

The Newsletter of the Churches of God, UK

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Matthew 28:19-20

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The Business of Church

Just how complicated is it to 'run a church'? The Roman Church, for example, expends many millions of pounds on the enormous bureaucratic task of holding together a worldwide organization. The same can in some degree be said for any number of church denominations. To function, it seems, the church has to be operated like a business.

Structure is at the heart of this. Set up an organization and inevitably rules and regulations and bye-laws become mandatory. In the church realm there is a 'path from the top' for virtually every function. Doctrine is determined at the top. Ministers are selected and salaries paid from the top. Disputes, too, are settled - or not - by the hierarchy. Complex rules, churned out by endless conferences, are imposed church-wide, often with no regard for local custom or circumstance.

The result all too often is binding the work of the church in a strait-jacket that hampers its true function. The average man-in-the-pew simply complies. Others are fired with a determination to challenge the hierarchy - and are vilified for their trouble. Or, like John Wesley, they simply get on with the work as they see it - and end up, usually, with a new denomination.

Simplicity

Contrast this with the simplicity of the church as established by Jesus and promoted by the apostles in their lifetime. A few Christian families bonded in small groups - often several such groups in a city. Each group appointed a qualified leader (their elder) and willingly accepted him as overseer. He was their shepherd and

guide. They hearkened also to the wise counsel of known and tested leaders from outside their own assembly - initially the apostles.

Internal Guidelines

Of course, as with any 'club' they had their guidelines designed to maintain an orderly assembly - internal rules based on divine principles. They took note, too, of 'best practice' from other like-minded assemblies.

But no assembly was beholden to a distant management team! Doctrine, order, discipline were not externally imposed. Each group - and especially its leadership - was answerable directly to the Head of the church, Jesus Christ. *He* disciplined them (Revelation 2, 3).

The apostles explained the mind of Christ - today we have this in writing - and each local assembly worked out how to implement Christ's 'game plan' for their area and circumstances.

Additionally, each assembly co-operated with others for mutual support. Suitably gifted individuals ('evangelists'), for example, would go out from an assembly 'to the work for which God called them' in other areas.

Unhappily, not all followed the apostolic ideal. Over the years the all too human desire for control took over and 'denominations' were born - usually following the often perverse ideas of a charismatic leader.

It's time for the twenty-first century church of God to 'recapture true values'. Surely apostolic practice has to be superior to modern business method!

Request - free:
**CGOM in Perspective
The Small Church**

Remember!

"This do", said Jesus, "in remembrance of me". It's the memorial which he instituted for his disciples the evening before his death. It's widely known as the Lord's Supper, Communion, Eucharist. Professing Christians observe it in a variety of ways and at different times. For some it is as often as daily, or weekly - for others, just when you please.

Close attention to the Scriptures has led many - including ourselves - to observe this solemn memorial *annually*, on the eve of the calendar date of his crucifixion. This year it will be Tuesday evening, **April 15**. The apostle Paul (I Corinthians 11: 23) tells us when: '*on the night he was betrayed*' (I Corinthians 11: 23). That year, as this, it was a Tuesday evening. [Request the free booklet: **The Resurrection Was Not On Sunday**]

Some who participate at this time link the service to the Passover, which was to be observed the following evening (John 18:28, 19:14). However, the memorial has characteristics which clearly distinguish it from Passover. It was not a 'celebration' (I Corinthians 11:20-22) like the Passover, which for Jews - even in our day - was largely a joyful time marking their liberation from slavery. The brethren in Corinth had abused the instructions Paul had left and turned it into a party. But the memorial is just that - a solemn remembrance of the death of Jesus, the tearing of his flesh, the pouring out of his blood.

So it was observed on the evening prior to Passover - and in a quite different manner. It was a simple gathering of brethren to recall the sufferings of the Saviour. In contrast to the Passover service with its bitter herbs, roasted lamb, unleavened bread - at the 'Lord's Supper' bread and wine were used as emblems, just as in the example Jesus set.

Another distinguishing aspect of the service focused on the life Christians are to lead - humble service to fellow Christians. Jesus again set the example saying: '*I have given you an example that you should do as I have done to you!*' (John 13:2-17). What did Jesus do? They were, at this memorial service, to '*wash one another's feet*' just as he had done to them (v.14).

Another contrast: the memorial instituted by Jesus was, as reported by Paul, to be the culmination of a time of self-examination (I Corinthians 11:28-32). We are, in the days leading to the observance, to carefully examine and judge ourselves. Further, the memorial of Jesus is to be observed 'till he comes' (v. 26), while Passover will be observed beyond this age and into the Millennium (Ezekiel 45:21).

One of these practices (Passover), then, is a celebration, the other (the Lord's Supper) is a solemn Memorial. ﷻ

A Home Service

The *Lord's Supper* is ideally a *communal* activity. When possible we should meet for its observance with other like-minded Christians. This, however, is not always possible and it is perfectly reasonable to observe it at home.

A leaflet with suggestions on how to do this is available from our various centres

What - No Bread?

It's a surprise to most professing Christians to learn that the early Christians observed a seven-day festival around the time they observe 'Easter'. You may read about it in I Corinthians 5. It began - see previous column - the night of the Passover, on the calendar then in use, Nisan 15. The festival was called the *Days of Unleavened Bread*.

Having previously removed leaven from their homes, during the seven days the first Christians didn't eat anything 'leavened' - *ie*, foods prepared with a raising agent like yeast. They ate unleavened products (not excluding, of course, other foods!) throughout the seven days.

The festival is highly symbolic for Christians. Late on the previous day Jesus died on the cross - at the time of the sacrifice of the Passover lamb in the Temple. (Keep in mind that the 'day' anciently began at sunset.) The then Jewish practice was to eat the roasted lamb after sundown - that is, at the beginning of 15th Nisan. Then began a week of festivity and joyous celebration of their freedom from slavery.

Jesus, however, is at the symbolic heart of the festival. The apostle Paul wrote, '*Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us*'. That night was '*a night to be much remembered [ie, noted]*'. Jesus was sinless, perfect - and our example of godly living. The Scriptures tell us that leaven (yeast) is symbolic of negative characteristics - hypocrisy, false teachings, sinful behaviour. The eating of unleavened bread then, represents our 'putting on Christ', our casting aside of all in our lives that is sinful - and doing the perfect will of God as revealed in His Word.

Christians, not surprisingly, therefore continued to annually observe these seven *Days of Unleavened Bread*. It makes more sense than 'Lent'! This year they will be observed from the evening of April 16 (Wednesday) through to sunset on April 23. ﷻ

A Note On Herbert W Armstrong

Although we severed our links with Herbert Armstrong twenty-five years ago in 1978, some of our readers remain attached in some way to his teachings. Here's my position.

I believe that Herbert Armstrong was used by God despite character flaws evident from the earliest available records. How he will be judged is not my responsibility. Much of what he 'discovered', however, was derived from other sources. But I think he had a 'genius' for packaging it, and presenting it to the church. Some of what he taught stands up to scrutiny, some needed adjustment, some was wrong.

It is claimed by some Churches of God that he was directly inspired by God, and probably the only one so inspired in our day. Truth, therefore, is now a closed book. Yet HWA changed his teachings from time to time - so which era was 'inspired'? My view is that there are no inspired apostles today. We get our 'inspiration' from careful and prayerful study of - and submission to - the inspired Scriptures. So we sometimes get it right, sometimes wrong! As he did. ﷻ

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