

outreach

The Newsletter of the Churches of God, UK

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providing
leadership
information and
Biblical teaching
Matthew 28:19-20

representing



The Balanced Christian

King Solomon (Ecclesiastes 7:16) tells us not to be '*overmuch righteous*'. As Christians we are, of course, to pursue the perfect righteous example set by Jesus. That's not the issue. The King's concerns were reflected in the behaviour of the Pharisees, so roundly condemned by Jesus (Matthew 23).

The Pharisees - externalists - were focused on the minutiae of doctrine and behaviour yet negligent of the true meaning of the divine Law: '*Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithes of mint and dill and cummin, and you have left aside the weightier matters of the Law: judgment, and mercy, and faith. It was right to do these, and not to have left those aside. Blind guides, straining out the gnat, but swallowing the camel*' (Matthew 23:23-24).

Could it be that Christians might inadvertently follow in their narrow footsteps?

Salvation Assured

For example, some brethren are perpetually concerned about their salvation, wondering if they are 'doing enough to attain the Kingdom'. As Christians, of course, we must be striving to '*...lay aside every weight, and the sin which does so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us*' (Hebrews 12:1).

Yet it's true that '*... now are we children of God, and it is not yet made manifest what we shall be. We know that, if he shall be manifested, we shall be like him; for we shall see him even as he is. And every one that hath this hope set on him purifies himself, even as he is pure*' (I John 3:2-3).

We strive for purity of life - yet are confident that *even now* we are God's children, knowing we are far from

perfect. If we stay faithful our salvation is assured.

Knowledge That Counts

The wide diversity among the Christian churches highlights the challenge of interpretation of the Scriptures. It's from the Bible that we discern 'truth'. Some teachings ('doctrines') are quite clear, and it is difficult to figure why there is diversity of interpretation.

For example, the Scriptures could not be clearer as to the day we set aside for weekly worship. Or the regular annual festivals. Or the intrinsic nature of man. Or the clear teaching on heaven and hell. Yet the broad swathe of denominations can't see it - too often blinded by tradition or personal preference - or simple Bible illiteracy and ignorance.

Beyond such matters there is considerable room for diversity. Some denominations, however, exclude from fellowship those who diverge even a little from their 'doctrinal statement'. The New Testament church welcomed newcomers to its fellowship: '*If therefore the whole church be assembled together and all speak with tongues, and there come in men unlearned or unbelieving, will they not say that ye are mad? But if all prophesy [ie preach], and there come in one unbelieving or unlearned, he is reprov'd by all, he is judged by all; the secrets of his heart are made manifest; and so he will fall down on his face and worship God, declaring that God is among you indeed*' (I Corinthians 14:24-25).

The account of 'the seven churches' (Revelation 2,3) is evidence that despite sometimes horrendous variety of belief each local assembly was recognized by Jesus himself as part of the church of God - even lukewarm Laodicea.

Christian Diversity

It often goes unrecognized by church leaders that each individual called by the Father to be part of His church is directly answerable to Jesus - who has

concern for each one. Each brother or sister must act in accord with conscience.

Paul, for example, addresses this in the matter of vegetarians, introducing his comment by saying: *'Welcome all the Lord's followers, even those whose faith is weak. Don't criticize them for having beliefs that are different from yours'* (Romans 14:1). He adds, v.4, *'What right do you have to criticize someone else's servants? Only their Lord can decide if they are doing right, and the Lord will make sure that they do right'*.

A newcomer to the faith (and to the local church) is on 'the bottom rung' of spiritual growth. Paul calls such *'weak in the faith'*. In the bosom of the church he or she is gently nourished to a fuller understanding of God's revelation in the Scriptures. It is through this process that an assembly comes to *'speak the same thing'* (I Corinthians 1:10).

Commenting on this passage, one writer says: *'...men should bear with each other, and not be so ready to imagine that none have the truth of God but they and their party'*. But given the diversity of the human family there will always be differences of opinion. As - *if!* - a church grows in Christian love, however, such differences will be minimized.

Closed Mind

The patriarch Job sums up a common attitude. Speaking to his 'comforters' he said: *'For truly you are the people, and wisdom will die with you'* (Job 12:2). Irony, of course, but all too common.

There used to be a tradition among some - perhaps it's still in circulation - that all Protestants are 'of the household of the devil'. Avoid them at all costs. Don't enter their 'temples'. Don't sing their - often uplifting - hymns. *Etc.* Many, perhaps most, may be 'nominal, go to church on Sunday' folk. Yet many of such people have - like the people of God in Old Testament times - been touched by God's Spirit. They diligently study God's Word and worship as they see fit. Indeed most of the great Bible helps - dictionaries, commentaries *etc* were compiled by 'Protestants'.

Your neighbour may call out 'Happy Christmas' or send you a card or ask about your Xmas plans. How do you respond? Turn away grumpily or perhaps launch a tirade against 'paganism'? A close relative is being married in a church - and on your holy day: Do you decline the invitation to attend a - hopefully! - once in a lifetime event? Do you forbid birthday celebrations? Refuse to attend a memorial service? Do you judge those who 'eat out' on Sabbath, or ladies who wear make-up? 'Scared' to enter a church building? And separate over an obscure point of prophetic interpretation? Or over church décor?

Just a few examples of the closed mind that can be-

come a barrier to understanding within and outside the church. There are ways, however, to explain your faith without driving away your hearers!

Cause for Celebration

We should celebrate the effect God's Word has had on people of every denomination. Without the influence - sadly now much diminished - of church and Sunday School and religious education and mission and worldwide dissemination of the Bible our nations would be in a far worse moral - and economic - state. Many godly people live exemplary lives of service to all - and are worthy of emulation.

God's Word is powerful - but acts mysteriously. Said Isaiah: *'For as the rain and the snow comes down from the heavens and do not return there, except it waters the earth and make it bring forth and bud, and give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall My Word be, which goes out of My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in what I sent it to do!'* (ch 55:10-11). Do we believe that?

So who knows what God is doing long-term? Through ignorance and through deception millions are blind to the true Biblical faith, for He is at this time calling out but a few whom He will *'purify [as] a special people for himself'* (Titus 2:14). But they are few and even they have limited understanding of His 'big picture' as it is presently being worked out in the lives of countless 'believers'.

Law of Liberty

Too often Christianity is perceived as the practice of a long list of 'do's and don'ts'. The faith becomes a wearisome grind rather than a joyous celebration of the divine way of life. And why not, given the exciting future planned by a loving Father for His children!

There are many activities to be avoided by Bible believers, and these 'works of the flesh' are spelled out clearly in the Scriptures. For example: *'...if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under Law. Now the works of the flesh are clearly revealed, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lustfulness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, fightings, jealousies, angers, rivalries, divisions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revelings, and things like these; of which I tell you beforehand, as I also said before, that the ones practicing such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is: love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control. Against such things there is not a law. But the ones belonging to Christ crucified the flesh with its passions and lusts. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not become vainglorious, provoking one another, envying one another'* (Galatians 5: 18-26). Surely that's enough to keep us busy for a lifetime!

True Christian practice is indeed a 'narrow way' - but *it is not narrow-minded*. God's way of life (James 1:25, 2:12) is lived by *'the law of liberty'*. Wrote Paul: *'...stand firm in the freedom with which Christ made us free and do not be held again with a yoke of slavery'* (Galatians 5:1). Ω

CGOM – on the move

The *Outreach Ministries* has had a busy couple of years. Richard Gawith reports:

2005:

- website literature requests up 60% over 2004
- 1-800 calls up 23%
- regular mail up 8%

2006:

- website requests up 15%, with an average 1247 'hits' each day: a total of 455,366
- 1-800 calls up 4% (to November)
- regular mail down 17%
- active mailing list 5359: up 8%

Richard reports that careful husbandry of resources has enabled this welcome increase despite an income drop of 8% in 2005 and 4% in 2006 (to \$45,000).

CGOM has few overheads, as virtually all labour is by enthusiastic and willing volunteers. There is no expensive 'headquarters' to support, and just two paid part-time - and overwhelmed! - administrative staff. The brethren in the Tulsa church volunteer needed help.

We welcome the financial support received from our growing readership, and want to express our thanks to you for your continuing interest in our efforts. Ω

Troubled Israel

According to figures released this week, "a growing number of children are born in Israel each year not knowing the identities of their fathers." (Jerusalem Post, 16/11/06)

Among the statistics that came out of this study, 3,500 children born in 2006 do not know who their fathers are and close to 40,000 children in Israel have no paternal ties. Also, 2,800 children were born to single parent families and more than 10,000 children are considered, according to Jewish law, illegitimate. The research comes from the Interior Ministry's data for the national registrar of births. *Israeli Economic News*

Our World...

(from the London Newsletter)

Why water is gravest challenge facing humanity

"More than one billion people live without clean water: Some 2.6 billion - HALF of the developing world's population lack access to sanitation. The two issues are inextricably linked, for without proper sanitation pollution of drinking water is almost inevitable.... in Ethiopia the military budget is 10 times the water and sanitation budget; Pakistan spends 47 times more on guns than on sewers and clean water.... India has a booming economy but no proper target on clean water and sewers. ...Some 700 million people there lack adequate sanitation and in cities such as Delhi and Mumbai the water systems are collapsing with rivers being

"Comment: If it isn't an actual physical problem its a problem of corrupt and totally incompetent government, such as in India. An example was given in this report of a school in Kenya, in the area of Kibera, the biggest slum in the world where 74,000 people live. People defecate in a plastic bag and then throw it into the street or on to one of the vast dung heaps. Some just visit the heaps and relieve themselves directly. The heap next to the school is about 20 feet high and the size of a quarter of a football pitch. The stench is unimaginable.

"A drought alters Australian ideas on global warming

"Australia's long hot summer has barely begun, but the dams are running dry, crops are stunted from lack of water, and livestock markets are being overwhelmed by farmers trying to sell sheep and cattle they cannot feed. Australia's drought is in its fourth year, and in the vast expanses of the Australian outback, where farms that can be the size of small nations, mould a hardy breed of farmer, there is desperation.... For the first time the cities are focused on their worries about the future of water supply. Everyone has taken for granted that you turn the tap on and water comes out. I think they now can see that that might not necessarily continue to be the case." *International Herald Tribune*

Two Houses

Some readers may be puzzled at the continuing support given by the US and UK governments for the nation of Israel. It's a matter of kinship.

The Israelis are the modern descendants of the ancient *House of Judah*. America and Britain - the largely Anglo-Saxon nations - have inherited the mantle of two of the northern tribes of the *House of Israel*. They represent the tribe of *Joseph*.

Their story is highlighted in the article *The Two Houses of Israel* - available on our website (www.cgom.org) or by mail from any of our addresses

"The first man..." (I Corinthians 15:45)

"Perhaps the most interesting thing about these [DNA] tests is that they cut through pretty much all of our notions of nationality and cultural identity (which are, of course, social constructs) to a much greater truth: we are all related to one another. According to [Doctor] Thomas, it has been estimated that someone living approximately 6000 years ago is a direct ancestor of every single person living in the world today".

*Dr Mark Thomas
Centre for Genetic Anthropology
University College, London*

"And He made every nation of men of one blood, to live on all the face of the earth, ordaining fore-appointed seasons and boundaries of their dwelling "
(Acts 17:26)

2007 Festival Dates

Lord's Supper	April 2 (evg before)
Unleavened Bread	April 3 - 9
Pentecost	May 27
Trumpets	September 13
Atonement	September 22
Tabernacles	Sept 27 - October 3
Eighth Day	October 4

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The Kingdom of God...when, where?
Make You Calling and Election Sure
Would You Recognize Satan?
Roadmap for Israel
Great Hope in Christ
Walk With God (MiniStudy)

Back issues of *New Horizons* are available to download on our website www.cgom.org

*Over one hundred and fifty
Bible-related booklets or articles
are listed on the CGOM website.
Take a look!*

Snakes and Scorpions

In Kentucky recently a 'snake handler' in a church service died from a snake bite. Is this a practice based on Biblical precedent?

Proponents of the practice claim it is authentic, based on Mark 16:17-18: *'And miraculous signs will follow to those believing these things: they will cast out demons in My name; they will speak new languages; they will take up snakes; and if they drink anything deadly, it will in no way hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will be well'*. Is this what is meant by these verses?

Some Christians, however, have been harmed by both snakes and poisons. Most have never spoken new languages. Only a relative few have been healed of illness. Not many demons have been cast out. Is this just a lack of faith?

In fact, these final verses of Mark 16 are of dubious authenticity. They range alongside the infamous inclusion of the 'trinitarian text' of I John 5:7-8.

Writes one scholar: "Bruce considers these verses in Mark "a great lapse from the high level of Matthew's version of the farewell words of Jesus" and holds that "taking up venomous serpents and drinking deadly poison seem to introduce us into the twilight of apocryphal story." The great doubt concerning the genuineness of these verses (fairly conclusive proof against them in my opinion) renders it unwise to take these verses as the foundation for doctrine or practice unless supported by other and genuine portions of the N.T"

Robertson's Word Studies

Follow the Money Trail

"despite international sanctions the Palestinians have received a total of \$318m in international aid since March; the European Union reported Tuesday that it had increased its contribution to the Palestinians by 27 percent from last year to a whopping \$865 million in 2006"

A recently released official cable is evidence that the US Government was complicit in covering up for 30-years its knowledge that Yasser Arafat's Fatah organization was in fact the front for several other terrorist organizations - a fact denied by him. As a result the US continued to support Arafat at a cost of billions of dollars

FINANCES (COGUK) - Nov/Dec 2006
INCOME.... £726 OUTGOINGS... £823