

# outreach

## The Challenge of Change

### *The Newsletter of the Churches of God, UK*

PO Box 2525  
LINCOLN  
LN5 7PF  
England

Telephone: 01526 861217  
e-mail: coguk@aol.com  
web-site: www.cgom.org  
Editor: James McBride

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providing  
leadership  
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Matthew 28:19-20

rep-  resending  
Churches Of God Outreach Ministries

Moving home presents its own challenges—no matter how suitable the new home may be. Not everything is how you want it to be. Unforeseen jobs present themselves. There are new people to meet, long-time neighbours and friends now far off.

A change of ‘church home’, for whatever reason, also has its challenges. New location. New leadership. New brethren. A different culture, perhaps, with different customs.

The style of leadership, too, may be different. In some denominations the hymn title ‘...*trust and obey*’ may be applied too literally. Trust what you are told without question—and, above all, obey!

### **Think!**

So, as with moving home if we decide to move our church affiliation we need to first ‘make enquiries’. Fleeing false teaching or oppressive governance is understandable—but ‘frying pan and fire’ come to mind.

There will, though, always be regrets. You may, for example, have been at home in your church for half a century. You will have formed firm friendships—but these friends may not wish to move on. Worse, they may now ignore you. (The power of religious oppression can overwhelm even close friendships.) As with moving home, such considerations

have to be carefully weighed. Moving church can be quite scary—especially if you have huge doctrinal issues. Attentive study of the Scriptures coupled with a willingness to accept what is taught there may require dramatic change.

Those of us in association with the *Churches of God, UK*, for example, don’t accept the transformation of doctrine subsequent to the teaching of the apostles. In consequence we observe the seventh-day Sabbath rather than Sunday, the Bible holy days—outlined in Leviticus 23—rather than such late additions to the Christian calendar as Christmas and Easter.

### **Trust and Obey**

Clearly, such dramatic change means a total makeover of our daily lives. And some who make the change experience intense opposition even from family and close friends (especially church friends)—just as Jesus predicted.

We ought indeed to ‘trust and obey’—but it is trust in God as revealed in the Scripture of truth, and willing submission to the Way He has laid before us in that Word.

Such radical change is indeed a challenge. Wrote Solomon: ‘... *Listen to what is wise and try to understand it. Beg for knowledge, plead for insight. Look for it as hard as you would for silver or hidden treasure. If you do you will know what it means* *cont’d p.2*

## The Evolution Debate

*The following is an outline attempt to reconcile the varied strands of debate on this vital matter*

The debate on *evolution v. creationism* continues. Too often heat rather than light dominates the argument—on both sides—but it should not affect our relationship with our Creator. By definition, believers accept the existence of God (Hebrew 11:6). For Christians, the process of creation comes down to how we interpret the Scriptural account. *But the debate doesn't define who is a Christian.* (Non-believers enter the debate to disprove God's existence, to disparage Christianity; for them, formation of the material universe out of nothing is accepted on faith.)

One strand of argument implies that to disbelieve evolutionary theory you must throw out the concept of the Christian Bible as the inspired Word of God. If it is proved that God didn't create in six literal days then who can trust the rest of Scripture? Is the Bible just another hoax? Is it mere poetry? Just primitive ignorance? Or, do we simply misinterpret it?

Indeed there is room for discussion on all sides of the argument. Modern research has ripped holes in some aspects of evolutionary theory. And there seems little doubt that creationists have much yet to explain.

### '...In Six Days'

It has been acknowledged that the Bible 'order of creation events' in Genesis chapter one is a remarkable fit with scientific investigation. The challenge is to explain the 'six days' of the creation account. Were they six literal 24-hr days? Was each 'day' a year or a thousand years long—symbols used elsewhere in the Scriptures? Were they *eras* of indeterminate length? All have been proposed.

It can be assumed that God has the power and resources to do as He pleases (*cp* Nehemiah 9:6, Psalm 33:6). We must therefore admit that each day *could* well be literally twenty-four hours and creation complete in a literal week, and all elements of creation formed some six thousand years ago in accord with the received chronology.

But was creation done and dusted in a *literal* week? What if God did indeed perform each stated daily work (itemized in Genesis chapter one) in one twenty-four hour day. But what if each creation day were followed by an undisclosed period of development before the next step of creation on the next creative day? It is only assumption that all six creation days formed a literal week. It is not unreasonable that our week—which has no relationship to sun or moon—*symbolizes* those six creation days. (The *seventh day* is not recorded to have ended yet.) The week-long *Tabernacles*, for example, symbolizes a long time period.

It should be noted that—Genesis 1:1—the Bible account begins with an existing Universe, created '*...in the beginning*'. It was then in a chaotic state—*tohu* and *bohu* (v.2)—the ultimate configuration of which is not yet complete. It was not destined to remain chaotic, but to be inhabited (Isaiah 45:18). The remainder of the chapter explains the

process.

### God's Decrees

Genesis one lists a number of decrees by the Creator: '*...let there be...*' *etc.* Because the Creator decreed an action, however, doesn't necessarily mean it all took place in that instant. The Universe, for example, is still 'evolving'. In the same way that we can advance programme an activity (*eg* a TV recording, or a night light), so the Creator can decree an activity to take place when His specified conditions are ready—as, *for example* I Timothy 2:6, Ephesians 1:4.

Take, for example, *day three*. (Genesis 1:9-13). The planet had until now been enveloped in water. Now God issues the decree that the waters should recede. The process isn't described but may have included huge earthquakes, volcanic action, mountain-building *etc.* And could have lasted millions of years.

Then at a suitable moment (before the *fourth* creation day) the rest of the decree (v.11) is enacted—creating vegetation. Ages pass by, as the newly created DNA diversifies in accordance with in-built natural law as designed by the Creator.

So also for *day five*—when God created the templates for marine and aerial life, each '*...after its kind*'—which would then diversify prolifically through succeeding ages.

### Mankind

*Day six* was special. God created the DNA templates for land animals each reproducing '*...after its kind*' (*ie*, each species was designed to remain separate). The process was replicated, the animals reproducing and diversifying, and some species becoming extinct as time rolled by.

Then comes the climax and purpose of creation—the pinnacle of all creation, mankind. And created at God's pre-determined, pre-programmed, time. The LORD created man and woman from earth's elements—created perfect in their beginning—as a unique species, endowing them with a unique higher spirit capable of communicating and forming a relationship with Himself.

All the templates for living creatures (including humanity) were in their beginning perfectly equipped with all the necessary DNA, and with the potential for diversity (within each kind). There was also the potential for degeneracy—the consequence of broken natural law. 'Cave-men' were contemporaries of Job (*ch* 30:1-8)! There were, too, degenerative genetic abnormalities—(Genesis 6:4). Ω

**COMMENT INVITED on this controversial topic!**

### Challenge...cont'd

*to fear the Lord, and you will succeed in learning about God*' (Proverbs 2:2-5). The prophet Jeremiah adds: '*...you will seek Me and find Me - when you search for me with all your heart*' (*ch* 29:13).

It's vital then, that we heed Paul's admonition: '*...these were more noble than those in Thessalonica, they received the word with all readiness of mind, every day examining the Writings whether those things were so*'. The challenge is that we change. Ω

## ATHLETIC FAITH

Even small towns today sport one or more ‘gyms’. Villages, too, have at least an ‘exercise class’—perhaps in the village or church hall. It was a situation familiar to the brethren in the world of the first century Hellenistic world where gymnasia were often impressive structures teeming with keep-fit fans. The apostle Paul often used the imagery of ‘the Games’ and these gyms in his exhortations to the church.

The use of a variety of words relating to athletics serves to highlight the context in which the Christian lives in our world—a world that is hostile to those who would try to follow the way exemplified by Jesus.

### Related NT words

<i>athleo...</i>	to contend
<i>agonizo..</i>	to struggle
<i>pykteuo...</i>	to box
<i>techo...</i>	to run
<i>paleo</i>	wrestle

*Contend*, for example, in its various forms derives from competing in the arena. No-one does so, Paul insists, unless he or she conforms to the rules of the sport (II Timothy 2:5). Discipline is paramount: ‘...you know that many runners enter a race, and only one of them wins the prize. So run to win! Athletes work hard to win a crown that cannot last, but we do it for a crown that will last forever. I don’t run without a goal. And I don’t box by beating my fists in the air. I keep my body under control and make it my slave, so I won’t lose out after telling the good news to others’ (I Corinthians 9:24-27 CEV).

The apostle reflects the words of Jesus: ‘...the gate to life is very narrow. The road that leads there is so hard to follow that only a few people find it’ (Matthew 7: 14 CEV).

Another word—to *struggle*—implies this challenge of true Christianity. In the original it conveys a familiar concept—agony (*agonizo*)! The Philippian brethren were suffering as did Paul—the imagery is of the carnage of a gladiatorial contest in the arena (Philippians 1:30).

Our struggle—against ‘the world, the flesh, the devil’—is, however, unbelievably worthwhile. Said Paul: ‘...we do it for a crown that will last forever. I don’t run without a goal’. What is laid up for the faithful conquering Christian far surpasses any laurels won in the arena. Ω

## A Portrait of God

We’ve become familiar with the Police sketch artist who attempts a life-like drawing of an offender as described by a witness. Too often it bears little relationship to the reality. It’s the same with the concept many folk have of God.

He is branded by some as a fearsome bloodthirsty monster, unsuccessfully at war with the devil and desperately trying against the odds to ‘save’ everyone. To clear up His mess He sent Jesus who by contrast was loving and kind to all.

A more accurate ‘identikit’ includes the following characteristics:

- The God of the Old Testament is identical to Jesus Christ, having the same nature and both having one mind and purpose; their characters are not in conflict, and Jesus is one with the Father
- He is not in a losing battle with Satan
- God is not trying to ‘save the world’ but acts according to a plan carefully devised before creation
- He selects those who respond to His invitation to now become His spirit sons and daughters
- His desire is for all mankind to enter His Family; the opportunity will be extended in His chosen time to everyone
- His love for ‘the world’ is expressed in part by His readiness to kill—even to the point of genocide—when His plan, which is always for the good of mankind, is at risk
- God is not a monster who endlessly burns the ‘wicked’ in so-called ‘hell fire’
- He is the Father of an expanding spirit Family and is not a ‘trinity’
- In its proper time God will establish His Kingdom [Family] *on Earth*, with Jesus as King and His Law universally applied; faithful believers will serve with Him
- God’s character and His purpose never changes
- He has not authorised any change of liturgy since the death of the apostles; the Creator is identified by the days He has set aside for worship—the weekly seventh-day Sabbath and the annual holy days of Scripture (Leviticus 23). He abhors any substitution by other days plucked from mythology. Ω

## Is Hell Painful?

The concept of ‘hell’ - a burning furnace that will torment the disembodied wicked soul for eternity—lies at the heart of Christian theology, Catholic and Protestant. And, indeed, most major faiths.

It has, for centuries, been waved as a big stick to encourage repentance. Who would want to endure for endless ages the agonizing pain of burning—but never completely burning up? The momentary pain of a match burn is suffering enough!

Although more muted today—we are perhaps more squeamish—it remains an underlying theme especially for evangelicals. Indeed for some the thought that such punishment exists for unrepentant sinners is savoured with relish.

But just how painful is ‘hell’?

Any serious Bible student will understand that the word translated as ‘hell’ represents more than one Hebrew and Greek original. Most often the reference is simply to the grave, to our final resting place in a tomb, in the ground, at sea—wherever.

### Fires of Hell

The burning hell of Christianity is the Greek *ge'henna*. In origin it refers to the Valley of Hinnom just outside the ancient city walls of Jerusalem. In the valley was an ‘everlasting fire’—in effect the city’s rubbish dump in which was burned up the detritus common to any settled community, together with deceased criminals and dead animals.

You may have noted in that description a clue to the truth about hell. *Ge'henna* was for rubbish, for rotting carcasses, for dead dogs and cats. It was for the bodies of executed (crucified) criminals. *It wasn't for the living.*

A vision given to Daniel illustrates this. ‘...I beheld at that time because of the voice of the great words which the horn spoke; I beheld even till the beast was slain, and his body destroyed, and he was given to be burned with fire’ (ch 7:11). Whether this is symbolic or literal the principle applies. The ‘beast’ was first killed, then

burned—just like the rubbish in the municipal dump.

Further confirmation is offered by the prophet Isaiah: ‘...they shall go forth, and look upon the carcasses of the men that have transgressed against me: for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched; and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh’ (ch 66:24).

### Complete Destruction

In such a ‘recycling plant’ the fire is never quenched until it completely burns up the debris. Any carrion that escapes the flames is devoured by maggots (‘remarkable eating machines’)—which don’t ‘die’ but pupate into flies. There is no reason to consider this scenario as other than literal.

Further insight may be offered by an incident after the millennium: ‘...when the thousand years are at an end’ (Revelation 20). Satan stirs up a worldwide rebellion by those opposed to the World Ruler, Jesus Christ. They attack the faithful but ‘...fire came down out of heaven and devoured them’ (v.9). These will be speedily, permanently and supernaturally destroyed —not cast into an everlasting ‘hell-fire’ from which there is no hope of escape.

At the closure of this earthly phase of the divine plan, Jesus will hand over the new creation to the Father: ‘...Later on, comes the End, when He is to surrender the Kingship to God, the Father, when He shall have overthrown all other government and all other authority and power. For He must continue King until He shall have put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy that is to be overthrown is Death’ (I Corinthians 15: 24-26). There will be no impurity in all the universe. God will be ‘...all in all’ (v. 28) Ω

[Should the reader believe that each of us has an ‘immortal soul’ that survives our physical death you are invited to request the free article **When Someone Dies.**]

*Apologies that once again we are providing  
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