

outreach

The Newsletter of the Churches of God, UK

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Biblical teaching
Matthew 28:19-20*

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Where Did I Learn That?

It's a fact of life that we go about daily life knowing that there's a lot of stuff out there that we *don't* know. Scientific stuff, certainly. And surely economics.

The snippets we do know (or *think* we know) are gleaned from television and radio documentaries or the newspapers or our wider reading. Or maybe from the words of wisdom from our parents—those 'old wives tales'—and from our formal schooling. But as we experience life we learn that too often those 'snippets' are just plain wrong, superseded by new discoveries, new theories.

The Source

Our 'philosophy of life' is a case in point. Grow up with atheist parents and you may never hear the word 'god', except perhaps as a response to sudden pain! By contrast, grow up in a religious family and you may become a rabid hell-fire preacher. Not that some views don't change as we mature.

Sometimes a concept, a thought, takes hold of an individual and even becomes universal—for example the idea that each of us has 'an immortal soul'. Or that God is multi-faceted (Hinduism) or that He is 'three-in-one' (Christianity) or that our destiny is heaven—or hell. We grow up, whatever our faith, within our own culture simply accepting the status quo, and most don't think to challenge it.

What Is Truth?

Nor do most Christians question their beliefs. If that's what the pastor or the priest says—'well, he or she is the expert and that's good enough for me'. The Christian Scriptures, however, insist on the concept of 'truth'. There is a divinely-revealed way, a way documented in the Scriptures. Deviation from what is there revealed locks us into harmful error. But, said Jesus: '*...the truth will free you*'.

Trust...and Obey

Some of those errors can have catastrophic consequences. Without the Holy Spirit, for example, we are not truly Christian. Writes Paul to the Romans: '*...if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his*' (ch 8:9). Surely that's an issue of vital importance.

And how do we receive his Spirit? Peter told his hearers: '*...[the Holy Spirit], who is God's gift to everyone who obeys God*' (Acts 5:32).

If, then, we are not in submission to God, not obeying His revealed Word, we cannot with certainty-claim a part in His Kingdom, cannot expect to be recognized as a true child of His. *That* is catastrophic.

We may indeed have changed our life-style and now reflect many Christian values. Have we, however, stepped beyond calling him 'Lord'? Note these words of Jesus, recorded by Matthew: '*...Not everyone who says to Me, Lord! Lord! shall enter the kingdom of Heaven,*

but he who does the will of My Father in Heaven' (ch 7:21). More, for he adds: '*...Many will say to Me in that day, Lord! Lord! Did we not prophesy in Your name, and through Your name throw out demons, and through Your name do many wonderful works? And then I will say to them I never knew you! Depart from Me, those working lawlessness!*'

That's frightening—that somehow we have adopted beliefs, perhaps healed people, or even 'moved a mountain' or led some to Christ only to find that we are, at the end, rejected by Jesus.

God is orderly, not a God of confusion but a God of law. To be truly His children we *heed* His Word, we note what He expects of us as revealed in the Scriptures—and we willingly submit ourselves to His will, no matter what.

True Worship

Back to your 'philosophy of life'. What did you learn, as your opinions were formed, about how God wants us to worship Him? Did you get it from Mum and Dad, from the pastor, from Sunday School? Recall that Jesus says: '*...God is Spirit, and those who worship God must be led by the Spirit to worship him according to the truth*' (John 4:24 CEV). And '*...Your word is truth*' (ch 17:17).

Does how and when *you* worship the Creator reflect that Word? Or, as with ancient Israel, have you substituted other forms of worship for God's? Have you substituted foreign forms gleaned from other faiths, other gods, for the true worship of the true God?

Note what God relays through Moses:

'...take heed to yourself that you do not become snared by following them [heathen]... and that you do not ask about their gods, saying, How did these nations serve their gods, that I too may do likewise? You shall not do so to Jehovah your God. For every abomination to Jehovah, which He hates, they have done to their gods All the things I command you, be careful to do it. You shall not add to it, nor take away from it

Deuteronomy 12:30-32

Jesus approvingly cited, in parable, Abraham's words: '*...If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded, even though one rose from the dead*' (Luke 16:31).

Christianity began as a continuation of the ancient faith as recorded in the Old Testament with, of

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 thou 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:

www.myyouthbiblelessons.com

Provided courtesy of Lynn Meakin

course, the essential insight of Messiah, Jesus. Not much time elapsed, however, till here and there the prevailing heathen culture was insidiously inserted into the churches: '*...certain men crept in secretly, those having been of old previously written into this condemnation, ungodly ones perverting the grace of our God for unbridled lust, and denying the only Master, God, even our Lord Jesus Christ*' (Jude 4). And before long those heathen practices became the norm—practices condemned outright by God.

Search the Scriptures. See what God has revealed and compare your own practices. Do you find there that any of the true people of God—in either Old or New Testament writings—observed Hallowe'en? Or Sunday? Or Easter? Or Christmas? Such practices were foreign to the first Christians, serving to obscure the true faith. They were idolatrous.

Again—search the Scriptures, for they contain '*...the faith once for all delivered to the saints*' (Jude 3). The apostle Paul urged his readers: '*...flee idolatry*' (I Corinthians 10:14). Let's not go the way of ancient Israel. Ω

Read our booklet: **Truth about Christmas**

http://www.cgom.org/Publications/Booklets/Plain_Truth_Christmas.html

The Feast of the Nativity

<http://www.cgom.org/Publications/Articles/TheFeastOfTheNativity.pdf>

Letter from England

Hello from Lincoln,

There's a tendency to assume that numerical growth is a mark of God's blessing, that abundance of 'fruit' is good. But the larger the organization, it seems, the more widely and easily the fruit is corrupted, and the more remote the believer becomes. In the smaller organization (the 'small church') the influence for error is more limited.

For the seeker after Biblical truth the largest denominations—often millions strong—are the last place to look for it! There has been too much compromise with what the Bible says, too much a settling for the lowest common doctrinal denominator, too much importing of ideas foreign to the Scriptures.

Added to this is the fundamental error of what could be called 'empire building', that bib means better. The first Christians, by contrast, assembled in small groups. They were intimate, supportive, in co-operation with other like-minded assemblies, the leadership of each independent assembly answerable directly to Jesus Christ. What you might call 'congregational' in contrast to a centralized format.

Inevitably, popular and charismatic leaders arose in the early post-apostolic church, and came to dominate several assemblies. Denominations formed, a complex web of 'offices' was spun—and error multiplied. Denominations became the cultural norm.

The *Churches of God Outreach Ministries* is not such a denomination, but a conduit by which the associated local assemblies may have a wider influence. All subscribe, in general, to an agreed body of beliefs and code of practice which we believe well reflects the Biblical pattern. And each learned from other churches, as in Thessalonica (I, *ch* 2:14).

Many Christians, dismayed at the divisions in the church, are living in spiritual isolation—not wishing to again be part of what they perceived as an oppressive organizations. It is our desire to provide a home for such. Our spiritual gifts can and should, of course, be exercised at home—but they are given to us to use for the benefit of the church you attend. And beyond.

Those of our readers sympathetic to the concept of the 'small church' or who perhaps already host such a group are welcome to associate with us. The *Outreach Ministries* web site will give you a flavour of our ethos, and contains numerous items with which to 'feed the flock'. There is, too, the benefit of access to an experienced leadership.

James

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September/
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**Jesus is God
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Join a Church?

There is a bewildering choice of churches calling for the new Christian to join. Many have attended evangelistic campaigns and study groups and been drawn to Christianity. Where should you go? What criteria should you consider before making a commitment? Here are a few.

- Remember that you are not joining an organization but committing *for life* to Jesus Christ
...some churches confuse loyalty to themselves as loyalty to Jesus
- Baptism into Christ is merely the first step in perhaps a lifetime of change and adversity
...too often a church seeks numbers, and your money, but doesn't teach God's way of life
- Beware a church that seeks to control all aspects of your life
...God wants you to develop as an individual, to use His spiritual gifts for the benefit of all
- Check that the pastor doesn't claim his to be 'the one and only true church'
...the Father knows who are His, and all such are family members of His church—wherever they fellowship
- Carefully compare a church's teachings with that of the Scriptures
...flee a church that demands obedience to its teachings alone, for salvation
- Don't assume a large mega-church has divine blessing and teaches the true faith
...Jesus warns that his way is difficult and that 'there are few who find it'
- You will never find a church that's perfect
...any assembly is composed of imperfect people
- Be sure that the whole word of God is preached
...based on the whole of the Word of God and His commands

Ω

The Umbrella Church

'Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!'

Unity—it's a concept close to the talking heads of all Christian churches, discussed in endless conferences and almost universally seen as the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. Is it as mythical as that gold?

- Given human nature it isn't surprising that churches divide, whether Baptist or Methodist or Anglican and a host of others, spawning an alphabet of titles. Even those denominations which claim to be 'wholly Bible based' are by no means immune, generating divisions
- For some, the reason for the division is plain to see. Take, for example, our own roots. A century and a half ago some Christians in the United States came to an understanding that *Sunday* observance did not reflect the teaching of the Christian Scriptures, that we best represent that teaching by observing the *seventh* day of the week—from Friday evening to Saturday evening. The idea, of course wasn't new, even then, for it had been planted in the USA by some Christians from England in the sixteen hundreds—notably through a man called Steven Mumford. Since then the original church has produced multiple offspring—not surprising, given that we are each endowed with a thinking mind! Differences are inevitable—but not necessarily ungodly!
- So doctrine (teachings), unsurprisingly, is a major cause of separation, and whole denominations have formed because a Bible truth has been rejected by a parent church. It is inevitable, since the treasures of Scripture lie in a deep lake. This lake, however, has limitations. It has not changed since the passing of the New Testament apostles: *'...earnestly contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints'*, writes Jude (Jude 3). Over the centuries variant teachings have emerged, but such are acceptable only as they are supported by the Scriptures, which urge us to *'...grow in grace and knowledge'*
- From time to time, however, buried doctrinal treasures are re-discovered, so some change (growth) is inevitable. If such a jewel highlights prior serious error (as with the Sabbath) division may become necessary, though we would hope that everyone would come to understand the new teaching—once proven! Sadly, *minor* differences, too, become a bogus reason for division. Power, authority, is not readily relinquished. Nor financial control
- But leaders, and not less church leaders, prefer to keep a grip on those levers of power, and in the church—as in III John—those who remain faithful to the word of Scripture are sometimes evicted from the visible church. The proliferation of divisive doctrines is enhanced by the influence of these errant leaders—and the larger the sphere of influence the more brethren are led astray. It is no less so today. A charismatic leader (bishop, apostle, pope, president) or a cabal sitting at the top of a denomination can speedily impose false doctrine on thousands (or millions) of subservient, and at times unthinking, brethren—jeopardising their Christian walk
- But follow the New Testament pattern of independent small groups generally of like mind who work together, and the effect of false teaching is limited. For the influence of co-operating leaders acts as a restraint on rash teaching. In place of intimate hands-on apostolic oversight, of course, we now have their inspired teachings authentically preserved in the Scriptures
- Each independent assembly in whatever city, whatever country, has its own agenda appropriate to its own language and culture. However, as James (*ch 3*) warns: *'...we should not all try to become teachers. In fact, teachers will be judged more strictly than others'*. The leadership, he says, is held directly responsible by Jesus Christ for what they teach! A solemn warning indeed
- House churches, clearly, are limited in their outreach ability, in the programmes they can implement. But, *if they follow the New Testament pattern*, they work in harmony with other like-minded assemblies—sharing pulpits and facilities, acting together in joint outreach and assembly, submitting to one another. And using the spiritual gifts of every member
- Ideally, co-ordination is needed, and an 'umbrella organization' is helpful. The *Churches of God Outreach Ministries* and its associated *Churches of God, UK* (joint publishers of **New Horizons**) are such, and welcome other like-minded groups and individuals to associate
- Under this 'umbrella' is a shelter from false teachings, welcoming fellowship, an opportunity to 'grow in grace and knowledge' and to freely employ for the benefit of all the spiritual gifts imparted at your baptism Ω

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