

The Newsletter of the Churches of God, UK

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MAY/JUNE 2004

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Matthew 28:19-20

representing



Churches Of God Outreach Ministries

Laodicean Danger

The Laodicean church was one of a circuit of seven Christian assemblies in a hundred square miles of western Asia Minor, towards the end of the first century. Although known intimately to one another, they present wide variation in practice and in the internal and external challenges that affected them. They were far from being a 'one church' organization directed, controlled by and dictated to from a central earthly location.

The Laodicean brethren (Revelation 3:14-22) were a strange lot though still seen by Jesus as brethren of the church of God. Jesus brands them 'lukewarm' - and cites that as the reason He would take away their light: "I am about to spew you out of my mouth" (v.16). That's serious stuff.

Jesus addresses Himself to them as the 'Faithful and True Witness' and calls on them to repent - presumably of their failure to be a witness, a 'lampstand' (ch 1:20) shedding the Gospel light in their city and its environs. He prefers them cold (*ie* frozen - not converted?) perhaps because they might then seek for spiritual 'warmth'!

The Self-satisfied Church

The Laodicean brethren were, Jesus says, self-satisfied because they saw themselves as 'rich and in need of nothing'. Contrast this with His message to Smyrna (ch 2:8ff), a church in abject material poverty and subject to intense persecution. Jesus said to them approvingly 'yet you are rich' - but this time rich with the true spiritual riches.

Yet despite such an accolade, Jesus tells the brethren in Smyrna - warning of serious trouble to come - to 'be faithful unto death' and they would be given a 'crown of life'. No promise here of divine protection in tribulation for these faithful brethren! "The Devil", said Jesus, "will cast some of you into prison". Yet they are among those who "overcame [the Devil] by reason of the blood of the

Lamb, and by reason of the word of their testimony [witness], and loved not their lives unto death" (ch 12:11).

The Laodiceans, by contrast, were a 'closed shop', un-cooperative and assuming they had it all with no need of external guidance: 'in need of nothing'. On the outside they were affluent, well-endowed, well connected. In the view of Jesus, however, this group of assemblies were, at heart - where lay their real problem - 'wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked'.

Jesus - ever loving of His people even in their weakness and blindness - counsels them to repent, to buy 'white clothing' - symbolic of purity and perfection. (He nowhere emphasises any doctrinal deficiency - they retained the foundations of the faith.) And gold - individual Christ-like character, the spiritual riches of Christ. And eye-salve for their lack of clear spiritual vision.

Excluded

But Jesus was locked out of the Laodicean churches. They failed to acknowledge that it is *He* who 'runs the church' - not a mere organization set up by men. God gave to Jesus 'the key of David' - overall administrative authority over His church. Given the chance, it is the living Jesus - knowing each assembly intimately - who directs each local assembly, overseeing the way each should travel, and intervening as He sees fit. And holding to account the human leadership of each assembly.

request the free 22-page booklet

Why Were You Born?

Do we spend enough time listening to His message, to His plans for our assembly? Or are we concerned only with the externals, satisfied with our efforts, boasting of our growth and our integrity, making comparisons? Are the decisions we take, the activities we assume acted upon in conformity with His guidance? Do they 'seem good to the Holy Spirit and to us' (Acts 15:28)?

[cont'd p.4

A Patented Widget

Any 'widget' - gadget, machine, instrument - has to be *designed* and *manufactured*. It has *purpose* - or it won't work or sell. It is *activated* in a specific way - press the red button, key in a code, operate a lever *etc.* It complies with *natural laws* - electrical, mechanical, chemical. It won't, otherwise, work properly.

The same principles apply to you and to me personally. Take *laws*. From our earliest years we learn we are subject to *gravity*. We quickly find out what *hot* means. It's an axiom that you cannot mistreat *electricity* among many other things. Then there are the consequences of misuse of tobacco, alcohol, drugs. Why? Because of the design of the human body.

More remotely, governments figure out the necessity for laws. Without good law and proper enforcement chaos reigns. (Just look at Iraq, Haiti, Zimbabwe, Northern Ireland *etc.*) And the need for those laws springs from 'the nature of the beast' - from design, from human nature. It's from there that all human evil stems.

Governments - even in 'democracies' - love to make their own law - usually the starting point being the rejection of God's revelation.

Origins

We can put all this down to the rather puerile and misguided theory of evolution. Or, we can face facts and acknowledge that just like the widget there was, in the making of man, premeditated *design* and *purpose*. That for optimal function, mankind must comply with inborn *law* - both physical and 'spiritual'.

And - just like the widget - there was a superior intelligence behind this creation. *God*, in other words. Indeed it is foolish - and foolhardy - to deny this origin for man.

Ignore the design and the purpose and the laws and you have, on the personal level, physical and mental ill-health, accidents, chaotic lives. On the level of community and nation - and globally - there is confusion, corruption, greed, lawlessness.

Designed With Purpose

It's not that we are left in ignorance. The *guidance* is there - in black and white, and recorded through divine revelation, in the Christian Scriptures, for us to use. We ignore it at our peril.

The *design* is there revealed. We are made '*in the image and likeness of God*'. Not some outgrowth

OUTREACH on the web

This Newsletter of the *Churches of God, UK* is now sent by e-mail to around four hundred e-mail addresses, and the print copy to a further nearly three hundred.

The e-mail copies are in both plain text and, for easier reading, also available in pdf format. For those not familiar with the latter, it presents **OUTREACH** just like the format of the print copy - except that the pdf version has added colour. A programme to read the pdf version can be downloaded - free - from www.Adobe.com/ Acrobat - click on the 'get Acrobat Reader free' highlight.

*We would encourage you to recommend **OUTREACH** to your friends - whether or not they have access to the internet!*

from a fish or a frog or an amoeba. But made with divine attributes: intellect, purpose-driven, creative.

Purpose, too, is revealed in Scripture. A reason for living. Mankind can become a part of the divine Family. We are designed with the purpose of attaining to an endless life in a perfect body. But not yet.

Prophetic Foresight

The prophetic utterances in the Bible, for example, are mere human wailings - so many words - *unless* there is a real and active Creator back of them. A God who will surely bring to pass what He has revealed through His chosen prophets.

The Bible prophets did accurately predicted past calamity - and there's no reason to believe these won't recur. They warn that basic human nature will keep repeating itself. The same problems return generation after generation. Only for a moment do we remember past mistakes - and learn from them. Then, because we ignore the Manual, we forget - and repeat them.

The message of the prophets is that individuals and governments must turn from their human reasonings and follow the guidance of the Creator of all. Fail - and the same calamities will come on us.

But beyond this life? That's where life begins to make sense, when all our present ups and downs take on meaning. It is then, through resurrection, that we break free of physical constraints and enter the real world-the world of spirit. **Ω**

request, no charge:

After the Resurrection

Counselling the Church

Every local Christian assembly has its problems - for *people* are involved! It may be gossip, or arrogance, or drug- or sex-related. It may be power-play or drawing away a personal following or false teaching. Whatever, there is always a need for firm and loving pastoral counsel and guidance - of the assembly and of individuals.

But what if there are just 'two or three' - able to assemble? Or if you are all alone? We all have God's Word, of course. It contains every godly principle to deal with our every challenge. If, however, you are new to the Bible and the church, or perhaps too close to the problem to discern the Bible guidance, then some support is undoubtedly necessary. What then? Who do you turn to?

As background we should look at the structure of the apostolic church.

Small Church

The Bible example is that congregations are small - perhaps no more than a dozen families, and based in someone's home. But that doesn't mean they are isolated. The church of God is one, though men have divided it into often competing denominations. In the apostolic church, however, many cities each supported several such small assemblies.

They co-operated, shared pastoral and administrative functions and activities. Spiritual gifts in one assembly were shared with others. The assemblies 'came together' at times. It's a model largely abandoned by the self-protecting modern churches of God.

Each assembly was pastored by one qualified man dedicated to it alone. Given the size of his congregation this was more than adequate for him to provide the necessary pastoral support for all his flock. But he was able also to call on the gifts present in his own and other nearby assemblies. He could, for example enlist the help of an elder gifted, say, in the counsel of a drug-related problem. The Ephesian example (Acts 20) points to this co-operation by several elders. All the local assemblies would form *'the church of*

God in Ephesus' - or elsewhere.

And - importantly - given the intimacy of the small group, and the openness of the brethren, there was opportunity for interactive sharing of personal burdens (*eg* Galatians 6:1-6). Crises could be aired, solutions sought from the experience and spiritual gifts of the brethren present. Not easy in a large congregation!

Independence

While part of the universal church, yet each assembly was administratively independent. It answered not to a 'headquarters' but to Jesus Christ - who oversees each. (Of the seven churches in Asia only Laodicea, apparently, had locked out Jesus. *See p.1*)

Independence, however, doesn't mean anarchy! Biblically, each assembly was structured. A properly qualified 'overseer' was appointed (*eg* I Timothy 3, Titus 1:5). His qualifications reflect the appropriate gifts of the Spirit for the pastoral and teaching function - including counsel. And as such he carries the authority of Jesus for that congregation. The brethren, then, are to willingly follow his leadership - as long as he 'stays on the straight and narrow'.

Who Needs Counsel?

Every 'new-born' Christian needs to become totally committed to an assembly of the church of God - for a 'shoulder to lean on', for guidance, for *'instruction in righteousness'* - and for spiritual discipline. And, along with the other brethren, ready to share his or her spiritual gifts with the whole assembly. We each need to be nourished by 'the water of life' that is God's Word ministered, especially, through His church.

And a Christian quite unable to be part of an assembly (health, distance *etc*) is no less in need of this spiritual counsel and support. Life 'in the dry wilderness' can cause our spiritual life to wither. We urge our readers to make opportunity to 'communicate' regularly - letter, phone - with a known and established local assembly (Hebrews 10:24-27) - so you may both *use* your gifts and *learn*. Ω

Just Deserts?

The war in Iraq goes on. It wasn't, though, meant to be like this. Go in. Overthrow Saddam and his evil regime. Install a home-born democratic government. Leave intact with the Coalition profile enhanced - a triumph of Western moral superiority.

There have, however, been positive changes. Indeed some reports indicate widespread satisfaction with progress. Power restored, water and oil flowing, security in most areas. (The media isn't interested in reporting good news!)

But now we have the appalling reports of the torture of Iraqi dissidents by Coalition soldiers and various 'civilian contractors'. But 'we're not like that', so it is covered up in high places. Fake or

not, the damning photos have soured even further the image of our Anglo-Saxon nations as altruistic liberators.

OUTREACH, last October, commented as follows on the Iraqi situation:

"The recent Coalition intervention in Iraq may well have been stirred up by God to punish an evil and oppressive and dangerous tyrant. (*Yes* - God is still active!) But that doesn't mean He is happy with the Coalition nations. The drain on economic resources and on prestige, the rise of Islamic terrorism, and the realignment of nations may undermine the world's greatest ever superpower. The on-going moral decay and religious decline of Britain and America is prophesied to bring about their downfall ..."

No surprise, then, that our soldiers are still being killed and maimed, that Islamic hatred is given free expression. (Although the Arab call to make 'sex slaves' of captured Coalition women doesn't enhance *their* image!) Our nations are decaying from within. Our incredible spiritual inheritance has been frittered away in recent decades through neglect of our godly foundation principles. God has to act.

God Is Even-handed

Our Anglo-Saxon nations are special to God: *'...he who touches you touches the pupil of My eye'*, He says (Zechariah 2:8). But God doesn't 'respect persons' - His justice is dispensed equally to all, sin being punished by Him in [cont'd over

Why Marry?

June is the time for weddings. Thousands will - despite the decline in its popularity - 'tie the knot' in church or elsewhere. Why bother?

On the face of it marriage seems unnecessary. Mankind can *'be fruitful and multiply'* without the benefit of a marriage certificate. And so, too, sexual pleasure. And millions of co-habitees indeed 'don't bother'.

But these factors are not what marriage is about! Somehow the notion of a man and a woman getting together, formalized by that certificate, has gripped all nations throughout history.

Divine Plan

Only the intellectually blind and willingly ignorant can conjure up the weird notion that man 'evolved' from an inert rock or drifted to Earth as a speck of plasma from an alien planet. No. We don't derive from blind chance but we are the product of direct divine creation.

And we are created with purpose. At the time of His choosing God created the physical universe as the foundation on which to work out the plan for which He had long prepared. He created mankind - the 'clay model' from which to develop Spirit beings in every way like Himself.

Rather than creating a hermaphrodite - a combination of both sexes - to procreate, God made us *'male and female'*. For, He said: *"It is not good for man to be alone - I will make him a suitable helper, completing him"* (Genesis 2:18). Thus He made woman - equal but different.

Companions

Man - and woman - are each of themselves incomplete. Only the union of the two as *'one flesh'* (v. 24) and over a lifetime enables the companionship that properly reflects the Creator's purpose. It is a *covenant* - a binding agreement with commitment, mutual obligations and privileges. Any other form of 'living together' pro-tem is *sinful*, and heaps up trouble upon trouble - as is clear from the many mixed-up relationships all around us.

As marriage - the uniting of a man and a woman for the duration of life - is a divine institution (and the very first institution) its rejection is a rejection of God Himself. Few understand its importance both for personal fulfillment and also for national stability. Fewer still understand it is a prototype for the forthcoming unbreakable marriage between Jesus and the church.

Will *you* this year be a 'June bride and groom'? Understand that you embark on a lifetime commitment with implications for your own future - from here to eternity. **Ω**
Request the article: *Spend a Lifetime - Together*

Just Deserts... cont'd

just measure. Hence Israel and their modern descendants - of whom God expects more having given us so much - can expect double trouble. Having warned of a yet future exile (surpassing in intensity previous dispersions of His people) God promises restoration - but only after He once again corrects us: *"My eyes are upon all their ways; they are not hid from Me, nor is their iniquity concealed from My eyes. And I will double the recompense of their iniquity and their sin because they have defiled My land..."* Jeremiah 16:17-18

Assuming God - mankind's sovereign Ruler - wanted the end of Saddam's monstrous rule, He isn't squeamish about who He uses! Take this incident from the 8th century BC. God said *"The LORD shall bring upon you, upon your people and upon your father's House...the king of Assyria"* (Isaiah 7:17). At that time God used the Assyrian nation (ancient Iraq) as *'the rod of My anger'* (ch 10:5) against His wayward people of Israel. The Assyrians were cruel, but God expected them to carry out the task with restraint - like the rules of our Geneva Convention. They didn't, and suffered the consequences:

It shall be when the LORD has finished all His work on Mount Zion [ie when He has fully corrected Israel] that I will inflict punishment on the fruit of the arrogant heart of Assyria's king, on the boasting of his haughty looks. For he claims, 'By the strength of my hand have I done this, and by my wisdom, for I have understanding...' (ch 10: 12-14)

God continues, *'Should an axe boast itself over the man who hews with it...? I shall send a wasting disease against his soldiery, and under his glory shall be kindled a burning as the burning of a fire'* (vv.15-19). God didn't, because of their arrogance, let Assyria His 'weapon' off the hook.

Unless our nations repent not just abroad but also in the homelands, we too will - despite 'carrying out God's orders' - suffer the ignominy of humiliating defeat. **Ω**

Laodicea ... cont'd from p.1

A Universal Message

These letters - sent direct from the glorified Jesus - were written as a message to each and every church throughout time and in every place. In every age there are assemblies and individuals whose profile fits one or other or a combination of these first century west Asian assemblies.

There is no evidence - *a warning for us!* - that those in Laodicea changed their ways.

Jesus in effect concludes: *'Every one of you listen carefully - without vigilance the same can happen to any of My assemblies - if I'm excluded from your affairs.'* **Ω**

Pentecost 2004: Sunday May 30th

Thanks. I appreciate the encouragement and support many readers gave me on my recent heart set-back. It required a short hospital stay to monitor any reaction to the prescribed medication.

Hopefully, 'normal service can now be resumed!' *Editor*