

The Newsletter of the Churches of God, UK

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providing
leadership,
information and
Biblical teaching.
Matthew 28:19-20

representing

Does Behaviour Matter?

Asked 'How do I get to xxxxx?' the local sage thought for a while then replied, 'If I were you I wouldn't start from here'. So, faced with questions like 'How do I get out of debt?' or, 'How do I save my marriage?' 'What should we do now about Iraq or how do we solve the Middle East chaos?' or, 'How do we manage immigration or deal with tax and benefit fraud?' we must voice the same reply.

The problems that confront every nation and individual on earth are rooted, often, in decisions made long ago: Why did I commit adultery or neglect my family? Why did I spend so much on credit? Why did the West support and arm Saddam? Why did Abraham cavort with an Egyptian lass? Why did the UK, back in 1973, secretly abandon our precious sovereignty? *Etc.*

Crumbling Foundations

The foundation of Anglo-saxon society is rooted in the Christian Bible. That foundation has for a century or more been undermined by 'humanism' - the thought that *we* know better than God as to how we should order society or our personal lives. The puny mind of man is pitted against the supreme wisdom of the Creator. Wrote the Psalmist: "If the foundations be torn down what can the righteous do?" (Psalm 11:3).

Well, there are certain things we can do - and *must* do. All around may be crumbling, but it is vital that Christians cling fast to what God has revealed in the Scriptures. Even among Christians, today, virtually anything goes.

The Anglican church, for example, in a bid to be 'all things to all men', and contrary to divine revelation, appoints homosexuals as bishops and turns a blind eye to co-habitation. Government turns its back on marriage and makes divorce virtually unregulated. The legal system perverts justice, encourages recreational drugs, fails to properly deal with criminal behaviour.

A Different Kingdom

'My kingdom', said Jesus 'is not of this world'. But *this* is a world the institutions of which are destined to be swept away by the return of Jesus as King of kings. Saddled with Government motivated by humanism and opposed to Biblical guidance there is little we can do but suffer the consequences of their policies. Indeed Jesus said: 'I pray for [believers]. I pray not for the world...' (John 17:9). As Christians our influence on the present world is limited to the example we set daily.

On personal matters, however, we *can* do something - though it may well be painful. We *can* break destructive habits, curb our consumerism, treasure the family. We can seek to model our behaviour on the inner life led by Jesus.

Despite this crumbling of the foundations of society Christians must *[cont'd p.2]*

Request the free article
Reap A Destiny.
It explores some ways to
overcome wrong habits

CONFERENCE 2004

the Churches of God Outreach Ministries is sponsoring the **eighth annual CGOM conference** during the weekend of **March 26-28** in Tulsa, Oklahoma, beginning the Friday evening.

All brethren and their representatives are welcome to join with us

- To share with others the outreach activities and evangelism efforts ongoing in your own assembly and region
- To take away ideas from other congregations for use at home
- To stir the spirit and find encouragement among others laboring with you
- To meet new like-minded believers and renew old friendships
- To learn what CGOM can do to help with meeting the needs of the brethren and the world at large

Further information (accommodation etc) may be obtained from any of our addresses

Does Behaviour Matter?...cont'd

align their life with God's 'gold standard' of holiness.

'Holiness' doesn't wear a halo. It's not an ecstatic experience. Not an emotional gaze heaven-wards, eyes closed, hands outstretched. Holiness is the outworking of the Holy Spirit in the life of a true follower of Jesus Christ visible in terms of our day-to-day behaviour.

Those divine standards are perfectly tailored *for all humanity* - not just the followers of Jesus. Our governments have been delegated - by God - to legislate these life-enhancing practices. They fail daily. So, what hinders?

The Missing Ingredient

Hindu and Muslim battle it out in Kashmir. Christians riot in Haiti. Devout Muslims murder in the United States - and wherever they find a soft target. At home there are child abductions, paedophilia, murders, homosexuality, thefts, fraud, corruption at all levels of society, shady business practice, justice in disarray, tolerance of the occult - even at the top. And in 'Christian' nations. In the recent UK census 72% of Britons recorded themselves as 'Christian', though perhaps fewer than 7% are regularly in attendance at any form of church service.

Clearly, Christians - and the entirety of mankind - need some ingredient beyond fickle human willpower. 'Religion' simply doesn't work. The missing ingredient is *divine power*.

Most of the Jews who heard Jesus 'in the flesh' were diligent in the externals of the true faith - Sabbath, holy days, unclean foods *etc*. But they lacked spiritual energy and *needed a change of heart*. Addressing some of them the apostle Peter said in effect: *'Turn aside from your sin. Be baptized in the name of Jesus your Messiah for the forgiveness of sin. And you will be given the Holy Spirit. Flee from this crooked generation'* (Acts 2:38-40). That message is no less important today. Our Creator enables that change of heart by means of His Spirit of holiness.

The only *'faith once for all delivered to the saints'* by God required the observance of His (seventh day) rest day and His revealed holy days. But that's just the foundation. Anyone can do that - certainly the Jews obey this instruction. What transforms us as Christians is God's Spirit - His mind. The Spirit in us challenges our very nature. In Christ not only is murder sinful - but so, too, is the inner seething anger that leads to it. Not only is adultery sinful - so, too, are the harboured thoughts that precede it.

The root cause of our problems - national and personal - is our perverse human nature. Being transformed in behaviour by God's Spirit is 'where we start'. Ω

Days of Unleavened Bread: some questions answered

- what is 'leaven'? What does it signify?
- ...or 'unleavened bread'?
- when is this festival observed?
- how do you prepare?

This article has already been e-mailed to many of our readers. If you would like a printed copy please contact us

Observe the Spring Festivals

No - I don't mean Easter! 'Easter' doesn't appear in the Scriptures - except in two places. One is a mistranslation in the *King James* version (Acts 12:4) where 'Easter' is used to translate the Greek for *Passover*. The other is a passage in Ezekiel (*ch* 8:13-16) in which the prophet describes an Israelite practice which God labelled '*an abomination*'.

It was an ancient family festival (Jeremiah 7:17-18) dedicated to Tammuz the 'dying year-god' - forty days of mourning accompanied by a sun-rise service in honour of his supposed resurrection. Familiar? [Request the free booklet *Is Easter Christian?* for a more in-depth analysis]

The Christian Observance

That doesn't mean God has left us without any celebration. The post-apostolic church shifted that heathen festival to recall the last days of Jesus. But God already had His own appointed festival to mark those momentous events: the *Passover* and the seven *Days of Unleavened Bread*. (You will find the dates for these listed in many secular calendars and diaries.) The dates coincided with, and were prophetic of, the final events in Jesus' life - his suffering, death and resurrection.

While Israel were slaves in Egypt, God commanded that in the late afternoon of Nisan 14 (on the Hebrew calendar*) a lamb was to be sacrificed - the 'Passover'. It was precisely the time the 'Lamb of God', some fifteen centuries later, was killed by a Roman spear. Each Israelite family then sacrificed a lamb, which was roasted and eaten with unleavened bread and 'bitter herbs' on Nisan 15 - *ie* that evening after the new day began**.

It was a '*night to be much remembered*' by the Israelites as it signified their freedom, their happy release from long servitude in Egypt. The meal was followed by seven days during which no yeasted bread was eaten, symbolic of the circumstances of their exodus.

The early Christians, guided by the apostles, continued to observe these seven festival days *joyfully* but with a new significance that focuses on the person and work of Jesus. A reference to this is in I Corinthians 5:7-8. This contrasts with the new observance Jesus introduced on the night of his betrayal - a *solemn memorial* of his suffering, to be observed *until his return* (see I Corinthians 11:26).

The Passover, however, will be observed during the millennial reign of Jesus. The prophet Ezekiel describes the form of worship Jesus will introduce: *"In the first month, in the fourteenth day of the month, you shall have the Passover - a feast of seven days; unleavened bread shall be eaten"* (Ezekiel 46:21). It is a millennial celebration Jesus himself looked forward to: At his last meal he said: *"I shall never eat the Passover again until its fulfilment in the Kingdom of God"* (Luke 22:16).

'The Lord's Supper'

Before his long night of suffering and subsequent crucifixion Jesus instituted for his disciples - and for us - a solemn annual memorial of these awesome events. *'This do'* he said *'in remembrance of me'* (*ch* 11:24) [*cont'd p.4*]

Life Lessons From Geese

Fact One:

As each goose flaps its wings, it creates an "uplift" for the birds that follow. By flying in a "V" formation, the whole flock adds 71% greater flying range than if each bird flew alone.

Lesson One: Cooperation

People who share a common direction and sense of community can get where they are going quicker and easier because they are traveling on the thrust of each other.

Fact Two:

When a goose falls out of formation, it suddenly feels the drag and resistance of flying alone. It quickly moves back into formation to take advantage of the lifting power of the bird immediately in front of it.

Lesson Two: Unity

If we have as much sense as a goose, we stay in formation with those headed where we want to go. We are willing to accept their help and give our help to others.

Fact Three:

When the lead bird tires, it rotates back into formation to take advantage of the lifting power of the bird immediately in front of it.

Lesson Three: Leadership

It pays to take turns doing the hard tasks and sharing

leadership. As with the geese, people are interdependent on each others' skills, capabilities, and unique arrangements of gifts, talents, or resources.

Fact Four:

The geese flying in formation honk to encourage those up front to keep up their speed.

Lesson Four: Encouragement

We need to make sure our honking is encouraging. In groups where there is encouragement, the production is much greater. The power of encouragement, to stand by one's heart or core values and to encourage the heart and core values of others, is the quality of honking we seek.

Fact Five:

When a goose gets sick, wounded or shot down, two geese drop out of formation and follow it down to help and protect it. They stay with it until it dies or is able to fly again. Then, they launch out with another formation or catch up with the flock.

Lesson Five: Family

If we have as much sense as the geese, we will stand by each other in difficult times as well as when we're strong. Ω

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free article
CGOM in Perspective*

SAVE SEX

def CAMEL: a horse designed by a committee.

Put a coterie of men in grey suits together, call them a Cabinet - and the resulting decisions are usually the opposite of sanity. The 'wisdom of the wise' has all but disappeared from national leadership. And despite the warnings from many experts and journalists, no less in the matter of sex.

Do you want to curb teen sexual activity? Then - the UK Government policy - teach them the mechanics of sex and encourage them to try it out. The result? Britain has the highest rate, and rising, of teen pregnancy in Europe - almost 42,000 single under 18s in 2002. In contrast, there has been a 30% drop in the United States.

So we have institutionalised sex education at an increasingly younger age. Couple this with the mad incentives of £5000 child care bonus, free housing, copious State benefits and is it any wonder children clamour to get pregnant. Add in shattered families and the decline in the implanting - through good stable parenting - of personal responsibility

and this distortion of human sexuality is inevitable.

Undoubtedly the teen years are sexually difficult! And more so than, say, fifty years ago. Teens are today assaulted by near pornography on the small and the large screen. The internet poses huge dangers, as do computer games. Child gurus advocate 'freedom'. Government and schools encourage sexual experimentation. There is, for many, the decline in sporting activity. All this stirs teens to inappropriate behaviour.

What Can You Do?

Christians can't say 'it's not my problem'. For there is little difference in the incidence of unmarried teen sex within Christian families than within the population in general. It's a cultural thing - *but not Biblical!* We are to raise our precious children *'in the training and admonition [counsel] of the*

Request the free article *University of the Home*. It's available from any of our addresses, or by e-mail. You may also download it from the web-site www.cgom.org/articles

Lord' (Ephesians 6:4). What, then, does God say?

The Scriptures are a rich source of sound advice. Check out the following references:

- from an early age teach reverence for God, and to look to Him for guidance (Proverbs 1:7, 3:5-6, 7:1-5)
- instil respect for parental guidance, especially the role and example of the father (1:8, Ephesians 6:4)
- teach that sex with strangers can kill (2:16-18, *ch.5, 7*)
- avoid sexual temptations (6:23-35; I Corinthians 6:18, Leviticus 18 defines, Ruth 3:10-11)
- teach respect for the body (I Corinthians 6:16)
- steer clear of gangs (1:10-19; Exodus 23:2; Psalm 1)
- help the young to learn self-restraint (25:28)
- exercise consistent discipline (Hebrews 12:9-10)

God's way for sexual relationships is *to save sex until in a marriage relationship.* Ω

FIRST LOVE?

The Ephesian brethren, at the end of the first century, were doctrinally sound - they put apostolic claimants to the test. And they remained faithful in face of the pressures they faced. Yet Jesus was on the point of shutting down their assembly. Why? It must have been important. They had, said Jesus, abandoned one ingredient vital for a successful assembly: "...you have given up your first love [Gk. *agape*]" (Revelation 2:1-5).

The brethren clearly had not taken up on Paul's admonition in his *Letter* to them some years previously. He there mentions *love* to them some seventeen times, and also focuses on those qualities of love he had outlined to the Corinthians (*ch 13*).

For many Christians, 'love' is an emotional attachment exemplified by hugs and 'holy kisses' and coffee mornings and chilli cook-outs.

Paul defines what love is not: "*Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels [or] have the gift of prophecy and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith so that I could remove mountains, but have not love - I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor [or] give my body to be burned, and have not love, it profits me nothing*" (I Corinthians 13:1-3).

Real 'love', then, is not faith or 'good works' or martyrdom. It is the very mind of God Himself as portrayed by Jesus in his earthly walk. For God is love. Paul goes on to list love's ingredients (vv.4-8). Such love never fails. This divine love is not the externals of religion but the evidence of a heart transformed by the Spirit of God. When it fills an assembly, that assembly won't be uprooted. 

Where Goes the Comma?

Occasionally the solution of a TV drama crime hinges on misplaced punctuation - always finally noted by the sharp-eyed sleuth. The effect can be humorous - or serious as in a slovenly drawn will. And one such instance has thrown Christians off-track on a situation related to the death and resurrection of Jesus and related to what happens after death.

'Today', said Jesus to the thief on the cross, 'I say to you today you will be with me in Paradise'. You put in the comma!

First, though, recall that Jesus was *not* that day in 'Paradise'. When he died he was buried. Speaking of Jesus on the first Pentecost of the Christian era, the apostle Peter said, '...his soul was not left in hell [Gk. *hades*]' (Acts 2:31). As a word search of the New Testament will show, *hades* is simply where the dead are buried or end up. The grave - not, by any means, Paradise. Jesus died and was buried. He did not that day 'go to Paradise'!

Recall, too, that the ancient Greek or Hebrew manuscripts didn't have either spaces or punctuation. So where you put that comma depends on the context. Placed *before* 'today' ('I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise') you are ignoring the fact that Jesus was for the next three days and nights in the grave.

Placed *after* 'today' - 'I say to you today,...' - and you have Jesus emphasizing to the repentant criminal that in spite of his crimes he would, because of his confession, have opportunity to be with Jesus when Paradise comes (Luke 23:40-42).

Paradise

After the millennial reign of Jesus there will be a resurrection of 'the rest of the dead' (see Revelation 20:5). That is, those to whom Jesus was not known - the vast majority of mankind. Those who commit to him at that time will have the gift of everlasting life. They - including our repentant criminal - will then be with Jesus 'in Paradise'. It is where the Father and Jesus now inhabit - and will come down to Earth in the new heavens and new earth (*compare* II Corinthians 12:4, Revelation 2:7 and 22:1-2). 

New Horizons

- What is important in your life?
- Are you concerned about the moral welfare of your children?
- Does life have a purpose?
- Worried about your finances?
- What happens when you die?
- Is there a fiery hell?
- Does it matter how we behave?
- Does God speak to us today?

These are some of the many questions that bother us. They are addressed in our bi-monthly magazine *New Horizons*. The articles are short, readable and to the point. Distributed as of now in sixty-five nations it is always free to our readers, supported as it is by friends of the *Outreach Ministries* worldwide.

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Some past articles in New Horizons

- ◆ *God's End Game*
- ◆ Human Sexuality
- ◆ *Reap a Destiny*
- ◆ Will You Live Again?
- ◆ *Why Bother With Church?*
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comment on or ask us questions about the issues discussed, and other Bible - or personal - matters

Spring Festivals...cont'd

The apostle Paul tells us to remember the suffering and death of Jesus on 'the same night in which he was betrayed' (I Corinthians 11:23).

This simple observance - the 'Lord's Supper' - uses bread and wine, and is accompanied (*see* John 13:4-10) by the brethren washing one another's feet, following the example set by Jesus (v.14). It's a renewal of our covenant with him, first made at our baptism.

Such a *memorial* service is observed annually by multiple thousands of Christians around the world, as are the seven *Days of Unleavened Bread*. (Why not join them?)

The manner of its observance, based on the Bible text, is described in our brochure *Unleavened Bread: some questions answered*. 

* This is in early spring - March/April

** The days, anciently, began at sunset

LISTEN!

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