

The Newsletter of the Churches of God, UK

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Matthew 28:19-20

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The Great Apostasy

Jesus and the apostles predicted a falling away from the truth which they proclaimed. Contrary to the expectations of many modern Bible teachers, they foresaw an end-time faithful church that is small, despised, ostracized.

Time and again the New Testament writers urged Christians to stay faithful, to be active in Christ's service, to keep themselves 'unspotted from the world'. They urged us to 'contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints'. No compromise with the teachings of Scripture. No bending of the truth.

That ideal did not last long. Within half a century of the life and death of Jesus the church was riddled with dissent, torn by heretical teachings and sinking into a whirlpool of immorality. The 'falling away' had begun.

The end-of-century letters Jesus sent to the disintegrating Asian Christians (Revelation 2 and 3) are a mirror of what happened in the following couple of centuries. The consequences of the emperor Constantine's political conversion to Christianity lulled the church of God into a spiritual sleep. It marked the fulfilment of Jesus' prophecy: "I will vomit you out of my mouth" (Revelation 3:16).

Strangled by the vain philosophies of gnosticism, stoicism, platonism *etc* the church sank into gross error. Apart from rare individuals, the Spirit departed from what was known as 'Christianity'. Succeeding centuries compounded the errors, only partially erased by such men as Luther and Calvin. Covered by a veneer of

Biblical terminology, the pagan concepts of the soul's immortality, heaven and hell, infant baptism, non-Biblical worship on Sunday, Christmas, Easter, saint's days *etc* obliterated the true apostolic faith. The flame of faith flickered - but (as Jesus promised, Matthew 16:18) was never extinguished, over the centuries flaring briefly on occasion.

This end-time has witnessed such a revival, with a restoration of many Biblical teachings. Sadly - as in the third century - 'easy times' have led to a further falling away, with the churches of God snarled by bureaucracy, structural faults and divisive leadership squabbling. Many brethren have succumbed to the prevailing lawless society and 'the love of many will grow cold' (Matthew 24:12).

'Revival'

Paganized - and Spiritless - Christianity, however, goes from strength to strength, even seeking ways to unite the denominations through the ecumenical movement. It's a step towards the predicted one world religion - a religion which will, as in the Middle Ages, persecute true believers even to the death. Allied with secular government and demonic powers, a 'lawless one' will 'make war with [those] who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ' (Revelation 12:17).

Many nations will suffer 'great tribulation': war, famine, disease, deportation. Following 'heavenly signs' (*ch* 6:12-17) God's awesome judgments will begin to fall on the world (the 'Seven Trumpets') leading to mega-death of unrepentant mankind.

Some time during all this, the true Gospel will be powerfully and supernaturally proclaimed. *No-one* will have excuse, for it will be a time when all mankind will have open access to repentance and true conversion (Joel 2:30-32, Matthew 24:14, Revelation 14:6-7). The outcome will be the conversion of many from the nations of Israel and 'a great multitude that no-one could number of all nations [*ie* Gentiles]...." (Revelation 7).

So - 'revival' certainly. But during a mercifully brief time of terrifying world chaos, destruction of Israel and persecution of the people of God. Those millions who accept the freely available *true* Gospel will - as 'sheep' - enter the fold of the imminent Kingdom of God ruled over by Jesus Christ and his saints. All who will resist him will be judged by the returning King of kings. The outcome will not be pretty:

Now I saw heaven opened and behold a white horse. And he who sat upon it was called Faithful and True and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes were like a flame of fire and on his head were many crowns. ..His name is called the Word of God. And out of his mouth goes a sharp sword that with it he should strike the nations. And he himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. (Revelation 19:11-21)

The predicted 'falling away' from the truth of the Gospel began in the first century and was complete within three hundred years, leaving but a tiny scattered remnant of the faithful. Since then, the spurious visible 'Christianity' has ebbed and flowed - but always advancing to its predicted climax.

So, too, the true church of God in the twenty-first century. The 'Western' church especially is decaying through laxity and worldliness, while elsewhere in the world it is hindered through state persecution and oppression.

All of us need to be alert, aware of the powerful spiritual forces that oppose us and resisting the strong pulls of worldliness and the pressing anxieties of life. Jesus warned time and again - in the midst of the first century falling away but equally applicable to century twenty-one - that we must 'overcome to the end'.

It's a potent warning to all who want to 'follow the Lamb wherever he goes'. *f*

request the free articles:
**Key to the Book of Revelation
Time of the Signs
Before Jesus Comes
Coming To Baptism**

"CGOM in Perspective"

This new article looks at the unique workings of the *Churches of God Outreach Ministries* (with which *COGUK* associates). The article explains how you may benefit from its various ministries.

Request a copy from any of our addresses

TABERNACLES 2002

Regretfully, we need to let you know that there will not this year be a *COGUK* Festival of Tabernacles site. My apologies for the unavoidable late decision on this.

I have obtained agreement that *COGUK* associates are welcome to attend the festival at other Church of God sites in the UK. I recommend the following for a profitable and enjoyable festival. Please contact Lincoln for information on how to apply for a particular site, to obtain details of accommodation *etc.*

- Chatsworth House** (Derbyshire; Global)
- Grange over Sands** (Cumbria; UCG)
- Llandudno** (North Wales; David Hulme)

OUTREACH for June

The June issue of *OUTREACH* was for financial reasons sent last month only to those who can see it via the internet. Only a handful were mailed. A paper copy is now belatedly enclosed. My apologies for the delay.

NEW HORIZONS for July/August

There has been a delay in the printing of the next issue - patience! If you have internet access its articles are now available on the web-site www.abcog.org

Autumn Festivals 2002

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|--------------------|--------------------------|
| Trumpets | September 7* |
| Atonement | September 16* |
| Tabernacles | September 21*- 27 |
| Closing Day | September 28* |
- * Begins sunset the previous evening*

ChurchLink

A note to thank all who phoned, sent cards or e-mails expressing concern about my health. Tests are ongoing to determine treatment (heart). Please continue to pray for a speedy recovery! *James*

Continuing prayers, too, for Sarah who has leg and foot pains which defy diagnosis.

Our readers are welcome to have us note their personal prayer needs in this column.