

outreach

The New Horizons Newsletter

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God Invites You

How often—apart from the occasional expletive—does ‘God’ enter your thoughts? Not very often, I guess. Yet one day you are destined to meet Him face-to-face. And He knows what you have been up to! As says the Psalmist of the ‘wicked’: ‘...there is no fear [ie respect] of God before his eyes’ (36:1). (the ‘wicked’ in the Bible are those who are not in covenant relationship with God, and in all shades of rebellion to Him.)

The concept of an active divine being has, largely through our education, been all but wiped from memory, as has the concept of impending ‘judgment’. Centuries of scientific mal-reasoning have turned most of us in the Western world into sceptics, with God at best someone we turn to in our dire need.

Judgment to Come

However, as we are told in Hebrews: ‘...it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment’ (ch 9:27). And don’t most of us have a suspicion that he is right, that we will, ultimately, be called to account? (Forget the false ‘hell fire’.)

The notion that we are just a collection of highly organized cells that suddenly appeared out of nothingness fails to satisfy us. There must be something more, a reason for our existence as unique sentient, rational beings. And doesn’t that imply that we must answer for how we live? Doesn’t our sense of guilt at wrongdoing demand it? What about our in-built need for justice? That adequate response be made by the authorities to criminal behaviour, especially fierce if ‘I’ am involved.?

Divine Plan

But even if you don’t respect your Creator, or forget Him in the daily round, yet ‘...we all must appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive the

things done through the body, according to what he did, whether good or bad’. He, God, is alive and well. Not dead.

Nor will the grave hide you: ‘...Do not marvel at this, for 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).

The one who said that—and himself the coming Judge—is the very one sent to Earth with the remedy, Jesus the Messiah. Yet we have an in-built hostility to God that precludes a relationship with Him. To change that we must have His Spirit—a supernatural infusion of the divine that can transform us. No longer His enemy but His sons and daughters.

That requires our willingness to *change*, to align ourselves with His revealed will—what the Scriptures call ‘repentance’. And He offers that opportunity to all who are within ear-shot (II Peter 3:9). (He also has a plan for those who aren’t.) When we show willing He gently leads us along a path to Jesus: ‘...All that the Father gives me [Jesus] shall come to me; and him that comes to me I will in no wise cast out’ (John 6:37).

And having come we have his life-long support—no matter what challenges we may face as a Christian. (There will be many!) But the ‘reward’ if we endure to the end is beyond our comprehension.

That ‘end’ may be your life—or it may be his return as King of kings to reign over the entire planet. You will then be resurrected or transformed as a spirit Son of God to carry out the will of God. For a thousand years—and on into eternity.

‘Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for them that love him’ Ω

The One Church

Many brethren in the Sabbatarian church of God movement lament the visible lack of unity—unity of structure, lament the diversity of teaching, the divided leadership. It is manifest in the ‘alphabet soup’ used to identify the various denominations within the movement.

Some brethren harp back to the—mythical—‘unity’ administered from Pasadena. Although just one of various existing Sabbatarian denominations, the *Worldwide Church* was tightly structured and there was little room for dissent, with legitimate enquiry often suppressed. Inevitably the structure cracked and spawned a variety of separate denominations—each with wafer-thin doctrinal difference, though some have perpetuated the same strict ideology.

The early church, too, experienced the desire to follow a particular leader, as Paul chided the Corinthian church: ‘...you are yet carnal [unchanged] : for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are you not carnal, and walk as men? For while one says, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are you not carnal? (1Corinthians 3:3-4)

We should ask if ‘corporate’ unity is what Jesus proposed, or, is there another way. For an answer we must turn to the practice of the New Testament church - surely the template for all ages. The apostles and their immediate successors were dedicated to proclaiming Jesus’s message: ‘...Go therefore, and teach [Gk. disciple] all nations’ And having made disciples they were to baptize and begin ‘...teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you’ (Matthew 28:19-20).

The apostles implemented their strategy by gathering the disciples in groups (‘Gk *ecclesia* or invited ones, ie by God) - commonly known as ‘churches’. *A cts* charts their plan for this ‘teaching’ period: ‘... when they had preached the gospel [Gk. evangelized] to that city, and had taught [Gk. disciples] many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch (ch 14:21). They returned to these earlier sites of evangelism in order to ‘...ordain, [ie appoint] them elders in every church [local assembly]’ (v.23). Paul defines their role (Titus 1:4ff).

‘The societies which were instituted in the cities of the Roman Empire were united only by the ties of faith and charity. Independence and equality formed the basis of their internal constitution.’ And again, ‘Every society formed within itself a separate and independent republic and although the most distant of these little states maintained a mutual and friendly intercourse of letters and deputations, the Christian world was not yet connected by supreme authority or by legislative assembly’. Edward Gibbon

Self-government

Each of these assemblies was initially self-governing guided by suitably qualified elders, and acted in co-operation with other assemblies with each answerably adhering to the apostolic teaching—and

Letter from England

The desire to recover the United Kingdom’s sovereignty motivated the 2016 referendum on our relationship with Europe. As supine parliamentarians refuse to face the result the nation reels and the populace seethes with anger at the delay. (As an aside: read *Daniel 2:20-22*)

The accompanying short article is, I suppose, also about sovereignty: *who governs the local assembly?* The *Outreach Ministries* has addressed this issue and consequently concluded that each assembly should be independently governed—by qualified leaders *directly answerable to Jesus Christ*. Now that is scary! James warns: ‘...My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation’.

Having, however, emerged from the swamp of a hierarchical organization where for decades structure was firmly implanted in the psyche of the ministry and the brethren—there’s a reticence to fully co-operate with other assemblies. Perhaps it is a fear of interference, of the imposition of ‘controls’. (Just as in the late first century.)

One aspect of co-operation is that none of us is perfect—we can all learn. Input from other assemblies can enhance our service to the brethren, can help ease a burden, can enhance our outreach to our community, can share local talents where they perhaps are lacking—and *vice versa*. Dare I say can also identify a creeping false teaching. (We are all in this together!) And indeed enable us to share in a world-embracing outreach programme.

Independence is important. But it is also helpful to have a ‘hub’, a centre to co-ordinate activities—as we have at Tulsa. They welcome and value your input, and work hard at juggling personal and church. Essential—*your prayer support!*

James

able directly to Christ. He is the sole authority and personally oversees each assembly, as related by John to the Ephesian church: ‘...Remember therefore from whence you are fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto you quickly, and will remove your candlestick out of his place, except you repent’ (Revelation 2:5)

With independent assemblies there is a brake on empire-building—a curb on the financial backing to acquire extensive property, and a curb on wasteful bureaucracy. When a leadership hierarchy is introduced (as in the late first century church) then co-operation becomes competition. Resources are misused and dissipated on the material rather than on the spiritual—the proclamation of the Gospel message. Further, independence restricts the spread of divisive teachings which in a hierarchical setting, with its slant to supine acceptance, can infect many.

In the cause of unity, leaders of the disparate groups should carefully consider the apostolic pattern. Ω

Insight from Paul

The apostle Paul's letters shed a bright light on our walk with God

The thought of bursting from the grave at the resurrection can inspire a ream of questions. How does that happen? What sort of state will I be in—a spirit, a body? Will I be recognized? Is it scary? What if I don't like heights? The apostle addresses some of the queries reassuring us that the resurrection will be our greatest experience ever: '...*Death was swallowed up in victory*' (I Corinthians 15: 54).

Some of us, of course, may well be alive at that time—but the experience will be no less glorious. We are assured that our resurrection will coincide with that of now dead brethren, and we will be instantaneously transformed (v.52)—projected into a new joyous dimension where time doesn't exist: '*...we the living who remain to the coming of the Lord will not at all go before those who have fallen asleep*' (I Thesalonians 4:15).

Crumbled to dust or still alive—what happens to us? Each of us is endowed and motivated by our human 'spirit' (Job 32:8), and at the resurrection we will be '*...clothed upon with our house which is from heaven*' (II Corinthians 5:2). Our physical body '*...is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body*' (described in I Corinthians 15:42-46).

We are assured by another apostle, John, that '*...when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is*' (I John 3:2). And that is amazing! For Jesus tells us that the resurrection body is not a disembodied spirit but has substance: '*...handle me, and see; for a spirit has not flesh and bones, as you see me have*' (Luke 24:39). Yet he could pass through into a barred (probably: John 20:19) room (v.36) and ate ordinary food (v.42). Earlier, Jesus had appeared to two disciples on their way out of Jerusalem. As he dined with them at an inn '*...he vanished [Gk. became invisible] out of their sight*' (Luke 24:31). Nor should we forget his final ascension from the Mount of Olives to be with the Father.

Paul adds: '*...the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.*' (Romans 8:21). We, as Christians, are now being transformed by God's Spirit—then, we shall be like him. Ω

The human spirit is *not* immortal and will ultimately perish, for God alone is immortal. Christians will 'put on' immortality by virtue of the indwelling Spirit of God (I Timothy 1:17, 6:16).

'unclean spirits' have, by reason of their sin, been stripped of their angelic body. They are restless when not linked to a suitable physical body—their 'house' (cf Matthew 12:43).

Is Anybody There?

There's a common perception that after the return of Jesus Christ to Earth that the planet will be swept clean of humanity. (*Why*, then!) Christians, of course, will be resurrected to be with Christ. The unrepentant remainers will be destroyed in horrendous end-time wars, plagues, famines. *Isaiah's prophecy has been cited as evidence:*

'...The earth also is defiled under the inhabitants thereof; because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore hath the curse devoured the earth, and they that dwell therein are desolate: therefore the inhabitants of the earth are burned...' (ch 24:5-6)

Sounds fool-proof. But notice the dots, for the prophet completes his indictment thus: '*...and few men left*'. And he is not alone, for the same situation is described by another prophet, Zechariah. Having described the return of Messiah—when he sets foot on the Mount of Olives (east of Jerusalem)—the prophet tells us,

'...All the land shall be turned as a plain from Geba to Rimmon south of Jerusalem: and it shall be lifted up, and inhabited in her place it shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles' (v.16)

It is further depicted by the prophets who relay the good news that every nation will look to Jerusalem: '*...At that time they shall call Jerusalem the throne of the LORD; and all the nations shall be gathered unto it, to the name of the LORD, to Jerusalem: neither shall they walk any more after the imagination of their evil heart*' (Jeremiah 3:17). As Micah points out, it is a time of universal prosperity and peace, of harmony among all nations, of one all-embracing faith (ch 4).

Israel, too

There is another major stream of survivors who will return to the land of Israel—the modern descendants of the patriarch Jacob. Prophecy informs us that they will be dominant the world stage just prior to the return of Christ—and not only the *House of Judah*, now in occupation of the land of Israel. Jeremiah (6th century BC) adds, '*...In those days the house of Judah shall walk with the house of Israel, and they shall come together out of the land of the north to the land that I have given for an inheritance unto your fathers*' (v.18).

There can be no doubt that Earth will also, after the return of Christ and the saints, be populated with flesh and blood humans for a millennium dedicated to the restoration of our fractured planet—and the harvesting of multitudes for the Kingdom. Ω

BE RECONCILED

Having recently observed the *Day of Atonement* the matter of reconciliation should be very much in the minds of observant Christians. But cast your mind back to the origins of this ‘...feast of the Lord’ (Leviticus 23:4) and picture the Israelites clustered at the Tabernacle as the drama of the *Day of Atonement* unfolded. The High Priest in all his glorious attire enacted the ritual associated with the reconciliation of the Israelites with the Father. [In the divine plan to unfold in the end-time it extends to the whole world.]

The fasting crowds must surely have been emotionally involved with the proceedings. Could any one of them not be moved to be reconciled with a neighbour with whom he was at odds? And what about that church member worshipping alongside you at services, with whom you are ‘at odds’. Even with the indwelling Spirit we can indeed have fractured relationships—and they need to be healed and not left to fester to ‘infect’ the whole assembly.

Jesus did address this issue: ‘...If you offer your gift on the altar [come to worship], and remember there that your brother has something against you [your offence], leave your gift there before the altar, and go. First, be reconciled to your brother, and then coming, offer your gift’ (Matthew 5:23-24). Doesn’t this apply when we worship at our services? The words Jesus uses imply immediacy—*do it now!* He further addresses it from another perspective: ‘...if your brother may sin against you, go and reprove him between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother’ (ch 18:15).

The Lord also provides a process to follow when the offending brother ‘closes his ears’ - Matthew 18:16-17). The *law of love* must include reconciliation and harmony between brethren. As said Solomon of what God hates, ‘...and he who causes strife among brothers’ (Proverbs 6:19).

Such encounters between brethren are rare, as many disagreements are somewhat trivial, if annoying, and can be forgotten and forgiven. As Paul told the Corinthian brethren: ‘... there is already a failure with you all, that you have lawsuits with yourselves. Why not instead be wronged? Why not instead be defrauded? But you do wrong, and defraud, and these things to brothers!’ (1 Corinthians 6:8).

Reconciliation is a vital aspect of this annual holy day, and clearly important to our Saviour. **Ω**

Good Works

It’s a given that as a Christian when I encounter a need then I will help, if I have the resources. But not just as a Christian, as caring for the needy is part of being human. The patriarch Job sums up the attitude all of us should have - but so often don’t: ‘...Since the time I was young, I have cared for orphans and helped widows. I provided clothes for the poor, and I was praised for supplying woolen garments to keep them warm (Job 31:19-20). As James notes:

‘...what does it profit, my brethren, though a man say he has faith, and have not works? can faith save him? If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be warmed and filled; notwithstanding you give them not those things which are needful to the body; what does it profit? (ch 2:14-16)

Jesus, echoing Moses, reminds us to ‘...love your neighbor as yourself’. And Paul adds: ‘...let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith’ (Galatians 6:9-10). And during the millennial rule of Christ when all of mankind will be in submission to him, this is how all will be judged (Matthew 25:31ff)—by their works.

However, it is remarkable that, while encouraging personal ‘alms-giving’, there is no record in the Scriptures of *corporate* ‘good works’. Rather, the emphasis is on the proclamation of the message Jesus brought, the message of salvation, of becoming a part of the everlasting Kingdom of God., and caring especially for the physical and material needs of those God has invited to be in His Kingdom.

Yet this is what drives most mega-churches. The emphasis of their evangelism is on satisfying needs: on ‘feeding the poor’, on healing the sick, on building programmes. All, too often, in the competition to gain adherents—‘rice Christians’. Sadly, the underlying motive is too often financial gain—despite the poverty of many in the congregation. They are, however, peddling a false gospel and Jesus and his message is wholly lost in the ‘holy laughter’, in the ‘tongues-speaking’, in those ‘slain in the spirit’. And in the false hope of prosperity and health.

‘Good works’ also includes fasting (see previous column), observing God’s Sabbath and His holy days (Leviticus 23), patterning our lives on God’s guiding instructions—the ‘ten words’ of Exodus 20. Christians are enrolled in a programme of personal transformation as we submit to His will and put on the personal characteristics of our Saviour—the perfect reflection of our heavenly Father.

Listen to the apostle Paul, to a young church: ‘...as elect ones of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassions, kindness, humility, meekness, long-suffering, bearing with one another and forgiving yourselves, if anyone has a complaint against any; even as Christ forgave you, so also you should forgive. And above all these, love, which is the bond of perfectness’ (Colossians 3:12-14). **Ω**