

outreach

The Newsletter of the Churches of God, UK

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Matthew 28:19-20

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CAST OUT *FEAR*

Fear can be healthy - a response to a real threat. For most of us, however, our fear is of a threat that isn't real but merely perceived. Because your neighbour loses his job you imagine suffering the same. Or you may have a fear of the future - when you can't know what that holds for you personally in health, in security *etc.*

Fear paralyses. It can stop you taking simple steps to get out of debt, for example. Fear can hinder our entering a personal relationship. Or because of past experience we isolate ourselves for protection.

'Once Bitten...'

Fear can, too, freeze your spiritual relationships. Bad experience growing up can affect your view of God - in reality a loving Father who is totally dedicated to serving us. And *church*. Many Christians have been disillusioned by past association with a church in which they had felt secure - only to discover in it corruption both material and spiritual.

Naturally, then, fear - 'once bitten twice shy' - is a wedge that cuts off from the fellowship that is so essential to our spiritual well-being. Some 'time out' may of course be appropriate - a time to reassess our priorities, adjust our beliefs, recover our balance.

But Christianity is not just about me or about you. If truly converted, having received the precious gift of God's Spirit, *we are joined into a Body*. As such we have been given - by Jesus Christ - specific spiritual gifts that some local assembly desperately needs. By our isolation - or wanderlust! - that assembly suffers. Through irrational fear we hinder the work of Jesus Christ. For each of us is needed for our talents and spiritual gifts..

Not only so, for we each also need other brethren. My absence from an available fellowship stunts my opportunity to be served, to be guided, to be encouraged by other brethren. And too often our absence stems from *fear*. Fear of 'being hurt

again'. Fear of rejection - by brethren!.

There's no guarantee, though, that the assembly you might associate with is one hundred percent spiritual. That didn't even happen in apostolic times. The perfect assembly doesn't exist - or if it did my joining it would spoil that record!

The *Churches of God Outreach Ministries (CGOM)* is an association of independent local assemblies. Each assembly is self-governing - no Orwellian 'big brother' overseeing it. For the most part, we meet in small groups for worship, fellowship, and instruction by trusted 'shepherds' selected and accepted by the local brethren. Because of our structure the opportunity for negative behaviour is minimized.

Start-up

Sadly - largely because of this 'fear factor' - the number of these local fellowships in association with *CGOM* is at present small. In apostolic times (and why not today?) a fellowship would often grow up around one individual Christian who witnessed locally to his faith. They met in homes and co-operated with other similar like-minded assemblies.

CGOM and the *Churches of God, UK* are available to support any such start-up fellowship with our many publications and out of our forty years experience in the church of God. There is no interference in the affairs of any fellowship!

Should you wish to associate, feel free to contact us at any of our addresses - by mail, by phone or by e-mail

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Bible-based magazine *New Horizons*

Is God Still There?

In the *UK Houses of Parliament* prayers are offered at the beginning of each day's session. Are they of any value? Does God - presumably that's where the prayers are directed - hear?

To judge by the shambolic state of the

Still There?...cont'd

nation, it looks like the prayers don't even reach the ceiling of the House of Commons. What's the reason?

We often wonder why our *personal* prayers are not answered. Usually, though, we do not recognize the word 'No' as a reasonable response! Parliamentary prayers are just nebulous generalizations: as, 'we seek Thy blessing on today's proceedings'. Often our own prayers are much the same style. So - how do we get to a 'Yes' from God?

We might ask, *If Government promotes legislation that is clearly contrary to what God has decreed (Examples could be multiplied.), can we expect His blessing?* On a personal level the same principle applies. I needn't pray for material prosperity if God knows that it would, for me, be a bad idea. (*Trust Me*, says God.) Can I pray for healing if I am seriously abusing my body? Should I be surprised if my promiscuity results in infertility...and God doesn't 'open my womb'? Or, if God lets me waste away and die at fifty (the average) because of my homosexual life-style? Wrote the Psalmist: "*If I regard iniquity in my heart the LORD will not hear*".

The key is: God knows what's best for each individual, and for a 'yes' our prayers will necessarily have to conform to His plan for us. So if we continue to trust Him (*ie* have faith) we will ask - and ask persistently - but leave the outcome in His hands while seeking His will. Our Parliamentarians do not do that. Nor do most Christians. When we so do - then our desires expressed in prayer are answered positively.

Yes - God *is* still very much there.

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ROAD BLOCK?

The Middle East continues to bubble and seethe. Iraq, Israel, Iran - all are presently unstable and giving politicians the gremlins. Stresses also in monolithic Saudi Arabia. A peaceful solution recedes by the day.

Request the free article:

The Origin of the Palestinians

It drives to the heart of that region's crisis and explains the final surprising, positive outcome.

The July/August issue of our *New Horizons* magazine has a related article, *LAND - does it matter?* Be sure to request a free subscription

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What Is a 'Minister'?

Several readers raise the question: *who should be a minister?* Most are influenced by the various ranks seen in, for example, the Church of England. Does such a structure have any Bible basis?

The heart of the matter lies in the structure of the church. The tiered ranks of deacons, ministers, priests, bishops, archbishops *etc* - or other denominational titles - is quite foreign to the legacy of the apostles. At that time the concept of 'church' was far removed from that of modern denominations. There was one church of God - but the brethren assembled in small independent groups of around a dozen families, just enough to meet in a private home.

Such a group had no need for a leadership hierarchy. The brethren chose and appointed - guided by other mature elders - a qualified (II Timothy 3) brother as their 'shepherd', their guide. He - always a man, though groups were often hosted by women - was not appointed to an exalted office but to a position of service, answerable directly to Jesus Christ as well as to his congregation. No need for special 'religious garments' or the pomp of an 'ordination' ceremony. And certainly no need for obsequious acclaim thereafter.

The role of elder was to 'shepherd' - protect, nourish - those brethren committed to his care. He was chosen for the role because the appropriate gifts of the Spirit were evident in his life (Acts 20:28).

As in ancient Rome, there may have been several such assemblies in a city, each with its own elder. They were in the beginning 'connected' only by ties of mutual service and not by a hierarchy, with due regard to the advice of other more experienced elders. The elders of a locality acted together as needed (*eg* James 5:14), and were at times instructed together (Acts 20: 17ff).

Only as the influence of God's Spirit waned in the church did human nature begin to carve out a range of 'priestly offices' and 'ministerial ranks'. The apostatising church began to model itself on the structure of the secular Roman government. It led to sects and, in modern times, to denominations. Because of size, these magnified errors by imposing them on many brethren. Control demanded increasing bureaucracy and spawned a proliferation of committees and the inevitable big-budget empire-building.

The process led, too, to intolerance of other views and to exclusivism. From it developed the 'we are the one and only true church' concept adopted by some church denominations. A right understanding of the apostolic structure avoids many pitfalls of the modern church. ف

Request the free article: *What Is an Elder?*

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