

# outreach

## The Newsletter of the Churches of God, UK

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Matthew 28:19-20

representing



## Why Church?

Once upon a time those Christians who observe the seventh-day Sabbath (Saturday) had little choice in denominational allegiance. In this twenty-first century the choice is 'legion'. Yet for the most part there's little to choose between them doctrinally. (Could it be largely a matter of ego?)

A major factor is that of *governance*: how the church is organized. Each claims its own system is 'Biblical', while some refuse fellowship to those who are of a different view from their own. And *doctrinally* these Sabbatarian denominations differ little.

Of course, if there is but 'one true church' then all but one (or maybe all!) are false churches and the vast majority of Christians are 'lost'!

Common sense suggests that there never has been that kind of unity: *ie*, one distinct organized and coherent body. The apostolic struggles were to instil and maintain the teachings of Jesus—but not to enforce organizational unity from a central 'headquarters'. They did, however, urge unity and harmony within each local assembly.

Rather than exalting Christ alone, the brethren formed factions, each aligning with a preferred leader. Much like today! The apostle Paul fiercely labelled that as 'carnal'—stemming from our base nature.

Doctrine and order, of course, are vital aspects of the faith. But they

should be equally yoked to a matter that is too often ignored, or which tends to be placed on the back-burner. I refer to '... *[growing] in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*' (II Peter 3:18).

The apostle Paul, writing to the Colossian Christians, puts it like this: '*...walk worthily of the Lord unto all pleasing, bearing fruit in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God*' (ch 1:10).

Peter's admonition is indeed '*why church*'. It's purpose is to spiritually nourish those who sincerely seek after God. So in an assembly there are those who are seeking, those who are learning and those who are of spiritual maturity (*see I Corinthians 14:22-24*).

The purpose of our calling is that Christians become children of the Father (Ephesians 1:5). And that we '*...be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren*' (Romans 8:29). Jesus, who perfectly expresses the steadfast love of the Father.

That is a lifetime of being shaped and transformed by the Master Potter into the perfect character of Jesus.

*Church* is an important means by which Jesus leads and guides us to become '*...the perfect man*' (Ephesians 4:11-16).

[There is a distinct link between *order* and the individual Christian's *spiritual growth*. In a poorly-disciplined **cont'd p.4**

## African Outreach

*A message from Brian Davis*

*August 2009*

In two weeks we will leave for equatorial Africa. It's not a glorious place, no safaris there, not a land of plenty, not a place for vacations, not known for its beautiful buildings or resorts, not a place of comfort. Why do we want to go there? It's a place where the history and culture are dark. A history of slave trading and a culture of war and bloodshed, and chieftain homes built of mud mixed with blood. Ruins of slave holding pens are still there. Benin is still a center for voodoo and animism, animal and snake worship, witchcraft, why do we want to go?

When I use the word "we", I don't mean just my wife and I, but rather the inclusive concept of we, as a part of the body of Christ, doing a part of what the body of Christ should be doing.

A new song by Casting Crowns includes the lyrics, "*If we are the body, why aren't his arms reaching, why aren't his hands healing, why aren't his words teaching, why aren't his feet going? Why is his love not showing them that their is a way*"

We, as part of his body, reach out to the needy, to those who live in spiritual darkness or in spiritually dark places. As we reach out, in various ways, with his word and his way, we often hold back from reaching out to third world countries where it is the darkest and where the needs are the greatest and where our dollar can go the farthest. Why?

It's a question that includes how can we best help, what can we provide that would help the most? How would our literature and our preaching help those who speak other languages? For example, we visited a congregation of about 150 persons, and 17 languages were represented.

That begs the question who, who could speak to them in their language, who would also be converted, who would be dedicated, who would do follow up ministry, who would feed the flock, who would be zealous, who would be trained to lead, and most of all who would be trustworthy?

These questions and more, form barriers to an outreach. They are barriers to the body of Christ in it's outreach to the most needy places and peoples. They are barriers to bearing much fruit on the vine, as our Father desires, fruit for the lowly, weak and base of nations and tongues, among the poorest of the world.

The matter of how do we help and whom do we trust weighed heavy on my mind for over ten years. We all need to be involved in outreach, including to these

places. We need to be doers of good works as many scriptures admonish. We must know who and how! There are thousands of great stories and holy sounding pleas coming from dark places where the needy are, but many are clever scams. I read of congregations who supported a mission in Africa for a year, and then visited them only to find gross fraud. Matthew 24:12 tells the result; "and because of iniquity, (wickedness) the love of many shall wax cold." Most of us are both careful and fearful of giving because of fraud, yet for our love to grow cold and for us to hold back from good works to the poor makes us unfruitful on his vine.

Why Benin? Because the Lord has made the way there easier for us.

- *Other languages?* Yes, Michael Porter speaks several tribal languages plus French and English
- *Converted?* Yes, Michael grew up Muslim and converted to Christianity. He learned English in London, and returned to Africa to serve his people and to teach them Christianity. He and his wife Stella have labored for 30 years in this work
- *Able, Committed, Dedicated, Zealous,?* Yes!
- *The Sabbath?* Over ten years ago, Michael was a student in his Bible class, and pressed he father on the Sabbath question until he studied it further, and so both his family and flock he was feeding keep the Sabbath
- *Feast?* About nine years ago, Michael found a place to use a computer and sent out requests for information on how modern Christians keep the feasts of the Lord. Mama Margaret Forster, in Bermuda, answered his quest and sent him info. and literature. She also sent help for the brethren there to keep the feast of the Lord. A few years later, she sponsored a Church of God radio broadcast, "Born To Win", in Benin, Africa. The last email I received from her this year included news of her retirement and recent move back to her homeland, England
- *Who is trustworthy;* one of the biggest hurdles? In 2007, I wrote Michael to tell him that my wife and I would be going to Niger, Africa with a group on a mission trip. Michael came twelve hours, via bus, to meet us in Niger to work with me drilling water wells and setting hand pumps in villages there. Michael and I worked together every day, we ate together, sang together, prayed together, talked together, and studied together. His heart is true, his zeal is strong, his knowledge is secure, he is a dedicated and loyal laborer in that area for the Lord. He has raised up 8 congregations, including 7 outlying villages. He does outreaches to the poor in Benin, Togo and even in Niger. He plays *Born To Win* on the radio in Benin every Wednesday and Sabbath. Also, he and one of his associates do a follow up on the radio in both *cont'd p.4*

## On the Move

Moving house—we are in the throes of doing so!—is a stressful activity. Moving from your current fellowship is for many equally stressful, or more so.

Reasons for abandoning a church affiliation are legion. You may, for example, find your own denomination is locally unrepresented should you move area, or no longer be able to travel far for health or financial reasons. Perhaps you can't stand the leadership—or the preaching! The 'programme' may be set in a direction you deem to be unbiblical. You may be concerned that your God-given gifts are underused. Or, you have issues related to doctrine—especially if your church has radically changed its teachings.

### A Falling Away

The early 'primitive' church exemplifies this. It took only half a century or so for Christianity at large to abandon the apostolic teaching (which, of course, perfectly reflected the teachings of Jesus). There was a mass falling away from what the apostle Paul called 'the truth', and it has been observed that a different church—doctrinally and structurally—had by the end of the first Christian century hi-jacked the true faith.

That shouldn't come as a surprise, for there's a modern example—the *Worldwide Church of God*, which although in many ways flawed—did reflect long-lost Bible teaching. Yet following over half a century of growth, in a matter of a decade or two clear Bible teachings were eliminated.

A major change in the first century was the change from the divinely-appointed and ancient day for corporate worship—the seventh-day Sabbath, which identifies the God we worship—and the substitution of Sunday, a day not sanctioned by the Creator. It's a change that is reflected in the *Worldwide* church, which today now promotes the demise of the seventh-day Sabbath alongside other doctrinal deviations from Scripture.

Such huge cultural and doctrinal changes seriously impact devout members. There is confusion, denial that it's really happening, even anger that what may have been a lifetime of loyal ser-

vice and support is being trodden underfoot by a deceived and self-serving leadership.

### Your Choice

So there's a stark choice—stay or leave.

*Leave* and you may lose friendships forged over years, for in close-knit churches there's a tendency to outlaw 'deserters'. *Leave* and there's a lingering suspicion that you are departing the 'one true church'—an irrational fear implanted and nourished by cultic leadership. *Leave* and you may fear you will 'lose salvation'. And if you leave—where will you go?


The *Worldwide* church is not, of course, unique—for every highly-structured denomination poses similar challenges for its members. The break-up of our featured church spawned literally hundreds of off-shoots each serving up its own special cocktail of doctrine and governance. And, yes, some re-cycled all that was wrong about the parent church.

Others implemented some change—yet mostly missed the key concept that could unlock access to positive growth. You see, hierarchical structure stifles personal and corporate development. Authority vested in a 'monarch' or an oligarchy tends to corrupt, and spawns a bureaucracy that spins its wheels and hoovers financial resources. How, then, can you cope?

### Exit Strategy

Personal animosity aside (Jesus taught us how to handle this—Matthew 18:15-18), we *can* deal with the trauma of alienation from our church fellowship, though leaving should usually be a last resort:

- Carefully examine your motives
- Identify your reasons for moving on
- Discuss your intentions in prayer
- Don't be hasty
- Be advised by trusted brethren
- Talk it over with your pastor; stay calm!
- As much as lies in you, maintain personal friendships
- Choose carefully your new fellowship

Above all, don't neglect your Christian way of life. Without due care you could 'fall between two stools' and begin to neglect your precious spiritual life. *Get connected.* 

## Africa ....cont'd

- English and French. If they have any funds, in response to requests, they mail out literature and Bibles. {Read CEM's brief article on Michael and Stella *A Friend In Need*}

These are hurdles and bridges that would take us years to cross. God has laid a marvellous groundwork for us in Benin. He has shined a great light in a very dark place. His work in Benin is bearing good fruit, but our poor brethren there are still in need of our help. They need literature, Bibles in English and French, funds for transportation to Feasts of the Lord, mosquito nets for malaria protection, especially for children. They need clothing, pens, pencils, writing materials, feminine hygiene items, and many more things.

### *Why do we go there?*

- Because they are our brothers and sisters in Christ in need.
- Because there are others who stumble in darkness and need light. They need to taste good fruit
- from the vine so that they can exclaim, "The Lord tastes good", and therefore seek him.
- Because we as the body, are commissioned to go and reach and teach and love
- Because we are admonished to do good works and to continue a pattern of good works.
- Because, as individual Christians and as part of the body of Christ, we need them to reach out to as much as they need us. They need Christ in us to

supply their needs and; as James 2:14-16 admonishes us, that we need to do more than say kind words. "*I will pray for you brother*" is not enough for the needy, if we don't supply those things needful

- Bearing the fruits of love toward God and toward fellow man (the two greatest commandments) involves action and sacrifice, lest we become unfruitful and our love grow cold
- We go to bring to congregations, names and faces of both those in need and those who are trustworthy, faithful, dedicated laborers doing God's work there.

*Finally*, we go to help facilitate outreach with trust, to point to who is in real need, to show who is trustworthy, by bringing back trustworthy proof through reports and photos to enable a continual flow of love from the body of Christ so that His living water which flows into our innermost beings can also flow out to others . It's part of his plan.

### In Christ's service

P.S. We are going by our own means to bring back this information in order that 100% that is given will go directly to Benin, Africa. We will be giving a report on our trip as soon as we return during the Feast of Tabernacles in Squaw Valley. Follow up reports and photos will be at a later date.

*Brian Davis pastors a CGOM-associated congregation in Enid, Oklahoma*

### ***Correction and apologies:***

The dates for the annual *Tabernacles/eighth day* festivals were wrongly listed in the previous *Outreach*.

It should read: October 3-10

## Why Church? ...cont'd

assembly there's little opportunity to learn and apply the teaching. Similarly, in an assembly with all the brethren—except one!—in silent serried ranks doing little but listening to (not necessarily truly hearing ) the 'sermon' which is often 'old hat' and doctrinally sterile. We all depend on a regular flow of tailored encouragement as we 'serve one another'.

A useful alternative is small group interaction in a well-ordered but flexible and caring environment, with opportunity there and then to discover real life practical application of Bible principles, and to meaningfully pray for one another.] Ω

## ***New Horizons***

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