

outreach

It's NOT the Economy!

The New Horizons Newsletter

e-mail: coguk@aol.com
web-site: www.cgom.org
mobile: 07949942180
Editor: James McBride

Temporary address:
Churches of God
Outreach Ministries
P O Box 54621 Tulsa
OK 74155-0621 USA

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Matthew 28:19-20

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Despite the Prime Minister's attempt to focus the minds of the British public on the vital issue of our coming departure from the European Union, other elements were determined to highlight the economy.

The doors are flung open to a free 'sweet shop' of unearned benefits: *Freedom from university fees*. Billions funnelled into the NHS. *Two-fifty billion poured into infrastructure and public services*. A welfare utopia. Unsurprisingly this package of goodies was embraced by millions, and responsible government was shelved.

Choice

This election offered a stark life-style choice—*personal responsibility*, or *state control*. Pay for your choices, or pass on a massive overdraft to the next generation(s). (In the UK we are approaching two trillion pounds in debt—£1,700,000,000,000, on which we annually pay billions of interest to our lenders!).

But that enormous debt isn't the cause of our national challenges. It is *one effect of our choices*. On offer was fiscal responsibility or state handouts, and blinded by the offer of 'pie in the sky' millions, unsurprisingly, opted for the latter, for at heart we all look after 'number one'.

As a nation we have long overspent on countless follies, forgetting that what we spend—both nationally and personally—we must earn or have future generations ultimately face the consequences.

The Source

Forgotten, too, is the source of our collective wealth. All we consume derives from the eco-system of earth's bounty. Our strength to earn is sustained by what we get from the soil and the planet's eco-system. It is useful to remember that all of this infra-structure was there before we were born! As was the intelligence we all inherit to develop it—whatever our race or colour. Some peoples do, some don't. So some individuals and some nations thrive, others don't.

What the Creator said to His chosen nation, ancient Israel, has resonance for all people, all nations, throughout time: '*...you must never think that you have made yourselves wealthy by your own power and strength. Remember that it is the LORD your God who gives you the power to become rich*' (Deuteronomy 8:17-18). Or, as records King Solomon, expressing the wisdom of the ages: '*...When the king is concerned with justice, the nation will be strong, but when he is only concerned with money, he will ruin his country*' (Proverbs 29:4).

Change and Decay

It's not unusual to hear talk of 'the good old days'. There was less crime. Money went further. Children playing in the street. Jobs galore. Free education. Peace on our streets. And such a view has merit—if perhaps somewhat overdrawn, nostalgic.

Our present chaotic age is, despite our lavish material benefits, a marked contrast—frenetic, loud,

terror on the streets, disparity, corruption in high places of business and politics. The King again: ‘...*When a nation sins, it will have one ruler after another. But a nation will be strong and endure when it has intelligent, sensible leaders*’ (Proverbs 28:2).

Reasons Considered

Our politicians and business and charity leaders emerge from among the general populace. They have experienced years of their own segment of national culture—and reflect that attitude in their behaviour and in their policies. Given that the public in general has over the past few decades all but abandoned its moral compass it is unsurprising that leadership quality has largely plummeted, with *self-serving* ousting national pride and service, and our Christian culture despised.

Whatever we think of the past, society has radically changed—for better *and* for worse. But how do we judge either state? What suits one person is poison to another. Average man will, unsurprisingly, think first of *self*—we protect ourselves and our own ‘estate’. It’s the ‘natural man’. But we are shaped by a range of factors, besides our genes:

- *Education*
It has lurched in a ‘liberal’, anti-God, intolerance; Christian values are suppressed
- *Surfeit of goods*
Fuelled by debt we spend, spend, spend, focusing on the material, neglect the spirit
- *Welfare dependency*
‘Bread and circuses’ has sapped the will of millions; too many ‘vote for more’
- *Political correctness*
We are force-fed from childhood with concepts contrary to our nature
- *Decline of Religion*
Relatively few now experience early exposure to the principles of religion—especially to the Christian Bible

Such factors mould us into a herd mind-set, and shape the nation’s reactions and aspirations. No surprise that as leaders emerge they too lack a sound standard on which to base their decisions. Those who stand up for their beliefs are vilified by the media and by politicians (who all emerge from the same swamp).

Gold Standard

Socialism, Conservatism, Marxism—each (and other guiding philosophies) attracts its dedicated adherents, many willing to sacrifice all to promote it. All have their faults!

Marxism—the ugly face of socialism—surfaced on the world scene over a century ago, leaving millions dead in its wake. Benign socialism and conservatism has flourished, alternatively, in the United Kingdom at the whim of the voting public—but each with its serious challenges and each deeply flawed. Socialism is presently in process of morphing into Marxism.

Lesson from the Past

Great minds embrace each *-ism*—yet all have failed us. For the various manifestos have sidelined the one and only God and indulged all other ‘gods’. Ignore His guidance, forget Him, and we spiral to oblivion—as did ancient Israel. Sceptics discount the history of that nation as legend—mere stories. The record was, however, ‘...*written for our learning*’ and for these times—and we must pay attention!

Blessed with abundant natural resources they ascended (at their peak around 1000BC) to the top table of contemporary nations: ‘...*Solomon exceeded all the kings of the earth in riches and in wisdom. And all the earth sought the presence of Solomon, to hear his wisdom, which God had put in his heart*’ (1 Kings 10:23-24). Israel became a great international trade, military and maritime nation with links to surrounding nations.

Conditioned as this was on following God’s revealed pathway—a Covenant to which they had wholeheartedly agreed (Exodus 24:7)—it didn’t last, for they abandoned that way and embraced the degrading culture of surrounding nations. Within three centuries the northern tribes were invaded, their kingdom overthrown—and then dispersed from their own land, never yet to return. A solemn warning indeed.

British ‘Values’

The anglo-saxon nations have also inherited divine material blessing coupled with an in-born respect, *via* the Bible, for the principles of Israel’s law and culture. But the last half-century has witnessed widespread moral decline, with Christian faith and practice jettisoned at all levels of society. We are even shamed by the alien cultures in our midst.

Our much-vaunted ‘values’ are a national disgrace. Almost 200,000 annually slain, by ‘maternal’ choice, in the womb—and over eight million since our Abortion Act, 1967. Families shattered. Children undisciplined and dictating policy. Adultery and std’s endemic. Shameless public behaviour. Corruption in business and politics.

All this in a nation for centuries exposed to Christian principles! A nation that inherited the divine promises of prosperity. Those days are past, as they were dependent on our fulfilling *our* part to the covenant. As said Moses to Israel: ‘...*You forgot the Rock that brought you into being and ceased to care for God who formed you*’ (Deuteronomy 32:18).

Israel—and her modern descendants—are likened to a protected vineyard. We have for long been surrounded by the ‘hedge’ of divine Law. But change is coming: ‘...*I will take away its hedge, and it will be burned. I will breach its wall, and it will become a trampling ground [for foreign nations]*’ (Isaiah 5:5).

No—it’s *not* the economy! Our prosperity, our national existence, hinges on our willing submission to God’s perfect Laws. Ω

Preach! But why?

It's the life-blood of every church—proclaim the Christian message to all and sundry, with the aim of drawing them to Christ *via* their church. The 'how' is as diverse as each preacher. The 'why' is largely misunderstood.

Many of us drift into our parents' church—at least initially. (It's the thing to do on a Sunday.) Most, perhaps, need nudging, and that's where preaching comes in. To prepare our hearers for 'heaven' or save from 'hell' is accepted as the 'why'. Though some sects will seek to lure members to its denomination to boost its financial status. For others it's 'come to Jesus to solve all life's challenges'. It is vital that we examine what Jesus himself tells us.

Go...

The foundation, of course, is the 'Great Commission' from Jesus to his disciples: '*...Go, then, to all peoples everywhere and make them my disciples: baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teach them to obey everything I have commanded you*' (Matthew 28:19-20). He had earlier told them: '*I will build my church and not even death will ever be able to overcome it*' (ch 16:18).

But he himself said that '*what I have commanded*' is no easy ride—a concept not widely understood by Christianity's two billion adherents (one-third of the global population). Note his discourse with the disciples: '*...Enter through the narrow gate, because broad is the gate and spacious is the road that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it, because narrow is the gate and constricted is the road that leads to life, and there are few who find it!*' (ch 7:13-14).

Selection

No employer would long tolerate an employee who is a mere hanger-on and unproductive. Yet most occupants of church pews are there due to parental example or solely by habit and with no direct involvement beyond the collection plate. An easy ride indeed.

Yet Jesus makes clear that God is *selective*, that He chooses with whom He will work—in this life and throughout never-ending eternity. Said Jesus: '*... People cannot come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them to me*' (John 6:44). And once they enter into a new covenant with him—with all that entails—'*...Everyone whom the Father gives to me will come to me,*

and the one who comes to me I will never cast out' (v.37). Enrolled for eternity!

How Shall They Hear?

How, then, does God convey His invitation? Writes Paul: '*...faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God*'. And to achieve that, '*...how shall they hear without a preacher?*'. God gifts individuals to herald His message '*...in all the world*', and those who '*...have an ear to hear*' that message He leads along a path to Jesus, the Messiah and Saviour.

The apostle Paul exemplified the energy that must be exerted, in face of all opposition, to make that message audible to those who 'hear'. His life was a living sacrifice so that others could hear: '*...in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings*' (II Corinthians 6:4-5).

False News

Our bombardment by 'false news' is not limited to politics. Jesus warned us about it! After outlining the difficulties of the path to the everlasting Kingdom of God he said this: '*...beware of false prophets [preachers], who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inside they are plundering wolves*' (Matthew 7:15). Sincere some may be—but often sincerely wrong.

The apostle Paul picked up this same theme: '*... I wonder that you are so quickly turning back from the One having called you by the grace of Christ to another gospel, which is not another*' (Galatians 1:6-7). Just as with what we read in the papers what we hear from the pulpit must be carefully sifted—taken with 'a pinch of salt'. As said Jesus—what matters is *truth*: '*...an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth*' (John 4:23).

To summarize: *We don't* preach so our hearers feel good about themselves. We don't preach to amass members. We don't preach to house the homeless or build hospitals. We don't preach to 'save the world'. Nor to bring in world peace.

What we *do* preach is the announcement of God's invitation to everyone who has ears to hear that they may choose to join the Creator at the top table—as an integral member of the Family, the Kingdom, of God. And to participate with the Father in His plans for eternity. Ω

Insight from Paul

The apostle Paul's letters shed a bright light on our walk with God

The apostle praises the Christians in Berea for their diligence in testing his teachings—against ‘the Scriptures’: ‘...they received the Word with all readiness, daily examining the Scriptures if these things are so’ (Acts 17:11). It’s a recurring theme of Paul (as it is in all the apostolic writings). In the Scriptures, he says, is ‘truth’, and God’s desire is that all of mankind attains to it (I Timothy 2:4). Indeed in his letters he refers to *truth* over fifty times. It is an echo of the words of Jesus: ‘...your word is truth’ (John 17:17).

Often, however, it is overlooked that the ‘Scriptures’ to which the apostle refers are the so-called ‘Old Testament’. They are the foundation for a proper understanding of the Christian faith. (There are, it has been said, some 350 quotations from these Scriptures in the ‘New’ Testament—all but for one hundred by Paul.) At no time does the apostle deviate from the spirit, the innermost significance, of the divine revelation.

As a direct consequence we do not find the apostle giving credence to much of what passes for ‘Christian truth’ today. He does not, for example in any way endorse the change from the weekly seventh-day Sabbath to the current almost universal observance of Sunday—the widespread practice of the non-Christian faiths in the first century world he encountered. Indeed he is recorded as continuing to observe Sabbath and to work the remainder of the week (as ‘tentmaker’ KJV; Acts 18:3).

The apostle elsewhere denounces idolatry—in the Scriptures epitomized by rejection of the creation Sabbath. It identifies the one and only God: ‘...I gave them my sabbaths, to be a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am the LORD that sanctify them’ (Ezekiel 20:12). It was revealed to all of mankind at our origin: ‘...God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made’ (Genesis 2:2-3).

The apostle warns us (Colossians 2:8) to reject the ‘traditions of men’, or—as wrote Jude—‘...contend for the faith delivered once and for all to the saints’ (v.3). Ω

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When Messiah Returns

Jesus said: ‘I will come again’ - but we don’t know *when*. (*So be ready!*) Succeeding events, however, are variously understood. Most of the world’s two billion Christians are blithely unaware that Jesus made that claim. It’s not a message often heard from the pulpits. Protestant denominations in general deny a future millennial reign of Christ.

The segment of believers who are ‘evangelical’, however, certainly look to his return—but are divided on detail. Most, perhaps, subscribe to the so-called ‘secret rapture’ whereby the faithful are taken up to ‘meet the returning Jesus in the air’ before divine wrath’ is inflicted on all the not so-blessed.

Others believe Jesus has already returned but is in some way engaged in a spiritual judgment of the true believers. A final great battle destroys all human life—except for the faithful who will reign in heaven. The dead are then raised to live in a thousand-year long material paradise should they then live a righteous life.

Others say that believers (only) will be caught up to heaven while earth is, for a millennium, a smouldering wasteland inhabited only by Satan and the demons.

All these concepts stem, supposedly, from the same inspired source—the Christian Bible. *You* choose!

Let’s look at what the Scriptures state about this hot topic, surely of interest to all of us who are concerned about what the Creator has planned.

The *Churches of God* are observant of the weekly and annual holy days (listed in Leviticus 23). They are a guide to our understanding of God’s plan for His creation. Several of these days fall in autumn, and provide a panoramic view of end-time events.

First is the *Day of Trumpets* which heralds the return of Christ and the resurrection of all God’s faithful from down the ages along with the faithful—in whom resides the holy Spirit—those Christians still alive at his coming. They will rise to reign with Jesus for a thousand years: ‘... the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout of command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first’ (I Thessalonians 4:16). Elsewhere the apostle tells us it is the ‘...last trumpet [of seven]’ (I Corinthians 15:52).

This is followed by the *Day of Atonement* representing the reconciliation to God of His estranged nation of Israel. They will be gathered from all nations and return, repentant, to Zion, to the land of Israel.

Next is the seven day *Feast of Tabernacles* which refers, in part, to the millennial reign of Jesus in company with the resurrected saints: ‘...they [the redeemed] will reign on the earth’ (Revelation 5:10). Earth will then begin to be restored to its pristine state as these saints oversee the survivors of end-time human destructiveness (Isaiah 24:6).

Finally the *Eighth Day*, a ‘day’ of new beginnings as the Father comes to our planet to reign over redeemed mankind (now spirit) for *eternity* in a sinless universe. Ω

*Request the booklet:
Key to the Book of Revelation*

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(Churches of God, UK
PO Box 2525
LINCOLN LN4 4EG
coguk@aol.com)

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(Churches of God, UK
PO Box 2525
LINCOLN LN4 4EG
coguk@aol.com)

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