugs - alcohol, cannabis, even heroin. What is more challenging is a radical change of personality.

But conquering these physical 'demons' is unlikely to make a person less arrogant, less selfish, less hateful. That's what the holy Spirit enables. Wrote the apostle Paul: '*...let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think*'.

All true Christians have that power from the time they are baptized and have hands laid on them. Along with it Jesus imparts spiritual gifts - appropriate to his purpose through us, and to profit the church in general.

It is for each of us - supported by our local assembly and its leadership - to actively develop those gifts to their full potential.

Don't Just Think

But we don't perfect our spiritual gifts - based, usually, on our innate ability and personality - by just thinking about them. The Spirit imparts the gifts but it is our responsibility (perhaps guided by others) to discover them, to use them, to develop them.

`You may recall the account Jesus gave of the servants given 'talents'. Diligent use was rewarded, inertia merited total loss.

Much the same applies to the general action of God's

Spirit in the believer. The apostle Paul had some advice on this. To the brethren in Colosse he said:

So put to death the sinful, earthly things lurking within you. Have nothing to do with sexual immorality, impurity, lust, and evil desires. Don't be greedy, for a greedy person is an idolater, worshiping the things of this world. Because of these sins, the anger of God is coming. You used to do these things when your life was still part of this world. But now is the time to get rid of anger, rage, malicious behaviour, slander, and dirty language. Don't lie to each other, for you have stripped off your old sinful nature and all its wicked deeds. Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him. In this new life, it doesn't matter if you are a Jew or a Gentile, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbaric, uncivilized, slave, or free. Christ is all that matters, and he lives in all of us. Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony. And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are called to live in peace. And always be thankful

But Is It Christianity?

The vast gulf between Christian practice today and that portrayed in the Scriptures is disturbing to some. Why do Christians observe different 'holy days'? Why so much deviation in doctrine from the Biblical teaching? Why so great variety of belief within the Christian fold?

Look out for the article *But Is It Christianity?* in the March/April 2006 issue of **New Horizons**. If you don't already subscribe, a subscription may be obtained, free, from any of our offices.

New Horizons, a bi-monthly, may be sampled - and downloaded - from our web-site: www.cgom.org

Miss Kathleen Peake

Old friends of Kathleen Peake will be saddened to hear of her recent death in early December. Miss Peake, aged 95, passed away at St Andrew's Nursing Home, Ewerby, Lincolnshire.

She has been disabled for some years, especially following a serious road accident and a more recent stroke.

Miss Peake - you may recall her two large dogs! - regularly attended Sabbath services at Bricket Wood many years ago before her move to Dorrington in Lincolnshire.

Get To Work!

Note the action language the apostle uses: *put to death, have nothing to do with, don't, get rid of, put on, be renewed, clothe yourselves, forgive, let...etc.*

Those are all *active* words. There's no 'sit back and let the Spirit do it'. What is your spiritual weakness? Get to work on it. God's Spirit - His mind - in us will prompt us to make whatever changes are necessary if we are to become like the Father. But it is for me, you, to make the changes with the help of that indwelling divine power source.

If you are a brother or sister of Jesus you already have the Spirit dwelling in you. Not just a part but all of the Spirit. Put that power to use and you are filled with the Spirit. Fail to exercise the will to '*put off*' our sin and our weaknesses and we '*quench*' the Spirit's activity in us. The flame burns low - and can be extinguished.

So, as Paul encourages Timothy: '*Stir up the gift of God in you*'. Whatever that gift of the Spirit may be - poke it into flames. Add the fuel of God's Word in the Scriptures. Blow on the embers with fervent prayer. Use your will to '*put off*' what mars God's image in you and to '*put on*' those qualities which reflect that image. Become like our Father. Ω

LIMBO - *lost children?*

Did you ever muse, 'We need to go back to square one'? It's an acknowledgement that the solution to a problem doesn't lie in the place we are currently looking or working on.

Seven centuries ago the Roman Church addressed the question: *What happens to babies who die unbaptized?* You couldn't really send them to spend eternity in a blazing Hell. Yet, being un-baptized they were deemed unfit for Heaven. Solution: *LIMBO*.

Limbo is a state of being 'on the edge of Heaven'. There are two aspects - the state of the righteous who died before Jesus came (Abraham, Moses *etc*), and the state of infants. The latter are deemed to have 'original sin' but not to have personally sinned.

It is reported that Pope Benedict is again addressing the question, and there's talk of the concept being abolished.

Here, 'square one' is the idea of the human soul as immortal. It's a view held almost universally by all major faiths - each of which has its unique solution. For the Hindu it is re-incarnation, the soul either ascending - in another human body or if perfect to God - or descending to a lower caste or even to animal or plant life. In Islam all infants go straight to Paradise, a view shared by most Protestant Christians. A strand of Judaism accepts a dogma of the 'transmigration of souls' - re-incarnation.

Back to the Bible

To abolish Limbo would raise deep theological questions. Unless forgiven, 'original sin' would exclude infants from Heaven. Perhaps a blanket universal forgiveness would solve this - similar to Mormon belief in 'baptizing for the dead'. Or perhaps a rethink of 'original sin' might satisfy. But overthrowing two millennia of what would then be false teaching would be hard to swallow.

Alternatively, the Biblical understanding might - with clenched teeth - be embraced.

The notion that humanity has inherent immortality was the first great deception, the first direct rejection of divine truth. Our first parents were instructed to keep away from a specific tree. *Don't eat its fruit*, said God, *and don't even touch it. If you do so you will die*. If they had obeyed they would have lived for ever, though each succeeding generation would face the same challenge.

The Tempter, however, assured them: '*...you will not surely die*'. So mankind, largely, has accepted that Satanic lie ever since: that the soul (Hebrew: *nephesh*) is immortal. The Biblical teaching is summed up by the prophet Ezekiel: '*...the soul that sins - it shall die*' (*ch* 18:4). In fact we are taught in Genesis that animals, too, are '*souls*'. In essence, mankind and animals don't have souls but *are* souls - alike subject to death.

Resurrection Hope

That tragically dead infant isn't in Heaven or in Hell or Purgatory or Paradise - or in Limbo. He or she will be placed in a grave, subject to decay - like all creatures. *But that's not the end*.

Humanity is different from all other creatures. We humans are all created in the image of God - potentially His children. We will *all* come out of our grave. Those who in this life have received the holy Spirit of God through the conversion process will be raised from their graves immortal at the return of Jesus Christ - forever part of the Family of God.

Those infants do not have that Spirit - for it is given by the Father as a result of mature adult choice. But in the Father's plan they will, at His appointed time, be restored for a physical lifetime to allow that choice. They too will have opportunity to become part of the divine Family. Not Heaven or Limbo but eternally serving the Father throughout His Universe as His exciting plans unfold.

Right now they are - along with *all* who have died - at rest, for '*...the dead know not anything*'. Ω

*For a fuller explanation request
When Someone Dies*

TRUE OR FALSE?

Old Testament tests for false prophets:

Does the prophet use divination etc?

No true prophet would deal with spirits
Deuteronomy 18:9-14

Have the prophet's short-term prophecies been fulfilled?

Do predictions come to pass?
Deuteronomy 18:22

Is the prophet marked by a desire to say only what pleases people?

A true prophet serves God not people

Does the prophet draw people away from God?

Many draw people for themselves or for their organization
Deuteronomy 13:1-3

What is the prophet's moral character?

False prophets were charged with lying, drunkenness, immorality
Jeremiah 14:14, 23:14, Isaiah 28:7

Do other Spirit-led people discern authenticity?

Discernment by others is a key test
I Kings 22:7, I John 4:1

from the Life Application Study Bible

GOD'S FACE

*"He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver."
Malachi 3:3*

This verse puzzled some women in a Bible study and they wondered what this statement meant about the character and nature of God. One of the women offered to find out the process of refining silver and get back to the group at their next Bible Study.

That week, the woman called a silversmith and made an appointment to watch him at work. She didn't mention anything about the reason for her interest beyond her curiosity about the process of refining silver.

As she watched the silversmith, he held a piece of silver over the fire and let it heat up. He explained that in refining silver, one needed to hold the silver in the middle of the fire where the flames were hottest as to burn away all the impurities.

The woman thought about God holding us in such a hot spot; then she thought again about the verse that says: *"He sits as a refiner and purifier of silver."*

She asked the silversmith if it was true that he had to sit there in front of the fire the whole time the silver was being refined. The man answered that yes, he not only had to sit there holding the silver, but he had to keep his eyes on the silver the entire time it was in the fire. If the silver was left a moment too long in the flames, it would be destroyed.

The woman was silent for a moment. Then she asked the silversmith, *"How do you know when the silver is fully refined?"* He smiled at her and answered, *"Oh, that's easy -- when I see my image in it".*

If today you are feeling the heat of the fire, remember that God has his eye on you and will keep watching you until He sees His image in you.

Pass this on right now. This very moment, someone needs to know that God is watching over them. And, whatever they're going through, they'll be a better person in the end.

"Life is a coin. You can spend it anyway you wish, but you can only spend it once" *Anonymous*

READ...

New Horizons - a free bi-monthly magazine of Bible understanding

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Can Spirit Die?

Animals die. Fish and birds die. You can squash insects and kill bacteria. And, of course, humans die.

Death is inevitable - unless you are God. For He is *'the King of kings, and Lord of lords; who only hath immortality, dwelling in light unapproachable; whom no man hath seen, nor can see'*. Only God, says the apostle Paul, is immortal - God alone exists from eternity to eternity.

Christians will live forever as part of God's Family by virtue of the divine immortal Spirit that indwells us. Our corruptible flesh will be replaced and we will *'put on immortality'* at the return of Messiah.

The angelic spirits who surround God's throne and who answer to His will all had a beginning, and many of whom serve the people of God. They have since proved their loyalty and will continue their functions as long as they remain faithful.

Perhaps a third of those spirits God created have aligned themselves with the Adversary, Satan. In due course they will cease to exist, for God will purify His *kosmos*, His Universe, restoring it to the pristine order He first created. Ω

CIVIL PARTNERSHIPS

The UK Government has authorised what is 'marriage' in all but name for male and female homosexuals. The legislation gives them the same legal rights as married couples. The pair merely register their intention and can then do as they please in regard to a 'wedding ceremony'.

It's the latest step in the Blair Government's undermining of real marriage - *ie* the divinely-appointed union between a man and a woman.

Some couples choose not to have children. Some are unable to have children. But around the world the vast majority see childbearing as part of life. Indeed procreation is the chief function of God's creation. Through human procreation He is building His spiritual Family to live with Him throughout eternity. A sterile same-sex relationship negates this purpose. Ω

Request:

The Mystery of Human Sexuality

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