

outreach

The Newsletter of the Churches of God, UK

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Matthew 28:19-20*

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Are We All Equal?

The ‘fruit’ of the recent UK ‘New Labour’ Government indicates that they had an obsession with ‘equality’. The new Coalition Government is committed to unpick the tangle of legislation and to restore sanity.

‘Equality’, however, is not confined to the secular, for it is a major topic in modern theological circles. It reduces to: *Are men and women fully equal?*

Often cited are the words of the apostle Paul in Galatians: ‘... *There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for you are all one in Christ Jesus*’ (ch 3:28). The absurdity of applying this to the respective roles of men and women in the church is plain. We are indeed ‘... *one in Christ*’—but we remain man or woman, a slave or free, and in Christ we do not change our racial origins.

Different Roles

God treats all His children—male and female—as individuals and the offer of salvation extends to all on the same terms. But in the beginning they were assigned different roles, differing functions.

The pattern of human relationships is clearly set out in the early chapters of Genesis. ‘Man’—God includes both male and female in the generic term—was created in the divine image and likeness: ‘... *let them have dominion...*’ (ch 1:26, 27). Both were ‘blessed’ and

instructed reproduce and to have dominion over all of the material creation. But each had a defined role.

Just as any enterprise would collapse if it lacked overall direction (the ‘chairman’), so the role of ‘shepherd’ of the human creation was assigned to the man. He was taken to the pre-planted Eden with instructions to ‘...*tend and keep it*’ (ch 2:15), and warned about the perils of forsaking divine guidance (v.17).

Adam was delegated the authority to ‘name’ the animal creation, thus emphasizing his leadership role (vv.19-20). In all the animal creation Adam was unable to find a suitable companion, so from his own DNA a ‘help’ was created for him with whom he could communicate and share. He exercised his leadership by prophesying her role as ‘...*the mother of all living [humans]*’ (ch 3:20), and naming her Eve (*Gk zoe*—life).

As Adam’s ‘helper’ Eve—women—should exercise a supportive role in the joint project of preserving the material creation until the ‘seed’ should come to restore it (ch 3:15).

In the perfect world, then, male and female had different and complementary roles—and were equal in the sight of God. But Adam—the male—had the responsibility of general oversight.

And Now...

This isn’t just ‘Old Testament stuff’ but is reiterated *cont’d p.4*

Preparing the Future

Long gone are the days when you could enjoy a meal out—or other activity—and not be annoyed by the antics of one or more children. Indeed many ‘top’ restaurants ban the little darlings. It has not always been so, for scroll back twenty or more years and children either behaved in adult company—or were excluded (by their parents) from formal gatherings. The reforms rooted in the Victorian era had ushered in the much-needed obligation of personal responsibility.

Across the classes—with exceptions, of course—there was a culture of restraint. Decidedly, society was not ‘child centred’. But for today’s new parents, confusion reigns: to discipline or not to discipline? On the whole expert opinion says *no*. And the fruit of this lack of discipline is clear.

It is intensely embarrassing (especially when their parent is present!) when your home is invaded by a marauding band of wild children, some

barely out of nappies. Step forward a few years and inspect the average classroom of five-year olds. Chaos. And the pattern is repeated through later age groups into mid-teens.

Parents are encouraged by ‘experts’ to allow their offspring to freely express themselves. To this end they withhold all restraint—at meal times, when preparing to go out, at bed-time. Chaos again, and frustrated weary parents.

Related material you may find helpful:

- **University of the Home**
- **Children—the best job**
- **Spend a Lifetime—together**
- **The Edge of Divorce**
- **The Law of Life**

Wild Olives

Any experienced horticulturalist will spot the problem. Leave a tree or bush to itself and it eventually defiles the garden. It becomes unruly. Ugly instead of beautiful. Untended, crops diminish. The longer there is neglect the greater the burden. Copy this over to child behaviour and the lessons are clear. Any system is known by its ‘fruit’—good or bad.

King Solomon long ago summed up the problem: ‘...*Correct your children, and they will be wise; children out of control disgrace their mothers. If you correct your children, they will bring you peace and happiness*’. Parents cry out for the ‘peace and happiness’ thus offered!

Help at Hand

By way of offering a solution the King adds: ‘...*Without guidance from God, law and order disappear, but God blesses everyone who obeys his Law*’ (Proverbs 29:15-18). It’s a principle—confirmed by both observation and experience—you can apply to the preparing of the upcoming generation—our future leaders.

From nature we learn the need for action to impose order. The tree untended twists out of shape. A dwelling decays without attention. Health deteriorates unless care is taken. And a child is ‘bent out of shape’ without informed guidance. For: ‘...*Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him*’ (Proverbs 22:15) Ω

Last Minute God

Answer to prayer depends on faith. So it’s not surprising that the answer often comes at the last minute—perhaps after what presents as a lengthy trial. But God’s timing is always spot on!

Faith doesn’t grow on trees. It is developed in us by our experiences coupled—once the matter has been placed in God’s safe hands—with the firm belief that He knows what’s best in all circumstances.

For example—a real event. A woman pregnant but with health problems comes near to the birth only to find that the

baby is breach—and only a 3% chance it will turn. A Caesarian looms. But folk were praying—and the baby turned just in time.

Her health still presented problems and it was decided the operation would still go ahead. Prayer continued. And a last minute consultant visit found baby was on his way—just as the anaesthetist, syringe in hand, was about to administer an epidural. The result—a safe and speedy natural birth.

So—hang in there. Jesus urges us to ‘...*pray and not to faint [lose heart]*’ (Luke 18:1). A loving Father knows exactly what our needs may be. And answers—sometimes at the last minute! Ω

Anglicans at War

The Church of England has once more indulged in a session of public soul-searching—again on the vexed matter of women as bishops. No longer a question of *whether* to appoint but of how to implement the change and still keep on board those ‘traditionalists’ who threaten to desert to Rome if they are not properly provided for.

Tangled in a web of ecclesiastical bureaucracy and divisive theological debate, Synod fears the monolith of ‘The Church of England’ could splinter. Both senior Archbishops have presented a solution—only for it to be rejected on a technicality and by a knife-edge majority.

Historical Review

In reply to his request for directions to his destination a lost tourist was told, ‘*If I were you I wouldn’t start from here*’. Anglicans—and others—should take note. The root of problems, and not least in this ‘war’, often lies buried in long-past decisions, and the church today needs to revisit those decisions. For the source of the Anglican current difficulty may be traced to shortly after the beginnings of Christianity.

The Church of God was a denominational unity for only the brief time it was confined to a single congregation in early first-century Jerusalem. All Christians were members of the one church of God but with no denominational affiliation. For some decades—while the original Twelve apostles appointed by Jesus exercised their ministry—the many daughter congregations were ‘one body’ but with each congregation independently organized.. There was variety of administration, though all voluntarily submitted to the apostolic teaching. (That is, the inspired continuation of the teaching of Jesus.)

After the demise of the Twelve authority was vested in their writings, and they became the source of such unity as existed. There were, originally, no ‘denominations’, with each subscribing to its own statement of beliefs and each separately organized as a corporate body. No Anglicans, no Methodists, no Church of Rome, no Baptists—*et cetera*. Brethren, rather, were bonded by the joyous bands of faith and their loyalty to Jesus.

Local Leadership

Each local assembly was cared for by an experienced, competent and mature member of the congregation, publicly appointed to that office. He—always a ‘he’ - was appointed as the ‘shepherd’ (pastor, elder) of their particular congregation to serve, protect and nourish it.

But then, of course, there was human nature. As years passed men arose (they were there, too, in Paul’s day—*see Acts 20*) who assumed authority over the congregation and set about empire-building..

Perhaps innocently in the beginning, respected more experienced elders gained wider recognition and authority. The office evolved and in time a hierarchy formed, headed by a ‘bishop’ (Gk *episkopos*, overseer), most notably in Rome. In the second century the Bishop of Rome—hitherto limited in authority to Rome itself—began to claim jurisdiction over all Christian assemblies. Thus evolved the ‘Catholic’ (*ie*, universal) church.

It was a departure from the ‘primitive’ apostolic practice, whereby each assembly had only local jurisdiction, yet voluntarily co-operated with other assemblies nearby. The simple structure inherited from Judaism, Jesus and the apostles became entangled in a complex web of ‘church offices’: Pope, Patriarch, Major Archbishop, Cardinal, Primate, Metropolitan, Archbishop, Diocesan Bishop—and dozens of titles through to various orders of the Laity.

The role of *elder* of a congregation was—in New Testament times—also known as an *overseer* (Gk *episkopos*; *see Titus 1:5,7*). The word is often translated as *bishop*.

The leadership titles in the primitive church were *elder*—also called shepherd, overseer— and *deacon* (Philippians 1: 1). Other terms indicated *functions*, such as prophet, evangelist.

In essence, the leadership role was by competent males who were overseers of his local congregation. The pseudo-office of Bishop as presently understood did not exist.

The Church of England could learn from the simplicity of the governance of the first churches of God. The lesson applies universally to all so-called denominations of every theological bent. Ω

The on-going chaotic divisions within the *United Church of God* highlight the need for the Biblical solution to church governance.

Attempts to tie all its congregations into a single structure will ultimately fail—as did its predecessor the *Worldwide Church of God*.

This applies equally to all minor denominational off-shoots of the WCG—such as the *Restored church*.

Read on-line or request the article:

The Small Church

<http://www.cgom.org/Publications/Articles/TheSmallChurch.pdf>

The Big Society

Plato's *Republic*, Shangri-La, Utopia, New Deal, City of the Sun, New Atlantis, Welfare State—and now, The Big Society. All praiseworthy aims, but in the long run—as witnessed by history—merely 'pie in the sky'.

The Perfect World

No-one would deny the universal desire for the kind of society envisaged by such concepts. Our world is beset by enough challenges to engender a longing for peace, security, prosperity, happiness and such material blessings as pure water for all, abundant harvests worldwide, perfect health. And our politicians should be encouraged to continually seek out the underlying principles that would usher in such a society.

*Request the articles:
God's Grand Design
Tabernacles...
...mankind in the flesh*

The desire for a Golden Age permeates all ages, all faiths, secular realists and dreamers. Begun with the best of intentions, however, such envisaged Golden Ages often end as base metal. From those with religious origins we could cite David Koresh's ('Branch Davidians') Texan misadventure. Or the 1978 Jim Jones (the 'Peoples' Temple') debacle in Guyana. Perceptive observers are more rooted in reality. As said Lord Macaulay: '*...An acre in Middlesex is*

Equal...? ...cont'd from p.1

in the New Testament both by Jesus and by Paul. And properly understood it is a liberating concept rather than restrictive.

Jesus, for example, confirms the Genesis recognition of monogamy as a perpetual institution ordained by God (Matthew 19:4-6), with its implication of male leadership—the man leaves the parental home and establishes a new order (Genesis 2:24). Paul, too, points to the primacy of Adam in re-stating the Genesis record that man was created first, and Eve was taken from his side (I Timothy 2:13).

The Bible, then, is consistent in promoting the essential equality of man and woman in the Christian context. It also firmly makes clear that in the intimacy of the family and the church there are God-given roles which lead to peace and harmony. Ω

better than a principality in Utopia'. But that doesn't ease the universal itch!

Key Clue

Given this urge it is worth enquiring as to why, after thousands of years of civilization and accumulated knowledge, we still fail to attain to our longed-for utopia. But reduce the challenge to its basics and clues leap out.

Our world is composed of families of varying size and complexity. But take the average—two adults and to children and even the best regulated is far from fulfilling the utopian dream. Never mind the seething mass of dysfunctional families. Clearly, the 'dysfunctional' element abides in all of us. Even the recently-elected UK Government for all its expressed desire to install a squeaky clean administration yet sinks to spin and betrayal of its principles.

Yes—it's our human nature that's faulty. Having abandoned the divinely inspired way to life, we are on a downward moral spiral and now reap the consequences. As said the prophet Isaiah '*...the way of peace [Heb. shalom: prosperity, welfare, health, rest] they don't know'*.

New Golden Age

But human nature won't change unaided. Only our transformation through a direct and continuing relationship with the Creator will work in us the necessary change. It's called *repentance*.

Several ancient sources hark back to an era of peace and harmony, a 'Golden Age'—that brief period before our first parents chose to ignore the Law of Life and were excluded from their utopia, Eden.

The Christian Bible predicts that in God's perfect timing that lost Golden Age will return. In Bible terms it's called *The Millennium*—a thousand years of peace under the benign rule of Jesus the Messiah, the '*...desire of all nations'*. Under His guidance all mankind will embrace that essential change of human nature. Utopia will at last be established.

It is a time celebrated from time immemorial and by Israel and by Jesus and the first Christians as the *Festival of Tabernacles*. Ω

This year the eight day Festival begins on **September 23rd**, and is observed by many Christians in sites around the world. *Ask us for details.*
