

Churches of God, UK
Newsletter

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Matthew 28:19-20

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Many Ways

Especially in our politically-correct world it is fashionable to claim that God may be approached in an infinite number of ways. *Your* faith is no less acceptable than mine. My 'holy book' is no less true than yours, nor my 'truth' no more true.

So in Judaism worship is directed to the God of the *Torah*—Jehovah or JHVH. Christians worship that same God, adding in the new revelation of the *New Testament*. And the myriad gods in the Hindu faith are subservient to the One Creator God. The Islamic *Koran* also—falsely—equates its god Allah with the God of the *Torah*.

One God

Assuming all the major faiths have reference ultimately to the one and only Creator of all—why is there infinite confusion when we try to define 'truth'? Why such varied approaches to Him? Or such conflict between His directives?

Unless we were to embrace the corrupt puerile view of Greek mythology with its varied gods at perpetual war, it is only logic to propose that there is but one God, Creator of all, with a clear purpose for His creation and a perfect plan to implement that purpose.

(Imagine the CEO of a company issuing contrary instructions to different departments of his enterprise! Or the Chairman setting a confusing company vision and conflicting goals.)

The Beginning

The received wisdom is that religious faith has over the millennia matured from a primitive grasping after 'something out there' with grotesque and barbaric ritual deriving from superstition and ignorance—to the elaborate ritual and sophistication of modern faiths. *Not so!*

Whatever civilized sheen we may today envelop religion, two millennia ago it was well understood that man's original close relationship with God became corrupted as they lost sight of Him: '*...The unseen things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things made, both His eternal power and Godhead, for them to be without excuse*' (Romans 1:20). Man '*...changed the truth of God into the lie, and worshiped and served the created thing more than the Creator*'. They even began to worship 'the host of heaven' - sun, moon, stars *etc* - symbols incorporated in modern Christian worship.

All religious practices since the beginning, then, are a distortion of the original true faith revealed to our first parents. This divine plan and divinely-revealed wisdom surfaces in the sacred writings of many ancient faiths, passed from generation to generation.

One Way

Among the pantheon of gods worshipped in ancient Athens, the apostle Paul notes: '*...I found an altar with the words, "To an Unknown God." You worship this God, but you don't really know him*' (Acts 17:23). It has been so before and since!

But as Paul continued—you can't pick and choose, for '*...[God the Father] now strictly commands all men everywhere to repent, because He set a day in which "He is going to judge the habitable world in righteousness," by a Man whom He appointed; having given proof to all by raising Him from the dead*' (vv.30-31).

We can, however ignorantly, worship the Father—but to be in a relationship with Him we must approach only through Jesus the Messiah to whom Paul here refers. His fellow apostle Peter proclaimed: '*...there is salvation in no other One, for neither is there any other name under Heaven having been given among men by which we must be saved*' (Acts 4:12). **cont'd p.4**

Religion at War

Globally over two-thirds of the world openly admit to being 'religious'. At heart, though, we all harbour some concept of a higher spiritual power, no matter how vaguely. Which faith we embrace is largely down to our parents—for few of us stray far from the tree. Once Christian always Christian, and so on for Hinduism, for Islam, for Judaism *etc.* The level of our involvement and commitment is a matter of individual choice. Change by individual believers usually means a drift away rather than radical change, but we still continue to be influenced by early teaching and experience.

Every major religion has myriad divisions, but all look back to a particular source—the founder, the holy books, the traditions, the later gurus each with his or her own interpretation.

Thus *Christians* look to Jesus Christ as Founder, and to the Scriptures of the Old and new Testament as their source. *Jews* focus on Moses and on the Old Testament Scriptures with their traditional interpretations by rabbis down the centuries. *Muslims* to Mohammed and on the Koran, the Sira (a biography of Mohammed) and the various interpretations by the Imams (the Hadith).

It is such factors that influence the behaviour of whole religions, of nations, of individual believers. And not least on the attitude to conflict.

Conquest

Most world leaders like to stake a claim to being peaceable, to bear arms only in the defence of their sovereign territory. In this world that position is acceptable, for the Creator—God—has delegated rulership to human governments (Romans 13:1-7). Human government, like the family, is a divine institution.

Inevitably the style of any secular government reflects the underlying national philosophy or religion. Or, in some cases, the beliefs of a powerful autocratic leadership. Few, however, understand that they—those who comprise the Government—will be held accountable by the Creator for its conduct. *Misrule*, and the nation fails, their authority diminished or removed.

The approach of the Anglo-Saxon nations, for example, tends to be undergirded by the faith of the Christian Bible—Christianity, Judaism by the Old Testament (the *Tanakh*), Islamic nations by the Koran. The approach of each to conflict is a reflection of their religious source.

Thus *Christian* leaders, until recent decades, are inclined to restraint—as large sections of the populace are anti-war and still influenced by the Bible. The *Israeli* philosophy is 'an eye for an eye' - even-handed justice. While *Islam*, reflecting the path pursued by

Mohammed, tends to pursue a path of conquest.

Men of War

Christianity, of course, has much blood on its hands. The Middle Ages was awash with the blood of Muslims and the blood of millions of Christians who opposed the established church. Civil wars have pitted Protestants and Catholics against one another. Recent years have seen 'Christian' nations invade Muslim nations.

Islam is deeply divided against itself, with different sects bent on annihilating one another in several Islamic nations across the globe. The recently-formed and fanatical so-called Islamic State has its own gruesome specialty killing methods and a focus on the destruction of opposing Islamic sects, and on Jews and Christians. And too many Muslims living in democratic nations seek to undermine the stability of their hosts.

Motivation

You might think that 'religion' is a path to peace and harmony, that it unites rather than divides. Indeed *that* is the kind of 'religion' as it came from the mind of the Creator. Man is a spiritual being and the human spirit has a built-in religious impulse—the desire to express our yearning to be at one with the Creator. But by abandoning the 'laws of the spirit' that impulse is distorted, divided, diseased leading to indulgence in all kinds of *isms*.

Since records began, however, religion has been a source of conflict—only being 'united' by coercion. Into the wretchedness and debauchery of ancient Rome God sent His son with the mission to restore the true faith. Jesus commissioned his church to sow the seeds of that true faith.

The 'weapons' used by the infant church, however, were never violent: '*...we do not wage war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not merely human, but powerful to God for the tearing down of fortresses, tearing down arguments*' (II Corinthians 10:3,4). It is what the Creator intended in the beginning!

Universal Faith

Any attempt to use physical force or coercion to advance the faith—*any* faith—does not come from the one and only God but from the 'god of this world', the Adversary. Mediaeval Christianity, sadly, abandoned its roots in the teaching of Jesus, murdering those who opposed its heretical teachings. Islam is now reverting to the path of conquest by the sword pursued by its founder and followed until just a century ago (the Ottomans).

Bible prophecy foresees a future when a worldwide tyrant will impose a universal faith by force of arms, by violence opposing all who refuse to serve him, and killing millions of believers of all faiths. We live in perilous times! Ω

SIN—IT MATTERS!

Have you sinned today? It's not a topic we much like to talk or think about! Rather, we ignore it, suppress it—even deny its existence, viewing it as a relic of a bye-gone age of strait-laced morals of no relevance in our modernity.

You have likely heard of 'the seven deadly sins' - usually given as *wrath, greed, sloth, pride, lust, envy, and gluttony*. And your path through life this very day may have exhibited one or other of them. They are difficult to avoid! But is that all there is to sin? Does it matter?

All religions have their sin-lists. *Islam* notes seventy major sins (without limiting the number of possibles). *Hinduism* is less specific, relying on *karma*. *Buddhism* has five cardinal sins. And to check in with some Christians, nearly everything is sin! So—card playing (the 'devil's cards'), dancing, make-up, short skirts, alcohol and much else is added to the Ten Commandments and to those *mortal* seven. [The latter are defined in the Roman church as sins that 'cut our relationship off from God and turns man away from his creator'. Lesser sin is known as *venial*.]

Sin Defined

If you are concerned about the future life you will want a clear definition. What about '...all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God'? (Romans 3:23). Would that exclude you—any of us? Or how about '...sin is lawlessness (*Gk anomia*)' I John 3:4)? Have you ever broken any laws, any rules—including God's laws? That's a pretty inclusive list! We are all guilty.

If you think you have escaped, the apostle Paul (he calls sin 'the works of the flesh') provides an impressive list: '...Now the works of the flesh are clearly revealed, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lustfulness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, fightings, jealousies, angers, rivalries, divisions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revelings, and things like these' (Galatians 5:19-21).

If that's not enough then listen to the words of Jesus himself: '...I say to you, Everyone who is angry with his brother without cause shall be liable to the Judgment. And whoever says to his brother, Raca, shall be liable to be thrown into the fire of hell' (Matthew 5:22). Or, '...Everyone looking at a woman to lust after her has already committed adultery with her in his heart' (v.28). For in God's economy, adultery is worthy of death.

Consequences

And to highlight how serious this is he adds: '...of which I tell you beforehand, as I also said before, that the ones practicing such things will not inherit the kingdom of God'. Elsewhere he notes: '...the wages of sin is death' (Romans 6:23). So—worth giving serious consideration!

But that's not the end.

Life is a mixed bag of experience. For multiple millions it can be horrendous, a constant struggle against illness or poverty or hunger. Yet whether this is your experience or you are privileged to live a relatively cosy life—most of us believe that death cannot be the end, that our experiences have purpose beyond our three-score and ten years. *Then what?*

You die, then you are buried and your flesh decays into earth's elements and disperses—'then the worms will come and eat thee up'. But your human spirit continues—though without any conscious thought. We '...shall return to the earth as it was, and the spirit shall return to God who gave it' (Ecclesiastes 12:7).

Next? It is recorded in the book of Hebrews: '...it is reserved to men once to die, and after this, Judgment' (Hebrews 9:27). As Jesus said: '...an hour is coming in which all those in the tombs will hear His voice. And they will come out, the ones having done good into a resurrection of life; and the ones having practiced evil into a resurrection of judgment' (John 5:28-29). And, as quoted above, the possibility of having our lifeless bodies thrown into an all-consuming fire.

So what you do in *this* life really counts. You cannot hide behind a self-imposed belief that God doesn't exist! Nor can you bank on a death-bed repentance—death can hit suddenly.

Judgment...what you probably don't know

You will face judgment after you die—whether or not you believe God exists! But there's much misunderstanding about this.

There is a divine plan to solve humanity's problems. At this time in history that plan is known as 'the Gospel' or Good News, and it's available to all. When anyone comes within the sound of that message they can choose to accept its terms—or not. If truly accepted you become a child of the Father, God. Remain faithful until death and you will live forever.

Acceptance, however is no easy passport through life, for God trains His children—and that sometimes means chastening!. Jesus warned: '...For narrow is the gate, and constricted is the way that leads away into life, and few are the ones finding it. But beware of the false prophets' (Matthew 7:14-15).

For that path demands that we have a change of direction. That we recognize our sin and our sinful nature (see accompanying article, p.2) and submit to the will of the Creator of all. When we positively respond to the Message the Father draws us to Jesus - there is no other way to an unending life (Acts 4:12).

Blinded

But note carefully that last part of Jesus' warning, about false prophets. There are preachers *cont'd p.4*

Youth Bible Lessons

You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise up

This popular website contains a series of *Youth Bible Lessons* and associated *Activity Sheets* for children (aged 5-13), and for teenagers.

It was created for parents to use freely as a resource to teach their children about God's Plan for mankind and His revealed way of life.

Read or download from:

myyouthbiblelessons.com

Provided courtesy of Lynn Meakin
(Living Church of God)

Many Ways ...cont'd from p.1

That's the Christian Bible for you. But what about the way to salvation promoted by other faiths?

Beyond Belief

A billion Muslims believe the way promoted in the Koran is the only way—and will kill or enslave those who resist the advancement of *Islam*. Salvation ideally comes through martyrdom, with inferior reward for the ladies, great for guys. There is no means other than by submission and works (prayers, pilgrimage, jihad *etc*) for an individual to have sin forgiven. Forgiveness is by divine (Allah) fiat.

In *Hinduism* the individual goal is to escape the cycle of reincarnation, and become one with Brahma (the Supreme god). In *Judaism* the focus is to keep God's commandments, studying Torah, caring for others and helping to repair the world—with possibly a resurrection when Messiah comes.

Christianity

By contrast, the *Christian* understanding is that '*...apart from shedding of blood no remission occurs*' (Hebrews 9:22). Not just human blood but the blood of 'the Word become flesh'. The blood of a sinless one. The blood of one whose being encompasses all mankind. By virtue of his sacrifice sin, upon repentance, is forgiven.

Not by works—just simple belief and readiness to willingly commit to him, to willingly transform your life to conform to his character. Sin forgiven. Guilt abolished. Empowerment from the in-dwelling Spirit of God, and reconciled to the Father. And with the prospect of serving with Him throughout eternity.

For all the major faiths there is one supreme god—but, ultimately, the *only* access to Him is through Jesus the Messiah. He alone is provably resurrected from the dead (Acts 26:23). Ω

SIN—IT MATTERS! cont'd from p.3

who will present an utterly false concept of this perfect plan of God. As a result, millions set out on the Christian life—but, perhaps persuaded by rhetoric and sentiment, fail to lay the solid foundation of conducting every aspect of life in accord with the Word of God, the Christian Scriptures.

Most of mankind, however, are blinded by the Satanic influence that envelops our planet—its education, its false religions, its perverted values in politics and in business, its focus on self-gratification.

Jesus spoke of this: '*...these are those by the way-side where the Word is sown. And when they hear, Satan comes at once and takes away the Word having been sown in their hearts*' (Mark 4:15). Or, as the apostle Paul writes: '*...in whom the god of this age has blinded the thoughts of the unbelieving, so that the brightness of the gospel of the glory of Christ who is the image of God, should not dawn on them*' (II Corinthians 4:4).

That's our world! Multitudes thus come within sound of the Gospel message but toss it aside as an irrelevance. They have 'stopped their ears'. Still others persist for a time in the Christian life—but become overwhelmed by mundane concerns. They simply don't stick the course.

However, you probably don't know that rejection does not mean you will be 'cast into the fires of hell' when you are brought back from the dead in that '*resurrection of judgment*'. For in that resurrection your spirit, preserved by God, will be clothed again with human flesh, your character re-instated.

At that time Satan's worldwide influence will have been neutered and you will be free to choose—life or death—through the one remedy for sin.

The Remedy

The apostle Peter explains: '*...there is salvation in no other One [Jesus], for neither is there any other name under Heaven having been given among men by which we must be saved*' (Acts 4:12). The apostle calls on his hearers to face the fact that it was *for them*, because of their sin, that an innocent was cruelly tortured and horrifically murdered.

Jesus, the Creator of the material universe and of mankind, was sent from Heaven by the Father (John 17:5), willingly giving up his Deity and his life *...for you*. We can't enter eternal life with our sin, with our sinful nature—and it is only through his death and resurrection that that sin may be forgiven.

That means *change*. That means we must each turn our backs on all that is contrary to the Glory of God—'repentance' is the apostle's word: '*... Repent and be baptized, each of you on the name of Jesus Christ to remission of sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit*' (Acts 2:38). Ω