

Why Persecution of Christians In Modern Britain?

Will Hutton in The Observer wrote: 'Britain became engulfed in a culture war last week as secularists and believers clashed over the role of religion in public life' (19 Feb). Evolutionist Richard Dawkins had reignited the conflict by publishing a controversial anti-religious survey about Christianity. What does the Bible say about persecution?

The persecution of Christians in the developing world has increased rapidly in the last decade. *Newsweek* reported that 'Terrorist attacks on Christians in Africa, the Middle East and Asia increased 309 per cent from 2003 to 2010' – a mere seven years (13 Feb). One wouldn't usually expect mistreatment in the English-speaking, democratic world. But raw persecution is now rearing its ugly head in the UK.

Most realise that the secular establishment has not been friendly to Christianity, and churchgoing in Britain has been in decline for decades. Evidence for this can be seen in a recent study of children called 'What's Next for This Year's Child?', in which the metaphorical baby states: 'By the time I'm an adult, there's a 70 per cent chance that I'll be an unbeliever' (*Seven, The Sunday Telegraph*, 19 Feb).

Does Britain do God?

The current British situation becomes evident from published statements such as the one in the *Financial Times*: 'It has been said that the British

"don't do God" in public life, but this week they certainly did . . . From one trench, Baroness Warsi's hysterical attack on secularism; from the other, Richard Dawkins' hysterically secularist attack.'

The *FT* continued: 'Lady Warsi, the Conservative [Party] Chairman, fears "a militant secularism taking hold of our societies . . . Her greatest fear seems to be the waning awe in which religion is held by states: "Faith has been neglected, undermined – and, yes, even attacked – by governments"' (19 Feb).

Take recent applications of the law. A high-court judge in England ruled against local councils including prayers in formal meetings. Concurrently a Christian couple lost their court appeal not to allow homosexuals to share a double room in their bed-and-breakfast establishment.

Following these rulings, Queen Elizabeth II and former Archbishop of Canterbury Lord Carey staunchly defended the Christian faith. Similarly, conservative newspapers like *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Sunday Telegraph*, the

Daily Express and the *Daily Mail* weighed in heavily in defence of Christianity.

Charles Moore, former editor of three prominent British publications, firmly stated: 'The Queen is right – our national religion is a force for unity and a channel of peace' (*The Daily Telegraph*, 18 Feb). Some may strongly disagree with his views, but he did voice them. Even the previously quoted adherent of Islam, Baroness Sayeeda Warsi, joined forces with Christians: 'Europe must hold back a wave of "intolerant secularisation," and stop denying its Christian heritage, Britain's only Muslim Cabinet Member will urge today . . .' ('Christianity in Europe faces danger,' *The Times*, 14 Feb).

Stern warnings by Lord Carey

A *Daily Mail* feature article penned by Lord Carey warned: 'For the Christian faith is being increasingly marginalised in this country – as a shocking court case this week has illustrated.' Lord Carey has stated his views very forthrightly. He continued: 'Since

the September 11 attacks [in New York and Washington DC], we seem to have become obsessed with not upsetting British Muslims while successive pieces of legislation means the rights of homosexuals now seem to trump those of everyone else.’

The former archbishop concluded this particular piece by saying: ‘Sadly I could take you to many countries in the world where brave Christian minorities are facing dreadful persecution. *What’s happening here [in Britain] is that Christians are being pushed into the background by a secular establishment that seems to be embarrassed by the fact that Britain is a Christian country*’ (10 Feb, 2012, emphasis added throughout).

Lord Carey followed up his previous defence of Christianity in another *Daily Mail* article defending the traditional marriage institution as biblically defined (Genesis 2:20-25). This constitutes a belated response to Prime Minister David Cameron’s stated plans, at the Conservative Party conference last autumn, to bring in gay marriage. The title of the former archbishop’s article is: ‘Marriage will ONLY remain the bedrock of society if it is between a man and a woman’ (20 Feb. emphasis Lord Carey’s).

To bring us needed perspective on these current occurrences in Britain, we must consult biblical history as depicted in the early New Testament Church.

Learning from Church history

Luke’s book of Acts provides us with a formal account of the first 40 years of the first-century Church. The apostolic epistles help fill in details, and John’s letters refer to events even beyond the initial 40 years.

After a spectacularly successful beginning, the early Church soon drew an enormous amount of persecution, first from the religious establishment, and eventually from the state. We pick up the story in Acts 8. ‘Now Saul was

consenting to his [Stephen’s] death. *At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles*’ (verse 1).

Saul continued his ruthless persecution until Jesus Christ confronted him personally on the Damascus Road. The most remarkable conversion in Church history quickly followed and the persecuting Saul soon became the apostle Paul (Acts 9:1-15). Afterwards Paul was severely persecuted throughout much of his ministry and was finally martyred. Peter suffered the same fate as Christ predicted (see John 21:18-19; 2 Peter 1:13-14). Greek history indicates that the rest of the twelve apostles were also martyred, with the sole exception of John, who completed the New Testament canon.

The persecution of Christians in general persisted throughout the first century and has continued ever since. *Foxe’s Book of Martyrs* (1563) and various other historical accounts clearly document a troubled church history.

So why should we in this 21st-century world think it strange that modern Christians would suffer the same fate?

The Bible promises Christians they will be persecuted. Jesus Christ predicted that it would happen to Paul (Acts 9:16). Near the end of his life, this apostle clearly stated: ‘*Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution*’ (2 Timothy 3:12). Yet our present sufferings will result in eternal life if we continue in the true Christian faith. ‘This is a faithful saying: For if we died with Him [figuratively through baptism or directly by martyrdom], we shall also live with Him. If we endure [suffer with Him, KJV], we shall also reign with Him’ (2 Timothy 2:11-12). (For more about this general subject, ask for our free booklets *Why Does God Allow Suffering?* and *What Is Your Destiny?*)

Suffering persecution for being true Christians

Throughout Church history many have been deceived into embracing a counterfeit Christianity. ‘Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name . . . and will deceive many’ (Matthew 24:4-5). Just adhering to the name of Christ (nominal Christianity) will not lead to everlasting life.

Read what Christ actually said: ‘Why do you call me “Lord, Lord,” and not do the things which I say?’ (Luke 6:46). ‘Not everyone who says to Me, “Lord, Lord,” shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he [or she, gender inclusive] *who does the will of My Father in heaven*’ (Matthew 7:21). And: ‘If you want to enter into [eternal] life, keep the [ten] commandments’ (Matthew 19:17).

God’s merciful grace in forgiving our sins is *not* a license to continue to do evil (see Jude 1:3-4). Many nominal Christians in our modern age have chosen the path of least resistance in conducting their personal lives. They simply do not adhere to the clear biblical teachings which the apostle Paul summarised for Timothy (see 2 Timothy 2:15; 3:15-17).

Nominal Christians need to check up on their Christianity (2 Corinthians 13:5). They need to be absolutely certain that they are indeed true Christians – obeying God’s way of life as well as expressing their devotion to Christ as their Saviour and High Priest.

John Ross Schroeder

Recommended Reading

What has happened to Christ’s Church in the last 2,000 years? How did it go off the track? How did a counterfeit church arise?

All of these questions are addressed in our comprehensive booklet *The Church Jesus Built*. Be sure to request or download your free copy along with the companion booklet *Jesus Christ: The Real Story*.

What Can You Do When Life Isn't Fair?

Unfairness seems to pervade life. When unfair circumstances affect you, how should you respond?

When I was a youngster, one of my most frequent complaints was, 'That's not fair!' Everything had to be fair.

When I complained about a perceived family injustice, my father would remind me of his often-used phrase, 'Life isn't fair.' He would explain that if I expected fairness throughout life, I would be sadly disappointed because it just wasn't going to happen.

Of course, I didn't like hearing that, but as I matured, I came to see that unjust, troublesome and undeserved events occur in everyone's life.

Even so, unfair treatment still bothers me – especially when I see it deliberately perpetrated against unsuspecting people. Perhaps you share a similar reaction when you learn that an unscrupulous person has taken unfair advantage or a criminal has gone unpunished.

Furthermore, how do you feel when you are personally cheated, lied about, betrayed, or your reputation is carelessly tarnished?

Realising such actions are inherently wrong, our natural human reaction is to feel distressed and offended. We may respond by becoming angry and bitter or seeking revenge. Alternatively, we may retreat into sad-

ness or depression and withdraw into virtual seclusion.

Are those effective ways to handle unfairness, or are there more constructive and productive methods? When life's events hand us significant troubles or when people treat us unfairly and unjustly, what should we do? How can we weather the upset and disappointment we will predictably feel?

A difficult start in life

Consider the story of Anne Sullivan. Born on 14 April, 1866, in Feeding Hills, Massachusetts, Anne's youth was filled with adversity. Not only was she raised in deep poverty, but she was physically abused by her alcoholic father. At age five she contracted trachoma, a bacterial infection of the eye. This disease was left untreated, causing her to go nearly blind.

When Anne turned eight years old, her mother, Alice Sullivan, died of tuberculosis. Two years later her father abandoned both Anne and her brother James to the state infirmary in Tewksbury, Mass, after finding it difficult to raise the children alone.

Conditions at the institution were deplorable since it was underfunded, overcrowded, and in disrepair.

During her four-year stay at



Helen Keller and Anne Sullivan

Tewksbury, Anne underwent two operations that failed to significantly correct her vision. However, in October 1880, as Anne turned 14 years old, she was accepted into the Perkins School for the Blind in Boston, Massachusetts.

Overcoming the obstacles

At the Perkins School the situation began to improve. She received additional treatment for her eyes that enhanced her sight enough so she could read for short periods. As a result, she diligently concentrated on her academic education. Anne also learned sign language to communicate with a

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World News & Prophecy Merges with *The Good News*

You may have noticed that the current *Good News* has an additional 16 pages. For the last 13 years the United Church of God has produced a sister publication, *World News & Prophecy*, devoted to explaining global events in the light of Bible prophecy. Considering how the world is rapidly changing before our eyes, and in ways foretold long ago by the biblical prophets, we thought it appropriate to merge *World News & Prophecy* into *The Good News* so that more readers could benefit from that valuable information. We have also added a number of new features, including a new section titled 'World News and Prophecy'.

friend who was both deaf and blind. Anne studied so meticulously that she graduated as class valedictorian.

In her valedictory address she challenged her classmates by stating: 'Fellow graduates, duty bids us go forth into active life. Let us go cheerfully, hopefully and earnestly, and set ourselves to find our especial part. When we have found it, willingly and faithfully perform it; for every obstacle we overcome, every success we achieve tends to bring man closer to God and make life more as He would have it.'

Several teachers and staff members at the Perkins School were impressed with Anne's positive attitude, talents, intelligence and persistence. So Anne was accepted by the Keller family in Tusculumbia, Alabama, as tutor and mentor to their blind, deaf and mute daughter Helen.

We choose how to react

What does Anne Sullivan's story illustrate? Considering the significant troubles she encountered in her youth, she could have turned frustrated, morose and resentful. She could have ceaselessly complained about the unfairness of her upbringing and the hardships she experienced.

But she didn't. Instead, Anne chose to rise above her circumstances and use every opportunity to discover, develop and expand her talents and abilities. In doing so, she grew in emotional maturity and character.

Just as Anne Sullivan consciously resolved to handle her disadvantages in a constructive manner, you and I have choices when we are afflicted by inequity and injustice. Whether we face a recent difficult setback or a long-term situation as profound as what Anne encountered, we can choose how we will react.

The Bible offers examples of such choices from a wide-ranging perspective.

Joseph and his brothers

Let's briefly examine the account of Joseph. It begins when Joseph brought a negative report to his father Jacob on

how his brothers were tending their flocks (Genesis 37:1-2). Joseph's account upset them. Furthermore, the brothers could see that their father favoured Joseph above them (verse 3). This perceived unfairness led to intense feelings of resentment.

Later Joseph experienced two vivid dreams in which he was honoured by his father and brothers. The brothers imagined he was pretentiously exalting himself, which infuriated them even more (verses 5-11).

Afterwards Jacob again sent Joseph to visit his brothers. By this time their hatred toward Joseph had grown so great that they began contemplating his murder (verses 18-20).

The eldest, Reuben, succeeded in calming the others down for a short time (verses 21-24). But later, without Reuben's knowledge, they sold him to passing Ishmaelite traders.

To hide their treachery, they killed a goat and dipped Joseph's tunic in its blood, taking the bloodstained garment to Jacob to indicate that a wild animal must have killed Joseph. Jacob wept bitterly and refused to be comforted.

Joseph's reaction

Considering all the unfair actions he endured, Joseph could have turned bitter and spent endless hours wallowing in his troubles, but he didn't.

Instead he decided to concentrate his talents and energies on doing his best while trusting God for help in every situation. Later when his brothers came to Egypt where Joseph was now a high official, he chose to treat them with kindness, generosity and forgiveness – even explaining to them that God used what they had done to ultimately save many lives (Genesis 50:15-21).

His example demonstrates that a person's attitude is significantly more important than what happens to him.

God is fully capable of eventually making up for unfair circumstances. God watches over those who, while suffering unjustly, remain faithfully obedient to Him. 'God will bless

you, even if others treat you unfairly for being loyal to him' (1 Peter 2:19, Contemporary English Version).

God allows unfair circumstances and events

In His wisdom, God sometimes allows unfair and even disgraceful treatment to afflict His faithful followers (Psalm 119:75).

The faith chapter, Hebrews 11, describes how God's servants suffered: 'Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented.'

Jesus Christ, having lived a totally sinless life, was undeserving of the merciless treatment He received (Matthew 16:21). What was His response to such dreadful unfairness? He willingly placed His circumstances in His Father's just and mighty hands. 'When He was reviled, [He] did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously' (1 Peter 2:23). Indeed, He prayed, 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do' (Luke 23:34).

Looking beyond today's world

What is God's message? It is to react in the same manner Christ did when we suffer unjustly. We are to 'pursue peace with all people' (Hebrews 12:14). Jesus Christ admonished His followers to handle unfairness with love and forgiveness (Matthew 5:44-45).

There may be certain instances where we can respectfully defend ourselves against unfair actions. For example, the apostle Paul used his rights as a Roman citizen to shield himself from the abusive treatment of military authorities (Acts 22:25).

When handling a disagreement with someone, the Bible counsels us to go directly to that individual to

(Continued on page 6)

Is the Passover Only for the Jewish People?

Does the Passover accurately highlight Christ's atoning sacrifice? If it does, why don't most Christians observe it?

A general belief pervades Christendom that the annual Passover only has relevance to the Jewish community and is of no real significance to Christians. We know that the Jews observe the Passover and that it was instituted at the time the children of Israel were about to leave the land of Goshen in Egypt.

But the Passover has greater meaning for Christians – and ultimately for the whole world. The Old Testament refers to it as ‘the LORD’s Passover’ (Exodus 12:11) while the New Testament identifies ‘Christ our Passover’ who was ‘sacrificed for us’ (1 Corinthians 5:7).

The LORD at the time of the Exodus is the same Lord spoken of by the apostle Paul, namely Jesus Christ (see Exodus 3:13-14; John 8:57-58). For further evidence, please ask for our free booklets *Jesus Christ: The Real Story* and *Who Is God?*

The overriding significance of the Christian Passover

So why doesn't mainstream Christianity observe the annual Passover, seeing that it focuses on Jesus Christ, who died in order to atone for the sins of mankind. In fact, the Passover and the associated Spring Holy Days have even more significance to Christians today than to the ancient Israelites. Here's why.

The Israelites at the Exodus were offered *physical* deliverance by smearing the blood of lambs on the door posts and lintels of their dwellings (Exodus 12:7). This action protected

them from the same fate as befell the first-born of the Egyptians.

The spilling of Christ's blood atones for the sins of the repentant sinner and opens the door to salvation for those who focus on Christ as the true Passover Lamb.

In retrospect, the Passover had considerable significance for the children of Israel in Old Testament times. But it has added significance for the children of God during the Christian era. The repentant person who acknowledges Jesus Christ as the slain ‘Lamb of God’ is offered everlasting life (John 3:16).

The New Testament Church continued to observe the Passover with the new symbols that Jesus introduced to His disciples.

An important Feast follows

After the Passover observance, the children of Israel were instructed to keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread. No leavened products were to be eaten for seven days, during which there were two Holy Days set aside for a commanded assembly (Exodus 12:15-17).

For the Israelites the significance of eating unleavened bread was so they could leave Egypt speedily, without waiting for it to rise. The significance is far greater today. In the New Testament leaven symbolised sin (1 Corinthians 5:7). It was Jesus Christ who atoned for our sins by sacrificing His life at the time of the Passover, a ceremony first instituted at the time of the Exodus, some 1500 years earlier.

The New Testament Church continued to observe the Passover annually with the new symbols that Jesus introduced to His disciples (1 Corinthians 5:7-8). The Church also continued to keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread with its two Holy Days set aside for collective worship. This festival shows that the followers of Jesus Christ have to put sin out of their lives, with God's help (Philippians 2:12-13).

Notice this instruction from the apostle Paul: *Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened.*

For indeed Christ our Passover was sacrificed for us. *Therefore let us keep the Feast not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth* (1 Corinthians 5:7-8).

The apostle Paul wasn't referring here to a Good Friday or an Easter Sunday observance, words which aren't found anywhere in the original Greek New Testament. Yet Paul was in no doubt that the Feast of Unleavened Bread is binding on Christians today.

Christ's sacrifice on the biblical Passover day atones for the sins (transgressions of God's law, 1 John 3:4, KJV) we have committed. Throughout its history, God's true Church has observed the Passover once a year, with its symbols of unleavened bread depicting Christ's suffering on our behalf, and the wine depicting the shedding of His blood. The Days of Unleavened Bread symbolise our part in putting sin (leaven) out of our lives.

In doing so, we are putting on the sincerity and truth of Christ – His very mind and qualities (Galatians 3:27; 4:19; Philippians 2:5).

In spite of Paul's clear instruction to keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread and identifying Jesus Christ as our Passover, the mainstream Christian world neglects to follow this plain biblical instruction. Instead, it has opted for days and festivals that have no biblical basis and whose origin lies in pagan religions. (To understand the historical and biblical evidence, request our free booklet *Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Matter Which Days Should We Observe?*)

A divine expression of God's love

At the time of the Exodus God established the Passover as an annual observance, picturing physical redemption from slavery. Some 1500 years later this divine act was highlighted when Jesus Christ gave His life and redeemed a people previously enslaved to sin. The Passover in Egypt was a type, a forerunner of the future Passover in Jerusalem when Jesus gave His life as an offering for sins. 'And I, if I am lifted up from the earth [crucified], will draw all peoples to Myself' (John 12:32).

The annual Passover observance with the symbols of bread and wine that Jesus introduced is for all mankind and transcends the passage of time. Its significance to Christians supersedes the meaning for the Israelites in Egypt – theirs was release from physical bondage, for Christians the release is

from the slavery of sin with the promise of everlasting life.

It was a just man full of years, who under divine inspiration, best defined the Passover's lasting significance. Simeon's words of praise are recorded in Luke's gospel account after he saw the Christ child in the Temple in Jerusalem: 'For my eyes have seen Your salvation which you have prepared before the face of all peoples, a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel' (Luke 2:30-32).

Eventually applied to all peoples

The revelation Simeon is referring to came through the people of Israel in Old Testament times, as Jesus himself told the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well, 'Salvation is of the Jews' (John 4:22). The apostle Paul affirms this by stating: 'To them were given the oracles of God' (Romans 3:2).

The Hebrew Scriptures are the divinely inspired words of God, and in them were written the prophecies relating to a future Benefactor of all mankind, the Saviour of the world, the Passover Lamb of God – Jesus Christ. But as Simeon prophesied, Christ would be the 'Light to bring salvation to the Gentiles' because the Passover has significance for 'all peoples.'

In this prophecy we see that salvation will not be limited to Israel, but all nations are going to be offered eternal life in God's own time. Jesus Christ is the true Passover for Jews and Gentiles alike.

Seeing that the Passover is much more than just a Jewish festival, why do so many leaders in Christendom neglect to observe it?

Thankfully, the Passover perpetuated by Jesus Christ with the new symbols serves as a supremely important reminder that Christ died for our sins, reconciling us to God the Father. This involves genuinely acknowledging Christ as our Saviour – and in repentance admitting our own part in the death of the true Passover Lamb.

G O Marx

When Life Isn't Fair

(Continued from page 4)

peacefully and diplomatically discuss the problem for an equitable resolution (Matthew 18:15-16; Galatians 6:1-2).

Paul also recognised that satisfactory justice will not always occur in this present age (Galatians 1:4; Luke 4:6). Looking beyond today he wrote: '*I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us*' (Romans 8:18, emphasis added).

The ultimate answer

The reality is that everyone experiences unfairness. It was certainly true for Anne Sullivan, for young Joseph and especially for Jesus Christ, who endured monumental injustice (Hebrews 12:2). The key principle to remember is how we react to unfair treatment.

Responding to unjust situations or actions in anger, bitterness and revenge is not the answer (Ephesians 4:31-32). Rather, trusting God in faith and obedience brings true peace of mind and, in due course, entrance into eternal life (Philippians 4:6-7; Matthew 19:17).

The time is coming when Jesus Christ will reign on the earth (Revelation 5:10; 11:15; 20:1-5). When that day dawns, all inequities, including those we have personally experienced, will be things consigned to the distant past and virtually forgotten (Romans 8:18, 35-39).

So the next time you feel you have been treated unfairly, you could be right. What should you do as a result? Carefully bring to mind that 'All things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose' (Romans 8:28). Let us always reflect and act on this passage when life is or even appears unfair!

John LaBissoniere

Recommended Reading

The Passover is the important first step in God's purpose and plan for humanity. But the autumn festivals reveal the time frame of how salvation will eventually be offered to all mankind. These wonderful truths are all explained in our comprehensive booklet *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*. Please ask for your free copy today.



(Matthew 4:4). Taking God's commandments found in Scripture and changing them, or teaching other ideas producing a counterfeit Christianity is heresy. Thus, we must use the example of the Bible to ascertain the true gospel and true doctrine.

When considering counterfeit gospels, it is important to look at

Q I am confused about counterfeit gospels. Are they to do with heresy or what?

E C, Naas, Ireland

A Many counterfeit gospels are preached in the world today, but there is only one true biblical gospel. Heresy in this context means non-orthodox – in other words, not the widely accepted views of mainstream Christianity. However, so-called Christian 'orthodoxy' is often an opinion, tradition, or misinterpretation of doctrines of men with no real scriptural support.

These unbiblical practices are created by whoever wields the power in religious circles, and are not found in the Word of God. A biblical example is when Jesus Christ came into conflict with the Pharisees, who instead of teaching what was in the Scriptures, added to God's Word their own ideas and traditions.

Christ told them, 'And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men' (Matthew 15:9). He also told them, 'All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition' (Mark 7:9).

The true gospel is what our Messiah told the devil: 'Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God'

what Christ said to distinguish the true gospel from heresy. In Matthew 24 Christ warned that true believers would be in the minority, with many false Christs and false variations of Christianity extant before His return (verses 4-5, 23-24).

Indeed He stated that true believers would be considered heretics by false religious teachers and would be persecuted (Matthew 24:4-5, 9), so what is considered 'orthodox' in this context is in fact heresy.

Jesus warned of those who would claim God's law was 'done away' (Matthew 5:18; 7:21-23). The apostle Paul spoke of the ruthless false prophet at the end of the age – the man of sin – warning us not to be taken in by those who deceive people into a sinful life-style contrary to God's will (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4).

In the book of Revelation, chapters two and three, Jesus Christ speaks of several false brethren within the Church who brought in heretical teachings, leading others into sin.

An Old Testament example is the infamous Jezebel, the wife of Ahab, king of Israel. She persuaded her husband to encourage the worship of Baal throughout the land (1 Kings 16:29-33; 21:25-26). The worship of idols could include anything contrary to God's commandments or putting anything in place of God.

Often illicit sexual behaviour was involved in this practice. Teaching, practising or encouraging any kind of sexual immorality is sin (Revelation 2:20-23).

Anciently, King Balak of Moab wanted to hire Balaam to curse Israel, but Balaam knew God wanted to bless the Israelites. Instead of refusing Balak's offer, Balaam went as far as he could in trying to curse them (Numbers 22-25). This man did not respect God's laws and purposes and tried to pervert them for his own gain. According to Revelation 2:14, Balaam had advised Balak how to lead the Israelites into sin so God would curse them Himself.

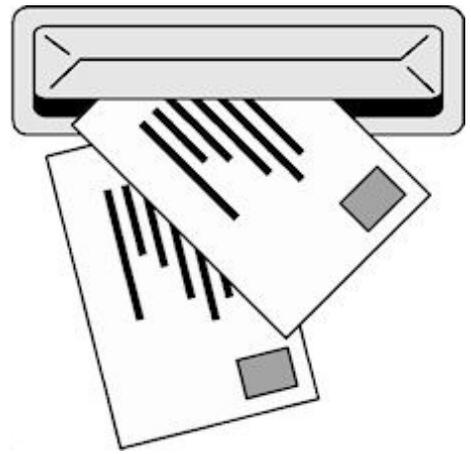
Again, the problem involved sexual immorality and *idolatrous festivals* rather than those ordained by God. (Request our booklet *Holy Days or Holidays: Does it Matter Which Days We Observe?*) The motive here is usually personal gain by the one promoting the wrong form of worship.

Similar to the practice of Balaam is that of Simon Magus in the New Testament (Acts 8:9-24). This man was well known and, having seen the Holy Spirit being given to newly-baptised Church members by the laying on of hands of the apostles, he wanted to buy this power as another way of achieving status in the eyes of those around him and perhaps profit too. The apostle Peter sternly rebuked him, but history indicates that he did not repent.

There are warnings against denying the divinity of Christ (1 John 2:22-23) and teaching another Jesus and another gospel (2 Corinthians 11:4). Counterfeit gospels teach about the person of Christ, but not His example, His teachings, His Lordship and the gospel of His soon-coming kingdom. They utterly fail to portray the real Jesus.

For much more information, request our free booklets *Jesus Christ: the Real Story*, *The Church Jesus Built* and *The Gospel of the Kingdom*.

Letters from our readers



Kingdom of God Seminar

On the 11th of February, I was privileged to attend the Kingdom of God Seminar in Dublin as preached by Messrs David Payne and David Fenney. The Seminar was under the auspices of the international United Church of God (www.ucg.org) . . . The Seminar was excellent in content, and the mood of the gathering was joyous and expectant . . . Discussed were the key signs Jesus said would be manifested, important information about our opportunity to enter the Kingdom of God, and how to develop a meaningful relationship with God – all based on Jesus Christ’s central teachings . . .

I received an email saying that if I wish to listen to a spoken version of the presentation, there are several on United Church of God websites: <http://members.ucg.org/sermons>. These are in audio and follow the presentation I saw which inspired me so much . . . Another seminar is planned for Dublin later this year . . . If you are in the area and interested in developing your personal prayer life [or] learning more about the things of God, why not attend?

C W, Internet

The British Supplement to *The Good News*

Interesting to read about the anointing of HM the Queen. The ingredients are to be found in Scripture. I have some oil that I use for anointing or when I send out healing cloths.

D R, New Zealand

• *The reader, an elder, bases his actions on James 5:14-15, Mark 6:13 and Acts 19:11-12. Ministers in the United Church of God also pray for; anoint the ill and post anointed cloths.*

I was reading your Jan/Feb 2012 Supplement including your articles on the Queen’s Jubilee and where the word came from. They were interesting and a good Bible lesson.

S W, Glasgow

Regarding your Supplement article on ‘Visiting and Praying for the Sick’, I have dedicated my life to visiting, praying for, and reading God’s Word to the sick, dying and those in prison. My first visit was to a girl of 19 years of age, who passed away soon afterwards. I was just 17 myself. I am now 78 and still visiting the sick.

F N, Honiton, Devon

• *You have personified Matthew 25:34-39. ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me [Jesus Christ]’ (verse 40).*

The Good News

The Good News magazine gets better and better. I consider myself blessed to receive it, and to learn and grow through studying the many exciting, interesting articles and features. It is the only magazine I am truly interested in.

G M, Londonderry, Northern Ireland

New donors supporting *The Good News*

I enclose a donation to be of a little help towards publishing *The Good News*, and to say a big thank you.

M K, Launceston

The Good News and your booklets have helped me to understand the Bible and God’s life plan for humankind. Thank you. I have enclosed a small donation. Hope it helps.

R A, Grimsby

Yes, please renew my free subscription to *The Good News*. I am a little sceptical about your views on the Trinity. But in the main, my husband and I find the articles very good and informative.

Mrs A T, Kenley

• *Readers may wish to request our free booklet Is God a Trinity? – and check this doctrine out for themselves (see Acts 17:11).*

Seeks spiritual guidance and water baptism

I have wanted to tell you about myself and my beliefs for some time now and have not done so because I am still studying the Bible and trying my best to follow God’s teachings. I now need your help and advice, please. I have always believed in God and Jesus Christ – and that the Bible was true. Shortly following the completion of the *Bible Study Course* (my wife also), I bought two King James Bibles, one for each of us. What I miss most is the lack of Church of God fellowship in our region. My aim is to be baptised, but I have not confessed all my sins, which I hope to do soon. I look forward to your help and guidance.

A W, Tyne & Wear

• *We have forwarded your letter to the United Church of God elder responsible for your area. He will contact you very soon.*