

outreach

The Newsletter of the Churches of God, UK

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*providing
leadership,
information and
Biblical teaching.
Matthew 28:19-20*

representing

Churches Of God Outreach Ministries

CHRIST RULES - OKAY?

No Bible student can deny that the Scriptures teach us the need for some form of rule in the church of God. An orderly assembly demands it.

If for 'rule' you read 'governance' - then there's trouble - inevitable, as there's little agreement as to its form. The form that governance takes is dictated largely by 'men in black suits'. That form may be inherited from a prior association, or a variant form of it. Or it may be the near anarchy encountered in some small house churches.

Who Governs?

None, however, would say that Christ is not in their assembly. His presence is invoked in 'opening prayers', and it is assumed he is indeed present. But does he *rule* your assembly? And does your church structure really reflect his rule? Possibly not. Recall that Jesus was stranded *outside* the church in Laodicea. They were deaf to him.

Where, for example, would you find Bible support for 'top-down' governance of a multi-assembly universal denomination with a central government? Yet it is claimed such is 'God's Government'. And too bad if you don't submit to it. Is Jesus perhaps left outside here, too?

A study of the 'Seven Churches' (Revelation 2-3) emphasizes that Jesus does indeed '*walk in the midst*' of His church in all ages, in all places. He exercises sovereignty over them. He commends their positive aspects. He points out their failings. He encourages. He punishes. He rewards. He opens and He shuts. And He actively intervenes as necessary - to the point of snuffing out their 'lampstand' or even killing individuals.

True Head

Jesus, in other words, is the administrative head of God's church, its CEO. God gave to him '*the key of David*'.

He has '*committed all judgment to the Son*' (John 5:22). So when it all goes pear-shaped in the church - is it mere coincidence? Simply bad luck? Or is Jesus - quietly and behind the scenes - perhaps wielding his rightful authority?

Assuming your church is indeed part of the church of God: when members leave in droves, or your work stagnates, or 'doors' close - is it just bad luck? Bad management? Or is it the corrective hand of the Sovereign Lord? Or maybe it is His guiding hand to set you on a new path - one He wants you to now follow?

How To Make Decisions

The priority in decision-making in church affairs is sensitivity to the voice of Christ: '*What is Jesus telling our assembly? Where is he leading us?*' When a decision is taken we should be able to say: '*It seems good to the Holy Spirit and to us that we...*' (Acts 15:28). In Antioch, for example "*...while they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them'. So after fasting and praying they laid hands on them and let them go*" (Acts 13:1-4). Christ made His plans clear to them.

In the church the 'government of God' is exercised through the unseen administration of church affairs by the risen and glorified Jesus. God's government is not modelled on human structures, but is the invisible 'hand of Jesus Christ on the tiller' of every one of His assemblies, large or small. As the all-powerful Son of God he actively walks in the midst of and rules his church. He '*knows our works*'. With burnished feet he walks in judgment.

The authentic, qualified and appointed leadership of each local assembly is in his hand. It is their responsibility, in co-operation with the brethren and with Jesus Christ, to listen to his voice and to willingly submit to his lead. He will patiently guide. He will correct. He will direct. Be sure Jesus is not excluded from your assembly. Ω

When Do You Belong?

Some church administrations promote the notion that the 'Seven churches of Revelation' (Chapters 2-3) represent specific - often centuries-long - 'eras' of church history. The 'best' era and the one to which 'you must belong' is selected as that of 'Philadelphia'. By virtue of the promises Jesus gives the church in that town, they are the 'goodies'. As human nature will have it, such claims for a specific denomination ('we represent the Philadelphia era') tend to instil an aura of superiority - evident in some such groups.

Three such eras are considered to be current: Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea, and will be - according to this interpretation - in existence at Christ's return. Laodicea, especially, is singled out for special condemnation: 'lukewarm'. Apparently because of their demeanour they are slated, by these groups, to experience the rigours of 'the Great Tribulation' in order to bring them up to spiritual speed. Philadelphians, however, will be spared.

The dates wrapped around each so-called era are arbitrary and there isn't much consensus as to when each so-called 'era' begins - or ends. Also implied is the assertion that we now live in the 'end-time'. Yet periods of world upheaval recur often throughout history. Caution is required!

Save My Skin

The main thrust of the desire to be Philadelphian is that you will 'flee to the wilderness' protected by God from the predicted awesome end-time events.

Becoming a Christian since the 1930s qualifies you, it is said, for this special status. Unless, of course, you have gone off the boil - spiritually lukewarm. Or, you belong to the 'wrong' church. Or, like 'Sardis', you are stone cold dead.

It's clear from Scripture, however, that as the end draws near Christians will be persecuted - and some will die, martyrs for the faith. Referring to those times Jesus, addressing the faithful, said: *'Then they shall hand you over for persecution and they will kill you, and you will be hated of all nations on account of my name'* (Matthew 24:9). These folk must not have joined the 'right church' - though Jesus doesn't differentiate. He had words about this: *'Whoever seeks to conserve his life for himself shall lose it, and whoever loses it shall revitalize it'* (Luke 17:33).

God's Shield

This isn't a denial that some Christians may indeed receive divine protection. It happens all the time, even in our day. The Psalmist conveys God's promise: *'A thousand may fall right beside you and ten thousand at your right hand, but it shall not come near you'* (Psalm 97). The protection, note, is *where you happen to be* - not because you have been whisked away to a 'place of safety'. An example is the protection God afforded Israel while Egypt was being laid waste around them. Or, the protection of Daniel from the lions that were breathing down his neck. Or his contemporaries shielded from Nebuchadnezzar's furnace.

Indeed some Christians living in Palestine as 'Armageddon' approaches are urged by Jesus to instantly drop all and *'flee to the mountains'* (Matthew 24:16). A sensible precaution. Back in the first century as the Romans attacked Jerusalem the Judean brethren - heeding Jesus' warning - hot-footed to

Pella in Transjordan.

Role of Law

There's a widely-held but erroneous view - harking back to a misunderstanding of the role of law in the Scriptures - that our eternal salvation depends on how well we obey God's Law, the 'book of the Law', and have the 'right doctrine'.

Not considered is the undoubted New Testament portrayal of the church of God not as a head-quartered denomination but as individual local assemblies united in spirit and holding generally to similar - sometimes plain wrong - beliefs. Just like the seven west Asian assemblies. Yet you must, it's claimed, hold to a specified number of 'restored truths' to be part of the true church. Competing denominations squabble over what these are. Find yourself converted outside the 'right' church and your salvation isn't secure. [The seven essential *'elementary teachings of Christ'* are listed in Hebrews 6:1-3.]

When we truly 'repent' God grants His holy Spirit. The Spirit is 'a piece of His mind' implanted in us - and will prompt (but not force) us to submit to His law. It's a Christian duty to comply, for our obedience is evidence of our conversion, and those commands and their subsidiaries define sin. Without the Spirit we *'are none of his'* and with it we willingly submit to God's instruction in His Word - all of it, as it applies and as we understand it.

Each of us is responsible for how we build on the Foundation - which is Jesus Christ, who dwells in each of us after conversion. The quality of our 'construction' determines our role in God's Kingdom. If, however, we have God's Spirit - and persevere until death - yet fail to build with quality materials we will still be saved. Wrote Paul to the brethren in Corinth: *'Whatever quality each one's work may be, the fire will test it. If one's construction survives he will receive pay [reward]. If one's work burns down he will be the loser; though personally he will be saved, yet only as passing through fire'* (ch 3:12-15).

You may consider it more a reflection of God's loving character that those thus protected - and not martyred - are the spiritually weak. Laodicean in their spiritual attitude, perhaps, but still considered by Jesus as part of his church (Revelation 3:14), and worth rescuing. Jesus, even now, is walking among his brethren and grooming all of us for Kingdom glory.

Christians are being judged now, day by day, and our various 'fiery trials' are carefully monitored by our Father to ensure we are not overwhelmed by them. He always provides a way for us to shoulder them (I Corinthians 10:11-14). 'Tribulation' - now, at this time - is allowed by God to perfect His character in us.

As is evident from how Jesus deals with each of the seven churches (Revelation 2-3), he is dedicated - in all ages - through instruction and correction to shepherd all his willing brothers and sisters safely into the fold of his Kingdom. That sometimes demands the fiery heat of persecution and trials - for any one of us, no matter to which 'era' or to which church we belong. At the same time, as in the church in Smyrna, fierce persecution comes even when the brethren are using spiritual 'gold' materials. Ω

OUTREACH on the web

This Newsletter of the *Churches of God, UK* is now sent by e-mail to around four hundred e-mail addresses, and the print copy to a further nearly three hundred.

The e-mail copies are in both plain text and, for easier reading, also available in pdf format. For those not familiar with the latter, it presents **OUTREACH** just like the format of the print copy - except that the pdf version has added colour. A programme to read the pdf version can be downloaded - free - from www.Adobe.com/ Acrobat - click on the 'get Acrobat Reader free' highlight.

*We would encourage you to recommend **OUTREACH** to your friends - whether or not they have access to the internet!*

ARE WE IN THE 'END TIME'?

request the free article

The Time of the Signs

Be alert to these events!

WHAT'S THE TIME?

Throughout the Christian centuries Bible students have often asked that question: *What's the time? Just when will Jesus return? Are we in the end-time?* All too often dates are set - and presented with 'infallible proofs' of their correctness.

So - unless the set dates are yet future to July 2004 then they have all so far been wrong - and how correct future dates may be remains to be seen. Whole denominations are spawned as sectarian interests squabble, and separate to rally round a specific date. Time and again particular dates set for the return of Christ or some other prophesied end-time event have come - and gone - without fulfilment.

Is This the End-time?

The end of our present civilisation and the beginning of the reign of Christ is set in stone. *It will come.* The Scriptures paint a vivid picture of the 'state of the world' we can expect at the end. And sure enough virtually all can be discerned in today's world.

But does that mean this is the end? Many Christians certainly believe so. As always, there's dissent. The Jews, for example, calibrate this present year as 5764 years since Creation. Many Christians say it is now 6008 years since then, give or take a few years. That's based on the work of Archbishop Ussher's calculation: creation, he figured, was in 4004BC.

As it is expected by many that mankind would have self-rule for a 'prophetic week' of six thousand years, then Jesus 'should have' returned by now to complete the week with a 'seventh-day rest' for mankind. The delay could be explained if there was a discrepancy in the calculation of the passing years. Or by Jesus' own

parable to the effect that his coming may be 'delayed'. Which is fair enough, and we could speculate on the reasons.

The setting of specific dates for prophetic fulfilment isn't new. Back in 999AD the notion of a millennium after Christ stirred a frenzy of activity. Then again the terrible events of the twelfth and again the fourteenth century convinced Christians in Europe that the end was near. In recent memory is the worldwide Y2K fears surrounding 1999-2000.

Whether 1844 was chosen, or 1975, or many specific years before or in between or after (dates are still being set!) - Jesus has still not returned. False expectations are induced about our resurrection and an end to life's pain.. And that, sadly, has helped turn some Christians aside from faith.

Timely Warning

It's unwise, then, to apply specific dates to Biblical statements. Time periods are indeed prophesied (eg the *'Seventy Weeks'* or the *'Times of the Gentiles'*) - though in such a way that they are open to interpretation. Witness the various views promoted in myriad books and articles!

Yet various pundits continue, for example, to assign specific dates to imagined 'eras' of church history. This notion helped lead to a great 'falling away' from the *Worldwide Church of God* when expectations failed of a 'flight to a place of safety' in 1975. Some corporate descendants of that church didn't learn the lesson and continue to this day to raise false hopes. A recent one is January 16, 2010 for 'the beginning of the Tribulation' - some 'hope'. We will see.

Bible prophecy *will* be accurately fulfilled. Jesus *will* return - *and on time*, but in the Father's concealed time. It is for Christians of every age to personally learn the lessons that Jesus outlined for all seven of those first-century churches in Asia: *"Whoever has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches"*.

However long each of us may live our efforts are to be two-fold: become Christ-like in character (a mammoth all-consuming personal task). And in co-operation with brethren in other assemblies to be witnesses for him in the world. 

Fences, not ambulances

Many men, women and children fell over a certain cliff. The local Authorities decided - expensively - to station a fleet of ambulances and paramedics at its foot to pick up the victims. Then some bright spark thought of placing a secure railing at the top. No more deaths or injuries.

When are the corporate churches going to learn that the sensible solution to governance is for each local congregation to be self-governing without coercion from a central headquarters? Each local assembly should have its own home-grown leadership and be small enough for the brethren to be interactive. No need for bureaucratic regulations or salary scales or a remote headquarters *etc.* Voluntary co-operation, not dictatorship, is the way forward. After all - such a system is the New Testament pattern.

Sadly, the appetite for power has not, largely, deserted the 'old' ministry. Nor has the desire for a comfortable salary or pension or prestige or respect. Old habits die hard.

For a 'working model' of this 'independent' approach please feel free to read *CGOM In Perspective*, downloadable at the end of the www.cgom.org Home Page. Or available in print from any of our addresses.

Outreach Ministries 2004 Conference Report

CGOM has an eight-year history of service, providing leadership, information, and Biblical teaching in ways of spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is a voluntary association of individuals and independent local assemblies who co-operate with one another on various agreed evangelistic programs. It is not a "denomination" or a "Church." *CGOM* does not legislate doctrine or local practice. As a commonly held foundation, all agree to accept the basic "*Statement of Beliefs*" passed down over the years. Each local assembly answers only to Jesus Christ. No individual speaks for *CGOM* on doctrine. Any assembly which in general shares these fundamental beliefs is welcome to be a part of *CGOM* in its Gospel mission.

Friday evening was a combination get-acquainted gathering and a welcome by Lawrence Gregory, pastor of the Tulsa Church. Rick Gawith reviewed the conference agenda.

A busy and informative day of presentations began at 7:30 AM with a continental breakfast. Julian Cruz opened the session with a TEAM acronym — *Together Everyone Achieves More*. He emphasized that Jesus had told His disciples to both "come" and "go." It is important to come together to share ideas, support one another - and to go forth with a vision of the Gospel of the Kingdom.

Operations consist of the following committees for 2004-2005: Outreach (chaired by Jeff Henderson), Member Services (Lawrence Gregory), Financial Oversight (Rick Gawith),

THE JIG-SAW CHURCH

...a parable of the Church of God

- Numerous small pieces* are assembled to form the big picture
- Each piece is unique - it will fit in only one place
- Looking at one piece won't give much of a clue to the whole
- The Assembler of the puzzle has seen a picture of the finished puzzle and he shapes and places each piece in its proper position
- Each piece works with the whole to complete the picture
- In this puzzle the Assembler painted the complete picture, cut each piece to shape and determined the content of each piece
- At the end the picture is complete, not one piece is missing - though some may have been spoiled and replaced

"I will build My church"

* independent local assemblies

Publications (James McBride), and Marketing (Renee Steel.)

A new approach was tried this year by having the attendees break out into small groups which were assigned individual questions relating to Member Services and Outreach development. The recommendations coming from these sessions were reviewed and will be condensed into a final report. Pat Dennis expressed concerns about dwindling volunteers to help in this program which led to a profitable discussion on how to improve our focus.

The Sabbath sermon presentations were "*Take it Easy*" by Steve Kieler and "*God's Purpose*" by Julian Cruz. The *Tulsa Fellowship Choir* presented several uplifting hymns between sermons. They travel to many Church groups in different cities and states with their music ministry. Ray Kurr is the director of the group.

The Marketing Committee concluded the evening from 7:00 to 9:30 with Web-site presentations.

The Sunday morning session included 2003 Feast of Tabernacles reports, and *CGOM*-sponsored or recommended sites for 2004. We had a conference call report from the United Kingdom by James McBride on the Publications Committee and a Canadian report by Len Leburnetz, who attended Conference.

The women of the local Tulsa Church provided delicious food for the entire conference. Their efforts were much appreciated.

A complete description of the *CGOM*'s objectives is at www.cgom.org, or, **Church of God Outreach Ministries, PO Box 54621, Tulsa, OK 74011-0621**, or by calling **1-800-611-8080**.

Report by Steve Kieler (Church of God News)

FINANCES (COGUK) - January-June 2004
INCOME.... £1721 OUTGOINGS... £1823