

outreach

The Challenge of Change

The Newsletter of the Churches of God, UK

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providing
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information and
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Matthew 28:19-20

representing



'...can a leopard change its spots?' queries God through the prophet Jeremiah (*ch* 13:23). Israel had become so accustomed to sin that change was virtually impossible. But doesn't that have echoes in the personal life of each of us?

We are urged - by Jesus - to '*...be perfect even as your Father in Heaven is perfect*' (Matthew 5:48). A tall order! In moments of introspection we are appalled by how far short we fall from such a standard, such a goal. We need not, however, despair.

Hired!

The Christian faith is not merely one choice of belief personally selected from the world's supermarket of religions. Biblical Christianity is the one and only faith acceptable to the Creator. It is the high point of the one faith that has existed since the beginning of human life, and those who embrace it are selected by the Father as part of His master plan to '*...bring many sons to glory*' (Hebrews 2:10).

Sir Alan Sugar, in his popular reality show *The Apprentice* chooses and hires one applicant from thousands for a position in his business empire. How much more selective must the Father be to 'hire' co-workers for His universal and unending Kingdom.

Divine Alchemy

The 'word of the Kingdom' is sown universally. But, despite appearances (there are two billion professing to be Christian) few are willing to accept its demands. For those who do, 'perfection' is the long-term goal.

The process by which we mature as 'sons of God' is one of change. God takes our human base material and transmutes it to gold (*see* I Corinthians 1:26-31). It is summed up in the words of Hannah: '*He raises up the poor out of the dust, He lifts up the needy from the dunghill, to make them sit with princes, and inherit the throne of glory*' (I Samuel 2:8).

But God never asks us to do the impossible. Where we need to change elements of our life He provides the means. When He says '*do this...*' it is possible. Even those character traits that are so habitual that they have become an entrenched part of our personality *can* be changed.

Writes Paul: '*...I can do all things in him that strengthens [Gk. empowers] me*' (Philippians 4:13). Whatever God requires of us is possible, despite our weakness - as we avail ourselves of the promised divine help: '*... the Spirit also joins in to help our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray as we ought, but the Spirit Himself intercedes on our behalf with groanings that cannot be uttered*' (Romans 8: 26). And often we need to be pushed!

Fatherhood of God

Unpopular as discipline may be in our day, the Bible is clear that the Father God takes seriously his responsibility to discipline His children: '*For they [our human fathers] indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed good to them; but he for our profit, that we may be partakers of his holiness*' (Hebrews 12:10).

As imperfect children we need disciplining! We need correction. Wrote the Psalmist: '*Search me, O God, and know my heart: Try me, and know my thoughts; And see if there be any wicked way in me, And lead me in the way everlasting*' (Psalm 139:23-24).

It's all too easy to dismiss the notion that God is behind some of our troubles. Those financial reverses - are they just 'bad luck'? Or the job loss? What about an illness that won't go away? Do we have relationship problems? Should we not ask if perhaps our Father - our loving spiritual Father - is trying to get through to us?

What, then, can we do?

- start from the assumption *cont'd p.3*

'...how much must I know'?

Some years ago I baptized a man - he was probably mid to late fifties - who showed an incredible desire to be part of the Family of God. In Bible terms *'his heart was right'*. He clearly understood that baptism was a life-time commitment, and he was determined to serve Christ to the best of his abilities. A few weeks later I had to conduct his funeral.

I don't baptize anyone unless I carefully outline what true Christianity is and is understood by the enquirer. Jesus warned: *'...for who of you desiring to build a tower does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has the things to finish'* (Luke 14:28). We all need to *'count the cost'* of discipleship. I have no expectation that he or she is already perfect but that baptism is the first step along the way to becoming a mature Christian - 'perfection'. So this man had a sound knowledge of the basics of the Biblical faith.

On the Move

Since then I have acquired a deeper understanding of various aspects of what the Bible teaches. Some old knowledge I trashed as error. For some aspects I get a clearer understanding.

Other bits of Scripture I still puzzle over, for there's no end to what we can learn: *'...[Gk. '...keep on growing] in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ'*, says the apostle Peter (II Peter 3:18). It's a mistake to draw a line under any church's or individual's 'statement of beliefs', though there are indisputable core teachings from which there is no turning back.

Wrote Paul: *'We must try to become mature and start thinking about more than just the basic things we were taught about Christ. We shouldn't need to keep talking about why we ought to turn from deeds that bring death and why we ought to have faith in God. And we shouldn't need to keep teaching about baptisms or about the laying on of hands or about people being raised from death and the future judgment. Let's grow up, if God is willing'* (Hebrews 6:1-3 CEV)

Writing to 'the noble Theophilus' Luke notes that he had been instructed in the principles of the faith. He writes his Gospel to underpin this teaching with the inspired, solid facts of the life and mission of Jesus. But there's no indication that Theophilus had, for salvation, to know every *'jot and tittle'* of what Luke wrote.

Treasure House

Bible study is exciting. I could spend hours following up comments made by Moses or the other prophets or the New Testament writers. And especially the words

of Jesus himself. The Bible is an inexhaustible treasure house of history, comfort when life bears down, practical day-to-day life-changing psychology - and spiritual knowledge.

But just how much 'knowledge' need we have to become part of the Kingdom of God?

Security

I have no doubt that the man I baptized is, in his grave, awaiting the resurrection of the first-born at the coming of Christ. *'...but when this corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal shall put on immortality, then will take place the word that has been written, Death was swallowed up in victory'* (I Corinthians 15:54). How much did he know?

I never, for example, discussed prophecy with him, for every Bible student's understanding of prophecy develops. It's shifting sand. Nor did we, before baptism, talk about 'church eras'. It won't make a particle of difference to his salvation. Nor will discussion on the use of cosmetics, nor healing, nor 'tongues', nor the scientific basis of the holy day calendar.

Many such topics can influence our joy in Christ, our enjoyment of our walk with God and our relationship with other Christians. But they do not alter the fact that with God's Spirit indwelling us we are already, now, part of God's spiritual Family. Repent, be baptized, receive God's Spirit through the laying-on of hands - and drop dead before you leave the water. Yet you are - thanks to Jesus - saved!

Who knows why? It may be simply *'time and chance'* to which we are all subject (Ecclesiastes 9:11). Or, as wrote Isaiah: *'... the righteous is taken away from the evil [adversity] to come'* (ch 57:1). Or, as Job points out *'... "Is not the life of man a place of trial upon earth?"'* (ch 7:1 LXX). God tests our mettle. He knows us individually and intimately, but uses the experiences of life to shape us to fulfil His purpose for us.

Most of us, of course, survive as Christians for many years. Often there's a half century or more of facing life's challenges - in a world that despises God's way. We are ever-open to 'new truth' - once firmly established by the facts - but our relationship with our Father and our elder Brother does not depend on 'getting it just right'.

Wrote John: *'...now are we the children of God'* (I John 3:2). Our relationship as children begins here and now - not 'pie in the sky when we die'! The Christian life is a joyous experience. Yes - study the Scriptures, for there we see most fully portrayed the life and character of Jesus our Saviour whose character we imitate. But let's not make it a burden. Ω

That's not funny!

Marriage is a sacred and blessed institution, where one man and one woman commit to each other in love for the rest of their lives. Together they create a home, raise a family, and grow to love each other more deeply as time goes by. They nurture and comfort each other, through the bad times and the good, in sickness and health, remembering the vows they made. They trust each other and are faithful in every way. All being well, they grow old together and die peacefully in God's good time.

That is the ideal. Sadly it is rarely achieved.

The act of love in marriage should be a time that brings a loving husband and wife closer to each other, and will feed and nourish that relationship.

Distorted Values

We are, today, surrounded by sex in every sort of perversion and abomination. It is in our face at every turn. Sex crimes are continually on the increase, rape, abuse, assault and violations – against women, against men, against children. Homosexuality has achieved a status and acceptance that would stagger Sodom and Gomorrah. Pornography is everywhere: advertising, films, books, television. Paedophilia and incest are still taboo for the most part but many billions of dollars are made from the appalling abuse of children and young adults for the perverted gratification of many wretched souls.

Behind closed curtains, lives are wrenched apart by the vile desecration of a most precious gift bestowed on us by our loving Father. Satan is the author of all perversions.

The *only* worthy sexual act is between a man and woman committed to each other; it is private, personal, and solely between the two concerned. Sex in

any form should *never* be portrayed for others to see. Frankly, it is voyeurism, plain and simple.

The Church

Marriage in its human form is a mere shadow, a type, of the relationship that the Church and Christ will share in intimacy, love and mutual respect and adoration. The Father and Son already enjoy such a deep and special relationship.

As Christians we should be able to say that our lives are pure. We have left old sins and ways behind, and are committed to our mates and long for the day when God's kingdom will be here, and that relationship, foreshadowed in marriage, is a reality.

We all enjoy a good laugh. Laughter is said to be the best medicine. To be happy and smiling, to share a joke with a few friends, to make others laugh, is a pleasure. But what is the nature of the joke? Do we laugh at off-colour jokes, double entendre, crude sexual references? Have we grown up from this sort of infantile school-yard humour or do we revel in it and pass it round? Have we, in fact, got a /dirty mind/? How do people see us – as someone who has respect for values, or someone who has low standards? Would Christ appreciate our sense of humour?

Do we realise that when we tell or listen to questionable jokes or snigger at tasteless cartoons that we are actually mocking and belittling that precious relationship that we will one day enjoy with our loving Father and His Son? By watching sexual behaviour on the screen, reading about it in books, sullyng our conversations, we are despoiling the very goal we are striving to achieve – eternal precious and Godly love in the Kingdom.

Have a good laugh – but know when to say “that's not funny”!

Rosemary Morton

Challenge ...cont'd from p.1

that we are yet imperfect, that we still have lessons to learn, personality traits to eliminate

- assume, until it is clear otherwise, that our 'trouble' is indeed divine correction
- ask the LORD to show you what is His message, how He desires *you* to change
- search the Scriptures to compare your lifestyle with the divine standard
- get wise counsel from mature Bible-believing Christians; but beware of pseudo-psychology
- accept joyfully that God knows what He is doing: *'My brothers count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the proving of your faith works patience. But let patience have its perfective work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. But*

if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask from God, who gives to all freely and with no reproach, and it will be given to him (James 1:2-5)

- all of us need a 'personality transplant'. Our behavioural standard - what as Christians we aim for - is to be that of Jesus Christ. The apostle John writes: *'Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him, because all that which is in the world: the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and its lust. But the one doing the will of God abides forever'* (I John 2:15-17)

Change is indeed a challenge. Sinful habits are deeply implanted in our nature. With God's help coupled with our personal application we can become more Christ-like. **Ω**

REFLECTIONS OF A MOTHER

I gave you life, but cannot live it for you.
 I can teach you things, but I cannot make you learn.
 I can give you directions, but I cannot be there to lead you.
 I can allow you freedom, but I cannot account for it.
 I can take you to church, but I cannot make you believe.
 I can teach you right from wrong, but I cannot always decide for you.
 I can buy you beautiful clothes, but I cannot make you beautiful inside.
 I can offer you advice, but I cannot accept it for you.
 I can give you love, but I cannot force it upon you.
 I can teach you to share, but I cannot make you unselfish.
 I can teach you respect, but I cannot force you to show honor.
 I can advise you about friends, but cannot choose them for you.
 I can advise you about sex, but I cannot keep you pure.
 I can tell you the facts of life, but I can't build your reputation.
 I can tell you about drink, but I can't say "no" for you.
 I can warn you about drugs, but I can't prevent you from using them.
 I can tell you about lofty goals, but I can't achieve them for you.
 I can teach you about kindness, but I can't force you to be gracious.
 I can warn you about sins, but I cannot make you moral
 I can love you as a child, but I cannot place you in God's family.
 I can pray for you, but I cannot make you walk with God.
 I can teach you about Jesus, but I cannot make Jesus your Lord.
 I can tell you how to live, but I cannot give you eternal life.
 I can love you with unconditional love all of my life . . . and I will!!!

Always, Mom

internet

Welcome Gordon Brown...

The Blair era is over, and the former British Prime Minister sails off to what he hopes will be a busy, fulfilling - and lucrative - retirement. He leaves behind a fractured and divided Kingdom crying into its sentimental boots and sinking in a raging red tide of debt. He leaves behind a Britain increasingly subservient to a foreign power. His legacy is chaos on our streets, educational standards plummeting, family life in tatters, civil unrest, unfair taxation, a deluge of 'teen promiscuity and its consequences, soaring abortion levels undermining morality and economic stability, the destruction of our independent Civil Service, distrust of a mendacious government, the Big Brother curtailment of civil liberty. And don't mention the war.

Welcome 'the son of a preacher man'. Gordon Brown, echoing Blair's '97 shattered promise to clean up politics, promises change. A new politics. He has, however, for ten years been a behind-the-scenes supporter and funder of the messianic Blair's policies. Brown is credited with establishing economic stability - though more apparent than real, for it is built on the back of his pensions theft, fiscal sleight-of-hand, personal debt topping £1.3 trillion, house-price inflation. A house of cards on the edge of collapse.

Attempts to 'change Britain' - or indeed the world - are doomed to fail given the sinful nature of mankind. Until Britain's 'heart' is transformed - a turning aside from greed, perversion, personal irresponsibility, violence, ungodliness - then change at the top simply means more of the same. A programme for effective change depends on the application of the divine Law. No nation will survive without it. **Ω**

Bible Translation

The Bible Society reports on the current status of translations of the Bible into languages other than English:

Complete Bible in 429 languages
 New Testament in 1144 languages
 Bible portions in 853 languages
TOTAL: 2426

3000 people groups still have no access to any part of the Christian Scriptures

[*Note: the Old Testament provides the foundation teaching without which the New Testament cannot be fully understood*]

"If we limit ourselves to the specific quotations and direct allusions ... we shall note that 278 different Old Testament verses are cited in the New Testament: 94 from the Pentateuch, 99 from the Prophets, and 85 from the Writings

"If clear allusions are taken into consideration, the figures are much higher: C. H. Toy lists 613 such instances, Wilhelm Dittmar goes as high as 1640, while Eugen Huehn indicates 4105 passages reminiscent of Old Testament Scripture. It can therefore be asserted, without exaggeration, citations or direct, that more than 10 per cent of the New Testament text is made up of allusions to the Old Testament".

Revelation and the Bible

New Horizons

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View it on our web site:

www.cgom.org

print copies are available on request

Autumn Festivals 2007

Trumpets... September 13
Atonement.. September 22
Tabernacles. Sept 27 to Oct 3
Eighth Day October 4

they begin at sunset the evening before these dates

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