

outreach

The Newsletter of the Churches of God, UK

PO Box 2525
LINCOLN
LN5 7PF
England

Telephone: 01526 861217
e-mail: coguk@aol.com
web-site: www.cgom.org

Regd Charity No 283358

OCTOBER 2002

visit our web-site:
www.cgom.org

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

representing



Churches Of God Outreach Ministries

"THAT THEY MAY BE ONE" political party. And when a crisis arose it began to fall apart.

This year, the *Churches of God, UK* did not sponsor a separate UK Festival of Tabernacles site. However, our family were privileged to be invited to a site sponsored by another Church of God organization. It was spiritually uplifting, warm, friendly - and we were welcomed by the brethren and the leadership.

On reflection, we wondered why so many turn aside from such a fellowship opportunity. A dozen or so small groups in the UK - often with only a handful present - meet for the festival in grand isolation, and with limited resources, though they may have - usually minor - doctrinal differences. Others stay at home for similar reasons, or simply because fed-up with the bickering. Yet others choose different dates to assemble for the festivals.

Talk to the brethren - usually but unbiblically classed as 'lay members' - and you find a desire to be shot of such diversity. It's only on the fringe - and at the top - that minor doctrinal differences are magnified into division.

False Unity

Why, then, don't 'we all get together'? Been there, done that, even literally worn the T-shirt. A quarter century ago all these groups were indeed one - all a part of the same mega-buck organization. But the unity was on the surface. Everyone answered ultimately to one human individual who had the say-so on all church matters. Beneath? Simmering discontent, corruption, extortion - all the political in-fighting you would expect in a corporation or in a

Reform seemed unlikely, so inevitably a host of 'new churches' formed. Some big, most small - and many claiming exclusively to be the authentic successor of the former organization. Smaller than 'the original', but too often the same ingredients with a new brand name. And, of course, a new leadership claiming to wear the mantle of the former leader.

Disintegration of the parent body was inevitable given its structure and policies. Ride a cycle with a wobbly wheel and all the nuts loosen and fall off! Clearly, another bicycle with the same wheel will have the same problems. Recent history confirms this, as the new churches have split and split again.

Divine Perspective

Surely this isn't what Jesus had in mind when he prayed that we, his people, might be 'one' (John 17). The church of God exists on two levels. There's the visible church with its varied forms. It includes all who meet or associate together whether converted or not, and infested with its fair share of heretics. There is, too, the 'hidden' church - those individuals in whom resides the Holy Spirit, motivated by the very mind of God, scattered within the visible church of God in its varied organizational structures.

Request the free articles:
CGOM in Perspective
Church Governance

Spiritual success is all too often measured by numbers, yet Jesus said he would be present even if only two or three assembled in his name. And

WWW.CGOM.ORG

Be sure to visit the *Outreach Ministries* web-site!

HALLOWE'EN

Arm yourself with the facts about this non-Christian celebration. A free booklet is available from any of our addresses

indeed small groups are the New Testament pattern for the assemblies of Christians.

In such assemblies the practical expression of concern - 'love' - is made easier. With face-to-face contact and under Spirit-led leadership the spiritual growth of each member of the group is enhanced.

A Larger Unity

Another ingredient, however, is essential. Isolated groups wander along destructive paths, and a doctrinal tunnel vision can develop leading to exclusivism - and there are dozens of examples. There may be unity (focused on the 'new truth') within the group - but lacking is the wise counsel of other mature brethren from outside. For none of us has a monopoly of true teaching! 'No man is an island' - certainly true of lone Christians and of lone fellowships. (Indeed this applies equally to a lone fellowship *and* to a 'denomination' - a tightly-knit organized church of any size with however many associated fellowships in tow.)

A key to the larger unity is association with like-minded independent assemblies. Certainly there are foundation teachings which should be generally agreed so that we can harmoniously be yoked together. Too often, however, the focus of 'church' is a narrow emphasis on doctrine rather than the 'feeding of the flock' and the 'great commission'.

The New Testament church was an open society. Fellowship meetings included not only brethren but also 'unbelievers'. They also welcomed the input and guidance of other mature brethren - even external discipline! For, before leadership battles began they were all one in Christ. ﷻ

A growing cause of division within the church of God centres on 'the calendar' - *when* should we assemble for 'holy convocations'?

The article *Origins of the Calendar* sheds light on this vexing topic. Request a free copy from any of the *CGOM* addresses

When all of us apply these principles harmony will be restored within the Family of God. Indeed, if we take these principles on board - *apply* them - 'church discipline' as Jesus teaches us (Matthew 18) will be rarely needed. But, then, we are 'carnal!' ﷻ

The Devil's Toolbox

Harmony in the churches of God is the last thing Satan wants! He uses every imaginable means to disrupt and divide. His toolbox overflows with an endless supply of equipment he has specially designed to undermine the church - and ultimately to destroy it. We are his deadly enemy - and he is ours.

Satan works through society - through the media, through our friends, through peer pressure - to drive a wedge between us and God so that our 'love grows cold'. And there's one tool in particular that he deploys, a tool that has bedevilled the church since it began. It is *personal animosity between brethren*.

Jesus had to deal with it even among his disciples. They became quite grumpy, for example, when two of them sought leadership positions. Paul had personal experience of it with both Barnabas and Mark. And he had to encourage two ladies in one of the Philippian churches to 'make up'. Carnality, Paul calls it: "For while there is among you *envying* and *strife* and *divisions* are you not carnal" (I Corinthians 3:3).

It's an infection that has spread down the centuries to our own day. Perhaps a controversy arises over a doctrine. (Usually it's minor.) Assemblies have split over such trivia as the time or place to meet or the colour of the decor. More serious is when two brethren, two families feud. Or when there's strife tearing at the fabric of a church family. Or when a brother or sister feels wronged and ignored by the assembly leadership.

Such strife begins, usually, from a tiny seed of mistrust or pride or self-righteousness. *Resolution is urgent*. Paul said: 'don't let the sun go down on your wrath'. So you have less than twenty-four hours to be reconciled!

The Remedy

The example of Jesus is helpful. Peter cites his approach as an example for us: "...who [Jesus] did not return the insult when he was insulted; who did not threaten when abused but committed it to the righteous Judge" (I Peter 2:23). And Paul: "Bless your persecutors; yes, bless and do not curse...harmonize with others in your thinking...in no case paying back evil for evil...as far as it depends on you live at peace with everyone...do not revenge yourselves...if your enemy is hungry feed him...be not overpowered by evil but master evil with good" (Romans 12:14-20).

And we do well to follow another piece of apostolic wisdom: "Be kind toward one another, tenderhearted, mutually forgiving - *even as God has in Christ forgiven you*" (Ephesians 4:32). [*cont'd previous column*]