

A 'New' Government But the Same Problems

*Government directives attempt to limit the effects of social problems.
But humanity can overcome crime, overspending,
and our lack of self-control through a 'heart transplant'.*

The United Kingdom's recent election brings some new faces to the political scene. In the next few months the government may well institute further measures that significantly impact our daily lives economically, socially and environmentally.

The state of the economy affects how many jobs are available, the value of investments, and the pension payouts that so many depend on in their later life. Decisions on how to run the country's infrastructure (and how to behave as a player on the world stage) affect tax levels and how much money remains in our pockets.

Over the last few decades we have developed a dependency on buying on credit, not helped by the huge debts most graduates in England and Wales are faced with on leaving university. We spend more than we have, and in the end those who do behave responsibly may

end up paying for those who don't.

Consider the state of our health. Although it places heavy demands on public and private health services, most do little to improve their nutrition or diet, or to take regular exercise. Obesity, smoking, 'recreational' drugs and excessive use of alcohol are threatening to become the spectre that poor

We need to recognise the consequences of our decisions and accept accountability.

sanitation and diseases caused by poverty were in the Victorian era. Schools, family environments and even religion appear to be unable to counter the escalation of violence, decline of moral standards and cancer of unscrupulous ambition. It seems that no one is able to provide a framework for improving the human psyche.

When all is said and done, the

consistent problems of our society will remain whichever party is in power.

Help is available to solve our problems

No government directive can solve the traditional problems of crime, overspending and the lack of self-control that often leads to major health problems.

From pre-teens to senior citizens, many previously unaffected age groups now overindulge in alcohol and 'junk' food and suffer from drug addiction. Work addiction and the stress that this brings will often destroy families as they seek bigger and better gadgets and 'gismos'.

Right now we do not want to face the consequences or be held accountable for our own problems. Yet we know that crime and other evils are fuelled by the destruction of family relationships. We are creating a generation of young

people in which many have seldom seen an example of a stable and caring relationship.

Yet there is hope for those willing to have a spiritual ‘heart transplant’ – the change of mind pictured by the Bible as ‘conversion’.

Upon seeing the effects of World War II, in 1945 General Douglas McArthur observed: ‘We have had our last chance. If we will not devise some greater and more equitable system, Armageddon will be at the door. *The problem basically is theological and involves a spiritual recrudescence and improvement of human character* that will synchronise with our almost matchless advances in science, art, literature, and all material and cultural developments of the past 2,000 years. *It must be of the spirit if we are to save the flesh*’ (emphasis added throughout).

The start of that change is personally acknowledging our part in promoting and supporting a society that is hostile to God. ‘For the fleshly mind is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can it be’ (Romans 8:7). Take a test. Would you lie to avoid paying tax? What about desperately wanting promotion at work – along with the better pay, benefits and status – and being willing to do almost anything to get it? God says we have all fallen short of His righteous standards (Romans 3:23). Yet He is willing to help us change and create a different society based on much better principles.

The sacrifice of Christ

Our relationship with the Father begins by being broken-hearted over our part in the death of His Son, who paid the penalty for our sins. This results in deep gratitude, a humble attitude, a willingness to learn from Him and a resolve with

Christ’s help to endeavour to live a life free from sin. This is part of what Scripture calls ‘repentance’.

The spring festivals set out by the Creator for us to observe show (1) that we need to accept the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ (the Passover), and then (2) overcome wrong influences (Days of Unleavened Bread).

This is possible (3) only through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit of God (the Day of Firstfruits or Pentecost) – Christ and the Father live in us to produce the beautiful attitudes, or beatitudes (Matthew 5, 6, 7) and the fruit of the Spirit:

It is possible to have a different mindset through the Holy Spirit of God.

‘love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness’ (Galatians 5:21-23).

A new kind of society

What would it be like to live in a society where everyone took responsibility for their own actions? What if we began to develop a caring frame of mind towards others and followed time-tested values and standards guaranteed to create ‘self-government’? What a stark contrast to the self-indulgent lifestyle often promoted by our consumer society.

‘My kingdom is not like this society,’ Jesus said nearly 2,000 years ago (John 18:36). After His return as King of kings (pictured by the annual Day of Trumpets, an autumn Holy Day) His government will redefine society as it expands throughout the earth.

People will see the results of

the law of God being put into the hearts and minds of men. National governments will dramatically change as people govern and moderate their own lives, led by the Holy Spirit to observe God’s law .

The peace of God

Should issues of today’s society consume our time and effort, raise our blood pressure, and give us sleepless nights? Jesus Christ told those who follow Him, ‘These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world’ (John 16:32-34).

The annual Feast of Firstfruits, or Pentecost, reminds us that it is possible to have a different mindset through the Holy Spirit of God. As we exercise restraint and moderation while living in this society, we develop the character of Jesus Christ. John 4:22-24 shows that God is seeking those who will worship Him now in spirit (our whole attitude and being) and truth (eternal values defined by the Creator of all).

Peter Hawkins

Recommended Reading

The United Church of God publishes a number of free booklets that help define our relationships with our fellow men and women and assist us in coping with the difficulties of having to live within this society. Specific suggestions are published in *Making Life Work* and *Transforming Your Life*. Please request these two publications by title.

Does a Christian Need to Go to Church?

*Whether to attend church, and which one, are among the most important decisions we can make in this life.
What are the characteristics of God's Church?*

Church attendance in the United Kingdom is certainly very close to an all-time low. Many observers label our secular society in Britain and Europe as *post-Christian*. Some lament the direction in which our paucity of right religious instruction is taking our peoples who inhabit a green and pleasant land, one of the choicest places to live on this planet.

The variety of churches has never been greater. A supermarket of brands awaits the potential church-goer. If you were searching for a church with which to worship God, what would you look for?

One religious survey showed that the top three factors people looked for were:

- Beliefs and doctrines
- Mutual comfort and care among the members
- The quality of the sermons

Notice that beliefs and doctrines were mentioned first. This is a good place to begin. From a biblical standpoint, certainly few, if any, points could be more important. But we are getting a little ahead of ourselves. The first question to ask is: Should we attend church at all?

What the Bible says

Most of our readers have a great

deal of respect for the Scriptures or they wouldn't be reading *The Good News* and this Supplement. But if you are not yet quite sure about the authority of God's Word over our individual and collective lives, we invite you to request our free booklets *Is the Bible True?* and *How to Understand the Bible*.

The New Testament strongly encourages Christians to attend

The Bible makes it clear that God's Church observes His law. It is described as a group of people 'who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.'

church regularly. One epistle specifically tells us: 'Let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, *not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together*, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much more as you see the Day approaching' (Hebrews 10:24-25, emphasis added throughout).

The Old Testament expresses the same thought in the form of a command. 'Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, *a holy convocation* [or '*commanded assembly*', New International Version]. You shall

do no work on it; it is the Sabbath of the LORD in all your dwellings' (Leviticus 23:3).

In terms of choosing a church based on fundamental beliefs, observing God's Sabbath is one of the most basic – so basic that it is enshrined in the Ten Commandments. (If you do not understand which day is the Christian Sabbath, please write for our free booklet *Sunset to Sunset: God's Sabbath Rest*.)

Equally as important are God's annual festivals. 'Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: "*The feasts of the LORD*, which you shall proclaim to be *holy convocations*, these are *My feasts*, . . . holy convocations which you shall proclaim at their appointed times"' (Leviticus 23:2, 4). Notice how God's ownership is clearly emphasised. These annual festivals belong to the Creator as does the weekly Sabbath day. They are not the exclusive property of any group of people; they are intended for all of humankind.

Leviticus 23 and other biblical passages show that these annual festivals and Holy Days are the Passover, the Festival of Unleavened Bread, Pentecost, the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, the Festival of Tabernacles and the

Last Great Day. (For a fuller description, please request our free booklet *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*.)

To sum up the importance of basic beliefs and doctrines, the Bible makes it clear that God's Church observes His law. It is described prophetically as a group of people 'who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ' (Revelation 12:17, cf. Romans 2:7).

Its members do not try to get around or do away with the requirements of God's biblical way of life. Remember that true Christianity is a way of life (Acts 9:2; 18:26; 19:9, 23, etc). The members follow the difficult, narrow and often unpopular way mentioned by Jesus Christ in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 7:13). Those who really want eternal life in God's Kingdom are pictured as living God's way (verse 14).

The same care

What is the Church?

Early in our study we should understand what the Church is and is not. It is definitely *not* a building. The glossary of the Translator's New Testament plainly tells us: 'Church in NT never means "building". It always represents either a group of committed Christians in any given locality [who] met to practice their religion, or the totality of these groups scattered throughout the world' (pp. 577-578).

The apostle Paul simply defines the Church as 'the body of Christ' (1 Corinthians 12:12, 27). It is a *spiritual organism*, not a physical edifice. Members go to the building where they meet, or they assemble in someone's

one for another

The apostle Paul urged the members at Corinth to 'have the same care for one another' (1 Corinthians 12:25).

Expressing proper love for the membership of the Church is an awesome responsibility on the shoulders of each member. Jesus Christ, the Founder of the Christian Church (Matthew 16:18), said 'By this shall all men know that you are My disciples, that you have love one for another' (John 13:35).

It is of utmost importance that we extend godly warmth and friendliness to other members and prospective members of the spiritual body of Christ, especially to new converts and visitors. We shouldn't ply them with endless questions or cause them to be uncomfortable in any way.

Role of the ministry

The membership is entitled to expect certain fundamental qualities from the elders' leadership. First and foremost is loyalty to God and His Word, and to the teachings and practices that Jesus Christ taught the apostles – namely 'the apostles' doctrine and fellowship' (Acts 2:42; cf. Ephesians 2:20).

In his teaching each elder must be 'rightly dividing the word of truth' (2 Timothy 2:15). Most other translations say 'rightly handling' or 'rightly explaining' or something to that effect. Perhaps the Revised English Bible has best grasped the basic sense of this passage as it simply says, 'Keep strictly to the true gospel.'

A British novelist made the following comment about many contemporary clerics: 'The modern clergyman has acquired in his study of the science which I believe is called exegesis *an astonishing facility for explaining things away*.' How regrettably true!

The ministry of the Word and prayer should be the priorities of every true minister of God (Acts 6:4). Paul urged Timothy to 'Preach the word.' How? 'With great patience and careful instruction.' Why? 'For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear' (2 Timothy 4:2-3, New International Version).

A faithful pastor will preach the truth of God's Word, *not* his own ideas. As one long-time Bible scholar and teacher explained: 'When he [a pastor] enters the pulpit, he is not an entirely free man . . . He is not at liberty to invent or choose his message. It

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Which Is God's Church: *Can You Be Sure?*

There are many claims made in the field of religion about which is the only true Church, but the evidence is often missing. How can we prove that the religious faith we hold is based on true evidence?

We live in an age of general distrust, which is expressed towards politicians in and out of government, towards the media, the police, the medical profession, judicial judgments of our courts and so on. This is equally true with religion. A measured distrust of religious organisations is understandable, but tarring all with the same brush is not a balanced approach.

The world embraces many religions, all different from one another. Even among the Christian world, there are hundreds of denominations claiming that they represent the true teachings of the Bible. How can you be sure that what you believe is biblically based and accurately reflects the teachings of Jesus Christ? There is a sure way.

Can we trust God's Word

The only effective way of gaining trust in God's divinely inspired Word is by reading what the Bible has to say. Once you do that you will begin to see the true teachings of Jesus and learn of God's plan in creating humankind. So where should you start?

The prophet Isaiah wrote in the 8th century BC that 'the word of

our God stands forever' (Isaiah 40:8). Despite many attempts to destroy the Holy Scriptures, the Bible still exists today and is readily available throughout the world, in print in most languages, as well as accessible via the Internet. The availability of God's Word is prophetically assured.

'For this commandment which I command you this day is not too mysterious for you, nor is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say, "Who shall ascend into heaven

God's true Church is that body of people who embrace the righteousness that comes from God's Word rather than the traditions of men.

for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?" Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, "Who shall go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?" But the word is very near you' (Deuteronomy 30:11-13).

No one in the developed world is excused by claiming that they are unable to access God's Word. We read in Isaiah: 'I have not spoken in secret, in a dark place of the earth; I did not say to the seed of Jacob, "Seek me in vain [in a waste place];

I, the Lord, speak righteousness, I declare things that are right'" (Isaiah. 45:19).

That is why God's true Church is that body of people who embrace the righteousness that comes from God's Word rather than the invented traditions of men – beliefs and practices that all too often have non-Christian and even pagan origins.

The Bible is, for true believers, the only source of true spiritual knowledge. It instructs us what is right and what is wrong in God's eyes. It provides the only message of hope man has in attaining everlasting life. It shows that Jesus Christ's atoning sacrifice plays a major part in salvation. Notice Acts 4:12, 'Nor is there

salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.'

The Bible isn't inaccessible, hard to locate, locked up somewhere no one can reach. It's readily available. At the time of the Exodus, only the ancient Israelites had access to God's Word (1 Kings 8:53; Amos 3:2). Today the Holy Scriptures have been translated into hundreds of languages and distributed around the world. God has kept His

promise that His Word will exist throughout the ages.

But that Word also tells us that God's true Church will exist in perpetuity (Matthew 16:18). Just as there was an Old Testament Church in the wilderness at the time of the Exodus (Acts 7:38), so Christ promised that in New Testament times He would build His Church, a group of people that would exist until His return (Matthew 16:18; 28:18-20).

But where is that Church? How can you recognise it?

Identifying the true Church

The true Church that Jesus founded bases its beliefs on God's inspired Word, both in the Old and New Testaments. It does not rely on humanly devised religious traditions that mainstream Christianity has adopted over the centuries. These manmade traditions have replaced the true worship as spelled out in the Bible.

In 2 Timothy 3:15 the apostle Paul shows us that the Holy Scriptures are the one source that does provide us the answer to the question of attaining everlasting

life. They 'are able to make us wise for salvation.' In the next verse we are reassured that 'all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.' The apostle Paul doesn't include humanly devised traditions in providing us the answer to the quest for everlasting life.

The way to go about identifying the true Church is to study the Bible for yourself and then compare the basic doctrines it contains with the doctrines that are being preached. The Greek Bereans in the New Testament did just that – not taking somebody else's word for it. They proved it for themselves.

Notice Acts 17:11: 'These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word in all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.' That is the only sure way of seeking out the true Church of God. Does your church rely on the Bible for its doctrines or does it adhere to doctrines that originated outside the Judeo/Christian Scriptures?

A ministry both written and personal

The readers of *The Good News* have access to topical issues which the magazine handles from a biblical perspective, including articles on doctrine and teaching. Then there is the 12-lesson *Bible Study Course*, which goes more deeply into the study of God's Word. *World News & Prophecy* focuses on prophetic events as foretold in the Bible. Many booklets on biblical subjects are also available free of charge. Our purpose is to guide our readers in studying the Bible for themselves (John 17:17).

'I will build My church,' Jesus Christ promised, and He reassures His Church in Matthew 28:20 that He will be with that body of believers even to the end of the age – because its teachings are based on God's Word rather than human traditions (Matthew 15:3).

If you would like information about the location of the various congregations of the United Church of God, please write or telephone. *The address is: P.O. Box 705, Watford, Herts WD19 6FZ; telephone: 020 8386 8467.*

Gerhard Marx

Does a Christian Need to Go to Church?

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has been committed to him, and it is for him to declare, expound and commend it to his hearers.' Faithfulness to the true message of God's Word is far more important than being an impressive orator.

Yet another important factor

One more factor is simply the ability of one's church to make a positive difference in the world.

The Church is commissioned to take the good news of the Kingdom of God to the world and faithfully teach others God's way of life as Jesus commanded (Matthew 24:14; 28:18-20). Any church not dedicated to performing this mission and task is seriously falling down on the job.

Some prospective churchgoers would like to be a part of a church that does God's work in the world. They would like to find a church actively fulfilling Christ's command to spread the gospel. But they may need some background knowledge to rightly evaluate which groups and organisations are obediently carrying out Christ's directives.

The Church is a big subject well worth covering in much greater detail than can be done in any single feature article. That is why the United Church of God has published an extensively researched booklet titled *The Church Jesus Built*. This is one of the most important booklets we have ever published. Why not request your free copy today?

Finding the right church will entail some serious Bible study on your part. It is not a decision that you should make quickly or lightly. You should search out a church that fits the true biblical model.

John Ross Schroeder

Questions & Answers

Q This question is prompted by recent articles about Islam in your magazine. Who is Allah? Is he the same as Yahweh? If so, why would God send another prophet (Muhammad) after what we are told is the fullness and completeness of Christ?

M T, North Lincolnshire

A The name *Yahweh* is derived from the Old Testament Hebrew word *YHWH*, which carries the meaning of 'The Ever-Living One'. *Allah* is an Arabic word generally equivalent to the English word *God*. Muslims believe that Muhammad is Allah's prophet and that the Koran, Islam's holy book, supersedes both the Old and New Testaments (views shared by neither Jews nor Christians). Allah, as described in the Koran, is very different from the God of the Bible.

The Judaeo/Christian Bible teaches that *Yahweh* (the LORD in the Old Testament) became flesh (John 1:14) and came to reveal the Father and die for our sins in order that we may inherit the gift of eternal life (John 3:16). In the New Testament, John the Baptist

identified Jesus as the Son of God (John 1:34). Although many Muslims accept Christ as a prophet, neither adherents of Judaism nor Muslims accept Jesus of Nazareth as the Son of God and true Messiah or believe in His resurrection.

The Bible shows that our salvation can only be assured if we believe in Christ's sacrifice for our sins and with God's help keep His law (Romans 2:7; Revelation 12:17). Notice Acts 4:12 where the apostle Peter makes a telling reference about the crucial role of Jesus Christ in our salvation: 'Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.' Peter was also inspired to say that we must follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 2:21).

The apostle Peter identifies Jesus as 'that Prophet' that Moses referred to in the law (Deuteronomy 18:18; Acts 3:20-23). We need to look no further than to Him. Most who have lived will for the first time come to understand this in a resurrection to physical life. For further understanding please request our free booklets *Who Is God?* and *Jesus Christ: The Real Story*.

Q Would it be fair to say that the Church is made up of all who accept the authority and teaching of the New Testament?

K C, London

A That is a step in the right direction, but it would be far better to say that the Church is made up of all who accept the authority of the *entire* Judaeo/Christian Bible including both Old and New Testaments.

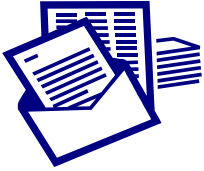
But even this is not all that is required to be identified as a Christian. Only those with the Holy Spirit are defined as such (Romans 8:9-11). The apostle Peter says in his powerful sermon on the Day of Pentecost, when the New Testament Church was born, 'Repent and be baptised *every one of you* in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the Holy Spirit' (Acts 2:38, New International Version, emphasis added).

In addition to accepting the authority and teaching of the entire Bible, each one of us is required to see the need for repentance and having our sins forgiven. To understand the vitally important details, please request our free booklets *Transforming Your Life*, and *The Road to Eternal Life*.

How our literature is funded

The United Church of God *British Isles* is registered as a charity in England and Wales (number 1079192). The publication of this Supplement and other literature is funded by the generosity of members of the Church, coworkers and our readers. Following Jesus Christ's instruction (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 Good News*.

Donations may be sent to: *The United Church of God, PO Box 705, WATFORD WD19 6FZ.*



Letters from Our Readers

Life now has purpose

Thank you ever so much for sending me *The Good News*, special edition, as well as taking the trouble to contact me personally. You have made possible what philosophy, Buddhism and cynicism didn't achieve in my life – that is to give it sense and purpose. You have shown me a new way and I will walk in it. The English language is very important to me – first because my relatives are Finns and I'd like to inform them about *The Good News*. They can speak English, but not a word of German. Secondly, I'm planning to settle for awhile in Canada.

E S, Germany

The Good News

One day when I visited my parents' home in India I came across the much spiritually uplifting magazine, *The Good News*. Each article and message is so touching and inspiring for me. I love to read God's Word which is a strength and a comfort to me, building up my faith in my Saviour Jesus Christ.

Mrs S M, Northern Ireland

Thank you for the free *Good News* magazines I requested some time ago. I must admit it took me quite a while to get through them on account of my having cataracts, but I managed. I find your magazines are up to date with what is happening in the world, especially the troubles surrounding Jerusalem. Please find a donation enclosed towards the wonderful work you are doing.

Mrs N J, Newcastle

I want to thank you for my first magazine of *The Good News*. It is very good for every person who wants to learn something about God. You have much information on events in the world.

P N, Serbia

Thank you very much for your free magazines. They are really very interesting and we find many articles that truly reflect history. My English is not perfect.

J D L G, Moldova

Thank you for the first consignment of publications I received last week from the Netherlands. I have realised many new things about Jesus as a new convert. I see every need to go on to gain an in-depth knowledge of His teachings.

E C, Brussels, Belgium

A committed Catholic

Thank you for sending *The Good News* magazine. I think you are doing a great work for God, and I agree with the articles. Yet as a committed Catholic I do not need to receive your magazine. In your question and answer section you said: 'There, of course, can only be one religion.' But you do not acknowledge that the Roman Catholic Church with Saint Peter as the first Pope, appointed by Jesus Himself, is obviously the one true church. The Anglican Church with the Queen as its head and all the other Christian churches are breakaway religions with rules of their own. Why do we Christians need other religions? It is time we united under the Pope.

Mrs A M, North Yorkshire

• Please read the two feature articles about the true Church in this issue of the Supplement, as well as requesting our free booklet *The Church Jesus Built*.

Attending Church services

I have been attending services with the United Church of God at Bricket Wood [just north of London] since September 2004. I have always found the services as well as your publications highly informative and inspiring. I am hoping to keep learning more about God: gaining wisdom and understanding through reading the Bible and your literature, attending church and getting baptised. Please accept this cheque as my contribution towards the printing and distribution of your publications. May God keep inspiring you and helping you to spread His Word.

E C, Harrow

As a struggling new believer who had a very unhappy childhood which carried on to teenage and as recent as 'now!' (50 years old), I'm writing again. I would like to fellowship with others and as I live in a bedsit, I have no computer. I would have to write. I am also interested in your booklet *The Church Jesus Built*. Somehow I feel I'd like to know the real Christ.

Miss A D, Eastbourne

• To access further help, please see the conclusion of 'Which Is God's Church: Can You Be Sure?' on page 6.