

The Newsletter of the Churches of God, UK

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Matthew 28:19-20

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Where's Grandad?

When an older family member suddenly disappears from their lives, children can be confused and certainly curious: *Where has he gone?* Adults can be equally confused!

If you have a strong belief system you may believe Grandad has 'gone to a better place'. Though Christians may be puzzled by the dichotomy between the concept of going straight to Heaven and the undoubted Bible claim that the mouldering body will one day be resurrected from the dust 'to be with the Lord'. Other faiths have their own version of life after death.

But for Christians there can be something of a dilemma. What if beloved, kind, generous old Uncle Tom was a drunk and a gambler, an adulterer? In which direction will the Grim Reaper despatch him—up, or down, heaven or hell? After all, he was a nicer person than some of your fellow-Christians! And after a long and happy marriage a Christian widow may grieve over the eternal fate of her unconverted former husband. Another may agonize over one who is presumed to have committed a 'mortal sin'.

Divine Plan

The good news is that we have a God who is '*... long-suffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression* (Numbers 14:18). Certainly He will call us all to judgment—but not in the way assumed by most believers. For He has a plan—not 'eternal hell-fire' but a resurrection to life. That plan has been outlined for us in a series of annual festivals. In this autumn season there are four such holy days.

One of these is the (feast of) *Taberna-*

cles (Heb. *sukkah*—a tent, a temporary dwelling). It is a seven-day festival that embraces mankind's tenancy of earth. The last day of the festival—'*...the great day of the feast*' (John 7:37)—has relevance to our subject (*ie* 'Grandad').

Tabernacles is multi-layered in its significance. These are detailed in our free article:

Tabernacles ...mankind in the flesh

End-time Scenario

The first of the autumn festivals (the *Day of Trumpets*) can be linked to events at the end-time: the return of Christ and the resurrection of the righteous dead (I Corinthians 15 *etc*). In the years prior to these momentous events earth and its inhabitants has been in turmoil under the heel of a religious dictatorship. Billions will die. And, like Uncle Tom, they die without Christ. What will become of them?

This is addressed by the festival of Tabernacles, the last day of which refers to it. We read about it in the book of Revelation, chapter twenty: '*... [the saints] lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished* (vv.4-5).

Death Not the End

Contrary to most Christian teaching, God is *not* attempting to 'save the world' - not at this time. His plan (which is detailed in the Spring festival round) is to choose potential candidates for His Kingdom. Those who remain faithful will '*...reign with him a thousand years*', during which His planet will be restored to its pristine glory after millennia of human destructiveness. Under the guidance of the resurrected saints millions—those who survived earth's dying days—will be prepared to enter His spirit **cont'd p.4**

MIND HOW YOU GO!

It's likely you have encountered this warning sometime along life's way. Perhaps heading home on a dark night. Or stumbling across an unlighted room, you remind yourself of it. And as we face the myriad other challenges of life we, too, have a need for 'light'.

The Psalmist highlights it thus: '*...Your Word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path*' (Psalm 119:105). Indeed the whole of the Scriptures is an expansion of his claim. The apostle Paul adds his insight: '*...whatever things were written before were written for our learning, so that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope*' (Romans 15:4).

The apostle often uses 'darkness' to describe the world in which we daily exist. But Jesus, the apostle John tells us, is 'light'. As Christians we are '*...of the light*'—meaning that we are walking in the light shed on our path by God's revealed Word and the example of Jesus. Upon our baptism we become grafted into the Israel of God, the divine law '*...written in our hearts*'. God's Spirit within us moves us to '*...live by every word of God*' as revealed in the Scriptures. Ω

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Letter from England

Hello from Lincoln

It's clear from current events and from the history of the church that 'summat's up'. There are numerous competing Christian denominations, many vying for the title of 'the one true church', supposedly the one and only administrative body representing the church being built by Jesus. And the assumption is that 'big is beautiful', the bigger the better. To this end vast sums are expended—in property, in media, in salaries. The result is that there are aspects of our mission that are unnecessarily made to be complicated, with a blurring of vision.

The message, however, is simple. The structure of 'the church' is simple. The administration is simple. So why do some denominations add layer upon layer of complexity? Why so much 'navel-gazing' at endless conferences? Take a look at those three 'simples'.

Our (the church in general) *mission* as the Body of Christ is to relay the message handed down by Jesus and his appointed apostles. It is simple: proclaim the good news of access to the Family of God through Jesus, and nourish to spiritual maturity those who respond.

As to the *structure* of the Church of God, it could

not—contrary to the various arrogant claims to be 'the one true church'—be more simple. For as a local assembly is founded, an informed leadership is appointed to oversee the spiritual growth and welfare of the brethren. It continues independently but in co-operation in outreach with other like-minded assemblies. It is responsible to Christ as Head as revealed in the Scriptures. It is 'a light set on a hill'—a witness in its geographical area (*cf* Luke 24:47). And as it becomes established, as God adds to them, it will form 'daughter' assemblies.

The *administration*, too, is simple. There is no burdensome central 'headquarters' draining resources into endless conferences, committees, salaries, pensions, roles and rules, acquisition of properties. Through the church's history vast sums have been squandered on such activities. A distraction from the commission assigned us.

All of this reflects the pattern set out in the practice of the church in the New Testament era. There never has been one 'mega-church'.

No! The church is local. It is small. It is manageable. It is time to focus on the fundamentals. Time to allow *Jesus* to guide and direct His church. And it is time for the empire-building to stop.

James

*You are invited to request
the free article:*

The Small Church

or view on line at cgom.org

Sabbath—a delight!

Isn't it true that many approach Sabbath with a sense of dread? All those restrictions on time—*"Does Sabbath start—or end—at 21.02 or is it 21.06?"*. Boring inactivity. A day under a cloud instead of bright sunshine. No telly—and guilt should we switch on early. Pre-prepared sandwiches for dinner. A long wait until sunset. [In Bible timing, Sabbath begins at sundown.]

Yet after a week with our 'noses to the grindstone' how refreshing to 'enter into God's rest'. A full twenty-four hours to relax, to re-charge our spiritual batteries away from our business activity. A time to absorb God's Word from the Scriptures. A time to praise our God and Redeemer. A time, where feasible, to fellowship with like-minded brothers and sisters in the faith. A time to serve where needed.


Sabbath, truly, is not an imposition but a time to enter joyfully. What makes it burdensome is tradition. For example, in Judaism electricity is not switched on during Sabbath. To shave is banned—as is driving, for many. And cooking. Travel is precisely limited.

Jesus, certainly (Matthew 12), had a more relaxed view of Sabbath observance than the tradition-bound Pharisees!

Christian Observance

Similar traditional practices have crept into the manner of observance by Christian Sabbath keepers. Such rules are often applied 'from the top' of a church organization, with threats of divine punishment for non-compliance. Add to these traditional restrictions the challenge experienced by many of downing tools mid-afternoon on winter Fridays.

The seventh-day Sabbath is appointed by God for our benefit (all mankind—not just Christians!) We also honour its Creator by observing it, ceasing from our 'daily grind'—the work that 'brings home the bacon'. Each Christian, with God's covenant now internalized (Hebrews 10:16-17), will rejoice in it, observing the Sabbath according to their spiritual enlightenment. Each of us is responsible to Jesus Christ for how we observe His day.

In all, we ought to recall Paul's advice, and warning: *'...why do you judge your brother? Or also why do you despise your brother? For all shall stand before the judgment seat of Christ'* (Romans 14:10). 

Millennium

God's plan is time-limited, represented by the seven days of the week—each representing about a thousand years of human civilisation. The *seventh* day marks the thousand year reign of Christ.

Time To Rest

The Creator blessed mankind with the Sabbath rest—before Adam had done a stroke of work! In future, God said, set aside every Sabbath day for communion with Me. Each evening begin to observe it for a complete cycle of 'evenings and mornings' - twenty-four hours. A time, primarily, for fellowship with Him, and also a time for physical refreshment.

In Bible lands latitudes, sunset was around 6pm to 7pm, providing year round approximately twelve hours of darkness and twelve of light. As said Jesus: *'...Are there not twelve hours in the day?'* Move farther north or south, however, and that becomes untrue.

In Belfast, for example, there may be as few as seven hours of daylight or as many as seventeen! Some areas don't have daylight for months on end. Not everyone in, for example the USA, keeps Sabbath at the same time—a sunset difference between east and west of four hours. Between New Zealand and California there can be a twenty hour difference.


It would not, then, be inappropriate—as we do not universally keep Sabbath at the same time—for Sabbath-observing churches, in the more northern (or southern) latitudes, to consider a Sabbath start at, say, 6pm—when that time slot reaches their time zone. Indeed this is already the practice in some extreme latitudes.

[Note: In Bible times, 'evening' began around 3pm to 4pm, the time of the evening sacrifice. 'Evening' does not equate with darkness—see Matthew 14:15, 16:2, Luke 24:29. It is not the 'moment of sunset' as traditionally interpreted by many. Precision of timing is a modern invention!]

Grandad ...cont'd from p.1

Kingdom. And all mankind down the ages, whom God has not yet called? They will be given their opportunity to respond to God's invitation—universal, available to all. They will be resurrected (in human flesh) from their resting place, to experience life under the benign rule of Jesus Christ—without the malign influence of Satanic powers. They will hear the same Gospel message as those called today, and given the same choice.

Over an appropriate life-span those who choose life will again experience the ups and downs of life in a perfect environment, the opportunity to build Christ-like character and become fitted for the divine Kingdom.

This phase of God's grand design will then be complete. All humanity will be spirit, and prepared to implement the Father's plan for eternity. 

That's Life!

Why do some folk seem to sail through adversity without batting an eyelid? Are they privy to some secret formula, a recipe for calm? Others—most of us, probably—struggle to cope with our day-to-day experiences, for ‘life sucks’. Millions of prescriptions for anti-depressants are issued yearly. Or, the coping strategy, too often, is poured from a bottle.

Why, we might ask, do some—and it's not gender-related!—take fright at the sight of a spider or a mouse, while others quite happily allow them to roam over them? The mere sight can evoke the ‘fight or flight’ reaction. Usually the latter!

Mr Calm will probably tell you something like ‘*catch yourself on—it's just a spider*’. Not very helpful to the terror stricken. Yet isn't that a bit like what Jesus tells us? In several texts in the Gospels he says ‘...*take no thought*’. He said, in other words: ‘...*Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow; for tomorrow shall be anxious for its own things. Sufficient to the day is the evil [ie, adversity, bad experiences] of it*’ (Matthew 6:34). He gives us a choice. We can choose not to worry! It's our personal responsibility to deal with our anxious thoughts, he says. But that, surely, is easier said than done.

Reality of Stress

It's very much a matter of self-discipline—and a proper understanding of ‘stress’—a much *misunderstood* concept. And faith. And our self-image.

The body's response to perceived danger (physical or psychological) is to produce an appropriate response in the form of blood sugar, adrenaline *etc*. If these are not ‘used up’—*ie* an over-reaction—they have an adverse physical effect.

You see, our bodies are designed to be in equilibrium, a balance of the physical, emotional and spiritual elements. This is in effect Christ-like character, ‘perfection’. (Said Jesus: ‘...*be you therefore perfect (Gk teleios = complete.)*’) When these elements are out of kilter, however, there's a reaction. This is what is called stress, experienced as some degree of discomfort (headaches, indigestion, sleeplessness, irritability *etc*) and often leading to quite serious illness if prolonged.

But the ‘event’ to which we often attribute the source of our stress is *not* the cause. Not an external threat, not a person no matter how obnoxious or irritating. The stress response is *within* us, physical—and something we can work at to put right. We change *ourselves* and not the perceived cause.

Jesus is the perfect example. We're told: ‘...*when he*

was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not’ (I Peter 2:23). Perfectly in balance—and completely unstressed.

The How

So the short solution to our life's challenges is—‘be perfect’! To the degree we incorporate the principles taught by Jesus to that extent we learn to reduce our inner stress response. Every adverse factor—anger, inordinate desire, dishonesty, greed *etc*—provokes a reaction in our bodies. Even an inadequate or poor diet, or medication, or recreational drugs have their adverse stressful effect on our body. The apostle Paul details some of these in his ‘put off, put on’ comments (*eg* Ephesians, 4). And the book of Proverbs is a university course in adjusting our lifestyle. The Scriptures spell out for us the real causes of our stress reactions. By them we can identify our personal stressors.

The apostle equates the putting on of these actions as ‘... *put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness*’. And in Colossians 3 he adds ‘...*put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him*’ (v.10). Elsewhere he says to the brethren: ‘...*of whom I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you*’ (Galatians 4:19).

Effort Plus

To move towards this ‘image’—the image the Father has for each and every person, no matter how far astray we may have wandered—our mind-set has to mirror that of Jesus. We can, of course, eliminate such adverse factors through our personal determination and willpower (*eg* anger management courses can be effective, or we can determine to be truthful, or we can eat healthily). But as Christians we have deep resources to draw on in overcoming our defects. (Remember, such defects are the true stressors!)

When we have the perfectly balanced psyche we *forgive*, we return *good for evil*, we *trust God* (faith), we *love*, we are *compassionate* and *merciful*. It's a package that few can achieve from our own resources.

Paul again: ‘...*The Spirit also helps our infirmities. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And He searching the hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God*’ (Romans 8:26-27).

Stress is essential for healthy living. But only to the extent that our stress response to external factors is proportionate. We are ‘made in the image of God’—and are in His eyes valuable, of great worth. To embrace this is at the heart of our self-image. Ω