

# BEYOND TODAY

The British & European Supplement

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## Itching ears or ears that heed God's Word

*Are we listening to God, or do we have a hankering to hear "some new thing"?*

**A**n eighteenth century French lawyer and political philosopher, Charles de Montesquieu, once said, "The less men think, the more they talk." Great talkers seem to do little else. Politicians often promise what they perceive people want to hear, yet rarely seem able to actually follow through. They know people have "itching ears" and will flock to someone who tells them what they want to hear, has something to say that sounds new or controversial or reveals some titbit of information that probably should best remain secret.

### Searching for truth or hankering for novelty?

It's not just politicians. The religious fraternity has many who preach doctrines that are not actually found in scripture, but which appeal to those who lack the willingness to truly seek God's guidance and bring their lives in line with it. It seems that whatever form of religion a person wants to practise, there is someone ready to offer him or her a home.

Some are genuinely seeking God's will in their lives. However, there are also many who are merely searching for other people who will agree with their particular viewpoint or for those who preach something new and interesting, be it true or not. The apostle Paul met this in Athens (Acts 17:21). When he outlined the gospel message of repentance and then the resurrection of the dead, many sneered and few were converted (verses 30-34).

Some don't want to accept the truth if it conflicts with



a personal agenda. Something in their minds doesn't want to follow the path that God lays out for those He calls (Romans 8:7).

It is easy to waste much time searching the internet for the "smooth words" that agree with a point of view or that depart onto a perceived interesting tangent, and thus avoid taking on board God's truth.

The prophet Isaiah wrote down God's assessment of Israel: "This is a rebellious people, lying children, children who will not hear the law of the LORD; who say to the seers, 'Do not see,' and to the prophets, 'Do not prophesy to us right things; speak to us smooth things, prophesy

deceits. Get out of the way, turn aside from the path, cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us” (Isaiah 30: 9-11).

Attitudes had changed very little by New Testament times. As previously mentioned, the apostle Paul came across this in Athens, where philosophers wanted him to tell them about the gospel not because they wanted to obey it but because they, their fellow Athenians and the foreigners who lived there “spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing” (Acts 17:16-21).

In the context of warning the young evangelist Timothy about the prevailing attitudes in “the last days” (2 Timothy 3:1-5), Paul instructed him to “Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke,

*During His earthly ministry Jesus compared those who heeded with those who heard and did nothing.*

exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfil your ministry” (2 Timothy 4:2-5).

It seems human beings have always been prone to this problem. Today we are constantly bombarded with information coming at us from all directions. Satan wants our ears to “itch” with excitement when we hear something like a piece of gossip or some new idea. We must always be careful when our ears start to “itch.”

In a dictionary, “itch” is defined as an irritation in the skin or an impatient desire. It is a desire for something that leads to excitement, novelty or a boost to our egos.

### **Heeding God’s words**

According to the dictionary the word “heed” means to “pay attention to; take notice of.” It is more than just hearing; it also includes doing.

Many Old Testament scriptures speak of the Almighty’s desire that His people would not just hear but do the things He commanded for their benefit. “And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments of the LORD and His statutes which I command you today for your good?” (Deuteronomy 10:12-13).

Sadly, despite their promise to obey, Israel rejected

God’s instructions (Psalm 81:11; Psalm 106:24-25).

During His earthly ministry, Jesus compared those who heeded with those who heard and did nothing. “Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall” (Matthew 7:24-27).

In the same vein, Christ’s half-brother James wrote, “But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does” (James 1:22-25).

Remember to be wary of those that talk much and do little. Let your own words be few (Ecclesiastes 5:2) but let your actions speak for you (Matthew 5:16).

Study the scriptures, pray for wisdom and above all heed the words of God. To help with your studies please request our 12 lesson *Bible Study Course* and our booklet *You Can Understand the Bible*.

*Adapted from a presentation by Mark Webb*

# When will Christ return?

In an increasingly dangerous, chaotic and uncertain world many Christians may wonder, “Where are we in Bible prophecy?” Most know that in Matthew chapter 24 Christ gave specific signs of the approaching end of man’s age. Is it possible to know how many of these signs of the end have been fulfilled and how many more are still awaiting fulfilment? Are there some that could only have been fulfilled in this present generation? Just what did Jesus mean when He said “This generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place”?

To learn more please request our Bible study aid *Seven Prophetic Signs Before Jesus Returns*.

# Have God's moral absolutes passed their sell by date?

*An ever-increasing number of people reject the Ten Commandments because these moral absolutes don't suit their lives and lifestyles.*

Is the Decalogue out of date in today's age of no absolutes? The attitudes and behaviours of many suggest that they believe this. The fact that the Hebrew Scriptures state that these commandments were "written with the finger of God" (Exodus 31:18) matters little to them. In this they reject the authority of God in favour of their own standards.

It was an ancient king of Israel who defined the commandments as "perfect" and "enlightening" to guide him as a ruler of his people. King David's description is recorded in Psalm 19:7-8.

## Hitler declared war on God's laws

On the other hand, a 20th century European dictator, Adolf Hitler, called the Ten Commandments "the curse from Mt. Sinai" and set out to destroy the very people who were identified with these laws (quoted in *The Ten Commandments*, edited by A. L. Robinson with preface by Hermann Rauschning, p vii). The dictator's reason for his view is given in his own words: "We are fighting against the most ancient curse that humanity has brought upon itself. We are fighting against the perversion of our soundest instincts . . . the day will come when I shall hold up against these commandments the tables of a new law. And

*A concerted effort was made to reject God's Ten Commandments by defining them as Jewish.*

history will recognise our movement as the great battle for humanity's liberation, a liberation from the curse of Mount Sinai." The leader of Nazi Germany abhorred any code of law that prevented him from living without any standards, especially those based on God's laws.

## Attitudes to God's laws changed after apostolic age

Were these commandments only intended for the ancient Israelites and are no longer binding on Christians? Justin Martyr, an early third-century "church father,"

thought so. In a letter to the Jewish community he stated, "For the Law promulgated at Horeb [Mt. Sinai] is now old and belongs to yourselves alone" (Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, editors, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, p. 100). Justin Martyr didn't go as far as calling the Ten Commandments a curse, but declared that there were "Christians" who believed that God's Law has been done away by the sacrifice of Christ and that those who based their moral conduct on the laws of God were "Judaising" Christians.

It was the original apostles who wrote the New Testament under divine inspiration. Yet from the early history of the Christian Church, a concerted effort was made to reject God's Commandments by defining them as Jewish. After the apostles died, the biblical Sabbath was rejected as being "Jewish", with Sunday being chosen as the new Sabbath. Even though the Sabbath was inaugurated at Creation, over 2000 years before the time of the Israelites, that evidently didn't matter to Justin Martyr.

## Abraham the law-abiding patriarch

Centuries before the Exodus, God appeared to Abraham with these words. "I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless" (Genesis 17:1). But how was the patriarch to lead a blameless or upright life? The answer is given in Genesis 26:5 where Abraham is praised by God for the obedience of His laws: "Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes and My laws."

This scriptural reference makes it clear that the spiritual "father of the faithful" (Galatians 3:29) expressed faith as a Christian must, and at the same time guided his life by God's laws. Both were required in his upright walk before the Creator. Of course Abraham was aware of God's compassion toward His creation and that he, like any other human being, fell short of leading a perfect life. However, that didn't prevent him from embracing the laws of God and striving to live by them.

After the Exodus of the Israelites, the Almighty ordered a portable Ark to be made to house the two stone tablets of the Ten Commandments. The lid of the Ark was

called the Mercy Seat. This showed that keeping God’s laws and the extension of mercy go hand in glove. Both are needed in our Christian life.

Having faith in God and keeping His laws is referred to in the New Testament in the last book of the Bible. There the apostle John defines true Christians as “those who keep the commandments of God and [express] the faith of Jesus” (Revelation 14:12).

The author of Hebrews wrote of the New Covenant: “I will put my laws in their mind and write them on their hearts” (Hebrews 8:10). Since this is quoted from the Old Testament, there is only one set of laws to which this could be referring.

### The source of moral standards

A thousand years before the advent of Christianity King David was inspired to write, “The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul” (Psalm 19:7). The Creator God is best equipped to tell His creation what is right and what is wrong. “For all your commandments are righteousness,” we are told in Psalm 119:172. It is for the Almighty to decide the moral standards by which we are to live.

Embracing God’s laws doesn’t in any way lessen our need for Jesus Christ’s atoning sacrifice. Since we all fall short of living by the standards that Jesus upheld, forgiveness of our imperfect state is an essential part of living righteously before God.

Are the Ten Commandments still in force today? Certainly! It wouldn’t make sense for God to require people in Old Testament times to live by His laws, then excuse people from keeping these same laws in New Testament

*How much better, happier, just and peaceful the world would be if humanity were to embrace the moral code the Creator revealed in His Word.*

times. When it comes to what is right and what is wrong, God doesn’t change (Malachi 3:6).

Just imagine how much better, happier, just and peaceful the world would be if humanity were to embrace the moral code the Creator revealed in His Word. Children respecting their parents. No murdering one’s fellow

## God’s laws reflect His character

A comparison between biblical descriptions of some of God’s personal characteristics and those of His law reveals common features.

Characteristic	God	God’s law
<b>Righteousness</b>	“The LORD is righteous in all His ways” (Psalm 145:17).	“All Your commandments are righteousness” (Psalm 119:172).
<b>Truth</b>	“You have redeemed me, O Lord God of truth” (Psalm 31:5).	“Your law is truth” (Psalm 119:142). “All Your commandments are truth” (Psalm 119:151).
<b>Holiness</b>	“And you shall be holy to Me, for I am holy” (Leviticus 20:26).	“Therefore the law is holy...” (Romans 7:12).
<b>Perfection</b>	Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect (Matthew 5:48).	“The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul” (Psalm 19:7).
<b>Just</b>	“He is the Rock, His work is perfect; for all His ways are justice” (Deuteronomy 32:4).	Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good (Romans 7:12).
<b>Spiritual</b>	“God is Spirit” (John 4:24).	“For we know that the law is spiritual” (Romans 7:14).
<b>Love</b>	“God is love” (1 John 4:8).	“Love is the fulfilment of the law” (Romans 13:10).

man. No illicit affairs with their devastating consequences. No stealing what belongs to another. No bearing false witness in order to damage reputations. No coveting another's goods and possessions.

What a happy world that would be!

The Ten Commandments will never pass their sell-by date, because these divine laws are applicable at all times and for all occasions.

Why not make God's laws an integral part of your life, for your personal well-being and for those with whom

you interact. Read online or request a printed copy of *The Ten Commandments*, which thoroughly explains each of them. It will show you how to get the best out of keeping each of those commandments "written with the finger of God."

For those interested in a more in-depth study of the New Covenant and how God's laws are still relevant today, please request our book *The New Covenant: Does it Abolish God's Law?*

G O Marx

# Lifespan research in line with biblical indications

*While life expectancy continues to increase for some, it seems there may be an upper age limit beyond which humans are unlikely to live.*

A recent report of the latest research into lifespans appeared in the journal *Nature* earlier this year. It states, "Our results suggest that the maximum lifespan of humans is fixed and subject to natural constraints" (5 October 2016).

Commenting on this research, *The Daily Telegraph* quotes Dr Jan Vijg, one of the senior researchers: "Further progress against infectious and chronic diseases may continue boosting average life expectancy, but not maximum lifespan" (Thursday 6 October 2016).

The longest *confirmed* lifespan was Jeanne Clemont, who attained 122 years and died in 1997. This apparently is unlikely to ever be exceeded, as a maximum possible lifespan for humans is estimated at between 115 and 125 years. Currently the oldest person still living is Emma Morana, a 116-year-old Italian.

What the researchers may not realise is that just before the Noachian Flood, God Himself may have set a limit of 120 years for the human lifespan (Genesis 6:3). The *IVP Bible Background Commentary* states, "The limitation of 120 years most likely refers to a reduction of the life span of humans, since it is in the context of a statement about mortality. While the verse is notoriously difficult to translate, modern consensus is moving toward translating it "My spirit will not remain in man forever," thus affirming mortality."

After the Flood, the multi-century lifespans experienced by the ancients began to fall to reach what was then considered a norm of 70-80 years (Psalm 90:10). Apart from the priest Jehoiada who attained 130 years (2 Chron-

icles 22-24), Aaron, the elder brother of Moses, appears to be the last person in the biblical records to exceed 120 years (Numbers 33:39). Moses was 120 when God ended his life (Deuteronomy 34:7).

Only in the last thirty years has life expectancy returned to anywhere near this apparent biblical limit. In 2014, Her Majesty the Queen, herself one of half a million nonagenarian Britons, had to increase her staff to cope with a 70 per cent jump in a decade of those eligible to receive the customary centennial birthday card from her (*The Daily Telegraph*, 24 September 2014). Currently centenarians in Britain number around 14,500.

Nevertheless, the aforementioned report states "improvements in survival with age tend to decline after age 100 and . . . the age of death of the world's oldest person has not increased since the 1990s."

There is however a conundrum. Not only do many people desire to live longer, preferably with continued health and vigour, but the very core of the human psyche expects and anticipates something more than this life alone offers.

There is a reason for this. King Solomon wrote that God has "put eternity in their hearts" (Ecclesiastes 3:11). This is why so many seek for something beyond this human life but so few discover what it is, as the rest of the verse explains.

To find out why human beings were created and what really happens at death, please request or download our booklets *Why Were You Born?* and *What Happens After Death?*

# Opinions are just opinions

*Religious, political or social viewpoints can all involve strong opinions. Holding such views is one thing, but expressing them, especially if done forcefully, can lead to division and even to persecution.*

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**H**ighly opinionated people tend either to irritate those who disagree with them, or attract those of a similar persuasion. As this world moves further away from God and His laws, Christians may find themselves in a quandary as to how to best explain God's teachings without causing unnecessary offence or being labelled a fanatic.

Here are two simple methods to lessen the chance for conflict.

## **Be wary of stating your own opinion**

Opinions, no matter how strongly held, are just that – opinions. If we do not argue with someone else's viewpoint, it does not mean that we agree, or disagree with it. We are simply keeping our own counsel.

When opportunity presented itself Jesus Christ did not offer an opinion of His own, but quoted scripture, deferring to the higher authority of God the Father. He did this in His encounter with Satan the devil, as recorded in the gospels of Matthew and Luke. Three times He responded to Satan's tempting words with scripture, in one case even calmly corrected the devil's attempt to pervert the meaning of a particular passage (Matthew 4:3-10).

It is better to quote chapter and verse to explain why we walk with God as He commanded (2 John 1:4). In this way we turn attention to God's opinion and not our own. If people choose to disbelieve God,

then that is between them and God.

If our opinion does not coincide with God's it is of no relevance anyway (Isaiah 55:8-9; 66:1-2).

There are passages of scripture where Jesus expressed what might appear at first sight as His own opinion. For example, He used the phrases "but I tell you" and "I tell you the truth" in many places in the gospels. However, He was still quoting the Father, leaving new information recorded for us (John 12:49-50; Hebrews 1:1-2).

## **Softly, softly**

When sending twelve of His disciples out on a preaching tour, Jesus warned them, "Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore, be wise as serpents and harmless as doves" (Matthew 10:16).

In the bird world, doves are softly spoken. Proverbs tells us, "A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger" (Proverbs 15:1). There is a way to respond to others using the fruits of God's Holy Spirit such as patience and self-control. We do not need to join in someone else's argument but should have our own emotions under control.

We can avoid much conflict if we keep our own counsel and use wisdom when we express God's word.

To learn more please request our free booklet *Making Life Work* and our free Bible Study Guide "Getting Along With People."

*Alex Preston*

# Forgiveness: a path to freedom

**T**owards the end of Disney's 2015 film version of "Cinderella," the heroine, about to depart for her "happy-ever after" life, looked at her cruel step-mother and said "I forgive you." She meant it. Not to have done so would have depreciated her joy, tainted her future and imprisoned her in the past.

Forgiveness in the real world is not always so easy. Anger, grief and resentment take time to work through. Threats of ongoing ill-treatment or unresolved injustice can make it one of the hardest things a human being can choose to do.

God's forgiveness frees us from sin, but we are required to forgive others too (Matthew 6:12-15). This is not the same as God's forgiveness, which blots out sin.

Our forgiveness of others leaves the offender in God's hands to deal with as He sees fit. It can be a long and difficult road, especially if we have been deeply hurt, but it frees us from the shackles of resentment, bitterness and grudges. It can bring peace of mind and allow us to move forward.

To study this important subject further, please request our free Bible study aid *Forgiveness Is Possible*.



**Q** I know some who claim that they have been to heaven and/or have seen God and the saints. Could this have happened?

*Reader from Croydon*

**A** Scripture states that no one has ever been to heaven, nor has anyone ever seen God, or heard His voice (John 1:18; 5:37). Only Jesus Christ has seen God the Father and gone to heaven (John 3:13). Thus, any claims of that nature are contrary to biblical teaching.

The Bible is also quite specific about the state of those deceased: “The dead know nothing” (Ecclesiastes 9:5).

Saints, all those who have been “sanctified in Christ Jesus” (1 Corinthians 1:2), who die in the Lord are described as being “asleep” and await the resurrection of the just. Notice 1 Thessalonians 4:14: “If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.” That will occur at Christ’s return (Matthew 24:20-31).

To the saints in Corinth, the apostle Paul wrote, “I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed” (1 Corinthians 15:51-52).

## Let the Bible Answer...

*Does the Bible comment on materialism?*

**Greed** is discouraged in Proverbs 15:27; Ecclesiastes 5:10-20; Luke 12:13-21; Revelation 18:9-19.

**Being content** is praised in Proverbs 15:16-17 and I Timothy 6:6-7. **Laying up “treasure in heaven”** is mentioned in Matthew 6:19-21.

The book of Daniel refers to a time at the end when those “who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake” (chapter 12:2). Some then receive everlasting life.

The writer of the book of Hebrews tells us in chapter 11, verses 39-40, “and all these [Old Testament saints], having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.”

So no one has been to heaven except Jesus Christ, who, for the time being, is still in heaven.

**Q** I am mystified by the reference to “before the golden bowl is broken” in Ecclesiastes 12:6. Can you explain it please?

*Reader from Devon*

**A** This section of scripture (verses 1-7) considers old age and death in poetic language. For example, “grinders” refer to teeth and “windows” to eyes (verse 3). The golden bowl seems to indicate a receptacle for oil in an oil lamp. When the silver cord snaps the bowl is broken and the oil spills. Since no more oil can reach the lamp it goes out, signifying death.

**Q** Can you please give me some more information on the “Great White Throne” judgement mentioned in the Bible.

*Reader from Devon*

**A** This judgement, mentioned in Revelation 20:11-15, seems to be an overall judgement on all human beings that have ever lived who were not judged in their lifetimes (Hebrews 9:27; 1 Peter 4:17-18).

In the context of chapter 20 we see that the “elect of God” – those called to salvation in this age of man – will already have been rewarded with God’s gift of everlasting life in the “first resurrection” and shall be ruling with Christ during the millennium (verses 4-6).

After the millennium is the judgement on those called “the rest of the dead” in verse 5. This will be a general resurrection to physical life of all those who did not receive an opportunity for salvation. They will live again and be judged accordingly. This will include those who have never really heard of Christ and also the Jewish people who at the time of Christ rejected their Saviour, as is made plain in Romans 11:1-2 and verse 26.

At the end of this period of time, those who reject God will face the second death (Revelation 20:15) – a fate awaiting all who refuse God’s offer of salvation (Hebrews 6:4-6). This sobering event is followed by a new heaven and a new earth and the arrival of God the Father on earth (Revelation 21:1-8).



# Letters From Our Readers

## Clear explanations

Thank you for the leaflets and booklets which aid my understanding of the word of God.

*Reader from Eastbourne*

Thank you for sending me your magazine. I find it explains about the terrible times in which we live. You make things so clear about what we can expect in the coming years.

*Reader from County Down*

Thank you for your ongoing teaching from which I benefit greatly. Please send me the free booklet "Heaven and Hell."

*Reader from Cheadle*

Thank you so much for your free booklets. I try to understand God's word through your explanations.

*Reader from Montrose*

## Prophetic messages

I appreciate you sending me the magazine. It provides God's prophetic messages to prepare us for the days ahead. I look forward to perhaps an article on the Great Tribulation

*Reader from Isle of Wight*

I love reading the prophecy in *Beyond Today*.

*Reader from Huddersfield*

I know that you did not ask me for anything but it takes money to print and post these papers. Moreover you seem to give the pure interpretation of the word of God. I find your prophetic writings quite realistic and profound and in line with the Bible.

*Reader from Birmingham*

*Editor's comment: The explanation of how our literature is funded can be found at the bottom of this page.*

## Does God Exist?

This is the fundamental/ultimate question that most people have been asking me about. Thanks for the booklet. I can pass it on to others to read. Could you also please send *Forgiveness Is Possible*?

*Reader from Essex*

## Rebuilding faith

I find this magazine and the articles based on the Bible are rebuilding my faith, which I lost. Please pray for me and my wife.

*Reader from Surrey*

## Forgiveness

In the Bible in the book of Matthew Jesus says "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those that trespass against us."

How realistic is the statement, "forgive and forget"? We can forgive but we can not forget.

*Reader from London*

*Editor's comment: By now you will have received the booklet you requested Forgiveness Is Possible. It explains that while we cannot easily forget a wrong, we are nonetheless to forgive and that forgiveness is a process.*

*It also advises how and when to "rebuke" or confront someone who has hurt us, or when it is more prudent to remove ourselves from a dangerous or abusive situation.*

*Please also read the item at the bottom of page 6 of this Supplement.*

**Our literature can be downloaded from our website, [www.ucg.org](http://www.ucg.org) or requested from the address at the bottom of the front page.**

## How our literature is funded

The publication of this Supplement and other literature is funded by the generosity of members of the Church, co-workers and our readers. Following Jesus Christ's instruction in Matthew 10:8, it is supplied free of charge so that His message can be made available to all. We are grateful to those who assist financially in the work done by the United Church of God.

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