

outreach

The Newsletter of the Churches of God, UK

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Strange Unions

Human relationships, it is often claimed, are a kaleidoscope where any mix goes. Any man with any woman or man with man, or woman with woman, or man with child. Even, perish the thought, with animals. (Germany is proposing a law against this growing menace there!)

Doubtless 'sex' is at the heart of the human condition, a built-in urge to propagate the individual or the race—but perverted at the level of the individual. And, sadly, corrupting global culture.

Divine Appointment

Although the sexual relationship is now confused, it was not always so—if you regress in time for long enough. For in the beginning it was clearly defined by the Creator—as the union of one man and one woman for life, a blueprint for all mankind throughout time.

Indeed the pattern has been taken up by all nations, with a few maverick exceptions. It was, of course, what we call 'marriage' - the union between a man and a woman, publicly recognized as a social unit.

Any deviation from that pattern has adverse consequences. We are familiar with the destructive effects of promiscuity (Gk *porneia*) in terms of sexual disease, the disruption inflicted on family life by adultery and divorce, the social impact of homosexuality and pornography. On top is the huge social and financial burden on the

State of broken and dysfunctional families—legal costs, welfare *etc.*

One Flesh

The 'complete person', with a few exceptions, is the effect of a life-time commitment to the union of a man and a woman. It produces stability through a family environment, based on the principle of mutual support through every trial of life. The breakdown of family life with its social consequences bears witness to this principle. And throughout the Scriptures the sexual relationship is protected, sacrosanct.

The foundation principle is '*...a man [shall] leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave [attach himself] unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh*' (Genesis 2:24). It applies universally. An equal partnership with separate physical and emotional roles.

Grand Design

The creation of man is no accident, not a 'divine experiment', but is the initial step in God's grand design, His planned family. Writes Malachi: '*...did not he make one?...And wherefore one? That he might seek a godly seed*'. God created one pair, united as 'one flesh' in marriage, with the ultimate purpose of raising up, through millennia, His Family (Ephesians 2:19)—a 'race' of spirit beings in His own image.

Clearly, the God-defined purpose of such a closed union is frustrated by any deviation from that blueprint. (The Scriptures define those deviations, as in Leviticus 20 and elsewhere in the Bible.) *cont'd p.4*

What Makes Us Tick?

The apostle Paul sums up the human condition as : ‘... may your spirit and soul and body be preserved entire (I Thessalonians 5:23). That is, the human spirit (Gk. *pneuma*), the life force (Gk. *psuche*) and our physical body (Gk. *soma*). with its organized groups of cells—heart, bone *etc.*

Little understood is the role of the human spirit. The Scriptures instruct that ‘...there is a spirit (Heb *ruach*) in man: and the inspiration of the Almighty gives them understanding’ (Job 32:8). Isaiah writes of God: ‘... He that gives breath unto the people upon [earth], and spirit to them that walk therein’ (ch 42: 5). It is associated with the ‘breath of God’ and may enter man with his first breath (Genesis 2:7). Records Job: ‘...the Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty has given me life’ (ch 33:4)

Humans differ from the lower animate creation only in that our ‘spirit’ ‘...shall return to God who gave it’ (Ecclesiastes 12:7), while the animal spirit dissipates at death (ch 3:21; yet, as both are invisible we can’t discern that—it is revealed).

The spirit of any created earthly being is active only in the presence of an animate body, probably acting through the nervous system. In the lower creation it provides their instinctive behaviour, varying in degree as God has appointed each kind. In human-kind the spirit imparts aesthetic sense, a higher intelligence and reasoning ability—and a God-consciousness.

Spirit-sleep

With mankind the spirit, at death, is somehow transported ‘...to God who gave it’. Indeed the disengagement process from the natural (Gk. *psuchikos*) body may account for reports of the physiological effects of near-death experiences. If the patient is resuscitated the spirit may indeed have ‘recorded’ environmental events which are recalled. (It has been called ‘quantum consciousness’.)

The apostle Paul emphasizes that when we die we are ‘asleep’ (eg I Corinthians 15:18). ‘Spirit-sleep’, that is, rather than ‘soul-sleep’, for the soul is ultimately destroyed - : ‘...fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell (Gk. *gehenna*—Matthew 10:28). See also Ezekiel 18:4, 20.

[‘...kill the soul’: ‘soul’, here, refers to life generally, eg: ‘...whoever loses his life [ie, soul, Gk *psuche*] for my sake shall find it’ (eg Matthew 16:25)—life that will be continued in the resurrection body]

That spirit, probably entering with our first breath, enlivens body and soul: ‘...the LORD God formed

man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul’ (Genesis 2:7, Job 33:4).

Having returned to God, every human spirit is preserved (*God* knows how!) until their resurrection—for believers, at the return of Jesus and for all others, for later judgment.

Resurrection Life

This sheds light on the resurrection from the dead. It might be asked, for example: *how can someone dead and buried thousands of years ago be resurrected? haven’t they ‘...returned to dust’?* During our life-span the human spirit, similar to the programmed hard drive of a computer, in a sense ‘records’ all there is to know about us—our DNA (body form, colouring *etc.*), our successes and our failures, our moral code, our choices, our memories (even those forgotten ones! cf Luke 12:3). Job again: ‘...The spirit of man is the candle of the LORD, searching all the inward parts of the belly’ (Proverbs 20:27).

That spirit entity returns to the One who imparted life, and is preserved in His care. When the appropriate moment arrives it is clothed with a body. For *believers* that will be a ‘spirit-body’ (Gk *pneumatikos*): ‘...So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body’ (I Corinthians 15: 42-44).

A *real* body, that is—but subject to different operating laws than the natural body. It has, like the resurrected Jesus (Luke 24:39), ‘...flesh and bones’ and shares the spiritual powers of their ‘elder brother’ (I John 3:2).

That spirit-body will not die, but will with Christ serve the Father throughout the Millennium and for eternity. The reason the *Christian’s* spirit becomes, ‘...puts on’ immortality lies in the fact it has been, in life—through a changed heart, baptism and conversion—been united with God’s Spirit. A true ‘new birth’ as a spirit being (John 3:1-8). Yet retaining the spiritual character built during our life-time.

The Rest of the Dead

What of the remainder of mankind—since Adam? In Hebrews we are told: ‘...it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment’ (ch 9:27). Writes John: ‘... the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished’ (Revelation 20:5). They too, will be resurrected, but in a cont’d p.4

Spirit—apart from God’s holy Spirit (I Timothy 6:16)—is created and not indestructible. When the lower creatures die they are gone. Satan and his angels, created beings, will, ultimately, be extinguished. The spirit of any human who in the end rejects God will perish.

‘...I saw the dead, small and

Letter from England

Hello

Now that December 21 has passed without ‘the end of the world’, perhaps we can put Bible (and any other) prophecies into perspective. We can munch through the stored extra supplies, drink the extra bottles of water—and settle back until the next prediction.

It may be useful to define for our readers ‘the end’. In Bible terms it is, literally, ‘the consummation of the age’. The present world—its civilization, its institutions, its governments—will be succeeded by a ‘new world order’.

Six thousand years ago God created one pair (a man and a woman) of human beings ‘in his image’, with the command to populate the world and to care for the physical environment, by applying His spiritual and social laws. The purpose was to provide a ‘godly seed’ who would become His immortal Family.

Man chose to ignore God’s rules and to apply his own. The result is the present dysfunctional world, now drawing to its end. When God the Father deems fit He will send Messiah (Jesus) to overturn it and to establish His governance—the ignored and forgotten laws of life.

As Christians we do our best to comply, knowing that when we fall short we have a loving, compassionate and forgiving God, our Father, and our Saviour, Jesus. But we do, of course, strive towards perfection—the character of Jesus built into our own lives. His way, including the pattern He set for His worship, is perfect.

Those who lead our nations have ‘lost the plot’. They lack the wisdom to govern which comes from submission to the will and Word of God. We can but expect their foolish law-making will lead us further down the path to oblivion.

So, as a new secular year dawns and in increasingly uncertain times, we must hold fast, must trust the Father to supply our needs—just as He has promised. No matter what challenges we may face in the coming year we know that ‘...*The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms*’ (Deuteronomy 33:27).

James

Inexactitudes

In the UK’s House of Commons no-one lies—they just speak ‘terminological inexactitudes’. Sadly, it’s not much different in religious circles, for such, literally, are too often spouted from the pulpit, knowingly or not.

Terms are lifted from the Biblical text and given often contradictory meanings. These result in confusion of the hearers who, too often, accept the words of the preacher and the terms he uses as ‘gospel’.

‘*born again*’ is an example. It is usually applied to the initial step of conversion to the faith, thus obscuring the magnificent divine plan for man. In fact it describes the ultimate change from our natural physical state to the spiritual state. It represents the culmination of our spiritual growth as a Christian and is a precise event that occurs at the believer’s resurrection when Jesus returns.

love is another example of misuse, too often presented solely as an emotional response to life. There’s more, though, for godly love is based on law, *God’s law*, which provides clear guidelines as to human behaviour—humanitarian as well as theological—in all ages, for all peoples.

Sabbath is a further example of misuse. Despite absolutely no evidence that it was ever changed from the seventh day of the week, the Christian world arrogantly substituted Sunday and condemned believers to be ‘...*least in the Kingdom*’.

holy days, too—for the ‘holy days’ of Christendom are anything but holy, no matter how sincerely observed. Christmas, Easter *etc* have replaced God’s revealed holy days (*eg* Leviticus 23) and are pre-Christian heathen observances, labelled by God as ‘abominations’.

law is generally in Christendom proclaimed as a burden on the believer. Yet Jesus constantly upheld the divine Law (which defines sin), while rejecting the burdensome additions of the Pharisees. The Ten Commandments, for example, are a blueprint for an ordered society and suitable for all mankind. It was adopted by Israel as their national Constitution—a universal model, and is written in the heart of true believers.

Bible believers are urged to be discerning.

Ω

The Jesus Myth

Dedicated Christians donate vast sums year by year for the worthy aim of spreading the Gospel, the underlying purpose being to ‘convert the world’. Given the low impact this has from generation to generation, however, it is perhaps time to question that purpose.

Dogma has it that unless a person ‘accepts Jesus’ before they die they will suffer ‘hell-fire’ for eternity, and fail to qualify for ‘heaven’. (Though it is not much publicized like that, today.) It is apparent, then, that—on this (false) scenario—most of mankind down the centuries, not having heard of Jesus or having ignored his message, would suffer such an awful fate.

There is no doubt that the Source of our faith—the Christian Bible—has itself had enormous impact on those who have had access to it. As God has said: ‘...*So shall my word be that goes forth out of my mouth: it shall not return to me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it*’ (Isaiah 55:11). It civilizes those who heed its principles! Indeed the Bible precepts nourished the philanthropy of Victorian England, with its water purification and sewerage schemes, the addressing of social problems *etc.*

Disappointment

But what of the message preached? Is God, is Jesus, failing? Are we?

The apostles were commissioned by Jesus to go worldwide with His message: ‘...*Go you therefore, and teach all nations...teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you*’ (Matthew 28:19-20). Christian teachers have indeed ‘gone’ - though perhaps have largely failed on the latter part of the commission. The lack of a lasting response has been a disappointment. There is a reason.

Long Range Plan

The misunderstood fact is—God is not at this time trying to ‘save the world’. Yes, the Gospel must be preached, heralded loud and clear, and many have given their all to that end, though too often not having properly understood the message they preach.

It is a clarion call, an invitation, that falls largely on closed ears. But some do hear—and some do take heed.

In his prayer at the end of his ministry Jesus rehearsed his purpose: ‘...*you have given him [me, Jesus] power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as you have given him*’ (John 17:2). Note: salvation, eternal life, he says, is a matter of individual se-

lection by the Father. Earlier in his ministry he tells his hearers: ‘...*No man can come to me except the Father which has sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that has heard, and has learned of the Father, comes unto me*’ (John 6:44-45).

Jesus adds: ‘...*All that the Father gives me shall come to me; and him that comes to me I will in no wise cast out*’ (v. 37). Having committed to this relationship with the Father through Jesus, the rest of life is to be dedicated to fulfill the urging of Jesus: ‘...*Be you therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect*’ (Matthew 5:48). Always behave like the Father as exemplified by the life of Jesus.

The ‘Gospel’ is the good news that mankind may be reconciled to God the Father through the death and resurrection of Jesus—and through him alone.

It is an error, therefore, to expect all who hear the message to accept salvation as offered, and therefore to confine themselves for ever to the false concept of ‘hell’. First you *hear*, then you *learn*, then you are *drawn to Jesus* and to his sacrifice on the cross.

It’s a myth, then, to assume that to be a Christian you ‘simply believe’. It is a life-time relationship in partnership with the Father and Jesus. **Ω**

Strange Unions ...cont'd

With few exceptions (Matthew 19:12) the sole form of sexual union instituted by God is between one man and one woman united in marriage—and for life. It’s a union that reflects the divine purpose. But it’s a process undermined by hearts hardened by our rejection of God (Romans 8:7). **Ω**

Spirit ...cont'd

re-structured physical body, the blue-print for which is in their spirit, preserved by God.

After the 1000-yr reign of Jesus and the saints, a period of judgment begins on earth for the rest of mankind. Their preserved spirits will be clothed with a physical body and they will experience the opportunity to qualify to be written into ‘the book of Life’: ‘...*I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works*’ (Revelation 20:12).

Quite an incentive for us to nourish that precious spirit within! **Ω**

NOTICE! OUTREACH will, temporarily, be available on-line only. Blame Royal Mail!

ROSY HALLEY

Some of our readers may know Rosy Halley, who has faithfully compiled a weekly Prayer-Lines - a list of those seeking prayer support in various life challenges.

Sadly, Rosy has died in hospital following a stroke and associated problems. I have known her personally for many years - a lovely personality. Rosy will be greatly missed by her family and friends worldwide, and for her dedicated service to God's people.

The following is a brief note from Richard Gawith in Tulsa, Oklahoma:

Dear friends,

It is with a very sad heart that I send you this note to let you know that our dear "Prayer Lines" friend, Rosy Halley, has passed away. I was informed that she died early this Friday morning, December 14, 2012. I don't have a lot of other information at this time, but it is my understanding that she wanted to be cremated and have only a small private funeral.

There is a possibility that a Memorial service will be planned and held at the Tulsa Church of God in the coming few weeks. I will give you more information as it comes available. Meanwhile, please remember in your prayers her son Mike and daughter Kem and their families during this time of their pain and loss. She was truly a very fine lady with a warm heart and care and concern for her fellows as evidenced in her "Prayer Lines".

She will be missed, but we do look forward to seeing her again in the Kingdom of God!