

outreach

The Newsletter of the Churches of God, UK

PO Box 2525
LINCOLN
LN5 7PF
England

Telephone: 01526 861217
e-mail: coguk@aol.com
web-site: www.cgom.org
Editor: James McBride

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

representing



Let God Work!

The church of God is on a mission. We are not here for our personal satisfaction but to do the will of God. How that will may be accomplished is too often misunderstood.

Multiple billions of currency is every year pumped into efforts to accomplish some form of work on behalf of God. Preach the Gospel. Train ministers. Counselling services. Drug rehab clinics. Bible colleges. Radio and television and internet programmes. Missionary activity.

The motive—at least for most, for as in all enterprises there are charlatans—may be laudable. But we must ask: is it *God's* work?

Motivation

Ministry overlap is in degree excusable, for a similar purpose may with some variation better appeal to a different audience. And for the most part start-up ministries are sincerely begun—often with the conviction that 'God is calling me to this'.

Not infrequently a ministry stems from a personality clash. Again, not necessarily a bad thing, for the work of the Gospel expanded when Paul and Barnabas had their barney.

But too often, as in business, a useful Christian ministry feeds on itself (and on its supporters) to build an empire. Wheels spin but go nowhere.

Whatever the reason, however, any new ministry must be motivated by a desire to do what God wants. This is when the problem arises: *how do I know this is God's will, God's way?*

Empowerment

Often forgotten or ignored is the undoubted fact the 'the church' is not

run by us! Of course, God's work is carried out by men and women called by the Father. The empowerment for that work, however, is God Himself, and not infrequently He acts in the world without our puny effort, and sometimes through us.


Jesus—not us—is building his church. He oversees it and he corrects it. Sometimes he rewards—and sometimes he removes our 'lamp stand'.

Jesus, for example, tells us that '*no-one comes to me unless the Father draws him*'. The part of Christians is to evangelize wherever we can to 'ferret out' those the Father is calling to Jesus. The Gospel has to be heard to be believed.

Spirit Power

But unless the LORD build the house we labour in vain. He does that by the action of His holy Spirit. And unless the Spirit is in a work then that work is so much hot air, so many wasted dollars, so much wasted paper and energy.

In view of the proliferation of 'ministries' an answer to the following may be helpful

- Does your perception of your 'calling' come from God—or from self-desire?
- Does your calling conform to God's Word—the 'sword of the Spirit'—in its purpose?
- Does your proposed ministry fill a gap?
- Are you perhaps causing division merely on the basis of minor doctrinal shortfalls? Do you know what teachings are indeed 'vital for salvation'?
- Is your mission open to the scrutiny of other mature Christians? And are you willing in humility to accept valid criticism? 

Go You...

Budding entrepreneurs have a dream. They envisage establishing a business with the ultimate goal of becoming the next Ford or GM or ICI. Each Christian, too, has committed to an expanding enterprise. Jesus' *Magna Charta*, his Great Commission to his church, is as yet a dream not fully fulfilled—but one sure to be accomplished in God's good time.

For two millennia the church of God has witnessed to passing generations. By varied means his message has circled the world. There are, for instance, reckoned to be more Bibles on the planet than people. In whosoever's hands, God's Word is a sharp two-edged sword accomplishing whatever God wants of it. That 'sword of the Spirit' has cut to the heart of countless individuals—even in the hands of the amateur, or the heretic!

Go you therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world

As Christians we have the most exciting programme for mankind's future—more exciting, more challenging, more logical and more powerful than anything dreamed up by any of our earth-bound politicians. A message of which to be proud, a message for which we need

have no shame but can confidently and joyously share with others.

All Christians are obliged to embrace that dream. We have a commission to reach out to those around us—by word and by deed, each in a manner in accord with our spiritual gifts. In the *Outreach Ministries* our desire is to support every effort—individual or corporate—to the limits of the resources provided.

Each of our readers is invited to work with us. Ω

COG...Lessons?

"I was walking across a bridge one day and saw a man about to jump. I said 'Stop! Don't do it'. 'Why shouldn't I?' he asked. 'Well, are you Christian?' I asked him. He said 'Yes'. I said 'Me too. Are you Catholic or Protestant?'. 'Protestant'. 'Me too. Are you Episcopalian or Baptist?' 'Baptist'. 'Wow—me too. Are you Baptist Church of God or Baptist Church of the Lord?' 'Baptist Church of God'. 'Me too. Are you Original Baptist Church of God or Reformed Baptist Church of God?' 'Reformed Baptist Church of God'. 'Me too. Are you Reformed Baptist Church of God, reformation of 1879 or Reformed Baptist Church of God, reformation of 1915?' He said 'Reformation of 1915'. I said 'Die, heretic scum', and pushed him off". *The Week*

Protected...or not?

I will keep you from the hour of temptation which shall come upon all the world to try them that dwell on the earth (Revelation 3:10)

Humanity, apart from a few desperate souls, desires to hold on to life for as long as possible. It drives us to seek by every available means to put off 'the evil day'. Health regimes, surgery, medicines define the lives of many.

Great Tribulation

The above quoted text is a source of comfort to many Christians. Ahead, just before the return of Jesus Christ, there will be a time of great adversity ('temptation')—often equated with 'the great tribulation'. One scenario claims that, because of their faithfulness to specified teachings certain Christians will escape the sufferings of those terrible years. In the context of the words of Jesus (he spoke them) this claim needs careful examination

We are told by Jesus (eg Matthew 24:9, Luke 21:12-19) that some faithful Christians can at that time expect martyrdom. However, he says (through Paul): *'Wherefore let him that thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. There has no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that you are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that you may be able to bear it'* (I Corinthians 10:13). Any 'escape' is individual—not collective, not an entire church group.

Good things are reputed to come in small packages—but so too does poison. One such 'packet' is that word *from*. Will faithful Christians *escape* the tribulation, not suffer its privations, not be martyred by the 'Beast' and his willing aides, be kept *away from* it?

The word is a translation of the Greek *ek*. It means *out of*. That is, God will deliver His people *out of* the tribulation. Along with the rest of mankind Christians will experience the dictatorial hand of a world ruler, but those who remain faithful whatever the consequences, are not fearful in the face of death and don't recant when persecuted, (Revelation 21:7-8, Matthew 8:26)—these will emerge triumphant to become a part of the Kingdom of God, some through a resurrection following their martyrdom.

Note the final phrase, above: *'that you may be able to bear it'*. Drawing on the divine resources in us we can survive the experiences of that awesome time—and 'overcome to the end'. It's a promise unique to the people of God—pilgrims now. Those whose home is rooted on earth, who willingly submit to the Great Dictator, will suffer his total wrath. Ω

The UK Election

Did we, in the May election, get the Government our country needs? The obvious question: do we really know *what* we need? And anyway, should Christians be bothered?

Whatever Government is in power, short of emigrating we have to adjust to its dictates. The first century church lived in the shadow of an oppressive dictatorship—the mighty Roman Empire. Britain isn't like that. At least, not yet, though there's a widespread perception that we are on that slippery slope.

Government isn't any longer about service to the nation but is geared to just the retention of power: 'Prepare now to ensure we win again next time'. So strategies are devised to that end, and the nation suffers.

Godly Government

Government—all government—is accountable to God, and will be called to account, . But that doesn't mean they can do as they please. A clear blueprint for good government , Godly government, is on the table. Judgment of all leadership will be on those terms.

Good government? That means properly executed justice. It means care of the genuinely needy, especially the elderly and infirm. It means the encouragement of personal responsibility. The control of national sovereignty. Internal and external security. Moral purity as prescribed by God. The strengthening of family life through marriage, and the curbing and healing of fractured families.

A Failed Mission

Notice it does not include the extortion of taxes from the wise to support the foolishly feckless. Nor does it include 'soft on criminals', nor sex mis-education of young children, nor the encouragement of abortion. (There are enough abortions annually in Britain to fill the labour gap now being filled by immigrants—some six million over the next twenty years.) Having come to power in 1997 waving the banner of 'tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime' it has lamentably failed on both counts.

For all its self-righteous posing as the 'party of the people' the new Government hasn't a clue as to godly governance. Rather than godly solutions to human needs its priority is to ensure its continuance alongside the feather-bedding of all MPs. Botched plans on transport, on education, on crime, on sexual promiscuity, on foreign entanglements and on the media litter the past eight years.

Yet there's no viable alternative on the table. *Lord Jesus come!* Ω

SABBATH REST

Any Bible scholar worth his salt knows that the weekly Sabbath of the Scriptures is not Sunday but Saturday. Even Roman Catholic scholars will agree, though claiming that the Roman Church had, contrary to Scripture, divine authority to change it. So how should those who follow the Scriptures observe the day?

- First, the 'day' itself is observed from sundown on Friday to sundown Saturday. This is, in Bible terms, the *seventh* day of the week. It is a day that has remained in unbroken sequence since the beginning of time
- It is a time designated by the Creator as 'holy'. That is, it is a day to be carefully distinguished from the other six days
- Sabbath is a day for physical joy and refreshment. We 'rest from our labours', our regular day-to-day business activity. It is well-known that mankind needs this regular recurring pause in our busy schedule. The Sabbath puts our acquisitive lives in perspective
- But Sabbath is especially a time for refreshment of the human spirit. It is a time to burnish our relationship with our heavenly Father and our Saviour through prayer and meditation on His Word. And a time to cement our relationships with our brothers and sisters in Christ—also a time to assemble for instruction from competent teachers
- The seventh-day Sabbath is a sign of our covenant, made at our baptism, with our God. It is a perpetual sign given by the LORD to identify the people of God—a sign that has cost the lives of obedient saints down the ages
- The *weekly Sabbath* and the *Day of Atonement* were, at their inception, the only holy days designated in Scripture as full 'Sabbaths'. That is, no secular work should be done and chores minimized. The other holy days are also for fellowship, instruction and physical enjoyment but without the physical strictures of the Sabbaths

In sum, the seventh-day Sabbath, for Christians, is not a burdensome chore but a welcome break from the daily grind, a pause in our daily lives that brings rich reward. It is not a complex system of 'don'ts' but a willing personal expression of our submission to our God and Saviour, and of our liberty in Christ. Each of us is free to observe it within the principles of the Scriptures Ω

request the articles:

**The Day To Remember
Delight in the Sabbath**

Is Cohabitation Harmful?

In a recent article of *Psychology Today*, the publication warned against cohabitation of couples prior to marriage. The article pointed out that "couples who move in together before marriage have up to two times the odds of divorce, as compared with couples who marry before living together. Moreover, married couples who have lived together before exchanging vows tend to have poorer-quality marriages than couples who moved in after the wedding. Those who cohabited first report less satisfaction, more arguing, poorer communication and lower levels of commitment."

In spite of these observations, the article stated:

"Thirty or 40 years ago, cohabitation was relatively rare, mainly the province of artists and other questionable types, and still thought of as 'living in sin.' In 1970 only about 500,000 couples lived together in unwedded bliss. Now, nearly 5 million opposite-sex couples in the United States live together outside of marriage; millions more have done it at some point... Some evidence indicates that women have less control over the progress of the cohabiting relationship. She may assume they're on the road to marriage, but he may think they're just saving on rent and enjoying each other's company... Cohabiting men may carry their uncertainty forward into marriage, with destructive consequences. A 2004 study... found that men who had lived with their spouse before marriage were on average less committed to their marriages than those who hadn't..."

"Cohabiting relationships, by their nature, appear to be less fulfilling than marital relationships. People who cohabit say they are less satisfied and more likely to feel depressed... While the precarious finances of many cohabiters has something to do with it, [another factor is] the inherent lack of stability. Long-term cohabitation is rare: most couples either break up or marry within five years... As a result, cohabitation is not an ideal living arrangement for children. Emotionally or academically, the children of cohabiters just don't do as well, on average, as those with two married parents, and money doesn't fully explain the difference... Cohabitation rates may be skyrocketing, but Americans are still entirely enchanted with marriage. That's a sharp contrast with some Western societies -- Sweden, France or the Canadian province of Quebec, for example -- where cohabitation is beginning to replace marriage... In the United States, 90 percent of young people are still expected to tie the knot at some point."

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Marriage—just a piece of paper?

Q and A

Does a sexual relationship mean a person is 'married in the eyes of God'?

This concept is widely believed in some religious circles. It has merit in the sense that the married state is a relationship initiated by the Creator and is His choice for all of mankind. Most cultures, indeed, are predominantly monogamous—one man married to one woman, and for life.

In a discussion on divorce, Jesus agreed with this, going on to say 'What God has joined man should not separate' (Matthew 19:6). Note—not *who* but *what* God has joined. The state of marriage is God's choice, He ordained the marriage relationship. He does not individually enter into every marriage! All marriages in the divine economy are to be monogamous and for life. Increasingly, however, human frailty fails to comply—thus forfeiting the full value of the marriage relationship.

Marriage

Marriage is a coming together of a man and a woman to complete one another, to become '*one flesh*' (Genesis 2:24)—emotionally, intellectually, spiritually as well as sexually. Clearly the latter is important, for among God's initial instructions to the first couple was: '*be fruitful and multiply*'. It is through the enlargement of the human race that God's purpose for humanity is fulfilled—for we all

have the potential to become '*sons and daughters of the Almighty*'.

request the article

The Family of God

Marriage, then, is not to be taken lightly. This has been recognized through the millennia, and to 'cement' the union it is usually surrounded by elaborate, public ceremony with commitment to permanence and enforced by societal norms. The breakdown of this pattern especially in the Western world has contributed to the decadence and decay of our civilisation.

It can be seen, then, that sexual union by itself is far removed from an authentic—and godly—marriage. Evidence (see preceding column) suggests mere co-habitation falls short on all counts.

'Fornication'

But what of 'fornication'? The Greek word *porneia* is in the New Testament translated so. In essence it is all forms of illicit sexual activity—in or out of marriage. (Any behaviour that falls short of divine standards is 'illicit'.) Anyone who promiscuously persists in habitually having multiple sexual partners is a 'fornicator' (elsewhere translated 'whoremonger') and is until repentance excluded from God's Kingdom. When such practices are permanently abandoned they can, in Christ, be forgiven.

It is doubtful that a heterosexual couple in a stable cohabitation situation is guilty of 'fornication'—though it falls short of the glory of God, and does not reflect the divine purpose of commitment to a life-long marriage. Ω

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