

The New Horizons Newsletter

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rep- Matthew 28:19-20

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What Makes it ‘Moral’? *faire* attitude to violence, from street crime to further

“Nothing can of itself always be labelled as ‘wrong’” *Bishop Robinson*

From the pen of an Anglican Bishop that may sound strange. It could, though, be argued that war isn’t always ‘wrong’. Perhaps that it isn’t always wrong to steal—to eat, for example (Exodus 22:3-4). What of abortion—*always* ‘wrong’? Growing up I was warned about playing cards—the ‘devil’s cards’. For others it’s dancing, or alcohol, or co-habitation, or deviant sexual relationships, or war, or drugs. We all have our list!

But may we not be permitted to claim that serial murder is indeed ‘always wrong’? Or, the molesting of a small child? Or the gross neglect of the disabled or the elderly? Or criminal activity as an occupation?

The modern consensus is that anything goes, that if it doesn’t bother you then do it. And unless it seriously impinges on someone’s ‘rights’ then the Law isn’t bothered.

Consequences

There are, of course, consequences. That last statement concerning law enforcement brings to mind the sage comment of wise King Solomon: ‘...*Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil*’ (Ecclesiastes 8:11). Hence repeat offenders.

But that’s not all. Getting away with murder generates a *laissez-*

violence and more murder. A blind eye to rape begets more sexual violence. A casual attitude to the killing of the unborn undermines respect for life in every age group. The growing menace of sexually transmitted disease and infertility stems from the blasé attitude to sexual promiscuity of all kinds from serial co-habitation, to adultery, to same-sex relationships. (Witness the devastation wreaked by divorce.)

Such consequences affect everyone and are not the sole province of the ‘religious’. Atheists and humanists will experience the same consequences! And when they analyze human behaviour they must quickly reach the same conclusion—that standards are essential for a stable society.

Morality Defined

We don’t, then, have to wheel out the Bible to say ‘be good’. Moral standards are writ large on the canvas of human experience and are obvious to anyone who thinks carefully about them.

The Bible, however, puts these standards (morals) into the context of the sole purpose for life. The Creator formed mankind as the raw material which He could shape into beings who would reflect His character, become truly His children—for eternity. Those who embraced His ‘standards’ would become part of His Spirit Family—the Kingdom of God.

He formulated the planet and its resources to perfectly supply every need to sustain us. The health of our physical, psychological and

cont’d p.2

What Can the Righteous Do?

These are uncertain times. In the words of the hymn: ‘Change and decay in all around I see’. It is, of course, no new thing (the Law of Entropy), and it’s a theme picked up by the Psalmist: ‘...What can an honest person [KJV: the righteous] do when everything crumbles?’ Decay of every kind dogs every generation!

The frequent response is to ‘run and hide’, to squirrel away a nest-egg, to arm yourself, even to literally migrate to a supposedly safe location. But that’s not the solution posed by the Psalmist:

The LORD is my fortress! Don't say to me, "Escape like a bird to the mountains!" You tell me, "Watch out! Those evil people have put their arrows on their bows, and they are standing in the shadows, aiming at good people. What can an honest person do when everything crumbles?"

The LORD is sitting in his sacred temple on his throne in heaven. He knows everything we do because he sees us all.

The LORD tests honest people, but despises those who are cruel and love violence. He will send fiery coals and flaming sulfur down on the wicked, and they will drink nothing but a scorching wind.

The LORD always does right and wants justice done. Everyone who does right will see his face (Psalm 11)

King David (he wrote this song) had more reason than most to deal with troubling times. As his song explains, he ignored the doomsayers and placed his trust in his Creator. God testifies of him ‘...I have found David the son of Jesse to be a man in accordance with my heart, who will carry out all my will’ (Acts 13:22). By no means perfect, yet he continually looked to Him in every adversity. He understood clearly ‘...what can the righteous do?’

Another psalm expresses a similar thought:

‘He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide in the shade of the Almighty. I will say to Jehovah: My Refuge and my Fortress, my God; I will trust in Him. For He delivers you from the fowler's snare, from destruction's plague. With His feathers He will cover you, and under His wings you shall seek refuge; His truth is a shield and buckler. You shall not fear the terror of night, nor of the arrow that flies by day; of the plague that walks in darkness, nor of the destruction laying waste at noonday. A thousand shall fall by your side, and a myriad at your right hand; it shall not come near you’ (Psalm 91:1-7)

Stay close to God, he writes. Be guarded by the shield of truth. Trust Him—do not be afraid when calamity strikes but realize that ‘...God is always at work for the good of everyone who loves him. They are the ones God has chosen for his purpose’ (Romans 8:28).

The apostle Paul expressed similar thoughts: ‘...Be

anxious about nothing, but in everything by prayer and by petition with thanksgivings, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus’ (Philippians 4:6-7).

Trust in His guidance, unburden yourself to Him, be thankful for His loving care—and divine peace of mind will sustain you whatever trial befalls.

Jesus himself expresses it this way: ‘...Come to Me, all those laboring and being burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, because I am meek and lowly in heart, and you will find rest to your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light’ (Matthew 11:28-30).

When through repentance and baptism we accept that ‘yoke’, being bound to him, we commit to conducting our life by his standards and in accordance with his will. That is no bed of roses for, as Jesus explained: ‘...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. But the gate to life is very narrow. The road that leads there is so hard to follow that only a few people find it’. And he follows it with the warning: ‘...Watch out for false prophets!’ (Matthew 7:13-15).

Those false prophets—the pulpit teachers—suppress these crucial words of the Saviour, implying an easy ride through life if you ‘accept Jesus into your heart’. Yes—please do that, but then be ready to follow where he leads. Such an encounter with mankind’s one and only Saviour has to be a life-changing experience.

The apostle Peter assures us that God provides the resources to sustain us in that journey: ‘...Grace to you, and peace be multiplied by a full knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord. As His divine power has given to us all things pertaining to life and godliness through the full knowledge of the One calling us through glory and virtue, by which means He has given to us the very great and precious promises, so that through these you might be partakers of the divine nature, escaping from the corruption in the world by lust. For these things being in you, and abounding, they will make you not idle, not unfruitful in the full knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Ω

Moral...cont'd from p.1

spiritual needs depends on our observance of those in-built laws of life—true morality. Transgress those Laws and we experience adverse consequences.

The degree to which a society voluntarily adheres to such standards determines its vitality, its success as a nation. Ditch them and ultimately oblivion awaits. The pattern of rise and fall set by ancient Israel is a red flag of warning for all nations—especially those spiritually nourished by the Christian Scriptures. God’s protective hedge is uprooted as a consequence of our rejection of the laws of life. Ω

Insight from Paul

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

Each of mankind's diverse major faiths designate weekly and annual days for worship of their deity. In Islam, for example, weekly it is *Friday*. The rationale, from an Islamic source, is that '*...The best day on which the sun rises is the day of Friday. The day on which Adam was created, the day he was ushered into paradise, the day he came down to earth, the day when Allah has forgiven him his sin, the day he died and the Day when there will be the Resurrection*'. For Christians it is *Sunday*—considered, wrongly, to be the day Jesus was resurrected. And in the Hindu faith each day of the week is dedicated to one of their gods—*Sunday* to the sun, for example.

The apostle Paul, however, firmly clung to the day revealed to mankind by the Creator—the seventh day of the week, largely our Saturday. But does it matter?

The seventh-day Sabbath is often considered to be a Jewish institution and of no general relevance. And it was, of course, included in the Constitution given by God to ancient Israel. As such it was an identification mark of the God they worshipped: '*...Speak also unto the children of Israel, saying, Verily my sabbaths you shall keep: for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations; that you may know that I am the LORD that sanctifies you*' (Exodus 31:13).

But the choice of the seventh day of the week wasn't dreamed up around 1500BC. It was a gift—a rest from man's daily work and a way to commemorate God's awesome work of creation: '*...in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it*' (Exodus 20:11). And after the Jews had experienced deportation they were ultra careful at scrupulous observance of the day. That was the settled mindset of Paul—both before and after his conversion.

The book of *Acts* testifies to Paul's special regard for the 'Jewish' Sabbath: '*...according to Paul's custom, he went in to them and reasoned with them from the Scriptures on three Sabbaths*' (Acts 17:2). And, '*... [Paul] reasoned in the synagogue on every sabbath persuading both Jews and Greeks*' (ch 18:4). He taught the Colossian brethren: '*...do not let anyone judge you in eating, or in drinking, or in part of a feast, or of a new moon, or of sabbaths, which are a shadow of coming things*' (ch 2:16-17).

The Pharisees (Paul was one...*a Pharisee of the Pharisees*') had added burdensome restrictions—not in the written Law—to Sabbath observance. But Sabbath observance was the inescapable backdrop to every New Testament writer, not least the apostle Paul. Jesus observed it, as did the apostles, the entire Jewish community—and the early church of God for several centuries after Christ. It was still valued for the same reasons—rest, commemoration of Creation and the

As a reminder:

Trumpets:	October 3
Atonement:	October 12
Tabernacles:	October 17-23
Eighth Day:	October 24

Letter from England

Greetings from Lincolnshire

You may have noticed a distinct emphasis in this issue—a bias towards how and when we approach God in our worship. Of course, if we profess Christ and the Father we can—and do—come to Him at any time of day, any day of the week and the year. But there is no denying that God has throughout history prescribed a time for worship (*cp* Genesis 4:3).

We notice this just after creation, when the LORD set aside the seventh day of the week as 'holy', special. We see it in Moses day when he petitioned Pharaoh to let the people leave to hold a '*...festival in th wilderness*' (Exodus 5:1). And again as He established Israel as a nation at Sinai. (Exodus ch 19-20).


You may be aware that the northern House of Israel soon abandoned the appointed days and fell into idolatry, marrying the true faith with the pagan practices which surrounded them. As a result God withdrew His protection and they were soon overrun by foreigners. The House of Judah (the 'Jews') desecrated the Sabbath and again the barriers were removed—they experienced seventy years under foreign domination.

In view of this record I'm bemused that Bible readers of our own time fail to see the parallels of 'our' Christianity with the path taken by Israel and Judah! Although the seventh-day Sabbath is observed today by millions, yet the vast majority of professing Christians fiercely defend *Sunday* observance—a day dedicated to the sun. And how many of you revel in the observance of the clearly non-Christian festival of Christmas? Or Easter? After all, they long *pre-date* Christianity. Red body suits and over-indulgence and debt. Rabbits and eggs and sun-rise services. How do they relate to the pure Biblical faith?

For most professing Christians, sadly, such irrational practices are thoughtlessly accepted as Christian. But what about *you*—the Bible student? Once you allow yourself to question such traditions you come to the attention of our Father in Heaven He opens the door of a deeper understanding—a way that when followed leads to the Kingdom, the Family, of God.

I urge our readers to carefully, as did the Bereans '*... receive the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so*' (Acts 17:11).

James

sign that identified the one Creator God to whom worship should be directed—and when. 

Appointed Times

As the autumn round of God's appointed festivals approaches it is of interest to consider their origin. They are generally considered to be a burdensome yoke placed on ancient Israel to keep them subservient to their God. How wrong!

Take, for instance, that so 'Jewish' observance the weekly seventh-day Sabbath—a feast [Heb *mo'ed*] of the LORD. The origin of this 'appointed time' long predates the founding of the nation of Israel (of which the Jews were but a part). It coincides with human beginnings and was bestowed on mankind as a blessing, keeping us in mind of the one and only God's awesome power in the creation of the universe and thus our dependence on Him to supply every need (Mark2:27). Sever the relationship with the one true God and all goes haywire!

Annual festivals were commonplace in the ancient world, celebrating the harvests, and as such they were tied to the observance of the stars and planets. In describing the act of creation '*... God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons [Heb mo'ed, a feast, an appointed time], and for days, and years*' (Genesis 1:14).

Before Moses God's faithful 'walked' with Him, willingly and freely choosing to worship Him as He prescribed, and to follow His guidance—the 'Law of Life'. Joseph serves as an example choosing under temptation not to '*...sin against God*' (Genesis 39:1-9). When God chose to establish Israel as His model nation (c. 1500BC) these 'Laws' became the foundation of their national Constitution (Exodus 20) and as with any nation penalties were imposed for transgressions of the law.

Note Isaiah's prediction for the conditions at the end of man's rule: '*...the earth is profaned under those living in it, because they transgress laws and violate a statute, and break the everlasting covenant [Genesis 9:17—for 'all flesh']. On account of this a curse has devoured the land; and they who live in it are held guilty*' (Isaiah 24:5-6).

There is an unrecognized but unbreakable link between recognition of the Creator through His revealed form of weekly and annual worship—and our personal and national stability. Ω

These related articles are worth a read!

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

http://www.cgom.org/Publications/Booklets/Why_Observe_Sunday.htm

<http://www.cgom.org/Publications/Booklets/HolyDays.htm>

The Precious Gift

'...I praise you because of the wonderful way you created me. Everything you do is marvelous! Of this I have no doubt. Nothing about me is hidden from you! I was secretly woven together deep in the earth below, but with your own eyes you saw my body being formed' (Psalm 139)

No crawl out of primeval slime. No worms or fish or simians. Just a unique perfect creation in His image from the hands of an all-powerful yet all-loving Creator God. That's mankind—a complex being far beyond the comprehension of the brightest.

Life...

Life! It didn't begin with my—or your parents—conception but with that original spark breathed by the Creator into the first man and passed along in all its variety and complexity generation after generation by the mystery of DNA. So there, now, is *you*.

The greater becomes our far from complete understanding of human physical, mental and spiritual intricacy the more we can—like the psalmist—gasps in awe. Certainly '*...fearfully and wonderfully made*'. (KJV Psalm 139:14). A precious gift indeed, and surely to be cherished.

Near enough eight billion of us occupy our bountiful planet. We are born and then we go. Most of us die naturally after our '*...three score years and ten*'. (worldwide it averages 71 years at birth.) Millions leave life through natural disaster, accident, illness, war *etc.* That's the normal pattern of events.

...and Death

According to the *Abortion Clock* there have been, since 1980, almost one and a half *billion* are chosen to die before birth. Since *Roe v. Wade* (1973) 60 million have been aborted in the United States. In the United Kingdom one in four pregnancies are chosen to be aborted annually—185,571 in 2015, 18 million since the Abortion Act, 1967. Those figures have adverse implications on many fronts—not least the impact on manpower, immigration, intellectual loss as potential genius is thwarted, the cost to society, the effect on future health and fertility.

It gets worse. The destructive act of killing the innocent undermines respect for life for all age groups. Disrespect for life in the womb infects and undermines all of society. A living bundle of cells with the potential to become an eternal member of the Family of God is nonchalantly cast into the hospital furnace or flushed into the sewer.

A society that refuses to support unwanted pregnancies and tolerates—even encourages—abortion has lost respect for life itself. As with the ancient Canaanites who sacrificed their new-borns, or the late Roman Empire with its casual attitude to life, or the Weimar regime which had a death culture for the unborn—the demise of the nation is inevitable. Ω

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