

**The Newsletter  
of the Churches  
of God, UK**

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www.cgom.org**

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

*representing  
Churches of God Outreach  
Ministries*

## The Fear of Change

Many churches pride themselves on the fact that they don't change, that they are *always the same*. It's a concept that has merit. After all, if you 'have the truth' - why change? It would be criminal. It would betray your leadership. It would be *sin*.

This view, however, deserves probing. For what is perceived as 'truth' at one time may, with new understanding, become - well, error. The astronomer Galileo, for example, was in his time branded a heretic for claiming earth orbited the sun and not *vice versa*.

Churches have in the past both discarded teachings and added others. Rome, for example, has in recent centuries added the doctrines of the *Immaculate Conception*, and the *Assumption* of Mary bodily to heaven.

When change better reflects Bible principles it is to be praised. But not all change is towards truth. For example, many former members and offshoot groups of the *Worldwide Church* [see side-bar] continue to remain faithful to the original - often erroneous - teachings. They have not '*grown in grace and the knowledge of Christ*', but have stagnated.

### Why Change?

Christians need to beware anyone who claims that they received a message, a new teaching, a prophecy inspired by the Holy Spirit. All that

God has revealed is written in the Scriptures. This doesn't exclude the possibility that in His time God will enlighten an individual to the significance of a portion of His Word. What's essential is that we come to understand the text. And that is where dissent can arise.

### Worldwide Church

One curious modern example is that of the *Worldwide Church of God*. At one level it has, since its Founder died in 1986, changed head-over-heels and is now 'mainstream Protestant'. It has changed from a 7th-day church to a Sunday church, from being binitarian to trinitarian, from observing the Biblical festivals to observing Christmas, Easter, *etc*.

Yet over its lifetime (1934-1986) its Founder vociferously claimed the church to be the only repository of Bible-based truth - the 'one true church', its teachings inspired by God's Spirit.

The church, however, was no stranger to flip-flop change - belying the claims that its beliefs were inspired rather than the personal - fallible - beliefs of the leadership.

Many factors influence our understanding of the text: cultural differences, the meaning of the language as understood by the writers, poor exegesis, erroneous traditional interpretation.

In light of such factors we need to go easy on those holding variant views!

### What Counts?

Those same Scriptures teach tolerance. They urge enquiry but not dogmatism. They ask us to bear with one another.

It's important that we come to understand what God wants of us - including 'truth'. We all strive for increased understanding of the Scriptures. But what counts primarily are those factors that affect our relationship with God and our fellows. Get it wrong and we suffer.

Believe, for example, that God's Law is obsolete and we shatter our relationship with Him. In His Law the LORD teaches us *when* He will formally fellowship with us - *ie* on the Sabbath and on His prescribed annual convocations.

In the Law He gives guidance on

### *"The mainstream churches are boring..."*

To judge by attendances - and media reports - the above statement sounds reasonable. Apparently to worship God, it's claimed, there must be excitement, bodily movement, noise.

Indeed one London church is so full of these elements that it has attracted attention from its neighbours - who want a noise abatement order. And so big that the local Council worries about parking problems and safety.

God Himself is far from 'boring' - so why shouldn't His worship be enthusiastic, attractive, exciting! He has the infinite power to create - and from nothing - the magnificent spectacle of billions of galaxies, stretching out the heavens like a curtain. Yet He also created the strangest looking creatures, the intricacy of the snowdrop, heart-stopping vistas. God doesn't do boring!

The Scriptures testify to joyful worship of the Creator by Israel. In their daily life they were urged to: '*... Praise ye the LORD. Sing unto the LORD a new song, and his praise in the congregation of saints. Let Israel rejoice in him that made him: let the children of Zion be joyful in their King. Let them praise his name in the dance: let them sing praises unto him with the timbrel and harp*' (Psalm 149:1-3).

Anglo-Saxon cultural norms tend to minimize such exuberance. The greatest excitement may be when someone drops the collection plate! What ought to be exciting, however, is the 'message', the 'sermon' Now how often does that happen?

Worship is the daily life-blood of a Christian - '*... singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord*'. Sadly, among some it tends to 'take over' corporate worship to the exclusion of sound instruction from the Word by competent teachers. Worship is important. But without the added 'spice' of intensive exposure to the truth as expressed in the Scriptures services can indeed be 'boring'. Ω

### **Fear of Change...cont'd**

how to conduct daily life. The divine Law gives structure to our walk in Christ. By ignoring these instructions Christians, wrongly, feel free to behave according to whim. And that is *sin* - with consequences.

Sound doctrine, then, can be vital to our life in Christ, while false teaching undermines faith.

What divides, what causes schism, is slavish insistence that everyone - no matter their degree of faith or their personal circumstances - believe the same. It leads to exclusion, ostracism, delayed baptism. And self-righteous finger-pointing.

*Read on-line the article:*  
**The Small Church**

### **ANNUAL REPORT**

The **year ending March 31, 2008** was a quiet year for the *Churches of God, UK*. The main outreach was the distribution of our magazine *New Horizons*, and responding to readers' questions. We are indebted to our colleagues in Tulsa - notably Richard Gawith - for printing *NH* without charge to us. (It is edited in the UK.) The magazine is now in its twelfth year of publication. Articles from *New Horizons* are added to the website ([www.cgom.org](http://www.cgom.org)) and draw many visitors.

Our readers are widely scattered throughout the United Kingdom, making face-to-face contact a challenge. We encourage the brethren to meet with like-minded assemblies wherever they are available. It's a disappointment that, because of high postal charges and reduced income, we have had to axe our overseas readers from the mailing list.

The on-going series of internet *MiniStudies* - now numbering sixty-three issues - deal with commonly asked Bible queries. They are also available in print on request.

It remains our aim to support individual believers and independent assemblies by means of our extensive range of Biblical articles - in print and on-line - and sharing of our ex-

### INCOME 2007/8

**Donations:**  
**...UK**      **£1230**  
**...Overseas**   **£ 678**  
**Tax Rebate:** **£ 316**

**£2224**

### OUTGOINGS 2007/8

**Postal:**      **£ 549**  
**Stationery:** **£ 134**  
**Print:**       **£ 48**  
**Internet:**   **£ 336**  
**Bank:**       **£ 147**  
**Utilities:**   **£ 224**  
**Travel:**      **£ 474**  
**News:**       **£ 373**

**£2285**

perience in helping to establish new assemblies. To this end we invite such groups - and individuals - to associate with us and with the *Churches of God Outreach Ministries* (based in the USA).

Financially, the year was quite difficult, seriously limiting our desired activity. We value your prayers for increasing success in serving the brethren, as we '*provide leadership, information and Biblical teaching*' Ω

## Will You Die - Twice?

Death won't bother you if you are an atheist, though as for all of us the process may be uncomfortable or painful. Believe, however, in an after-life and you may have concerns, for: '*...it is appointed to men once to die, and after this the judgment*' (Hebrews 9:27). 'Judgment to come' is an almost universal belief.

The Bible tells us there is also a '*second death*' (eg Revelation 20:6), and quite clearly tells us some will experience it. Right at the end of humanity's existence in the flesh those individuals - hopefully few - who continue to reject God's offer of life through Jesus will face this 'second death'.

### Multiple Resurrections

So, at the end of this life, however long or short, we die, we are buried or cremated or die at sea. No-one disputes that. Then comes '*...the judgment*'. Jesus said: '*...Marvel not at this: for the hour cometh, in which all that are in the tombs shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of judgment*' (John 5:28-29 ASV).

There will be, Jesus said, a resurrection for *all* of us.. Paul tells us that this will be orderly: '*...as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order* (1 Corinthians 15:22-23 )

John adds: '*...But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that has part in the first resurrection: on such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years*' (Revelation 20:5-6).

To summarize:

- everyone dies, but will be resurrected
- some - Christians - will be in a 'first' resurrection and will '*reign with Christ*' for a millennium
- all others who have drawn breath '*...the rest of the dead*' will be raised after that thousand years in the 'second' resurrection
- then comes the weighing up of our life - judgment

### Fit To Live

God's purpose for us is that we join Him in His Spirit family. That means that only those in whom dwells His Spirit will survive into eternity. Those who now have that Spirit are Christians. Those in the 'second resurrection' will be given opportunity to receive the Spirit.

The Father and Jesus are one in spirit: every thought

and every action is identical. To be part of that Spirit Family mankind must be willing to share their thoughts and their ways. That requires a transformation of character, for '*...my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the LORD*' (Isaiah 55:8). It's what Peter means when he says the Spirit is given to those who obey God. Not some craven slavery but our willing submission. That can come only by means of His indwelling Spirit.

Paul adds: '*...And be not fashioned according to this world: but be you transformed by the renewing of your mind, and you may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God*' (Romans 12:2).

### The Ultimate Hell

Eternity, then, is peopled only by those who have the divine Spirit which enables us to become like God. The implication is that those in that second resurrection who refuse the Spirit - who won't 'repent' - will not live forever but will cease to exist. They will 'die twice'.

John fills in the detail: '*...And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death*' (Revelation 20: 14). There's a common misconception that 'hell' - Gk *hades*, here - is a burning place of unending torment. '*Death and hell*', however, simply refers to all those places where the dead rest, and from where they will be resurrected.

We may learn about their fate by looking at events just after the thousand years. Satan, released from his 'prison' will again deceive many - despite experiencing the fruits of a millennium of divine rule. John again: '*...fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them*' (Revelation 20: 9). Daniel, too, speaking in symbol: '*...I beheld even till the beast was slain, and his body destroyed, and given to the burning flame*' (ch 7:11).

This 'fire', the '*burning flame*', is the real 'hell'! In Greek it is *ge'henna*., the term being derived from the Valley of Hinnom - Jerusalem's rubbish dump. In it were cast dead animals - and the bodies of executed criminals. Note - they were *dead*. We can see here the fate of those who finally and consciously reject salvation: they are die and, like rubbish, their dead bodies cast into 'a lake of fire'.

It will be possible to '*... look upon the carcasses of the men that have transgressed against me: for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched; and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh*' (Isaiah 66:24). The flames will burn until they consume the dead bodies.

Each of us, then, has the opportunity to determine our ultimate destiny. Ω

## The Holy Day Calendar

Many of our readers are familiar with the festivals that are appointed by God for His people. They are outlined in *Leviticus 23*. The Bible text, however, uses terms unfamiliar to most Christians today - and may need explanation.

The Bible festivals are based on a twelve-month (of thirty days each - a 360-day year) calendar used extensively in the ancient Middle East, including Palestine in the time of Jesus. It was based on moon phases, with modifications - for example, an occasional 'leap month' to keep it 'in season'.

*[One factor is the addition, in early Spring, of an extra month seven times in a 19-yr cycle].*

By it, the year begins in early Spring, the first month being called *Abib* ('green ears' - of barley) or *Nisan*. The first day of each month begins with the new moon. For example, it was in this first month that the trial and death of Jesus took place - on the 14th of that month on the extant calendar.

*[As the sighting of a new moon was at times difficult, scholars worked out a calculated calendar.]*

Today, this calendar needs some interpretation! Our Western ('Gregorian') calendar, now widely used, is solar-based, with months of varying length and with an approximate 365-day year - the time taken by earth to orbit the sun. Clearly the two calendars are out of synch.

Christians who observe the Bible festivals - including the various Churches of God - are guided by the calculations of scholars within Judaism. To reconcile the lunar and solar calendars the latter have compiled a scheme\* which takes account of several factors. By cross-checking from the Hebrew date the relevant modern date can be noted

Readers may have noted that on the Islamic calendar - which is totally moon based - the festivals (eg Ramadan) 'float' throughout the year. The Hebrew calendar seeks to maintain the festivals 'in [their] season' (Exodus 13:10). For example, to keep the time for the seven-day Passover season in Spring.

[Request (or check the web) the article [The Origin of the Calendar](#) and the booklet [God's Holy Days](#)]

*[\* The Comprehensive Hebrew Calendar, by Arthur Spiers, is a standard work, listing the dates for many years to come. For convenience, the various Churches of God publish handy 'mini-calendars' covering several years. These are available from any of our addresses.]*

## Church Calendar

It's fundamental - and a prime responsibility - for Christians to attain to '*...the unity of the faith*' (Ephesians 4:13). and that we should '*...no longer be young children, being tossed about by waves and being carried about from place to place by every wind of teaching [or, doctrine], by the cunning of people, in craftiness, for the purpose of the trickery of deception.* (v.14 ALT).

Since authoritative apostles - as in the New Testament - no longer exist such unity can be problematic. The calendar is a case in point. Within Christianity, for example, from early days there was dispute as to the timing of the spring festival - later changed to 'Easter'. Eventually a compromise was agreed in the mainstream churches - though there is dissent to this day.

For those Christians observing the Bible's holy days unity is disrupted unless there is an agreed calendar for their dating (*Leviticus 23 - see column 1*). Almost all Christians who observe these annual holy days agree that we use the 'Hebrew calendar'. They were, in Moses' day, observed on a pre-existing calendar which was passed down the generations in one form or another.

The *Church of God (7th day)* - the oldest of the modern churches of God - has used this calendar for over a century to date the annual *Lord's Supper*, and there is consensus among the churches based on judgments arrived at by the church leadership, for the Scriptures do not have the detail necessary to structure a calendar. It remains a point of contention, and an opportunity for some to gather a personal following.

Logic - and experience - demonstrates that deviation by individuals or groups is disruptive of that coveted unity. Observe different dates and fellowship is fractured. Where there remain 'grey areas' a spirit of tolerance combined with an ear tuned to the voice of the church at large contributes to unity. Ω

### Lost Days?

Some readers may be concerned that the various changes to the secular calendar have affected the seven-day weekly cycle, that the seventh-day Sabbath was 'lost'. The following chart shows that when the Gregorian calendar was adopted, in England in 1752, the daily sequence was unchanged. Note that Wednesday 2nd was followed by Thursday 14th

Curiously, there were riots as some thought they had lost eleven days of life!

#### September 1752

Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa
&	&	1	2	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30

**FINANCES (COGUK) May/June 2008**  
INCOME.... £135    OUTGOINGS... £104