

# outreach

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## **Christianity isn't all about doctrine**

### **The New Horizons Newsletter**

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*Matthew 28:19-20*

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The apostle Paul came to understand that in Christ *'...are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge'* (Colossians 2:3). And the apostle Peter urges us to *'...grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ'* (II Peter 3:18). What is that 'knowledge'? Let's examine some aspects of his inestimable character.

In the book of Hebrews it is explained that there is a foundation of knowledge essential to our relationship with the Father and with Jesus. It is the foundation on which we build our life in Christ, without which we can't claim to be Christian.

They are the 'first principles', the 'milk' of our faith (Hebrews 5:12), which is reflected in the new Christian's status as 'newborn babes' (I Peter 2:2), in need of 'milk' rather than solid food.

These principles are summarized as: *'...repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, Of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment'* (ch 6:1,2). He then urges us, having embraced these, to move forward, to *'...go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation'*.

### **Hidden Treasure**

What, then, does this 'perfection' entail? There are many strands, but surely one of the most essential is Christ himself. Our goal as Christians is that we become 'Christ-like', his 'spiritual *doppelganger*', his 'double'.

Theologians down the century squabble over any and all aspects of the Scriptures—hence the multiplicity of denominations and the disgust

that leads many individuals to 'go it alone'. [And my don't the denominations mangle even the basics!]

### **Christ In Us**

But what of Jesus himself? How well do we know him? What can we learn from his bio in the Scriptures? It is, of course, impossible to measure the depths of his perfection; but we can set the goal of personalizing him in our own life, of taking on his characteristics.

Nor do we lack support, for those foundation principles can be our guide as we seek to 'grow in grace'. Take, for example, *'...the laying on of hands'*. It is the outward symbol of our receiving and accepting of the divine Spirit. As we heed the promptings of the indwelling Spirit we are alerted to implement necessary changes to our life-style coupled with the Spirit's power.

### **Jesus lived by every word of God**

The Scriptures were his 'meat and drink'. No action was executed without the express consent of the Father or in accord with the written Word.

### **He was in constant contact with the Father**

Prayer was his life-blood, and he is recorded as spending all night in prayer, especially before making vital decisions. He frequently went to pray alone.

### **He expressed compassion for all**

Jesus emotionally supported all who called on him for help.

### **He had respect for all**

No 'class' was too far below nor too high for his concern. All were treated according to individual need.

### **He 'went about doing good'**

Where Jesus encountered need he acted.

### **He conquered every temptation**

All temptations that we *cont'd p.2*

## Pledge of Allegiance

*Allegiance*—it's defined as 'loyalty or commitment to a superior or to a group or cause' As in, "those wishing to receive citizenship must swear allegiance to the republic". Not only to a nation but to any club or organization. Or to a church.

Join up and we would anticipate first knowing and then following the 'rules'—both written and unwritten. Ties only. Formal or casual. Member fee. Meeting venue and time. Alcohol free. *Etc.* A serious breach and you are out!

The Christian faith also has its norms not least in our expected behaviour, but also in our 'rituals'. Much of Christianity has added layers of ritual not representative of the original faith. There is, however, one that in a variety of forms is expressive of our topic—*allegiance* and *commitment*. That is the *Lord's Supper*, variously known as Eucharist, Communion, Passover (a misnomer).

Jesus, on the evening before his death, shared a pre-Passover meal with his apostles. In the course of it he introduced a ceremony by which they would remember him. It was a simple rite using *bread* (representing his torn body) and *wine* (his blood, shed for us). The next afternoon he died at the time of the sacrifice of the Passover lamb in the Temple, thus perfectly fulfilling the *typology* for the Passover.

AS he introduced the symbols Jesus requested: '... *this do in remembrance of me*' (I Corinthians 11:24). It is a memorial, observed annually

### Personal

As with that first memorial, we seek to observe it with other brethren. However, it is also very personal. Paul received guidance direct from the risen Christ as to how to observe it: '...*let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eats and drinks unworthily, eats and drink damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body*' (I Corinthians 11:28-29).

Each Christian, having been reconciled to the Father through acceptance of the sacrifice of His Son, having been baptized and then having received the indwelling holy Spirit, keeps this annual memorial on this date\* yearly. It is a renewal of our life-time commitment, our allegiance, to him.

### Lifetime Commitment

Many believers fail to understand that the Christian faith is a lifetime commitment. We are not simply accepting the benefits of his awesome sacrifice—for we are making a *covenant* with him and with the Father. A covenant has at least two parties, each of which commits to an agreed programme, to agreed terms.

Through Jesus, and only through him and his sacri-

### Christianity... cont'd from p.1

face he faced. As 'one of us' he battled them daily—*yet without sin*. His response?: '...*in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared*'. It's our example.

### He endured intense opposition and persecution

His persecutors disfigured him: '...*his visage was so marred more than any man*'. Yet Jesus never wavered from his core faith.

### He forgave all who opposed him.

Even on the cross Jesus asked the Father to forgive his persecutors. Nor did he respond in kind to those who vilified him.

**Jesus was the personification of the Father whose wish is that we, as His children, reflect His characteristics as demonstrated in the life of Jesus, our 'brother' Ω**

...fice, may all sinful mankind be reconciled to the Father. Only through him can we cast aside the chains of our mortality and be resurrected to live eternally. Only through him have we access to the Spirit of the Father and the right to become His sons and daughters. These he promises, these he supplies.

As for *our* terms under the covenant, *it is a lifetime commitment* Jesus warns us to 'count the cost' of discipleship: '...*If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever does not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.*' (Luke 12: 46-47).

[*'hate'* is a relative term without the modern implication of strong animosity. It is a comparative term]

There is, in other words, no turning back: '...*No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God*', said Jesus (*ch* 9:62). As we navigate our life in Christ we must keep our eyes on him, remembering his sacrifice, remembering his guidance—and remembering we are aiming to reflect in our life the perfect image of the Father as portrayed by our Saviour. And as we take part in the foot-washing during the memorial of the Lord's Supper (John 13:14-15) we focus on our service to one another as brethren and joint-heirs with Jesus. Ω

\*The *Lord's Supper* is held on *Nisan 14* of the Hebrew calendar, the equivalent of March/ April today. It is, in 2020, April 7th after sunset

## Insight from Paul

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

The apostle goes far in alerting us to end-time activity on the world scene. It is a snapshot of what we read about every day in our twenty-first century newspapers. But as in his own day he is often misunderstood by modern pundits.

In presenting to the brethren in Thessalonica his (inspired) outline of events to expect in the end-time he told them: *'...yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction comes upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.* (I Thessalonians 5:2-4).

That somehow alarmed the brethren and they began to assume all sorts of scenarios, prompting a response from Paul: *'...be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand'*.

Down the centuries since, the same error has been repeated, and recent decades have witnessed 'prophets' compounding the false impression of the imminent return of Jesus—even providing us with exact dates.

The apostle, however, does make clear the reality of that coming (II:1:7-8) while adding some caveats. He warns his readers (and us!) *'...Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first'* (ch.2:3). Indeed that set in during his lifetime (he constantly battled it) and was noted decades later by the apostle John (I John). The 'falling away' continued throughout the mediaeval centuries, fostered by the papacy receiving a temporary—but partial—set-back in the sixteenth century (the Reformation) and near extinction in the late 1800's. (It recovered and is once again in the ascent.)

But Paul had the long view, referring the consummation of this 'falling away' to just prior to Jesus's second coming: *'...then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming'* (ch 2:8).

The prime mover—Paul names him 'the man of sin' and 'that wicked one'—who establishes himself in God's temple (*ie* the Christian church) and who is acclaimed as 'God'. He is the final one of a succession (I John 2:18) through the Christian centuries claiming to be God's representative on earth, His 'vicar', but labelled as 'antichrist'.

The antichrists will usurp Chris's authority over his church, perverting his teachings and substituting a Babylonian religion for divine law (*eg* replacing Sabbath with Sunday observance)—yet retaining the false title of 'the Christian church'. They will be

'wicked' (as in the Inquisition)—but will reach the peak of wickedness as Christ's presence approaches (*cp* Matthew 24:9).

God is interested in human affairs, and will square things. Writing to the Thessalonians, Paul says: *'...Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ*

### Watch!

There always have been earthquakes and famines and plagues claiming countless lives. Unregenerate nations—including the Middle East—will always battle for supremacy and to defend themselves. But as Jesus said *'...the end is not yet'* (Matthew 24:6).

Whether you fear or joyfully anticipate Christ's return these are the signs you need to watch—and prepare—for:

- The ultimate antichrist *will* arise
- He will persecute and put to death faithful Christians
- He will deceive mankind through false miracles—by technology?
- He will dominate the religious and secular world with worldwide acclaim by world leaders
- His invidious and insidious perversion of the Christian faith will come to dominate, accepted by all faiths—on pain of death
- His 'mark' will be the enforced observance of Sunday

Then *'...know that your redemption draws near'*. In the interim, world events will ebb and flow. There will be claims and counter-claims. The once faithful, sadly, will fade away. The apostle then urges the brethren—and us, *'...on whom the end of the ages has come'*—to *'...stand fast, and hold the traditions which you have been taught, whether by word, or our letter'* (II Thessalonians 2:15). Ω

### Correction:

*Trumpets is September 19th—not on the 15th as listed in previous issue. (fading eyes!)*

### Festivals 2020

|                  |                  |
|------------------|------------------|
| Lord's Supper    | April 7 Tues evg |
| Unleavened Bread | April 9-15       |
| Pentecost        | May 31           |
| Trumpets         | September 19     |
| Atonement        | September 28     |
| Tabernacles      | October 3-9      |
| Closing Day      | October 10       |

## The Inner Light

There is an increasingly-held belief in the Western world, seeping in from the 'mystical east', that there resides within each human being an 'inner light'. As recorded the prophet Isaiah in regard to ancient Israel, and familiar today: '*...The land is full of magic practices from the East and from Philistia. The people follow foreign customs*' (GNB ch 2:6). In Hindu faith there is one supreme god, Brahma, who '*is inside every soul, in the heart and consciousness, waiting to be discovered*'. It is that 'inner light' that underpins the eastern faiths and which now permeates the Christian world.

This philosophy has fostered the increasing interest in such eastern ideas as Buddhism, transcendental meditation, yoga *etc.* These practices can for some of us be physically and mentally supportive—but their underlying philosophical base is a falsehood blinding us to the reality.

### Fall of Man

Mankind was created '*...in the image and likeness of God*' (Genesis 1:27), endowed with many of His characteristics through the human spirit (Job 32:8), including the potential to live endlessly. However, man transgressed the covenant with his Creator and condemned himself to death and the loss of any 'inner light' he possessed. The life, death and resurrection of Jesus is a snap-shot of what man could have become.

Having lost his intimate relationship with the LORD, man and all his offspring set themselves on a course of destructive behaviour—in the Christian Scriptures it's called '*sin*'. All access to God then came solely through an intermediary and animal sacrifice. That is, until Jesus, the promised Deliverer (Genesis 3:15), conquered sin, leading a fully sinless life—through the power of the indwelling holy Spirit (Hebrews 4:15).

No human has escaped the power of sin—all have remained in chains and subject to the influence of mankind's great Adversary. The latter has blinded human kind down the ages, continuing to do so in this age when the liberating power of the Deliverer is available (II Corinthians 4:4).

### The 'Inner Light'

Humanity persists in residing in darkness (John 1:4-5), experiencing the penalty of millennia of sinful behaviour through wars, disease, poverty—and death. The Father through Jesus has made available the power by which the darkness is dispelled—His holy Spirit. Without it we struggle in the dark and remain alienated from our Creator: '*...Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his*' (Romans 8:9).

It is *God's Spirit* in a man or woman that provides that inner light. It's influence was extinguished when Adam sinned and remains so, but is now available to all who align themselves with God and His programme, to all who listen to God's invitation as it is presented freely by His church. No matter how feebly presented,

## The Cocktail Dress

Do I wear a tie—or not? How about casual—or should it be a business suit? How about jeans? Trainees? Cocktail dress or smart frock? Dress suit? Or maybe it's okay to shop in pyjamas?

Clearly we decide in regard to the occasion, the location, the company. We dress appropriately for a wedding or the Queen's Garden Party or a job interview. Or if we are representing our country as a diplomat or an ambassador—or representing our constituency in Parliament or on Capitol Hill. Or if we are worshipping the almighty Creator of the universe.

But not always! The question is—*do we care?* Some don't. Some want to make a point. But mostly it is because a restraint has been lifted ('Casual Friday') - or we just go with the flow of fashion, the '*...course of this world*'.

### Standards

There's an underlying reason, though. For our standards have declined, respect for others lost. Pyjamas in Tesco or Walmart? They belong on the shelf. The vain flaunting of acres of bare flesh in public? A cocktail dress worn by a Member in the House of Commons? Nursing babies on the green benches? Surely out of place. Why, even clapping and singing—as did some MPs in the UK Parliament—were once considered beneath contempt.

Isaiah offers insight reflective of the twenty-first century '*...He will let children and babies become your rulers. You will each be cruel to friends and neighbors. Young people will insult their elders; no one will show respect to those who deserve it*' (CEV Isaiah 3:4-5).

The apostle Paul describes a preview of our times: '*... You can be certain that in the last days there will be some very hard times. People will love only themselves and money. They will be proud, stuck-up, rude, and disobedient to their parents. They will also be ungrateful, godless, heartless, and hateful. Their words will be cruel, and they will have no self-control or pity. These people will hate everything that is good. They will be sneaky, reckless, and puffed up with pride. Instead of loving God, they will love pleasure. Even though they will make a show of being religious, their religion won't be real*' (CEV. II Timothy 3:1-5). A sad litany, so true in our world.

Paul adds the antidote: '*...be gentle, kind, humble, meek, and patient. Put up with each other, and forgive anyone who does you wrong,... Love is more important than anything else. It is what ties everything completely together*' (Colossians 3:12-14). Ω

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that invitation remains open to all.

*It requires a response.* Ω

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