

The New Horizons Newsletter

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Matthew 28:19-20

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Beyond Law

Space photography has focused our attention on the awesome beauty of our universe, with its billions of stars and galaxies in fascinating variety and colours. Yet throughout the far reaches of space all are subject to the same physical laws.

Down on Earth the same fundamental laws of physics apply: Relativity, Thermodynamics, Motion, Mass and Energy, Light—a complex tapestry woven in perfect harmony. Even the mysterious Quantum Mechanics is subject to the same physical laws. Scientists bow in awe before these inter-acting systems. Every technological advance must conform, or failure ensues, to their cost

Living Law

Nor can we forget *life*—all of it subject to law governing our very existence, and all governed by the same universal laws.

The incredible complexity of a living cell—subject to inexorable chemical law. Our innumerable interactions with the physical world— all subject to law. And not just the laws of physics and chemistry, for mankind, created in the very image of the Creator, is also subject to the *moral* law.

Divine Image

The entire animate creation derives from God and is, too, subject to the physical laws. Mankind, however, is unique and functions in accord with a raft of *moral* laws—laws as inexorable as the physical.

Unlike the animal creation man-

kind is created in the very *image* of our Creator (Genesis 1:27). Every aspect of our physical and mental existence was perfectly designed to live harmoniously with God, with self and with neighbour. It could be called ‘the *Law of Love*’.

And that’s how it continued—but only for a limited time.

Sin Enters

Our first parents severed their personal face-to-face relationship with the Creator, who then provided mankind with a pattern of behaviour that summarized (for unregenerate mankind) the underlying principles of the *Law of Love*. It was later summarized in the ‘Ten Commandments’.

This understanding of a spiritual and moral law of life prevailed universally in some degree since creation. The moral law was passed on from our first parents to succeeding generations, their substance reflected in the legal codes of nations—traceable through the historical records, notably the Hebrew Scriptures. The *Code of Hammurabi* is an early (c.1750BC—uncertain) written record.

Law of Man

Following Adam’s sin mankind was set on a trajectory of lawlessness and self-destruction. Not many centuries passed before God had to intervene:

“Egyptian law was based on the central cultural value of *ma’at* (harmony) which had been instituted at the beginning of time by the gods. In order to be at peace with oneself, one’s community, and the gods, all one had to do was live a life of consideration, mindfulness, and balance in accordance with *ma’at*.”

'...God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually' (Genesis 6:5). Mankind was all but wiped out, but one family remaining: '[God] spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly' (II Peter 2:5).

As human clan leaders soon discovered fallen mankind didn't always live in harmony! Individual leaders devised their own legal systems—some draconian (eg Nimrod)—but all in some degree at their core reflected the original law of life.

It is recorded, for example, that the patriarch Abraham (c.2000BC) *'...obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws' (Genesis 26:5)*. A contemporary of his, the Canaanite king of Gerar was appalled that he was in danger of committing adultery with Abraham's wife and therefore subject to the death penalty (*ch 9:6, 20:6*). This act breached the regulations God had placed on sexual relationships. A similar situation arose with both Abraham's grandson and great grandson (Joseph in Egypt). The Scriptures name these breaches of the primeval law as *sin*: *'...how then can I [Joseph] do this great wickedness, and sin against God?' (Genesis 39:11ff)*.

When we transgress those laws there are inevitable negative consequences. The integrity of civilisation depends on man's willing submission to them.

The Law of Love

In the beginning, however, man's inner driving force was *love*. His behaviour flowed from 'clean hands and a pure heart', with no need for an external code of law. By his (then) spiritual nature he acted in accord with the divine will.

In response to a question about the Law, Jesus referred to this law of love. He answered him: *'...You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, You shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets' (Matthew 22:37-40)*.

When God established the tribes of Israel as a nation (c.1500BC) He codified these laws of life, summarized as the Ten Commandments, placing them at the heart of their national Constitution and legal system (Exodus 20). It is a model for all cur-

By Faith

As the apostle Paul notes: *'...until the law [given to Israel] sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law' (Romans 5:13)*. The positive relationship with God, as exemplified by Abraham, was by reason of his faith and not by his 'good works'.

Paul, again: *'...Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness' (ch 4:3-5)*. To the pagan Athenians he said, *'...as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device. And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commands all men every where to repent' (Acts 17:29-30)*.

rent legislators and far superior to, for example, the Code of Hammurabi. The prophet Moses describes it so: *'...what nation is there so great, that has statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day?' (Deuteronomy 4:8)*.

The Law of Life, the Ten Commandments and the various derived Statutes and Judgments, are not strictly 'religious', but the practical application of the Law of Love for unregenerate and sinful mankind—love for God (the first four commandments) and love for neighbour (the last six).

The empowering by the holy Spirit following our repentance and baptism begins to restore in us that Law of Love. As we actively allow the Spirit to increasingly influence our whole inner being and our behaviour—and as we suppress the 'works of the flesh'—we grow the 'fruit of the Spirit': *'...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance [self-control]: against such there is no law' (Galatians 5:22-23)*.

We won't, of course—in this life—attain to the perfection of our Saviour. But having covenanted our life to Jesus we become, there and then, a child of the Father: *'...now are we the sons of God, and it does not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him' (I John 3:2)*. We seek to emulate the divine characteristics—the Law of Love.

So great salvation is solely by His grace, and no amount of our law-keeping can earn that. As God's sons and daughters we willingly and joyfully are transformed by His Spirit to live in accord with His revealed way of life. Ω

Insight from Paul

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

Is 'Israel' dead—a relic of the distant past? Or has it been resurrected in the form of the Christian church? Not according to the apostle, for Israel lives on. He rehearses their role: '*...[my kinsmen] are Israelites; to whom belong the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the Law, and the service of God [ie form of worship], and the promises; whose are the fathers, and of whom is the Christ according to flesh*' (Romans 9:4-5). That's some responsibility!

But there's a catch. At their inception as a nation they avowed: '*...all that the LORD says we will do*'. By abandoning the one true God, by trashing His laws, by embracing idolatry Israel as a nation despised the role cast for them and it was taken from them. They were removed from their land and scattered widely. But not for ever.

Paul explains: '*...Am I saying that God has turned his back on his people? Certainly not!*' (Romans 11:1). And, as in the time of Elijah, '*...at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace*' (v.5). They are what the apostle elsewhere calls '*...the Israel of God*' (Galatians 6:16), the true heirs of the promises—not by race but by grace.

That remnant of faithful Israelites is alive and well in Abraham's offspring (Israel) even if they are not generally recognized as Israel on the world stage. Christians also, says Paul, are Abraham's seed: '*...if you are Christ's, then are you Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise*'.

The nation of Israel will in God's time be restored, this time as partakers of the new covenant. Ω

Letter from England

I do not personally have the opportunity to have face-to-face interaction with the varied congregations of the churches of God. However, rumour does circulate, and sometimes it's not very pretty. So it is sad to hear that brethren are sometimes excluded simply because 'they are not one of us'.

Such exclusivity has long been recognized as a mark of a 'cult' and certainly should have no place in any of God's congregations. It is an insidious cancer that can devour our relationships with Jesus and with one another. The apostle Paul wrote to Timothy '*...regarding brotherly love, you do not need that I write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another*' (I Timothy 4:9). Love is the essence of our faith and a key fruit of the Spirit in us.

I venture to suggest this cancer thrives when there's undue emphasis on 'being right'. Certainly, we must have a firm grasp of the basic teachings of Jesus, and each of us must daily be immersed in the Scriptures. But we all grow at a different unique to us pace, and are each at a different level of understanding—and each responsible only to our Head, Jesus.

It is said that 'a fish rots from the head' and it's for the leadership of a congregation to set the pattern exemplified by Jesus of compassionate care for all brethren—whether or not they are in regular fellowship. The 'cure' is indeed *love*. James

Britain's Glorious Future

A leader of nations. A pioneer in health care. Blazing the way in the reconstruction of mankind's habitations. A beacon shining brightly as an example to all nations in family relations, in ethical business, in care of the environment, in true religion. Renowned worldwide for its unenviable legal system. A bed-rock of world peace among nations. This is Britain's utopian *future*.

A pipe dream? A stretch of the imagination too far? Unattainable? Not so—for this is the future mapped out for our nation by the Creator.

Bleak Future

The current dysfunctional and chaotic state of our UK government doesn't bode well for such a time. The squabbling, the egotism, the scramble for high office by men and women who fail *Government 101*. Where status and self promotion trumps public service. Clearly this is not the way to achieve such high-minded goals.

Having embraced democracy our leaders abandon its basic principles. Their encounter with truth is brief, as manifest by the failure to honour their manifesto and referendum promises. They are flotsam and jetsam tossed on a sea of indecision. And the nation pays the inevitable price. They may exist comfortably in their 'Westminster bubble'—but their antics cause the public to seethe with anger, to battle with anxiety and depression.

The nation is on a pathway to oblivion. The challenge *isn't* the economy—which is presently fine. It is moral and spiritual. Led by the media, the populace increasingly embraces smut and violence—an encouragement to society's low life (eg Psalm 12:8). The wrangling over Brexit is confusing. The immediate future is far from rosy and will end in national humiliation at the hands of our enemies and a descent into chaos.

Glorious Future

Happily, that is not the end. The Scriptures tell us that in the wake of our defeat and global dispersal Jesus Christ will return to regather us—his people—from wherever we are scattered. A humbled people will be restored to a position of positive global influence alongside our fellow Israelites and in harmony with our erstwhile enemies. It will fulfill our predicted role as a model nation.

Such a prophetic scenario (national destruction), however, can be averted only if we turn our backs on our deeply-entrenched national sin. Ω

Respect!

You wouldn't think that (not so wise) *homo sapiens* was created in the very *image* of our Creator. The media, in print and on screen, bears witness to the prevalence of widespread disruptive public behaviour. As of now the general populace—your neighbour, for example—behaves in a reasonably civilised manner. Increasingly, however, youthful exuberance spirals downward to disrespect.

Town centres on a weekend witness alcohol-fuelled assaults on the emergency services as they battle to maintain order or assist with the drunk or the injured. Young women vie with 'men' in an affront to human dignity. Stand at the school gates as pupils disgorge and you hear an awesome mix of foul-mouthed distortion of our language.

Scale up to the adult world and it's reported that 30% of us no longer trust or respect the police. Respect for the elderly by children, by the 'sandwich generation', by our government is in incredibly short supply. Britain's health and social care services relegate the elderly to the back of the queue. Classroom learning is disrupted by unruly and undisciplined children. And whatever your view of abortion surely the disrespect shown to the unborn—about 170,000 'executions' each year in the UK fuelled by rampant promiscuity and greed—is a national scandal.

In the reverse of its meaning '*Respect*' has become a watchword for lawless youngsters roaming the streets with machetes and sensitive to every perceived wrong glance.

Cause and Effect

Respect is *learned* behaviour. It must be implanted as a life pattern from earliest years and sustained throughout childhood. It begins with potty training! (Teachers are often having to change the nappies of five-year olds.) It can be taught by teaching how to properly use a knife and fork around the dinner table. It can be taught by appropriate sanctions for misbehaviour (kicking, insults, swearing etc). It can be taught by disciplining a child to write a 'thank you' note or to tidy their room.

Clearly, one answer to the decline in respect lies largely in the home, with the family, with the parents. It lies in inculcating spiritual values from an early age. Nor must we neglect the part played by those on the public stage—parliamentarians, comedien(ne)s, authors, the media; all in a position of influence and who set the pattern especially for the young—all too often the promotion of a godless world-view.

It lies, too, in valuing our origin as a divine creation potentially destined for an eternity of service in harmony with our Creator: '*...Eye has not seen, and ear has not heard, nor has it risen up into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for those that love Him*' (I Corinthians 2:9). We are not the product of blind chance and therefore ***next column***

A Call To Arms

The church of God, you may be surprised to hear, was alive and well with the patriarch Abraham over three millennia ago. Paul notes: '*...if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise*' (Galatians 3:29). Through his 'one seed', Jesus, we are the heirs of the Father. The good news message was previewed to Abraham through God's promise that his seed would bless all nations. Down the centuries the faithful have participated in that promise as we become joined to the 'Israel of God'.

In this great ocean of the faithful, the *Outreach Ministries* is but a mere spoonful, having existed as a ministry for just a score or so of years. A scion of a church of God tradition stemming from the 1930's, we believe we have much to contribute to our 'siblings' - other churches from the same root. And indeed to others of similar belief.

As goes the saying, '*A journey of a thousand miles begins with a step*', and so far we have put down a marker for the concept of interdependence, and co-operation by the various churches of God. That's a pattern first established by the infant church in the first century. In our uncertain times, as then, it is prudent to avoid a visible corporate profile.

CGOM has yet to make an appreciable impact. It's so true that 'old habits die hard' and for us to succeed in our outreach efforts we must first look inwards to our own ranks. An independent congregation—just like a 'corporate' church!—tends to 'settle on its lees', to become complacent and cosy, inward-looking and concerned more about appearances than heralding the good news.

But we have a mission. Each of us has been gifted by the holy Spirit to accomplish a task, and provided with talents necessary to contribute to that mission. If we don't individually use our talents and direct them in the service of our high calling our effectiveness is curtailed.

Each of our associated congregations must become a spiritual dynamo driving forward our mission as the church of God. *Someone near us is waiting to hear our voice!* **Ω**

existing without moral responsibility.

Transformed

As Christians we have been called to be ambassadors of a new way of life '*...Don't be like the people of this world, but let God change the way you think. Then you will know how to do everything that is good and pleasing to him;*' (Romans 12:2 *CEV*). As we yield to the inner working of the Spirit we are transformed more closely to the likeness of Jesus Christ, and called to be a light in a darkening world.

We are, in other words, selected by the Father to live lives that are in marked contrast to that of the world. We are to be 'holy', separate. We are to respect the divinely-established institutions as an example to all. **Ω**