

# outreach

## The Newsletter of the Churches of God, UK

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Matthew 28:19-20

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## Living in Two Worlds

*'This world is not my home, I'm just a'passin through'* goes the spiritual. We are indeed, as Christians, 'pilgrims'. We are on a journey. But we also have to live in *this* world—and it's not always easy.

Active Christians increasingly stand out. Employers run scared of them, and often take refuge in censure to avoid 'offence' to minority faiths. Take a strong stand to 'live by the Bible' and a clash with the world's culture is inevitable. Yet we have to live with it.

### No Compromise

To 'live with it', however, does not mean we become slack in sticking to what we believe is right. The world's moral standards, however attractive to human nature, are not Christ-like standards.

Nor does it mean we become hermits! Inevitably we interact with '*...this world*' while fully committed to '*...the world to come*'. Each Christian in his or her circumstances needs to find an accommodation with family, friends, work and leisure colleagues. But not to compromise. Said Jesus: '*...You cannot be the slave of two masters! You will like one more than the other or be more loyal to one than the other. You cannot serve both God and money*' (Matthew 6:24 CEV). As 'slaves of Christ' he is our all.

### Conflict

But sometimes conflict arises. Take, for example, how we measure time—our calendar. Most Christians don't give it a thought; the days of the week, months, the twelve-month year, each with its peculiarities.

Live by the Bible, however, and there's a different, a parallel, calendar, relevant for the dating of the 'feasts of the LORD' (Leviticus

23)—festivals observed by the early church, Jew and Gentile. Days are numbered (except Sabbath) and not named after planets or gods. Months are all thirty days. Some years have thirteen months. A different world. But we live with the difference.

Indeed the weeds of paganism are sown throughout our culture. We tolerate rings, for example—an ancient sun symbol; but we don't worship the sun. Many wedding and funeral rituals are rooted in pagan practices *etc.*

### Pre-Christian Legacy

It's unlikely, in century twenty-one, that a neighbour will invite you to sacrifice an animal to a heathen god in his place of worship! (I'm not so sure, though!) The apostle Paul, however, had to address that issue for the Corinthian Christians who daily confronted it—'*...sacrifice to demons*' he called it. They were also confronted with temple prostitution, tongue-speaking (as practised in the nearby pagan Delphic Oracle), Emperor worship, endemic promiscuity.

First century Christians faced a blatantly pagan culture, and we are living today with its legacy. Most who profess Christianity don't notice it—for the churches have absorbed that culture wholesale into their belief system. But if you live by the Bible the challenge remains.

People of faith have, throughout history (*see* Hebrews 11), had to cope with 'the world'. It's a world that despises those who are in a faithful relationship with the Creator through Jesus. God's call is that we remain faithful, that we overcome. Writes James: '*...Be patient therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient over it, until it receive the early and latter rain*'. Ω

## It's Over...

The apostle Paul was an accomplished psychologist! The 'principles of living' he promoted are foundation for the pronouncements of present-day psychologists. He didn't, of course, just dream them up, for they are distilled from the wisdom derived from the Scriptures.

One useful comment could be summed up by 'it's over.... Learn the lesson and get on with life'. Here's how he put it: '*...one thing I do, forgetting the things which are behind, and stretching forward to the things which are before, I press on toward the goal unto the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in anything you are otherwise minded, even this shall God reveal unto you*' (Philippians 3:13-15).

Paul was leaving behind his past behaviour (for example, persecuting Christians) and his prior misunderstanding of *Torah* (the addition of traditions etc).

### Move On

The principle is reinforced by Peter: '*... grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*' (II Peter 3:18). Our walk with Christ is forward moving. We have learned—and now, hopefully, practice!—the basic principles. So we move on. We move on to becoming more Christ-like. We move on to a deeper understanding of the message God has for us in His Word. *We grow.*

The implication is that what we believe is subject to review. The '*...the rudiments of the first principles of the oracles of God*' (Hebrews 5:12) are clear (*ch* 6:1-2), but Paul warns that at times they need to be re-taught. And then he adds that we must move on—to solid spiritual food and not 'milk'.

In other words, we mustn't be mired in the past, in what we once understood as 'truth', but be open to on-going sound Biblically-based teaching. Other than Jesus and his apostles no-one throughout the past two millennia was or is infallible. We each have our understanding of the Scriptures, but what we believe must be subject to review—no matter how high or low we may be in the church's pecking order.

James addressed this—with a warning (*ch* 3:1-6):

*My friends, we should not all try to become teachers. In fact, teachers will be judged more strictly than others. All of us do many wrong things. But if you can control your tongue, you are mature and able to control your whole body. ...It takes only a spark to start a forest fire! The tongue is like a spark.*

Everyone who professes to be a 'teacher' of God's truth bears heavy responsibility. As James points out, his words can spread like a forest fire—and disseminate error! Charismatic preachers can lead a whole denomination astray—and have done. Worse, is when he or she refuses to admit error, and leaves a trail of 'hero worshippers' blinded to the need to move on, to grow in grace and knowledge of Jesus and all he is.

### Solid Food

What, then is one form of 'solid food' referred to in Hebrews 5? '*...People who live on milk are like babies who don't really know what is right. Solid food is for mature people who have been trained to know right from wrong*' (vv.13-14 CEV).

Paul tells us what 'milk' is:

*My friends, you are acting like the people of this world. That's why I could not speak to you as spiritual people. You are like babies as far as your faith in Christ is concerned. So I had to treat you like babies and feed you milk. You could not take solid food, and you still cannot, because you are not yet spiritual. You are jealous and argue with each other. This proves that you are not spiritual and that you are acting like the people of this world. Some of you say that you follow me, and others claim to follow Apollos. Isn't that how ordinary people behave?*

(I Corinthians 3: CEV)

Not spiritual? Even with the indwelling Spirit of God? It was a problem for the brethren in Corinth—and is not unknown in the twenty-first century church of God, with its myriad denominations!

A case can be made for some 'group variation'—*ie*, different emphases suited to the members of a local assembly ('denominations' are not the New Testament pattern), but accompanied by sound Bible teaching. Paul's counsel was that we shouldn't cluster round a particular leader. *That's milk*, he says. Childish, immature!

So, unless there's false teaching each Christian should wholeheartedly support, be involved in, his or her local church. Don't be a 'butterfly Christian', fluttering from one church to another! Perhaps especially, if the attraction is a personality, or 'prophecy'!

The past is past. Let's move on to Christian maturity and unity of purpose. Ω

Denominations—a number of local assemblies overseen by a central headquarters—do not represent the organizational structure of the early church, in which each local assembly was self-organized, autonomous

*Read the article: **The Small Church***

## Christian Identity

Sabbath-observing Christians tend to battle with conscience in regard to ‘Sunday-keepers’. Clearly the latter are sincere in their beliefs. Those who are committed believers are, too, good people who worship God and are diligent in their service to their fellow man.

Yet—these same believers appear to have a mental block as to the requirements of Scripture. *Sunday worship* is just one area of ignorance (or of disobedience). Then there is the observance of non-Biblical holy days which have clear connection with ancient pre-Christian observances: *Christmas, Easter etc.* Other important differences could be cited, How should we interact with them?

In the past (and even today, for some) there was a tendency to see Sunday worshippers as pariahs. Don’t fellowship with them. Don’t attend their weddings or funerals. Don’t step into their churches. Reject their scholarship—though in our tradition we owe much to the studies of those from ‘mainstream’ Christianity.

The fact remains, however, that the bulk of Christian theological studies have over the centuries been blind to clear Biblical teachings—notably that of the seventh-day Sabbath. This has seen a change in recent years, with many studies now supporting our Sabbath position.

### One Source

Paul’s principle ‘...let each man be fully assured [be informed, settled fully] in his own mind’ (Romans 14:5) is apt. But how? To what source should we turn for that assurance, for confirmation of godly practice?

We are each persuaded to our beliefs by our interaction with the world around us—its literature, science, our friends, family. Lots of room for conflicting advice!

In fact, for the Christian there can be but one reliable source: the Christian Scriptures. What does *God* say on any matter? Wrote the apostle: ‘...contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints’ (Jude 3). On the important issues the Bible is unambiguous. We may argue about variation in translation—but the message is uniquely consistent over millennia, cultures and many authors.

For those who profess Christianity the Bible is the

‘holy book’, and its moral teachings are internalised by serious Christians. Many are, however, in the same state as the ancient Israelites to whom the LORD said ‘...this people draw nigh unto me, and with their mouth and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear of me is a commandment of men which has been taught them’ (Isaiah 29:13). Jesus quoted this in reference to the religious leaders of his day.

### Variant Belief

In some church circles there’s a tendency to be ‘touchy’ in respect of variant beliefs—sometimes objecting to even minor differences: ‘We must get it right’, it’s claimed. The ‘Lord’s Supper’ is an example, with even the name in dispute. The timing, too: *daily, quarterly, annually?* And should the ‘bread’ be *leavened* or *unleavened*?

Paul’s counsel is that each of us is to be fully persuaded as to our beliefs and not to judge those with a different persuasion. We each have to personally come to a *Biblical* understanding.

As with healing, the ‘*unity of the faith*’ takes time. Medical staff don’t exclude the sick or injured from their hospital!

Sadly, much of modern Christianity has followed suit. As Jesus referred to this word from Isaiah: ‘...It is useless for you to worship me, when you teach rules made up by humans. You disobey God’s commands in order to obey what humans have taught’ (Mark 7:7-8 CEV). He had said ‘...But the gate to life is very narrow. The road that leads there is so hard to follow that only a few people find it. Watch out for false prophets!’ (Matthew 7:14-15 CEV). The implication is that none of us are just ‘born into’ the faith as are two billion professing Christians. Personal, mature hard choices have to be made, and it is those who ‘go the extra mile’ who enter the Kingdom.

The Scriptures portray many in ancient Israel as joyously worshipping God yet not having the indwelling Spirit, which, said Jesus, was ‘...not yet given’. And without which we are not yet ‘saved’.

Patience, then, with those who worship the Father but who have not fully committed to His revealed way of life. God will respond to those who ‘seek him early’, who truly ‘...hunger and thirst after righteousness’ and will draw them to Jesus in whom alone is salvation (John 6:65, Acts 4:12, Hebrews 11:6) **Ω**

### Lord’s Supper 2009

This annual memorial of the suffering and death of our Saviour is by definition a communal event—all brethren are ‘...one loaf’ (1 Corinthians 10:17). When at all possible, then, we should observe with other brethren.

Since this not always attainable—distance, health, cost *etc*—a leaflet is available on request with suggestions for a private memorial service.

## Darwin is God...

At least to listen to the media—and notably the BBC—you would think so. Undoubtedly Charles Darwin was a man who has made an indelible impression on the modern world, and has provoked controversy, even setting Bible believers in opposite corners: evolution *v.* creationism. Strident atheist voices now seem to dominate the media.

The concept of evolution, of course, long pre-dates *Origin of Species*; it is ancient history, and Charles Darwin and others simply tried to provide more reasons for it. But nineteenth century 'Darwinism' has long been superseded by recent scientific research—though the almost universal view is still that evolution in some form is 'fact'.

### Questions

Darwinism, however—even in its modern clothes—fails to account for life's origin. Even 'Big Bang' assumes pre-existing material, and physical and chemical laws of breath-taking complexity. Indeed his theory was never meant to explain origins—just to explain how, once life happened, modern man come to be—sourced from a single-celled organism, and obscured in the mists of time long past.

Natural Selection proposes gradual step-by-step changes over millions of years from single cell to the incredible complexity that is humanity. The fossil record, however, presents us with more questions—millions of years when no changes occur. Then, suddenly, new life forms appear.

The Human Genome project, too, has evolutionary scientists puzzled. Man's twenty-five thousand genes fail to account for the complex human brain!

### Divine Operator

The prime mover of the natural world is the all-powerful Creator acting through His Word.

Of Jesus, Paul writes: '*...in him were all things created, in the heavens and upon the earth, things visible and things invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers; all things have been created through him, and unto him; and he is before all things, and in him all things consist*' (Colossians 1:16-17).

Criticism of the divine too often focuses not on the Scriptures but on the distorted interpretation of the Scriptures by mediaeval Christianity. Yet the Bible has repeatedly been vindicated in both its historical record and in its science. For both evolutionists and Bible students there are gaps to fill in regard to man's—and earth's—origins. Ω

## The Passover Season

At the centre of Christian practice is what is variously termed *Lord's Supper*, *Passover*, *Communion*, *Eucharist*, *Mass*, *Memorial Supper*, *Lord's Table*. Different denominations have evolved their own presentation, but at heart is the remembrance, by the symbols of bread and wine, of the suffering and death of our Saviour, Jesus the Messiah.

The timing of the Memorial, too, is varied: some hold it daily, others weekly or quarterly or annually. And some use unleavened (flat) bread, while for others ordinary bread is the norm. What say the Scriptures?

The service is modelled on the 'last supper' of Jesus (John 13), while the detail is, in part, explained by the apostle Paul:

*I have already told you what the Lord Jesus did on the night he was betrayed. And it came from the Lord himself. He took some bread in his hands. Then after he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is given for you. Eat this and remember me." After the meal, Jesus took a cup of wine in his hands and said, "This is my blood, and with it God makes his new agreement with you. Drink this and remember me." The Lord meant that when you eat this bread and drink from this cup, you tell about his death until he comes*

I Corinthians 11: 23-26

A point to note is that this incident in the life of Jesus took place at the season of the Biblical Passover—in early Spring, at the beginning of the 14th day of the first month (Abib, Nisan) in the calendar used in the Bible (*see* Exodus 12-13). It was the night preceding the Passover.

The memorial, says Paul, is observed '*...on the night he was betrayed*', and this is when it should be observed—ie *annually*, on this date. This, of course, was the night before his crucifixion. His *death* (as '*...our passover*') coincided with the official Temple sacrifice of the Passover lamb— 3pm to 4pm on Nisan 14 (the *eve* of Nisan 15).

The seven day *Feast of Unleavened Bread* which then follows is, in Scripture, called 'Passover' '*...the passover, a feast of seven days; unleavened bread shall be eaten*' (Ezekiel 45:21). It began with the sacrifice of the lambs. Paul's testimony is that the Corinthian brethren (mainly Gentiles, note) continued to observe this festival—as do many Christians today (I Corinthians 5: 7-8). Ω

Request the article: **Passover—Is It for Christians?**

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