

outreach

The Newsletter of the Churches of God, UK

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providing
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Matthew 28:19-20

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By Invitation Only

Christians are not alone in 'evangelism'—it's a practice common to all faiths. In Britain, for example, Islam has 'converted' over 100,000 to their faith and vast sums are spent on propagating it. Hinduism, too, has its evangelists and spends millions on outreach.

For Christians, evangelism—at the command of the Founder—is also a major focus. 'Go into all the world...', said Jesus. But is the Sabatarian Church of God movement in competition with all these faiths? Or even with Christianity?

Bogus Growth

'Christianity' embraces some two billion believers in thousands of denominations large and small. The range of beliefs is mind boggling! But each sincerely-held belief system is vigorously promoted, and the pool in which all 'fish for men' is self-renewing (deaths and births), so there is no shortage of potential members.

Much of the 'growth' in church denominations (including the Church of God), however, is simply the transfer of members disaffected by some aspect of their previous affiliation—the pastor, other members, doctrine *etc.* (Though there can be valid reasons for change.) But 'soul-winning' is on the agenda of most churches, with the more fundamental groups seeking to 'save from hell-fire'.

To this end a variety of devices is deployed to entice new members through the door: social outreach, youth programmes, removing pews, fear, modern music and dance are examples. There are echoes of Jesus' words to the Pharisees: '...You travel over land and sea to win one follower' (Matthew 23:25). Which is fine—if the teaching truly reflects the

faith of Scripture. (The Pharisees didn't.)

It is generally assumed that *persuasion* is all that's required. Convince of the truth of 'our' church and the new member is 'caught' in the net. Certainly the example of the Apostle Paul tells us that part of the process is indeed persuasion. And he risked his life in his attempts to persuade his hearers. But isn't there more?

Invitation Only

It's not generally accepted, but becoming a Christian isn't a random process. Convince a person of the merits of the Christian faith and he becomes a Christian? Not so—hence the missionary movement.. The missing ingredient is *selective intervention by the Father*.

Said Jesus: '... No man can come to me, except the Father which sent me draw him' (John 6:44). Yet: '...him that comes to me I will in no wise cast out' (v.37).

Each of us in our own way should be active in 'evangelism', but we can't convert. Even though the call comes from the Father it is for us to deliver the invitation. That's where persuasion enters, why the apostle was so 'aggressive' in his outreach.

God in His wisdom and for His own purpose provides opportunity in this life for *some* to have an inclination towards Jesus. (Others will in due time receive such a call.) The onus is then on the hearer, if called, to respond.

Let's each energetically 'herald the good news' to all the world, each in our own way, as we bear the special invitation of the Father. Ω

READ! New Horizons,
available on our website or
in print from our offices

The Law of Love

The apostle Paul has much to say on the matter of God's Law. He tells us, for example: '... *All that the Law says can be summed up in the command to love others as much as you love yourself*' (Galatians 5:14). And '*...love is the fulfilling of the Law*' (Romans 13:10).

So, *do* all that the Law demands and you are okay? Not so! Just look at those implacable opponents of Jesus, the Pharisees (Matthew 5:20). Diligent in the Law's observance down to the last herbal leaf. Spanning the globe to turn others to that same Law. Clearly there has to be more.

Anyone who has lived even a short time knows that with the best of human effort we simply can't fulfill all the Law's demands. Even if you have had God's indwelling Spirit for a lifetime.

As Christians, of course, we strive to understand God's Law and to implement it in our daily walk. Our life's goal is to become like our spiritual Father as exemplified by the life of Jesus while here on earth. And when we fall foul of it?

That's why he died, removing our sin '*...as far as the east is from the west*'. But that doesn't stop self-examination and attempting to put it right.

The rest of Paul's exhortation is '*...love works no ill to his neighbour, therefore...love is the fulfilling of the Law*'. In other words, if we were to perfectly love our neighbour we would be doing what the Law requires—even without knowing what the Law says! And if we were to perfectly love God—the same.

Most of us have 'good neighbours'. But to love them as we love ourselves? That's *supernatural*! It doesn't come 'out of the goodness of my heart' (Jeremiah 17:9). And we will learn what the Father hopes of us only through the study of His living example—Jesus the Messiah—as recorded in the entirety of Scripture.

Conversion, then, followed by immersion in water—and in the Word of God. It is for each of us to *personally* apply the lessons taught there, according to our present understanding. We '*...work with fear and trembling to discover what it really means to be saved*' (Philippians 2:12). We can't do that without the Law to guide Ω

Letter from England

We believe the work of *the Churches of God, Uk* is contributing positively to the outreach of the various churches of God. By promoting the independence of congregations—not beholden to an over-ruling organization—we can avoid much of the mayhem that repeatedly strikes the large denominations of the churches of God.

At present our outreach is limited, though we do have an internet presence at www.cgom.org and publish the *New Horizons* magazine—mailed to many countries. It's our intention to expand our influence and message as resources permit. We don't have expensive (or any) property upkeep nor staff and ministerial salaries—so no unnecessary expense. But we do have a 'work'.

For income, however, we are totally dependent on the contributions of our church family and a few others. Of late, however, donations have been few and far between (perhaps understandable in the present financial straits) limiting our outreach ability. We have, for example, only been able to mail a small portion of the recent issues of *New Horizons*, while *OUTREACH* is available only on the web.

If *you* think our work is worthy of support I would ask you to consider a donation—no matter the size of it. As we are a registered charity you can (if you pay tax in the UK) donate as Gift Aid, increasing the value for COGUK by 25% with no extra cost to you. (Ask for details.) Above all we ask for your regular prayer support.

A big 'thank you' to all who continue to support our efforts. Ω

Spring Festivals

No—not Lent, *not* Easter. Informed Christians understand that neither gets a mention in the New Testament (except as a mistranslation). God, however, has provided a series of annual festivals held throughout the year which clarify His purpose for mankind.

In Spring is the Passover season beginning with the *Lord's Supper* held annually '*...in the night he was betrayed*'. In its observance we renew our baptismal covenant and our commitment to a life of service. to our brethren and to the world.

It is followed next evening by the seven-day *Festival of Unleavened Bread*. 'Leaven' (a raising agent) is symbolic of all impurity—of behaviour, of doctrine. It represents hypocrisy. By avoiding it for the seven days we emphasize to ourselves the pure teachings and perfect lifestyle of Jesus our Saviour. Ω

Lord's Supper: evening of April 17 Unleavened Bread: April 19-25

'The Work of Elijah'

Not unusually the identity of the 'two witnesses' (Revelation 11) is being discussed, this time in relation to the so-called 'work of Elijah'.

Some Christians believe that the prophet will indeed return—but 'in the spirit and power' of Elijah, seen as an end-time work by the church of God. For some this signifies a co-operative work of witness by two Church of God denominations, while many *individuals* have claimed to be Elijah. For others, Enoch (or Moses) and Elijah—resurrected—are believed to be the 'two witnesses' of Revelation 11. And others say these are two *individuals* chosen for that work. (There are many claimants to the role of a witness!)

Jesus himself—fresh from an encounter with Elijah and Moses in vision—can be understood to state that Elijah will himself return: '*... Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things*' (Matthew 17:11). This reflects the prophecy of Malachi 4:5. It may be significant that the burial of Enoch and Elijah is not recorded in the Scriptures—though both died (Genesis 5:23, Hebrews 11:13). The grave of Moses, too, is unknown (Deuteronomy 34:6). It is noteworthy that the works of Moses and Elijah are replicated by the two witnesses, whoever they may be (Revelation 11:5-6).

Throw into the mix the fact that John (v.4) equates the two witnesses with the '*two anointed ones that stand by the Lord of the whole earth*' (Zechariah 4:14). A reference to the two remaining cherubim (*cp* Ezekiel 28:14)? They are associated with *witness* (KJV *testimony*) and the Law which was preserved on stone in the ark. (Exodus 25:21-22). There can be no objection to these (created) spirit beings taking on flesh, being killed and then resurrected—as was Jesus.

Work of Elijah

Whatever the truth, what will 'Elijah' *do*? His message—just as with John the Baptist (the 'messenger': Malachi 3:1, Matthew 11:10)—is a call to repentance, but just before the (second) coming of Jesus. At that time the world will be in chaos, in thrall to a world dictator and awash with false religion.

The apostle John tells us that at that time the remnant of mankind in general will refuse to repent (Revelation 9:20). *Repentance*, then, is the substance of the preaching of the 'two witnesses': '*...And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony [witness] of Jesus Christ*' (Revelation 12:17).

The Malachi prophecy gives a clue: '*... Remember the law of Moses ...even statutes and judgments...And he*

Insight from Paul

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

'I know my rights'

Spoken assertively it's not unusual to hear this demand. Fuelled by the mis-named *Human Rights Act* companies are bled dry by Tribunals, the Courts are clogged with claimants, lives blighted. Paul has much to say on the matter, and has vital lessons for our Christian walk.

It's a mistake to assume that as a Christian we become a door-mat, giving in to every pressure. Paul wasn't backward at claiming his rights as a Roman citizen! To the brethren in Corinth (I Corinthians 9) he lists other 'rights': for sustenance (v.4), for family life (v.5), the right to R & R (v.6), the right to be supported in his work for Christ—listing examples in other occupations (vv.6-12) and the instruction of Jesus (*eg* Matthew 10:10).

Yet he states another—and over-riding—right: *the right not to claim his rights*. He adds: '*...the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel. But I have used none of these things...*' (vv.14-15). For the sake of 'the gospel of Christ' Paul chose not to require 'wages' from the brethren. Rather, he and his colleagues '*...worked with our own hands*' (*ch* 4:12). (Money matters are sensitive!)

Elsewhere he gives another example of this principle. Appalled that brethren were taking other brethren to court Paul says: '*...When one of you takes another to court, all of you lose. It would be better to let yourselves be cheated and robbed*' (I Corinthians 6:7 CEV). Be willing to forgive!

Paul may well have based his stance on the words of Jesus: '*...If any man will come after me, let him deny himself*' (Matthew 16:24). Be prepared as a Christian, when it is appropriate, to give up our legitimate rights for the sake of the Gospel. Ω

shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers' (*ch* 4:4-6). This final witness will provide a last chance for mankind to turn to the divine Law.

But the surviving remnant of 'Israel' *will* repent (the 'new covenant'—God's law willingly obeyed from the heart—with Israel and Judah: Jeremiah 31:31-33, 50:4-5, Isaiah 11:11). Those same Laws will then be taught to all mankind to prepare them for eternity (Isaiah 2:1-5).

Whatever or whoever 'Elijah' or the 'two witnesses' may be, we each must remain steadfastly faithful. Ω

Proclaiming the ‘Gospel of the Kingdom’

The message preached by Jesus has sounded around the world. Sadly, it is largely ignored and misunderstood. In the days of the apostles, Paul—echoing Psalm 19:4—could say ‘... *their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world*’ (Romans 10:18). Jesus’ commission had been completed. Mission accomplished?

Of course not. For generation succeeded generation and billions more had to be ‘evangelised’. The effect was the same—as Jesus predicted, his message was distorted and few responded to the true Gospel.

Today, only a relative few of earth’s six billion plus are true believers. Usually they are considered by ‘mainstream’ Christians (some two billion) to be outside the Christian pale. For the most part they are zealous in efforts to reach out with Christ’s true message.

Kingdom Message

That message is unique—though some denominations claim to be ‘more unique’ than the others! Their distinctiveness focuses on the significance of ‘*the gospel of the kingdom*’ (Matthew 24:14). This is assumed to have the narrow meaning of a reference to the earthly kingdom that Jesus will return to rule for a thousand years—the ‘millennium’.

On this presumption vast resources are dedicated to preaching this message, inducing a ‘ghetto-style’ view of the church—‘us and no other’. It’s worthwhile examining this presumption.

The millennium, it should be noted, is a mere blip on the time-line of eternity. God is King of His creation (Psalm 47:2 *etc*), and has existed ‘... *from everlasting to everlasting*’ (Psalm 90:2). Certainly the coming reign of Jesus Christ must be part of the message proclaimed by the church. But the ‘Kingdom message’ is much more.

Jesus asserted ‘...*I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it*’ (Matthew 16:18). It is alive today—though perhaps not so well!—testimony to his insight.

Only a blind church leader would claim that all who say they are Christian are true believers. It’s a label loosely worn. Yet there are millions of sincere believers who heard the Gospel message. For the most part, however, they have boarded the Christian ‘train’—that is, committed to Christ—but it has headed along a different track. The message was distorted—not wrong.

Gospel of the Kingdom

Central to the message of Jesus is Jesus *himself*. Without him—no Christianity. Indeed the message of the Scriptures, Old Testament and New, focuses on Jesus—his life, his death, his resurrection and his continued presence on earth through his church. That was the message of the apostles as recorded in the New Testament.

While on earth Jesus stated to questioning Pharisees who were expectant of an earthly kingdom under Messiah: ‘...*the kingdom of God is within you*’ (Luke 17:21). That is, it is a ‘heart thing’, as represented by him standing in their midst. The Kingdom with its eternal King, its Laws, its whole ethos is the realm of the transformed mind. As the LORD spoke through Jeremiah: ‘... *I will write my laws on their hearts and minds. I will be their God, and they will be my people*’ (ch 31:33).

Applied to all human life and politics that transformed mind will—at the return of Christ—usher in an earthly Kingdom overseen by the King of ages together with his people gathered from all ages—to prepare a people for eternity.

And Now?

The church of God must focus on proclaiming the true Gospel of salvation through Jesus—not just on a tunnel vision focus on a brief earthly Kingdom ‘coming soon’. Through the millennia few have embraced it fully. But the Father continues to invite all who will to become part of His Kingdom to *repent*—to live a life transformed—through a new covenant with Him, His laws embedded in our thoughts and actions.

Beyond that earthly Kingdom lies an eternity of the expansion of the Kingdom of God beyond our wildest imaginings. Truly follow Jesus Christ and you will be part of it. Ω