

The New Horizons Newsletter

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providing
leadership,
information and
Biblical teaching

Matthew 28:19-20

representing
Churches of God Outreach
Ministries



WHY FEAR DEATH?

Most of us, it's claimed, no longer list death as our number one fear. Available end-of-life medical care removes the pain for many. Then as a last resort there's *Dignitas* to ease our way out of this life.

We might also consider the decline of religion! Until recent years there loomed the after life. There was, too, a 'fear of God' that fuelled the fear of death. That, however, has largely faded. Increasing numbers—at least in the West—no longer believe in 'hell' - or heaven, for that matter. So what's to fear beyond any suffering in the passing.

Judgment

Historic Christianity, however, had a different take. In the words of the Scriptures: *'...it is appointed to men once to die, and after this, Judgment'* (Hebrews 9:27). As Jesus amplified: *'...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).

In the past, preachers like early eighteenth century Jonathan Edwards scared his hearers with lurid tales of the judgment that awaited them upon death! He was known as a 'fire and brimstone' preacher.

Judgment, though—not a sentence. It's a period when each individual is assessed over time (by Jesus and his 'joint-heirs' - Matthew 19:28). They are judged after having been raised from their graves, not having been part of God's 'elect' in their first life.

The apostle John received this message from Jesus: *'...I saw the dead, the small and the great, standing before God. And books were opened. And another Book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were*

judged out of the things written in the books, according to their works' (Revelation 20:12). Then comes the sentence, which may indeed incur *gehenna* ('hell') - the ultimate destiny for those who even then totally reject God and His gracious provision of eternal life through Jesus. Puff! Gone in a flash—without any further consciousness. A wasted life.

Read: **Is Hell Real?**

God's Remedy

Of course, you'll find preachers who will offer you an escape, a quick prescription for immortality: *'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved'*. *'Only believe'*. *'Just pray this prayer'*. All so easy, all so simple. But only partially true—and therefore dangerous.

Jesus made clear that coming to him is no joy-ride. Believe, certainly. But hear this: *'...Go in through the narrow gate. The gate to destruction is wide, and the road that leads there is easy to follow. A lot of people go through that gate. For narrow is the gate, and constricted is the way that leads away into life, The road that leads there is so hard to follow that only a few people find it'* (Matthew 7:13-14). The words of the one who experienced it.

Moreover he told his disciples: *'...Do you think that I came to give peace in the earth? No, I say to you, But rather division. For from now on [those] in one house will have been divided, three against two, and two against three'* (Luke 12:51-53). You may lose family (as did Jesus), your friends may desert, you may lose your job.

Calling

Is it a surprise, then, that the Father is selective in those He chooses to be with Him for eternity? He needs stayers! His church is commissioned to announce His message, *cont'd p.4*

It's not in the Book!

You turn up for an event—only to find it has been cancelled. You plan a picnic—and it pours. You look forward to a big night out—and go down with ‘flu. We are used to such disappointments—that’s life!

Then you get curious about some of your beliefs only to find they don’t fit the facts. The moon isn’t green cheese. The earth isn’t flat. Matter isn’t solid and can be in two places at once. And—you can’t find your long-held Christian beliefs in Christianity’s source Book—the Bible. Now *that* could present some long-term issues.

Let’s look at some misunderstandings.

Hell

As most think of it, hell [*gehenna* - ‘fire and brimstone’] as a place for the wicked doesn’t exist—yet. But *everyone* when they die goes to ‘hell’ [*hades*] - the state in which the human spirit resides after death—unconscious until resurrected. Only the ultimately rebellious die and their body incinerated.

Sunday Observance

Sorry—not in the Book. The Book teaches observance of the *seventh* day, Saturday. It took more than three centuries for the pagan Sunday observance to supersede the day kept by Jesus, the apostles and the early church, with just a minority continuing to observe the seventh day. Millions of Christians now observe it worldwide.

Christmas/Easter

Puzzling that neither gets a mention. Except for a brief reference in the Old Testament where God strongly condemns them, and some veiled warning references by the apostle Peter. But with clear evidence that God-appointed festivals were and should still be observed.

Immortal soul

Not there. That’s the lie Satan taught to Adam and Eve: ‘...*you shall surely not die*’. God only is immortal. Those in whom resides God’s immortal Spirit will *put on* immortality at the first resurrection at the return of Christ.

Heaven

No—the saved do not go there. They remain in God’s care (as inert spirits) until Jesus returns, when they reign with him firmly on Earth. In the end, the Father comes *from* heaven to reside on Earth.

Law

No—it’s not ‘done away’. Jesus makes clear in the Scriptures that God’s Law undergirds all Christian behaviour. When the Father draws us to Jesus we are to set aside our law-breaking (‘repentance’) and are baptized by immersion as a symbol of our becoming a ‘new creature’ in Christ.

It is to God’s Word, the Christian Bible, all of it, that we must look for the authentic teaching of Jesus. He

Letter from England

Hello from Lincolnshire

In over fifty years in the Church of God it has been a privilege for my wife, Sarah, and I to have known many brethren from around the world. Indeed we remain in touch all those years with many such great church friends. Sadly they are a decreasing number! Age and illness takes its toll.

Perhaps as distressing as their loss are those who have not stayed the course, but have been distracted by life’s pressures into worldly pursuits. In the past we have attended church festivals in the joyous company of over a thousand like-minded brethren. Not any more. For, as Jesus predicted, ‘...*the love of many grows cold*’.

Others who no longer fellowship with ‘us’ and have taken a different path still cling to their core belief of salvation through Jesus—they certainly don’t deny him, and are accepted by him (Matthew 10:32). And, like all God’s children they, too, benefit from the Father’s patient and loving correction to prepare for His Kingdom (Hebrews 12:5-11). *None* of us has yet reached a perfect understanding of ‘the truth’!

The many (myriad!) strands of the faith, each with its own perspective of ‘doctrine’ and with its own clientele (*ie* attracted by its ethos), would do well to introduce mechanisms by which they can co-operate with one another in the furtherance of the Gospel message. For each has a view which may contribute to our mutual success. That’s probably the least that the Master would expect.

A trend towards secrecy, for example, could recognize that church may have something to share with other brethren. Or, if ‘doctrinal purity’ is your ‘big thing’ you might in humility perceive that none of us have doctrinal perfection but have yet unrecognized defects and can learn from others. (Differences between Church of God groups are wafer-thin!) Suspicious of the leadership of other churches? Well—they, too, serve Jesus Christ and he is their leader as he is yours. Show love, and leave them in his care. *Pray for one another!*

Open services. A welcome to visitors. Shared festivals. Exchange of preachers and teachers. Joint projects in outreach. Toleration of minor differences yet holding firm to foundation teaching. Don’t condemn. Refer isolated ‘members’ to an accessible alternative assembly. Just some to get going!

James

warned that many would pervert his message and urged us to be constantly on our guard for false teachings—and teachers! Ω

Studies on such topics and more are available on-line or from our addresses

THE ENDURING WORD

Over the centuries since Jesus rose from the dead the message he taught, the Gospel, has had a roller-coaster ride in the effectiveness by which it has been proclaimed. After explosive growth in the first few years with many thousands 'converted' the church leadership succumbed to the pressures of the surrounding false religions—notably Mithraism—and to secular pressure, to personal advancement.

The Message was firmly rooted in the Scriptures of the Old Testament, in the words and practice of Jesus Christ, and in the word of the inspired apostles: '... [My Word] shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in what I sent it to do!' (Isaiah 55:11).

The church, which Jesus said would never die, came close to extinction at the hand of the apostate Satanically-inspired mediaeval imposters masquerading as Christianity. Only a faint flame continued to bear witness to truth. Appalled by this spiritual darkness enlightened men stirred by God's Spirit and at the risk—and reality—of martyrdom began to translate and publicise the Scriptures for all to read.

In 1517 Martin Luther exposed the corruption of the apostate church, and preachers like John Wesley (1703-1791) brought the Word to masses resulting in changed lives. The Methodist and Puritan revivals in Britain and America laid the foundations for the deeper understanding of Jesus's teaching.

Around the world in ensuing centuries individuals and societies fanned the flame of truth and spread the Word—multiple millions had easy access to God's Word as recorded in the Christian Scriptures—in many languages (now over 1,700 full Bibles and 2,500 partial) and dialects.

As noted elsewhere, the original message has been veiled, misunderstood, distorted—even before the apostles had died (II Peter 3:15-16). The Bible was suppressed by the mediaeval church and the candle of truth flickered—but continued to enlighten in obscure corners as believers gradually cast aside the overlay of idolatrous practices.

Notably, the way in which God has prescribed His children should approach Him in worship was restored. Such practices as *Christmas* and *Easter* and *Sunday* were replaced by the Biblical observances. Long-held and near universal false beliefs such as the 'immortal soul', *heaven* as the final destiny of the righteous, and *hell* for the wicked were abandoned.

Slowly the church is learning the true meaning of the Word of God—the divine truths revealed by Jesus, the apostles and the prophets of old.

*'Your word is true from the beginning:
and every one of your righteous judgments
endures for ever' (Psalm 119:160)*

The Christian Society

"It gives us more than we can take. I tells us there are to be no passengers or parasites. If man doesn't work he oughtn't to eat. Everyone's work is to produce something good: there will be no manufacture of silly luxuries and then of sillier advertisements to persuade us to buy them. And there is no swank, no putting on airs...Christian society insists on obedience—obedience (and outward marks of respect) from all of us to properly-appointed magistrates, from children to parents and (I'm afraid this is going to be very unpopular) from wives to husbands. It is to be a cheerful society full of singing and rejoicing and regarding worry or anxiety as wrong. Courtesy is one of the Christian virtues."

(C. S. Lewis in a 1940 radio broadcast)

Written before the acquisitive society enveloped us in a sea of debt. Before the welfare state strangled enterprise and self-respect. Before the epidemic of childhood disobedience and 'teen-age' disrespect for authority and the swamping of society in a sea of immature youth culture. Before the downgrading of manhood and the abandonment of true femininity and the failure to lovingly discipline children in the path of civilised behaviour. Before the psychiatrist's chair encouraged dependence, and replaced the role of Bible-based counselling and true grit.

C S Lewis—a sage for the *twenty-first* century! **Ω**

'ALL ONE BODY'

UCG/LCG/COG/COGWA/PCG/COG7/
CGOM/CGI/ICG/CBCOG/
CEG/CCOG + + + +

We believe...

God the Creator exists
His Word—the Scriptures
Jesus is our Saviour
We must repent of sin
We shold be baptized
Sabbath is the 7th day
Jesus is coming back
He will reign on Earth
The resurrection of the 'saints'
The Bible festivals only

Er—*ONE?*...So why not work together, while cherishing our unique traditions. Don't we have the same God, the same Saviour, the same destiny? Let's get with the programme!

Prophecy in a Nutshell

The world is in chaos
God is in charge
It works out

Fear Death? ...cont'd from p.1

the Gospel—a task we have largely neglected, for in every generation only some heard the clear truth of it. But if that message seeps into your consciousness and you ponder it, then you have received God's invitation, His calling. And from those invited the Father will choose, select, elect, those to whom He will in this life offer salvation. *Trust Him—He is the Sovereign God!* Said Jesus (Matthew 22:14): '*...Many are called [Gk.kletos] but few are chosen [Gk.eklektos]*' .

Jesus, addressing this, described a banquet and selected his guests. They excused themselves—and the guest list was then thrown open to everyone. The Jews of his day rejected his invite to the Kingdom, and all mankind are now invited (Luke 14:16-24). But acceptance remains a personal choice.

Why?

The apostle Paul provides one reason why people don't accept the Father's invitation: '*...the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should not dawn upon them*' (II Corinthians 4:4). Or, as said Jesus in his parable of the sower ('*...the seed is the word*): '*... then comes the devil, and takes away the word from their heart, that they may not believe and be saved*' (Luke 8:12).

Other hearers simply don't give it much thought. The message, the invitation, doesn't sink into the depths of their being and any 'conversion experience' is superficial and passing. Others set out along the way of Christ but mundane responsibilities, the pursuit of sustenance, worldly distractions cause them to lose heart. Remember, Jesus did warn that it would be tough going! As noted: '*...few are chosen*' .

Endure to the End

Once a person entertains the message of the Gospel taught by Jesus and the Apostles, God the Father draws selected ['chosen'] individuals to Jesus Christ and his sacrifice: '*...No one is able to come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him, and I will raise him up in the last day*' (John 6:44).

Communicating with the apostle John, Jesus had this to say to all of his church: '*...he that overcomes [endures] and he that keeps my works unto the end, to him will I give authority over the nations*' (Revelation 2:26). Authority to guide the nations, to teach the world for a thousand years the one true way of life, (the Gospel), to oversee the reconstruction of a shattered planet—and to prepare for an eternity beyond the millennial reign of Jesus.

When Jesus returns from the Father he will be accompanied by angels and by the resurrected believers from all previous centuries (Matthew 24:31, I Thessalonians 4:16-17). These '*...with him are called and chosen and faithful*' (Revelation 17:14). Faithful, enduring, overcoming to the end—despite all the opposition, even persecution or martyrdom! *next column*

Festival 2015

The 2015 *Feast of Tabernacles* was celebrated in Harrison, Arkansas and was sponsored by *Church of God International*. 165 attended the first Holy Day and 178 on the Last Great Day, from CGI and other independent members of the Church of God. The Festival coordinator was Wynn Skelton of CGI. He did an excellent job of directing all the many activities. The main auditorium for Services and other activities was the Durand Convention Center .

We had fifteen messages, a youth day, two Bible Studies, a family game night, a movie night (*The Life of King David*), a pizza and raffle night, a Fun Show, and several shared meals. The messages were uplifting, corrective, and instructional. Yes, there were even a couple of free afternoons and evenings midst the busy schedule. A great time of worship, praise and fellowship was had among former and new friends. The oldest person at Harrison was a gentleman of 95 years young. The youngest will be born next Spring.

Wynn announced that the 2016 Festival will be held at Wagoner, Oklahoma, (Sequoyah State Park Lodge) about 50 miles southeast of Tulsa, OK. This was the last year at Harrison, Arkansas.

It was a great Feast!

Janice K Gregory
(Tulsa, OK CGOM)

Another Banquet

Death, however is not the end for those not yet chosen. We are used to seeing **RIP** with reference to those who have died—*Rest In Peace*. And that's exactly the state of the dead, good and bad! They are at rest, unconscious, unaware, at peace—and awaiting the call from the grave. Jesus confirms they will be returned from that 'grave' - wherever that may be: a tomb, at sea, cremated, lost.

All will be raised into a world no longer deceived by spiritual forces, this world's 'god' who is '*...the deceiver of the whole world*' (Revelation 12:9). A world restored to perfection after a thousand years of divine rule (*ch 20*).

Quite a plan, designed by a loving God who has made us free to choose our pathway through this life—and the next. *No-one* need lose, for their 'feast', their banquet, will come. **Ω**