

Servants' NEWS

Vol. 1, No. 7

A newsletter for servants of the Almighty Eternal Creator, wherever they may be

November 1995

What is the Role of Church Members in Governing the New Testament Church?

How was the Church governed in the first century? This question is being asked in many Churches of God today.

There were three major groups who together governed the early first century Church. One of those groups consisted of the entire Church membership. The other two were the apostles and elders. Many people do not realize that the collective membership of the first century Church was very much involved in leading and governing the Church. The purpose of the paper is to show how Church members were involved in governing the Church in the first century.

A DEFINITION OF "CHURCH"

The term Church in the Greek is "ἐκκλησία" (*Ekklesia*). The *Ekklesia* or Church is the "assembly," the "gathering," the "company," the collective body of believers who comprise the Church of God. The best translation of *Ekklesia* is probably "Assembly". So the term Assembly will be used in place of the term Church throughout most of this article.

The Greeks used the term *Ekklesia* primarily to refer to a body of citizens gathered to discuss the affairs of state. There are a number of other secondary meanings such as the one in Acts 19:32 where *Ekklesia* refers to the gathering together of a riotous mob.

In the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament the term *Ekklesia* is used in reference to the nation of Israel. It refers to the gathering of the nation of Israel, where the nation was summoned for a specific purpose. The Septuagint also uses the Greek term *Ekklesia* to mean a gathering of a group that was smaller in size than the entire nation, but which was regarded as representative of the entire nation of Israel.

HOW JESUS CHRIST USED THE TERM "EKKLESIA"

But as a definition of how the Greeks used the term *Ekklesia*, "Assembly," is only a starting point for

Continued page 23

Godly Unity

"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" (Ps. 133:1).

Does the church group that you meet with dwell together in unity? In the organizations that you affiliate with, do they dwell together in unity? Does the Church of God around the world, as God sees it, dwell together in unity? Paul exhorts the Romans, "Be of the same mind toward one another..." and "Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom 12:16; 15:5). It is obvious that Paul is stressing true godly unity. Paul, like the Apostle Peter, emphasized this theme in many of his letters.

Many connect truth with godly unity. Paul spoke of those who "...did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved" (2Thes 2:10). Jesus taught his disciples and the Apostles, who further taught us in their epistles, that God's church should be unified. If all the members of God's church believe the truth, it should bring unity among them all. Yet, in the many splinter groups of the church that have formed since the time of the Apostles, there are people who blame "the truth" for causing the church to splinter! One person understands a doctrine one way and another understands that doctrine another way and each claims to have

Continued page 20

IN THIS ISSUE: UCG CHOOSES A GOVERNMENT

This issue contains many government-related articles as the United Church of God General Conference is meeting this December 2-4 to adopt the form of government that they will use. We hope they will arrive at a solid, Bible-based conclusion.

- 3 Nicolaitanism
- 5 News of Local Congregations
- 7 Oh, How I Love Your Law
- 11 Submission on UCG Draft Constitution
- 13 Ray Wooten on Church Governance
- 15 Letters and Responses

On Blessing Those Who Curse You

If there is any 'holy apostle' (Eph 3:5) we can 'get behind,' surely he is Jesus himself (Hebrews 3:1). Another that we could 'get behind' is the genuine apostle Peter.

Jesus, overflowing with love, tells us: "Bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you" (Luke 6:26).

Paul, indisputably a holy apostle, a true father of our faith (1Cor 4:15) tells us: "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse" (Rom 12:14). Paul and genuine 'servants of Christ' (1Cor 4:1) with him can sincerely say: "when we are cursed, we bless (1Cor 4:12).

Peter, indisputably a holy apostle, tells us: "Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. For whoever would love life and see good days must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from deceitful speech. He must turn

from evil and do good; he must seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil" (1Pet 3:9-12, quote from Pslm 34).

Peter tells us exactly what he means by "bless you" in the concluding words of one of his inspired sermons: "When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways" (Acts 3:26).

Those who curse you, more than likely, will consider your blessing mockery; and so, in a way, it is; the Lord: "mocks proud mockers but gives grace to the humble" (Prv 3:34). So, holy brothers, to bless those who curse you is truly a "labor in the Lord!" (1Cor 15:58.)

God's way of mocking those who curse is to bless. It is not comfortable to be mocked; "men detest a mocker" (Prv 24:9); it's something they want to get

away from!

It is good to provoke our fellow humans with the desire to get away from sin since it is written:

The Lord's curse is on the house of the wicked, but he blesses the home of the righteous.

He mocks proud mockers but gives grace to the humble.

The wise inherit honor, but fools he holds up to shame." (Prv 3:33-35).

You see, men, women and children need to be "saved" from the Lord's curse, the Lord's punishment; justice for the wicked, is hard: "fools he holds up to shame" and "when justice is done, it brings...terror to evildoers (Prv 21:15). For those who repent, those who turn from their evil ways, there is mercy; "but for those who are self seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil" (Rom 2:8-9). So the duty of genuine love is to help turn our fellow human beings away from the paths leading them to shame and disgrace, trouble and distress, ruin and death!

As it is written: "it will go well with those who convict the guilty, and rich blessing will come upon them" (Prv 24:25). Part of your "labor in the Lord"—the duty of genuine love to bring about the repentance of every fellow human being is to do as Jesus says: "bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you." It is the sacred duty of genuine love, holy brothers!

—Jeff Caldwell

Servants' NEWS

Vol. 1, No. 7

A newsletter for servants of the Almighty Eternal Creator, wherever they may be November 1995

Servants News is published monthly by *Friends of the Brethren*. Subscriptions are free to individuals interested in obeying their Creator as described in the Bible. We believe His law is the basis for living a life that is pleasing to Him in harmony with our neighbors. We believe the holy spirit gives us the power to live such a life as long as we continually repent of our sins and accept the salvation provided through our Messiah and Savior. We believe in living "by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God" (Deut 8:3).

We believe the gospel should be given freely: you may copy any or all of this publication and give it to others. *Friends of the Brethren* is financed by donations and has no ties with any of the other organizations listed in this publication.

Editor: Norman S. Edwards
Associate Editors: Norman Brumm III, Marleen Edwards, Robert & Christine Feith
Contributors: (many) "Thanks" to everyone involved.

Servants' News accepts articles for publication. Include a self-addressed stamped envelope for items that you want returned. We do not publish materials that attack individuals or organizations, nor do we publish materials that claim there is only one human organization through which the Eternal works. We are happy to print corrections for any significant errors. Address articles, letters and subscription/literature requests to:

Friends of the Brethren Phone: 501-872-1003
PO Box 6516 Fax: 501-872-1004
Springdale, AR 72766-6516 E-Mail: 75260.1603@CompuServe.com

Subscription and literature requests may also be sent to these addresses:

Canada: Friends of the Brethren, R.R. #2, Hastings, Ontario, K0L 1Y0

Scotland: Steve Little, 14 Roman Camp, Broxburn, West Lothian EH52 5PJ

Most scripture quotations are from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted.

Looking for a Way to Serve?

The Bible Sabbath Association is looking for a person or couple to serve as "corresponding secretary." Duties would include opening the organization's mail, recording subscription and literature requests, mailing literature, etc. The Bible Sabbath Association promotes the Sabbath—it is not affiliated with any particular church organization. For more information, contact:

Bryan Burrell
HC 80 Box 8
Fairview, Oklahoma 73737
Telephone: 405-227-4494

NICOLAITANISM

First-Century Clergyism and Priestcraft

Reprinted from the American Christian Magazine, July-Aug 1992

But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate.

So have you also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which thing I hate. —Revelation 2:6, 15

Speaking to His own, Jesus Christ identifies the spirit of Nicolaitanism as the thing He hates (or detests). Thinking of the things you personally detest can bring you to understand the emotion of Godly anger our Lord has toward Nicolaitanism. His response of anger to this nicolaitan spirit is not unlike His response to the money-changer spirit recorded in Matthew 21. Should not we (the genuine followers of Jesus Christ) demand of ourselves complete agreement with the mind of the Lord in detesting the nicolaitan spirit?

Hating Nicolaitanism should be a “basic of the faith.” But, there is overwhelming evidence we, as a people, have done the exact opposite! Contemporary leaders claiming to represent Christ not only fail to hate, detest and despise Nicolaitanism, they passionately covet it and support it.

They love, revere, maintain, defend and protect Nicolaitanism ... thinking they are doing God a service. We, the saints born into the contemporary “Christian” experience, have been blindly following these leaders who themselves have been blind to this nicolaitan spirit for several centuries now.

RECOGNIZING NICOLAITANISM

Identifying this spirit is a major first step toward restoration of genuine representations of the *Ekklesia* ... which will, in turn, restore the purity, potency and vitality Jesus Christ infused into first century communities.

When denouncing the nicolaitan spirit, our Lord was addressing communities of saints at Ephesus and Pergamos. Would not His words be the same today to us in our communities where we interact with fellow saints? Yet, investigation reveals contemporary **saints are almost totally ignorant of the cursed spirit of Nicolaitanism among them.**

EXPOSING NICOLAITANISM

Two Greek root words are brought together to form “nicolaitan”: NICO and LAOS. “Nico” means to conquer or bind. “Laos” means “the common people.” “Lait” (as in the central section of NICO - “LAIT” -AN) is a form of “laos.” The modern term “laity,” was formed by simply adding a “y.”

Now, for there to be a **laity** there must be a **clergy**. The “clergy” is the elite ruling class, as contrasted with the “laity” which is the common class. Hence, we now understand that the thing **Jesus Christ hates and detests is the spirit of clergy/laity** (i.e., class society with one ruling over another). Are you beginning to smell something?

Nicolaitanism is a widespread gigantic system of error and deception perpetrated upon the saints of God by those claiming to represent God. Actually, Nicolaitanism was devised by the church/state system of this world as a replace-

ment for the *Ekklesia*.

Nicolaitanism reveals the concept of “conquering the common people,” “victorious over the people,” and “subjugating the people.”

The work of the nicolaitan spirit is to establish and maintain a **“government”** over the regenerate followers of Jesus Christ so as to control and limit them in their effectiveness of representing the Kingdom of God on Earth.

The nicolaitan “government” is counterfeit to the government Jesus Christ referred to in the model prayer for His disciples, “Thy Kingdom come, on earth as it is in Heaven” (Matt. 6:10). Can we see this paraphrased as, “let there be manifest on earth, a visible body of people whose government is Jesus Christ”?

The body of Christ is presently in bondage to the spirit of Nicolaitanism. Nicolaitanism, as government, is interpreted by the Christian as **clergy**. Christians en-masse give support and obedience to clerical government, ignorantly believing clerical government is one-and-the-same as Christ's government. **Clergy propagates itself as a special “spiritual” class with privileges the laity doesn't have.** They claim to be officials (e.g. by ordination & license) who have the right to leadership in spiritual things. Churches have held the saints in bondage by practicing Nicolaitanism. Man-made titles are issued as counterfeits to God-authored abilities and natural positions (Rom. 12:4-8; Rm 13:1; I Cor. 12:4-11; Eph. 4:7; I Pet. 4:10).

NICOLAITANISM-PAGANIZED CHRISTIANS

Occupied with worldly things, the “laity” are brainwashed to think they can't be spiritually equal to the clergy. Thus, the people (or masses) are ushered away from, and excused from, their personal spiritual responsibilities. In the *Ekklesian* concept (founded in Ex 19:5-6) each head of the household would be a “king/priest”—each one commis-

Continued from previous page sioned directly under Christ—with no middlemen! (1Pet 1:23; 2:5; Heb 13:15, 16; 1Cor 12:7). There is nothing in the New Testament about needing “ordination papers” from the establishment church clergy before one is qualified and authorized to serve.

The *ekklesia* is opposed to Nicolaitanism, in every form—church, government, etc. The danger is that some may recognize it in Catholicism, but fail to see it in their own congregation. **The truth is that Nicolaitanism is Churchism—anywhere it appears.** It is seen in titles such as Reverend, Doctor of Divinity, Apostle, Evangelist, etc. Protestant, Fundamentalist and independent “Churches” need also to come clean on these issues.

A primary question is: does anyone teaching today (deluded by the spirit of Nicolaitanism) properly identify what a genuine New Testament “pastor” is? Has not this term “pastor” been corrupted and twisted in order to perpetuate the error to the extreme detriment of virtually the whole body of Christ?

A “pastor” is, in fact, a shepherd. An *ekklesia* is a called-out body of people; a specific community. The pastor shepherds within the community. Neither of these titles indicates “church,” “religion,” or “ritual.” The challenge is to identify clearly the mind of Christ pertaining to these terms. Once defined, this revelation would do wonderful destruction in Churchdom and be a quantum leap for the *Ekklesia!*

CLERGYISM = ELITISM

More than any other group, church “pastors” today restrict, hinder and prevent saints in the congregations from maturing into effective disciples. Under the nicolaitan system of control, **pastors must hold their “flock” from maturing to equal “spiritual” status as themselves.** There is an unwritten code: “my people must not progress to the ground I hold or I lose my ground, my status and benefits as “pastor.” Under the nicolaitan spirit the pastor must always be the pastor, the flock must always be the flock. The only exception being for people who will adhere to nicolaitan disciplines (Bible college, license, ordination, etc.) and aspire to the corrupt “pastor” status themselves.

CHRIST HATES CLERGYISM

Contemporary nicolaitan ordination

practices which anoint and appoint “pastors” and other “church” offices are far afield of what Jesus Christ established for the first century *Ekklesia*.

What is firmly in place today in Christendom is precisely what Jesus Christ warned the *ekklesia* at Ephesus and Pergamos to avoid.

With little exception, “pastors” today have vested interest in the nicolaitan “system” and will not “bite the hand that feeds them.” Licensed to marry and bury, the contemporary “Reverend” enjoys maintaining his position a “step above” the flock. Where do you find a “minister” performing a wedding or a funeral in the Scriptures? The perks of status, salary, parsonages, pensions, etc., make “pastoring” today an attractive “profession” for those who will meet nicolaitan standards of practice.

The “sacred desk” of the pulpit, the special class “ordained” to baptize, advise, sermonize, etc. maintains the nicolaitan stronghold. Only the “pastor” or his designates (those he deems will not upset the nicolaitan apple cart) are allowed access to the “sacred desk.” Nicolaitanism results in the “one tongue, many ears” syndrome of pulpit and pews. Full operation of the entire organic body, as established by Jesus Christ, is thwarted by the **nicolaitan system which prevails in virtually every “church” today.** The nicolaitan spirit demands a ruling hierarchy over the organic body, usurping the “Headship” of Jesus Christ. So-called “pastors” today justify this by calling themselves “undershepherds”??? Book, chapter and verse!

Whether it be to the “founding families”, church board, corporate board, missions board, or denominational headquarters, **apathetic saints** today are kept in tow via the nicolaitan concepts Jesus Christ detests. The purity, power and potency God could supply through obedience to His *Ekklesia* concept is kept at bay. “Church” members are taught the outright lie that God wants them to “tithes” and contribute to the continuance of these nicolaitan churches and pastors.

Nicolaitanism divides the true organic body of Christ at given localities, fostering a spirit of un-Godly competition among the saints. Saints, like dumb sheep, relish the social benefits and pay dues to these “churches” and “pastors” to their own detriment and

destruction. Then, when the crops fail, they blame God for the weakness.

They cry out to God for revival. But, revival is not what is needed! Transformation is what is needed. Transformation through repentance and housecleaning of the nicolaitan spirit, and a turning to adhere to *Ekklesian* principles of Scripture by the Spirit of the Living God!

But what about the “independent ministries”? Virtually all “para-church” ministries today are life-supported by the nicolaitan spirit as well—in traditional church fashion. Exposing the spirit of Nicolaitanism will serve to bring the contemporary “Christian Star System,” and big name nicolaitan ministries, crashing down to God’s Glory!

Would to God those who would give to ministries today could cease from following after deceptions which drain off funds needed for genuine *Ekklesian* work and local body cultivation.

MISPLACED “BODIES”

Exhortations of Jesus Christ to the seven *Ekklesias* (Rev. 1-3) reveals additional insights.

Baalism (Rev. 2:14) is companion to Nicolaitanism in causing God’s people to mix with the nations from which God had carefully separated them.

“Church” members today are not a visible, practical, identifiable, separate “called-out” people. Nicolaitanism has succeeded in holding the saints of God under the dual aspects of Roman Civil Government and Clerical Government (i.e., Priestcraft). Hence, the saints have not functioned practically under the **government of Jesus Christ.** Commitment and obedience to the government of Jesus Christ is shown to be inconclusive as the “first love” of the saints is abandoned in Revelation 2:4. The “False Apostles” of Revelation 2:2 are those whose “calling” is by the nicolaitan spirit. They attempt to make the *Ekklesia* fit the mold of synagogues (today we call them “Judeo-Christian churches”).

Revelation 2:9 mentions the “...synagogue of the adversary.” These false Jews were attempting to hold the saints bound to the rabbinical system and religious standards. Churches, by nature, must perpetuate themselves by providing the nicolaitan structure for offices and the ostentatious statuses of men.

Continued on page 6

Local Congregations



Announcing: Jubilee 95-Texas

A Seminar on The Sabbath and Holy Days in the 21st Century

Enjoy lively, inspirational discussion with some of the most knowledgeable scholars, educators, and speakers on the subject:

Speakers include:

Samuel Bacchicocchi, Andrews University
Donald Ward, United Church of God
Ron Dart, independent minister
Ernest Martin, Assoc. for Scriptural Knowledge
Jerold Aust, Church of God, Intran.
Peter Nathan, Ambassador University
Whaid Rose, Church of God, 7th Day
Larry Salyer, Global Church of God
...and numerous other leaders from diverse perspectives.

Subjects include:

Searching for the Sabbath at the Vatican
Holy Days for Christians—An Overview
Holy Days in the Early N.T. Church
Typology of Holy Days in the N.T.
Biblical & Historical Holy Day Calendar
Holy Days in Revelation—Language & Symbolicity,
The Sabbath and Holy Day Linkage,
Holy Days in Galatia and Colossae
...and numerous other interesting and timely subjects!!

Where is it? La Mansion Hotel, located on the beautiful River Walk in San Antonio, Texas. Special conference rates available.

When? December 23-25, 1995.

The Cost? Tuition only \$49 for the entire 3 day conference!

Who's the Sponsor? *The Friends of the Sabbath*, a service fellowship of business and professional laymen.

Who will be there? Representatives from most of the major Sabbath-keeping organizations will be there as well as men from a dozen or more smaller groups. The *In Transition* paper plans to send a team and Norman Edwards will be there from *Servants' News*.

What about Tapes? Tapes are available from the last exciting seminar held in Dana Point, CA. earlier this year. The complete set of 15 total hours costs \$49 for audio tapes and \$89 for video tapes.

More Information? Write *The Friends of the Sabbath*, 27068 La Paz #500, Laguna Hills, Calif. 92656 or Email: Sabbath26@aol.com or Voice Mail 714-491-3866 (Attn. Gordon Barr).

Church of God Worldwide Web

Internet users should take a look at this new Worldwide Web site:

<http://www.fred.net/rohrerll/wcg.html>

It contains links to almost every other "Church of God" Web site. It also contains lists of a couple hundred Sabbath-Keeping groups. One of its latest features: The Sept-Oct issue of *Servants' News* is available on-line. Whether or not every issue will be available depends on available time and disk-space.

Help Starting Local Congregations


Friends of the Brethren has always encouraged the brethren to fellowship with one another regardless of organizational or doctrinal differences. We have listed contact information for the larger church organizations and sources for locations of smaller congregations. However, we have heard of an increasing number of cases where brethren are allowed to attend the services of a particular group only if they promise to primarily support that group.

We have been receiving more requests from individuals asking if there are others on our mailing list with which they could fellowship or study. While we have responded to some of these requests, it is a time consuming process. We do not give out names and addresses without permission. We must send a let-

ter to those people on our mailing list that are within driving distance of the requester—asking them to reply if they are interested. It is a lot of work for us as we must look at many cities on a map and determine which ones are "within driving distance." Then we must fill out the appropriate number of form letters, address the envelopes, etc.

We have a way to simplify this process! In the next issue we will publish **just the names of all the cities and states** where all of our subscribers live. We will publish the number of households in a given city if there is more than one. For example, if you live in Dallas and would like to meet with others, our list might show you that there are 3 households in Dallas (one of which is you), 2 in Ft. Worth and 1 in Denton. You could send us five stamped postcards or letters with Dallas on 2, Ft Worth on 2 and Denton on 1. (If you consider Denton too far to drive, do not send us a post card for it.) We will write the proper name and address on each card or letter that you send us and put it in the mail. If the person likes your letter and responds back to you, you can talk about friendship and/or studying together.

If you do not want your city name published in the next issue of *Servants' News*, please call or send a postcard right away. We realize that a few people may be the only Sabbath-keepers in a particular small town and may wish to keep their *Servants' News* subscription private. Please do not worry about receiving unwanted mail—if you are not interested in making local contacts, just throw away what you do not want. We will not forward letters to you from the same individual more than once.

If you are reading someone else's copy of *Servants' News* and would like to have your city appear in the list, please ask for your own subscription. If you know of other scattered brethren looking for local fellowship, please let them know they are welcome to participate. 

**"Nicolaitanism", from page 4
THE "BODY" SHOULD BE HEALTHY
AND VITAL**

The *Ekklesia* is an organism; a living thing; a complex structure of interdependent elements whose relations and duties are largely determined by the needs therein. The *Ekklesia* is the "one new man" of Ephesians 2:15 & 4:24—a body constituted to carry on the activities of life by means of organs separate in function but mutually dependent. Do we recognize this in 1 Corinthians 11:29-30? "...many are weak, sick and die... not discerning the Lord's **body**."

Genuine love toward our Lord Jesus must bring us to repent of the nicolaitan spirit. This must be our chief occupation today if we are to be overcomers and "...eat of the Tree of Life..." (Rev. 2:7), "...of the hidden manna..." and "...receive a new name..." (Rev. 2:17). **Without this repentance we have the Lord's promise He will fight against us (Rev. 2:16).**

This must call us to the work at hand. Deliverance begins in the house of God (1Pet 4:17). The nicolaitan spirit pervades religion today ... indwelling individual saints. This spirit must be cast out. Nothing less than the all-out warfare of Ephesians 6:12 against "...wickedness in high places..." must be implemented to the pleasure of our God and the success of our posterity.

Leaders willing to accept the challenge to root out this nicolaitan spirit prove themselves as genuine leaders. Warriors bold enough to overcome this nicolaitan spirit prove themselves true warriors!

"Wherefore come out from among them, and be you separate, says the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you" (2Cor. 6:17).

—C. J. Milosh

Reference:

Nicolaitanism: The Rise and Growth of the Clergy, by Fredrick W. Grant


Nicolaitanism by R. P. Daniel

Both available for a few dollars from Believer's Bookshelf, PO Box 261, Sunbury, PA 17801.

Further word-study:

Strong's Greek Dictionary, #3531,32
Babylon Mystery Religion, Ancient and Modern by Ralph Woodrow, p 115.

Unger's Bible Handbook see Revelation Chapter 2:6-7, page 845.

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, a commentary by John F. Walvoord, pp 58, 67-69. 

If it is not government from the "top down" then what kind of government is it? As we know a kingdom has laws. The laws of the Kingdom of God are the commandments given by God. Jesus summed these laws up simply as love toward God and love toward neighbor. The Kingdom of God requires

that its subjects love God with all their heart and their neighbor as themselves. Jesus said God is love. The law is love. Jesus amplified the law in the sermon on the mount.

How can anyone get hierarchical government from the Ten Commandments? Where is there ever mentioned in the Bible a "hierarchical form of government?" The scriptures that talk specifically about government condemn "exercising dominion over them." "Let the greatest among you be as a servant" (Matt 20:25). Indeed, the word "minister" means "servant."

Hierarchy by definition implies division—some over others. Christ prayed before he left this world that we would be one with God, Him, and each other. If we are at one with someone, that certainly implies a very close relationship. In close relationships trust, mutual respect, and admiration replace long lists of do's and don'ts. Rules and regulations are often so subtly inferred that there is hardly any occasion to bring them up. If they are brought up, they are never done so in a heavy-handed way.

Which of us "lords" it over his friends? Which of us thinks we have to "govern" them? We are the most comfortable with our close friends. I've never entered into a friendship where someone told me they were going to be the boss. That's not to say I did not follow the other person from time to time. They followed me sometimes also. We call that "give and take." No one kept score, though.

When the veil was torn at the death of Christ, Christians gained access to the Holy of Holies. This meant that we now could go directly to God the Father's throne in Jesus' name. The curtain symbolized a barrier that Christ's death removed. What then stands between us

and God? Certainly not a hierarchical government. "What shall separate us from the love of God.

Shall trial, tribulation... No, for we know that in all these things we are more than conquerors through Christ Jesus who loved us." (Rom 8:35,37).

Once we ask God to forgive our sins they are gone. We are at one with God.

How are we to rule? With love!. We know that "perfect love casts out fear" (1Jn 4:18). So, we cannot rule with fear. We can, however, rule with the righteous law. "...Love is the fulfilling of the law" (Rom 13:10). As the scripture says, "in the latter days I will pour out my spirit upon man" (Acts 2:17). The law of God, the love of God, will be in the heart of man. All that means is that everyone in God's kingdom will have written that law in their mind (heart). That is where ruling takes place—in the mind of man. Man is going to rule himself with the law of God.

As Church of God people, we know that we are the sons of God (1Jn 3:1-2). Who rules God? Why, of course, He rules Himself! We too must rule ourselves!

Man has always ruled himself. No amount of external pressure, rules, or regulations can really govern a man from outside his mind. The problem has always been man's heart—how and what rules he uses to control himself in the privacy of his own mind (Deut 5:29).

While some have said: "God is testing us now to see if we will follow an imperfect human government—if we do, then He knows that we can follow His perfect millennial government." **No scripture says anything like that!** It is often the politically-wise sycophant that flourishes in human hierarchies. A person who adheres to the Bible instead of the human leaders is usually put down.

—Mike Summers

This article was slightly edited from the original version appearing in *Your Choice*, a thrice-yearly publication encouraging the keeping of the ten commandments. For a subscription write:

Your Choice

PO Box 156

Warren, MI 48090 

**The Myth of
Government
From the Top Down**

Oh, How I Love Your Law!

Part Three

“Therefore be careful to observe them [the laws]; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’” —Deuteronomy 6:4

Parts One and Two of this article appeared in the June and July issues. Please write or call for a copy if you would like them. Those articles covered the five major principles of law and the specific laws of Exodus 21 and 22. We continue our exposition with Exodus 23 and part of 24.

Righteousness when Others Sin

You shall not circulate a false report. Do not put your hand with the wicked to be an unrighteous witness. You shall not follow a crowd to do evil; nor shall you testify in a dispute so as to turn aside after many to pervert justice. (Ex 23:1-2)

The initial reaction to these commandments is often: “I do not do that—I do not go around telling lies or join mobs in a riot.” It is good that we do not do those things, but the application of this law is bigger than that. Who are the wicked we are not to follow? Are they people with torn jeans and blank t-shirts that say “WICKED”? Or could they be nicely dressed people that are leaders in our congregation or civil government? Could they be TV commentators?

The Hebrew word for wicked is *rasha*. It is used over 200 times in the Old Testament, usually in a general sense to denote undesirable people. A few times we find specific sins defined as “wicked” or specific people that are called “wicked.” Murderers are called wicked (Num 35:31 and 2Sam 5-12, Pslm 37:14,32, Prv 12:6). People that do not repay loans are called wicked (Psalm 37:21). But the most frequent mention of wickedness is the perversion

of justice—those that are wealthy or in authority using their power to do evil (Jer 5:26-8, Pslm 10:2, 11:2, 28:3, 17:9, 37:12,16, 55:3). In Proverbs 17:23 we find that bribery, offering money to pervert justice, is wicked. The elders that tried to lift themselves up over a righteous man, Moses, were also called wicked (Num 16:13,15,25-26).

Proverbs 29:12, KJV, is particularly interesting: “If a ruler hearkens to lies, all his servants *are* wicked.” A servant of a ruler that is listening to lies has the duty to tell that ruler the truth, and keep telling him until the ruler believes the truth. Of course, the ruler may depose the troublesome servant—but it is better to be deposed than wicked. It can be particularly difficult to tell the truth when an erroneous view-point is popular with the “boss” and most of our friends, but that is what the law requires.

This writer must confess to sitting in congregations and talking about how “John and Jane Exmember” must be bad because they were “disfellowshipped.” No sins of the Exmembers were publicly mentioned nor was I personally knowledgeable of any difficulties. Yet I followed the rest of the multitude in shunning and speaking evil of them.

This same problem can occur in secular society. A person can be arrested as a suspect for a well-known crime, and then be vilified, physically injured or even killed by angry people that have no evidence against the person except his arrest.

When we read Exodus 23:1-2, we must realize that we must avoid joining a crowd to do evil, even if the crowd is “respectable.” Our father is no respecter

of persons (Rom 2:11).

You shall not show partiality to a poor man in his dispute (Ex 23:3).

If a poor man takes something from a rich man—something so small that he will not miss it, should the poor man go unpunished? What if the rich man gained his wealth from oppressing the poor man to begin with? Our all-wise Lawgiver knew that the approach of “I cheat a little so you can cheat a little” will only lead to evil. The poor man must be punished for stealing so he can learn to work for his living rather than stealing. If he has been oppressed by a rich man, then the rich man must be punished—in most cases by restoring double of what he has taken from others.

If you meet your enemy's ox or his donkey going astray, you shall surely bring it back to him again. If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying under its burden, and you would refrain from helping it, you shall surely help him with it (Ex 23:4-5).

This is a true test of what kind of heart we have. When someone that has caused us trouble is suffering, do we conclude that they are suffering a judgment from the Eternal and rejoice in their suffering? Or will we help them in their suffering? (The person may refuse your help, but it is at least your duty to offer.)

“You shall not pervert the judgment of your poor in his dispute (Ex 23:6).

This addresses an opposite problem to the one in verse 3. Judges shall not respect the person of the rich and decide in his favor, figuring that the poor man will not have any recourse. Unfor-

"Law", from previous page

unately, this has nearly become a standard practice in our society by at least two methods: Laws are so technical and complex that it is often the man that can afford an expensive lawyer that gets his way—not the one with the righteous cause. Also, criminal sentencing studies show that a janitor who walks off with a few thousand in cash from a bank is likely to serve a much longer sentence than a white-collar employee that embezzles millions.

Importance of Justice & Fairness

Keep yourself far from a false matter; do not kill the innocent and righteous. For I will not justify the wicked. And you shall take no bribe, for a bribe blinds the discerning and perverts the words of the righteous (Ex 23:7-8).

Nearly our entire marketing and business world is based on false claims and bribes. Advertisers admit that they are not selling cars to the public; they are selling prestige and self confidence. They are not selling soap or make-up, but beauty and youth. Advertising claims are often as deceptive as possible—as long as they are not technically illegal. Popular books on "personal success" instruct readers to buy flowers or other little gifts for the boss to get a promotion later on. Bribery is often a way of life in obtaining big-business or government contracts.

Killing the innocent? Does anyone do that? Over a million babies are killed every year by people that did not adequately plan before their conception. Whether governments support or prosecute this killing is not as important as changing the attitude of parents that are willing to kill their children because they are inconvenient.

Also you shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the heart of a stranger, because you were strangers in the land of Egypt (Ex 23:9).

While this scripture certainly refers to the policies of civil governments, it also refers to the way we treat others. When many of us began keeping the Sabbath, we became "strangers" to our friends and relatives—some of which stopped associating with our "strange" and unusual customs. What do we do now when someone begins to attend a religious group that has doctrines different than our own? Do we oppress the strangers?

Times for Resting

Six years you shall sow your land and gather in its produce, but the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow, that the poor of your people may eat; and what they leave, the beasts of the field may eat. In like manner you shall do with your vineyard and your olive grove (Ex 23:10-11).

We do not have the space to adequately discuss the land rest scriptures in this article. There is much more information in Leviticus 25. It is important to note that it is very difficult to fulfill the intent of this scripture in that the seven-year cycle may have been lost and most poor people today live far away from farms and would have no idea when or how to gather from the resting land.

Six days you shall do your work, and on the seventh day you shall rest, that your ox and your donkey may rest, and the son of your female servant and the stranger may be refreshed (Ex 23:12).

In contrast to the land rest, we do know when the weekly Sabbath is. Of the hundreds of languages throughout the world, about half of them derive their name for the seventh day of the week from "Sabbath." The New Testament Scriptures record numerous confrontations between our Saviour and the leaders of his day over what could be done on the Sabbath—there was no argument about which day was the Sabbath. Romans, exiled Jews, and other peoples have maintained calendars from the first century until now. There is no disagreement on which is the first and which is the last day of the week.

Something some of us may wish to think about is whether or not we are letting our servants rest on the Sabbath or not. If we pay someone to cook and serve us food, are they not our servant? Shouldn't we prepare food on Friday, so we do not have to hire someone else to work for us on the Sabbath? It is true that most restaurant workers will certainly be at their jobs whether or not we patronize their business. However, the commandment **to us** is to give **our servants** the Sabbath off, not to give **everyone else's** servants the Sabbath off.

Look only to our Father in Heaven

And in all that I have said to you, be circumspect and make no mention of the name of other gods

[Hebrew *Eloyhim*], nor let it be heard from your mouth (Ex 23:13).

Some have taken this scripture to mean that we should never pronounce the names of other would-be deities—we should even avoid saying the days of the week or the names of the planets because most of them are derived from names of Greek and Roman deities. This understanding cannot be correct in that we are commanded to read the scriptures and they contain names of numerous pagan deities: Baal, Dagon, Chemosh, etc. Furthermore, there are places in Israel named after Baal, and these names are used in the scriptures (Jud 20:33, 2Sam 5:20, 13:23, 1Kngs 9:18). The intention here is that we should never invoke their names in a manner dignifying them as "gods." Isa 45:5 makes it clear that there is "no God [Eloyhim] beside Me."

Three times you shall keep a feast to Me in the year: You shall keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread (you shall eat unleavened bread seven days, as I commanded you, at the time appointed in the month of Abib, for in it you came out of Egypt; none shall appear before Me empty); and the Feast of Harvest, the firstfruits of your labors which you have sown in the field; and the Feast of Ingathering at the end of the year, when you have gathered in the fruit of your labors from the field. Three times in the year all your males shall appear before the Lord God. You shall not offer the blood of My sacrifice with leavened bread; nor shall the fat of My sacrifice remain until morning. The first of the firstfruits of your land you shall bring into the house of the LORD your God. You shall not boil a young goat in its mother's milk (Ex 23:14-19).

These scriptures give us important information about the Holy Days and some of the offerings required of the people. We will discuss them in detail in future papers on the Holy Days.

The admonition not to "boil a young goat in its mother's milk" occurs two other places in scripture (Ex 34:26, Deut 14:21). All of these places are talking about commands that produce prosperity and blessings. Adam Clarke and other commentators point out that there was an ancient ritual of boiling a young goat in its mother's milk to assure a prosperous year. This is a clear command not to be a part of such false "prosperity rituals." The traditional Jewish interpreta-

tion of these scriptures—avoiding the eating of milk and the meat of any clean animal at the same meal is very questionable. All verses specifically describe the ritual of boiling a young goat in its mother's milk. There is never a reference to other clean animals or any mention of eating anything together. In Genesis 18:8, we find Abraham serving his guests milk, butter and meat together.

Behold, I send an Angel [Hebrew *mal'ak*—messenger] before you to keep you in the way and to bring you into the place which I have prepared. Beware of Him and obey His voice; do not provoke Him, for He will not pardon your transgressions; for My name is in Him (Ex 23:20-21).

The Hebrew *mal'ak* appears in the old testament 195 times, about half the time it is translated “messenger”, a few times “ambassador” and the rest of the time “angel”. The Hebrew means “messenger” but does not indicate whether the messenger is heavenly or human. The Bible translators attempted to determine which messengers were divine and wrote “angel” when they found it appropriate. That leaves us to ask: “Who was this special messenger with ‘My name... in Him’”? Was it Moses? Joshua? A special angel? Melchizedek? YHVH? These are good questions to which we are still searching for answers.

Blessings for Obedience

If you indeed obey His voice and do all that I speak, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries. For My Angel will go before you and bring you in to the Amorites and the Hittites and the Perizzites and the Canaanites and the Hivites and the Jebusites; and I will cut them off. You shall not bow down to their gods, nor serve them, nor do according to their works; but you shall utterly overthrow them and completely break down their sacred pillars. So you shall serve the LORD your God, and He will bless your bread and your water. And I will take sickness away from the midst of you. No one shall suffer miscarriage or be barren in your land; I will fulfill the number of your days (Ex 23:22-26).

This is a simple promise of physical blessing for seeking the Eternal and obeying His way. It is interesting to note that as most Western nations are glam-

orizing and accepting more non-Biblical religious practices (New Age, occult, Roman, Greek, Hindu, etc.), the very curses described in these verses are coming upon us: devitalized bread, polluted water, massive health-care expenses, a more than 10% infertility rate among couples that want babies, and a rising death rate among young people.

I will send My fear before you, I will cause confusion among all the people to whom you come, and will make all your enemies turn their backs to you. And I will send hornets before you, which shall drive out the Hivite, the Canaanite, and the Hittite from before you. I will not drive them out from before you in one year, lest the land become desolate and the beast of the field become too numerous for you. Little by little I will drive them out from before you, until you have increased, and you inherit the land (Ex 23:27-30).

These are promises that the Eternal made to his people that many have forgotten. These promises were made before Israel sinned in the matter of the golden calf, and before they lacked the faith to enter into the promised land at their first attempt. The Eternal promised to drive out the inhabitants himself—Israel would not have to fight! It was only later, after their lack of faith, that the Eternal had them go to war. Even when they did fight wars, if they obeyed the Eternal they had no or few casualties (see the books of Joshua and Judges). The more they disobeyed, the more casualties they had—eventually being defeated by the same people that the Eternal would have driven out if they had only obeyed.

We can learn a great spiritual lesson from this. Rather than wearing ourselves out fighting each of the many injustices that infringe upon us in this world, we might be better off to concentrate more on obeying those commands that our Father has clearly given us, and asking the Eternal to fight our battles for us.

And I will set your bounds from the Red Sea to the sea, Philistia, and from the desert to the River. For I will deliver the inhabitants of the land into your hand, and you shall drive them out before you. You shall make no covenant with them, nor with their gods. They shall not dwell in your land, lest they make you sin against Me. For if you serve their gods, it will surely be a snare to you (Ex 23:31-33).

In verse 9 we were told not to “oppress a stranger”, but here we are told he is not to dwell with us? How can we reconcile these scriptures? The answer is right here! The problems the Eternal brought out were “lest they make you sin against Me” and “serving their gods.” If “strangers” are openly practicing their religion and customs in sufficient numbers that Israelites are seeking to be like them, then it is a problem. Our Loving Father realized that celebrations and practices of other cultures would eventually draw His people away from Him. While it is not the job of His Congregation to try to change the immigration policy of today, we can understand why so many Western nations are having immigration problems.

Spiritually, we can learn a lesson about attendance at our worship services. Strangers can attend and should be treated fairly, but they should conform to the existing service. If they continually attempt to teach or practice doctrines that are clearly unbiblical, they should be asked to leave.

Covenant Ratified

So Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD and all the judgments. And all the people answered with one voice and said, “All the words which the LORD has said we will do.” And Moses wrote all the words of the LORD.... Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read in the hearing of the people. And they said, “All that the LORD has said we will do, and be obedient.” And Moses took the blood, sprinkled it on the people, and said, “This is the blood of the covenant which the LORD has made with you according to all these words” (Ex 20:3-4, 7-8).

After their initial agreement of obedience in Exodus 19:1-8, these verses record the major covenant between the Eternal and his people. While the “ten commandments” are special because the Eternal spoke them directly, there is no separate covenant recorded in relationship to them. When we think about the Sinai covenant, we must include all of these principles in Exodus 20-23.

To Be Continued

This concludes the Exodus portion of this study, but there are several other books that contain very similar sections of practical principles for our lives.

—Norman S. Edwards

Thoughts Regarding UCG-IA "Draft" Constitution & ByLaws

Dear Brethren,

Over the last four months, I have had several direct communications with two particular United Church of God *an International Association* (UCG-IA) Board members: Director Victor Kubick and Director-Pastor Bob Dick.

In essence, I have exhorted and pleaded with each of them, and with the entire Board, to accept the basic proposition:

All Brethren have Spiritual gifts, and thus such gifts ought to be the building blocks of our Church, beginning with local administration and growing into an affiliation of local Churches which act collectively in doing a collective work.

To my deep disappointment, these two Directors along with almost all other Board members of UCG-IA have apparently moved away from this principle since the May Indianapolis General Conference of Elders.

Today, we Brethren (who attend UCG-IA or who are looking for a non-hierarchical alternative to WCG) are facing a "draft" of UCG-IA Constitution and ByLaws which follows the form of central government which we all formerly experienced. As you may know, this "draft" seriously departs from the spirit of the Indianapolis Conference where central government was to be downplayed and the membership were to become full participants in organizational aspects of the Body of Christ, and especially within each local church area.

In fact, there are recent reports of pressure being put on certain congregations and their ministry (where local boards have been functioning quite well for some months) to **not** remain separately incorporated and/or to stop their local collections of tithes, budgeting, etc.

In the Pacific Northwest,

Regional Pastor Bob Dick has avoided the establishment of a local board in our Seattle congregation despite a vocal minority of Brethren requesting one according to the May 1, 1995 Financial "recommendations" of the Indianapolis General Conference. There are no indications that the local pastors within the Northwest Region have been encouraged to establish local boards.

Many articles have already been written as to the lack of Biblical basis for the form of government as proposed under the "draft" Constitution and ByLaws.

These proposed ByLaws and Constitution would place the Brethren into two distinct groupings: (1) an ecclesiastical governing group, and (2) the "laity".

We have recently left an organization that has maintained these groupings and as a result, the spiritual growth of ALL individual members has been impaired and impeded.

You may find it helpful and interesting to consider Herbert Armstrong's article on church government published in the Good News in February 1939 (see back page of this *Servants' News* for a free copy.)

You may wish to consider the following propositions in your prayers and discussions with other Brethren regarding the proposed "organization of the UCG-IA."

1. Separate groupings between Brethren ought not to be made in the

Before his many years of Sabbath-keeping, Richard Bodkin attended Quaker worship services. While the Quakers may lack beliefs that we consider essential, their Biblical understanding of government has allowed them to work together in a stable manner for over 300 years. Quaker congregations are locally autonomous and both local and national leaders are elected. Bodkin is employed as a lawyer and is familiar with the construction of corporate bylaws.

Constitution and Bylaws.

There is no respect of persons with God. (Rom 2:11.)

2. All Brethren ought to be asked to vote on the matters approved by the General Conference of Elders.

There is no respect of persons with God." (Rom 2:11.)

...and when they had chosen by show of hands... (Acts 14:23.)

3. Delegates from each local Congregation—chosen by the members of the local Congregation and in addition to the local Elders—should be sent to the General Conference of Elders, for their vocal input.

...they were received of the church, and of the apostles... (Acts 15:4-22.)

4. Each local Congregation—associated with United Church of God, *An International Association* should be ensured in the UCG-IA Constitution and Bylaws to have the freedom to maintain its own local self-government policies, viz. local Board of Directors, local collection of tithes and offerings, and local budgeting.

...look ye among you...whom we may appoint over this business. (Acts 6:2-5.)

...send it unto the seven churches... (Rev 1,2,3.)

You may wish to consider writing on the subject matter of these propositions to those persons you know who will be participating in the General Conference of Elders in Cincinnati this December.

Your Brother in Christ,
—Richard E. Bodkin
11913 93rd NE #203
Kirkland, WA 98034
Phone: 206-820-8495

Submission on the United Church of God Draft Constitution

(or it's time to learn the lessons of history)

I. Introduction

The United Church of God leadership has asked for member input into the draft constitution. This is within the spirit to permanently involve the membership in decision-making, the Work and also to break down the old concepts that members should just 'pray, pay and obey'. UCG obviously wishes to be an open Church, doing everything in the light, rather than in the dark. As a result, its constitution should reflect these values lest some wish to return to the old school of doing things in the dark and whipping the membership over trivia. We do not want a repeat of the 'God's Government' syndrome; being screamed at that 'ministers are as Christ before you' nonsense; harassing members out of jealousy if they are perceived to have talents, having a book published and so forth; or believing rumours and distortions about God's children.

The draft constitution as it is, is a fine document, including checks and balances on preventing anyone becoming too dominant; preventing basic doctrine from being changed (although some basic doctrines have been left out); and providing for legal aid for the ministry and so forth. But guess what? There is not a thing for the membership. We have been promised checks and balances, local Church boards as a permanent feature and member involvement in doing the Work. But where are they mentioned in the constitution? And why not? For, if they are not included in it, they can be taken from us at any time.

With each member possessing a copy of the constitution, annual reports (with audits and salary levels stated), the circulation of minutes of meetings, statement of beliefs, code of conduct for ministers and disfellowshipping appeal rules, guidelines for setting up local bank accounts, guidelines for screening incoming ministers will result in the Church operating in the light rather than in the dark. This of itself is a check and balance and would cause any authority to be very careful about making rash decisions (such as huge salaries) when it would be known by all and sundry.

Let's be quite frank, this openness would be good for the Church. The

world could not complain about our governance and our will to be honest and open in our operations. They could not complain about our Christian conduct, but they may about our doctrines. We all want to do a real big Work again. But it would be counter-productive to do a big Work which may be full of such severe problems, wastage and abuse of members. No use throwing tens of millions of dollars into a giant media effort if we find that we are continually lashed in the public for abusive and wolf-like 'ministers'.

II. This submission is made upon the following principles:

1. The draft constitution is a very good first attempt; 2. Certain checks and balances and means of ensuring the open form of Church government and local boards promised to us at the outset of all of this is adhered to; not to continue the local Church boards as a permanent feature would be unethical; 3. Certain critical doctrines should be added to the constitution to make it extremely difficult to alter; 4. Fairness and Biblical principles adhered to in areas of judgment.

Why the interest in the constitution? Some think that we are becoming bogged down in red tape, committees, paper work and such like. But this is not the case. Note the following reasons.

III. My interest is for the following reasons:

1. Constitution is the basis of government. Church government and the lack of checks and balances was the means used to undermine the Truth.

2. We are all responsible before God to do our little parts to ensure that the Truth survives. Leaving it up to the ministry or just hoping that God 'will do something' shows a lack of faith and responsibility. In fact, it is sheer laziness

and dangerous and one is thereby transferring one's rights and responsibilities to someone else in effect. This "someone else" may be one who may not want member involvement and is eager to see the membership just become lax in such issues. Also, we need to learn the lessons of the past few years.

3. Some may argue that they have joined UCG for doctrine and not governmental issues. Such a one has not been listening to the messages or reading the material. Government is a doctrine. In fact it is an undergirding doctrine upon which the rest survive. Some think that a Work can be done without an organisation by just somehow printing magazines. The world is a sophisticated place requiring bases for operations. In law, operations (in our case a Work) cannot be undertaken by a corporation (in our case the UCG) without a constitution.

4. This is a means to continuing vigilance. I think strategically and long-term. By simply extrapolating out the changes made over the past few years, many members have forecast the very changes made this year.

The same principle applies to the constitution. If certain safeguards are not included, then we can see what is likely to occur in a few years. Christianity is not a religion for fatalism or thinking that such and such is inevitable. We are here to think, use our brains and do something about these things and we must do what we can to prevent apostasy and abuse. It is **not** inevitable that the Church goes off the track again [see Coworker Letter 25 August 1985].

5. I see no safe-guards from abuse for the general membership in the constitution. Only an ignorant person or liar would claim that this was a minor problem in the Church. Here we are, the body of Christ, and not a thing for us! Everything in the constitution is for the ministry and for the doctrines. What

“UCG Constitution” from previous page about us for a change? The only time we get a mention is over disfellowshipping! Why have we not learnt the lessons of history?

6. Consideration for the recent history of the Church of God. Consider what would have been if the WCG constitution contained the following clauses upon the death of HWA: (a) The new Pastor-General may not change the constitution or doctrine without 75% agreement of the Council of Elders; (b) He could not replace any member on the Council without 75% agreement; (c) The Council can replace him under certain conditions (eg heresy); (d) Basic doctrines were written into the constitution; and so on. We could have avoided all of the unhappiness and stress of the past few years. The neo-Protestants would have been forced to split off. Instead, we have been forced out. We must do all in our power to ensure this never happens again. Let's learn the lessons of history please!

7. I am concerned that we have the correct foundations to do the Work and for the Church to function. Let's get it right so that we don't have endless rewrites (although amendments are inevitable). No doubt the Australian United Church of God constitution will generally mirror the US United Church of God constitution. As such, this submission applies equally to both.

IV. Following are the suggestions for the constitution:

The numbering system used below matches the numbering used in the UCG draft constitution. Some of the points below are comments, some are suggested revisions and some are new articles.

2.0 mission statement: It is difficult to understand why it is not stated that the UCG will continue in the basic truths which came to the Church of God via HWA. This should be stated.

3.3 (1) general conference of elders may approve doctrinal changes: which doctrines? Those in the constitution or those in the statement of beliefs? Both should be the case. Add a line “in full consultation with the membership” which will keep it in accord with the principle in the last line of article 2.0.

3.6.1 expulsion of an elder: add a line “in accordance with the code of conduct approved by the general conference

of elders”.

4.1 Preamble: As it will take many years to address so many issues and doctrines, the UCG should adopt the doctrines of HWA as expressed in the “18 truths” (except with a modification of the 1st truth—government) and the “Mystery of the Ages” as well as D&R, the race question, Mark of the Beast, the coming Holy Roman Empire, born again in the resurrection, history of the Church of God etc until such time as each doctrine is examined and approved by the general conference of elders. At this time the only doctrines that there is general consensus which there has been agreement for change are Church governance, medicines, make-up and perhaps one or two others. This should be stated in the constitution. Without this we would be virtually doctrine-less and without continuity. How do we currently administer divorce cases for example?

4.1.1 Christ “is true God and true man”: what does this mean? Has this ever been a teaching agreed to or understood by the Church? I can recall that this is what we believed He was while on the earth, but not after His resurrection. This is something that trinitarians teach. Why is it creeping in here?

4.1.3 Satan and demons: We should also mention something about the angels here.

4.1.10 Sabbath: Why leave out that the Sabbath is a sign? Most strange.

4.1.11 annual holy days: add that every member household will be supplied annually with a copy of the Church's current understanding of whichever Sacred Calendar it has adopted; it will include both Hebrew and Roman dates and an explanation of how the calendar works.

4.1.13 Christians are forbidden from taking human life: extend this concept to include abortion except in the case of a mother's life being threatened.

4.1.14 This hints at the teaching that the Anglo-Saxon-Kelts and Nordics descend from Abraham. We need to be more explicit and state just who Israel is today. At the same time state that this is not a racist doctrine. God is calling people from all nations into spiritual Israel. All peoples may be traced to the descendants of Noah as outlined in the Table of Nations in Genesis 10.

4.1.15 God's purpose is the creation of spiritual character: we need to

be proud of the doctrine that God is a Family and that we are born into that Family. This should be stated openly. We should not be ashamed of the truth nor reject it (Hos 4:6).

4.1.16 The Church is not a denomination: extend this to state that the UCG is only one ‘branch’ of God's Church and consequently members are free to visit other sabbath-keeping groups.

4.1.17 the resurrection: state that there are 2 (or 3) resurrections. As is, anyone reading this would think that there would be just one.

4.1.19 new clause: state that tithing and offerings are principles.

7.2.2(7) relationships with other organisations: change to “with other sabbatarian organizations”.

7.2.2(13) develop rules of association for local congregations: add the words “jointly with the local congregations”

7.3.1 “The board may provide, by resolution, for representation on the board of those elders residing outside the United States”: To ensure that this is possible, the Australian constitution should include an acceptance clause, adding that “if approved by the Australian-based elders”

7.9: Church membership and discipline: before we get into this negative area, we need to state that members have rights such as a right to love, fairness and justice. When addressing disfellowshipping, state that any minister who maliciously disfellowships anyone will themselves be disfellowshipped and the member reinstated immediately (Deut 19:15-21). The constitution should empower the local Church boards to review cases of harassment, slander against a member by a minister, suspension or disfellowshipping in accordance with the principle of Matt 18:15-18, and overturn such decision. See 15.0 below. On further reflection, this clause should be removed and perhaps be contained in a separate policy document.

10.4 the annual report to be made available to all members: add that the report shall contain the annual budget, audit, list of all ministers, code of conduct for ministers, disfellowshipping appeal guidelines.

10.5 disclosure of top five salaries: instead state that all salaries plus allowances of all ministerial levels and

RAY WOOTEN ON CHURCH GOVERNANCE

November 10, 1995

Dear Friends,

I have received many requests regarding what I believe relative to church governance and "the work". I decided as a result to write a brief letter to at least explain my overall concepts in this area. I would like for my friends to know that I don't have any complaints or contention with the doctrines of most Sabbath keeping groups, which have in the past been associated with the Worldwide Church of God. My basic difference with some lies in the area of governance. I simply disagree with the concept of any man or group of men having dominion (i.e. governmental control) over the faith and beliefs of others. (2Cor. 1:24) I have been told that I have no following or support for these convictions. That is probably true but that is not my purpose. These personal convictions, by their very nature, preclude the prospect of personal gain or large following for any one man or group of men. They are, however, based on the Word of God and allow for the freedom of every Christian to be directly under the dominion of Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit.

I believe that under the New Covenant that Jesus Christ is the Head of each member of the Body. There is no one between the Head and any other member. The Holy Spirit is the ingredient in the New Covenant that was missing in the Old Covenant. With the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, each person is led to the understanding and the willingness to submit to the living and

the written Word of God. There is not the need for human government or for a human mediator such as Moses. This is why there is no "Moses seat" in the New Testament church. Under the Old Covenant, Moses actually sat on Christ's seat.

Remember that today, all power and authority has been given to Jesus Christ by the Father. Christ is the Mediator, the Apostle, the Shepherd, etc.. As a matter of fact, He has all these offices for Himself. He delegated the job of Mediator to Moses—for a time. He delegated the job of Apostle to those whom He personally selected and sent to introduce His message, i.e., the gospel of the Kingdom of God. And those Apostolic jobs or responsibilities were not transferred or passed as a baton from one human to another. They are gifts from God and are not transferable. Today, He has delegated to some the responsibility of assisting Him as shepherds. But it is always under His direct supervision and authority. This is the reason He has said "You are not masters, rabbis, fathers, rulers, lords or governors..." "But you are brothers..." and servants. (Matthew 23:2-10)

I do believe in a work. And I would hope that it could eventually include every human being on earth! But we have to begin where we are. I believe that the work includes making disciples, not merely preaching the gospel as a witness or visiting heads of state and other political figures and never even mentioning the name of Christ or the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. This

work must emanate from healthy congregations, all of whom are involved and have a sense of ownership in this work. The sense of ownership must involve more than paying one's tithes and offerings and praying for the success of the others as Christ told the Pharisees. (Matthew 23:23)

As Christ knew, the Pharisees were precise in paying their tithes and offerings and they prayed often. He tells them in Matthew 23:3 that they did not have judgment, mercy and faith and says "these ought you to have done, and not to leave the other undone". They should have practiced judgment, mercy and faith and so should we. Judgment requires each of us to be involved in the process of making decisions within an assembly or congregation relative to the commission. And all of us must know that we are a necessary part of that process.

It is in this way that God is working with each and every one of us to build holy, righteous character and to help us qualify for rulership in the coming Kingdom of God. Such a concept—that is so different from our recent past practices—requires absolute faith in God. But this is and has always been a work of faith. The only question is: Are we mature enough in the faith of Jesus Christ to accept it?

Your Brother in Christ,
Ray Wooten
PO Box 361334
Birmingham, AL 35236
Phone: 205-822-8524
Fax: 205-822-8529

"UCG Constitution", from previous page officers will be listed. Why were the allowances left out? Why were the other Board members left out? [If leaders are setting an example of righteous financial management, should not the members see and learn from it? —SN Editor.]

10.8 new clause with sub-points: ACCESS BY MEMBERS TO UCG POLICIES AND MATERIAL

10.8.1 The UCG is committed to undertaking everything in the light rather than in the dark. As such it shows that it has nothing to hide and fulfills its original promise to the membership to have

an open form of government with the resultant checks and balances.

10.8.2 Every member shall be supplied with a regular updated list of all UCG books, booklets, reprint articles, research papers, policy documents and such like.

10.8.3 Any member of the Church shall, within 14 days of the request, be loaned for 14 days or supplied with a copy of the following items that the Church produces: Statement of Belief, Ministerial Code of Conduct, Disfellowshipping appeal rules, Conflict and Grievance Resolution Procedures,

Ministerial and Officer Performance Management System Guidelines, National and Local Board Minutes, any ministerial bulletin or letter [i.e. anything similar to the PGR —Ed.], guidelines for interviewing potential ministers, guidelines for setting up local bank accounts, doctrinal research papers, general conference statutes, agenda and any papers associated with the international or Australian general conference of elders and any other document related to rules, policy or doctrine.

12.6 judicial authority: remove or alter. Only the courts may interpret and

“UCG Constitution”, from previous page enforce Bylaws.

14.0 new article: INTERSABBATARIAN CO-OPERATION

14.1 It is mentioned elsewhere in these bylaws that the UCG does not consider itself to be the only true Church nor is it exclusivist. As such it will endeavour to break down the barriers with other Churches of God [eg Church of God, 7th day —Ed] and to co-operate in any way possible (eg joint Feast sites or sharing resources) with similar groups [eg CGI, GCG, CBCG, CGG, —Ed].

14.2 As such the leadership of the UCG will attempt to establish a General Advisory Council of Churches of God. The Council will meet at least once each year to attempt to break down barriers, establish dialogue and to ascertain whether joint activities are feasible. It is envisaged that the Council will include the leadership of the Churches on it.

14.3 All members will be given a copy of any policy or guideline on intersabbatarian co-operation and any news on such co-operation will be announced at Sabbath services and published in the Church's periodical.

14.4 No member, elder or pastor will be prevented from visiting or attending another positive sabbath-observing group or reading material from another sabbath-observing group.

14.5 Other sabbath-observing Churches of God may affiliate with the UCG to undertake a joint 'Work'. The guidelines for such affiliations are produced separately by the Board. No application for affiliation is automatic.

15.0 new article: EMPOWERMENT OF LOCAL CHURCH BOARDS

15.1 Local Church boards are a permanent feature and no local Church will be without one, unless the majority of members are opposed to the concept. However, the members will be surveyed annually to ascertain whether they wish to, or not to, have a local board.

15.2 All members will be supplied with the guidelines or policy on the nature, purpose, structure and role of the Board. The policy will be produced by the regional home offices with participation by the general membership.

15.3 Generally the board's function is to assist the ministry and membership in numerous administrative ways. The following guidelines shall apply: review

of disfellowshipping and suspension decisions- relieve the ministry of many burdensome administrative responsibilities- the board shall contain no more than 50% of ordained men and no less than 5 and no more than 12 members- both men and women shall be represented on the board- the board shall have offices such as a secretary, treasurer, media co-ordinator, activities co-ordinator and youth worker and any other advisory office that is seen fit- the UCG recognises that to undertake a big Work certain functions related to doing the Work should be centralised (eg TV, magazines), but that the local churches may also be involved in activities for the Work (eg radio show, local lecture campaigns, writing articles, advertising or personal evangelism). The board would be an appropriate body to co-ordinate such efforts without approval of the home office—provided the home office is notified of the activity. This way the Work may be co-ordinated and local talents/gifts utilised (1Cor 12).

15.4 all local boards will be elected by an annual vote of all adult members (both baptised of any age and unbaptised from the age of 20 and older).

15.5 Local Church boards are empowered with the review and reversal of any ministerial decision on disfellowshipping or suspension of a member. Should a member not be satisfied with the outcome of the decision, the regional home office and then the international office established in the USA are the next steps in the review process.

15.6 The principle of Matt 18:15-17 shall apply in regard to serious offenses and sins. This principle applies equally to the ministry as to the lay-membership. No minister is exempt from this Law of God.

15.7 Matthew 18:15-17 steps: In similitude to a serious offense, the ministry must provide the membership with an appeal or conflict resolution procedures based on this principle. **(a)** Go to the alleged offender to determine the nature of the problem. No minister will be allowed to act on rumours and gossip. **(b)** If that does not reach a satisfactory solution, then the two parties must meet at a neutral venue with 2 or 3 neutral, non-ordained witnesses. That is, witnesses of the meeting, not witnesses who allege crimes. **(c)** If an impasse is reached, it may go to the board for deter-

mination. It does not go to the board if a person has repented or who accepts the discipline. **(d)** Should the board be involved and the decision not be acceptable, it may be appealed to the regional board [neutrality is not guaranteed —Ed]. **(e)** Finally, should that not be acceptable, then the board based at Arcadia may be the final determinant [more likely to be neutral —Ed]. (Appropriate scriptures: 1Cor 6:1-6; Matt 5:22; 1Tim 5:19-20; Deut 17:4-7; 19:15-21).

16.0 new article: RELATIONSHIP OF LOCAL CONGREGATIONS WITH THE REGIONAL HOME OFFICE [this section to spell out the relationship between those few local congregations that want autonomy and the home office. Points in addition to the ones below will probably be needed.]

16.1 Although it is not the desire of the UCG for such actions, each local congregation shall be free to be an autonomous associate of the UCG, provided that a majority of the membership has voted to be so. Voting on the status of autonomy or full membership of the UCG shall be voted on regularly by the membership bi-annually. [note: I do not personally advocate autonomy, but a balance between the full control by the home office and the local churches. These clauses will permit the continuing affiliation, fellowship and brotherly love of the churches to continue. Together we can do a big Work. If we force those that want autonomy out, the organization will splinter. —Ed]

16.2 An affiliate church should utilise the UCG name and may utilise UCG resources and material to undertake the Work. These resources may be given free to the affiliate or paid for by it.

16.3 The affiliate's pastor shall not be paid from the UCG home office, except by special agreement.

16.4 The affiliate church shall only have observer status at the general conference of elders and may not cast a vote on any matter.

16.5 There shall be free inter-action and fellowship between the affiliate and the general voting UCG churches.

It's time to learn the lessons of history!

—Craig Martin White
GPO Box 864
Sydney, Australia 2001
craigwh1@pop.ozonline.com.au



We print a representative sampling of our mail—both positive and negative. We do not include names unless we are fairly sure that the writer would not object. To avoid any difficulty, writers should specify how much of their name and address they would like us to print. We include our response to each letter in this type-style. We have selected a title for each letter for easy reference. If writers supply their own title, we will be happy to use it.

This Past Feast: A Better Way

LETTER: Nov 1, 1995
Dear Norman,

I find meat in every issue of Servants' News. Your efforts are much appreciated! This past Feast I was able to visit with some small independent churches that avoid authoritarianism and hierarchal government. It was a refreshing change. Not only is there a more healthy relationship between members and ministers but the church seems more functional and flexible. There is a better way and with God's help we will find it.

Your friend,

—L. W., Colorado

RESPONSE: We helped sponsor a similar Feast this year. The Feast is very different when you go to be a part of it, as opposed to just going to listen.

—Norman S. Edwards

Looking for a Congregation

E-MAIL LETTER: Oct 27, 1995

Hello Mr Edwards,

Thanks for the newsletter, Servants' News. I really enjoyed reading it and look forward to many more issues.

I am a little confused though. I need your assistance, please. What really is the difference between the UCG, CGI, and the GCG. Can you help me out. Right now I am a member of the WCOG, but I am in the process of leaving it, because I feel that heresy is invading it. I am looking for a new church home, (I am leaning heavily towards UCG based on my study up to now) but I want to be lead to the right one through the Holy Spirit. Can you tell me as

clearly as possible the tenets of the three above and also whatever happened to the Church of God, 7th Day, that HWA broke away from? Do they now follow the Holy Days and other WCOG teachings from the pre-Tkach era?

I am looking for a church (and I realize no church with humans in it is perfect nor has 100% of the truth) that follows the Holy Days, the Ten Commandments, and of course, the Sabbath as a seal of God's people. I believe in the New Covenant, but I feel that the WCOG is misinterpreting it to fit in with mainstream Protestantism. I was intrigued by your articles on church gov't and I believe that Christ IS the ruler of His Church and that man made hierarchal gov't only leads to bad things. Too much power gets concentrated and absolute power does corrupt absolutely! Is there a church out there that follows Christ's teachings and the few examples of "church gov't", i.e., collegiality amongst humans WITH the Holy Spirit from Christ leading IN EVERY WAY? Please help out if you can.

[request for five articles deleted]

I am looking for such an organization or one close to that in the Oakland/San Francisco Bay Area (Oakland preferably) in northern California. I appreciate your assistance in this matter. Thanks and God bless!

—Serapf@aol.com

RESPONSE: Your question is a fairly common one and very important. Many of the WCG splits would like you to believe that they are the primary group through which God is working. After all, if they believe in a hierarchical government, is not there only one "man at the top?" They need to make these claims in order to establish their headquarters as the place where you should send tithes and to establish authority to set doctrine and to govern "their people." Yet most of these groups will acknowledge that there are converted people in other organizations. Is it your job to make sure that you join the one "right" (or at least "best") organization? How can you go about doing this?

If you try to pick the right organization on the basis of doctrine, you will find that most of the relatively young organizations have no writings at all on many important doctrines. Some organizations pretend that they understand everything but simply haven't had time to write it yet. Others will honestly admit that they need to do much more study before they feel they understand certain doctrines. Even if you study all that an organization has written about,

you will also probably find some doctrines in every organization that you do not completely agree with. While we are not saying that all organizations' doctrines are about equal (some clearly have major errors), we are saying that it is difficult to prove one "right" organization.

If you try to pick an organization based on fruits—how they are preaching the Gospel, you have a fairly major statistical problem on your hands. The Church of God, Seventh Day is still split into several branches, but there are well over 100,000 members on the planet—more than all of the other WCG splits combined (most of these members are not in the United States). While most of these people do not keep the holy days, they allow their members to do it—their government is very tolerant. Without any massive media campaigns, they apparently have born a lot of fruit. CGI has baptized several thousand new people (no previous Church of God experience) over their 17 year existence and spawned many other groups which have also baptized people. The Global Church of God has baptized a few dozen new people in their two years of media efforts. The United Church of God has yet to launch an outreach effort. They plan to, but we have no way to know how effective it will be.

Obviously, it is unfair to compare the long- and short-lived organizations. It takes time to establish a teaching program and time for people to respond and grow to be ready for baptism. In addition, we must ask the question: what is their criteria for baptism? Do they baptize anyone that requests it so their numbers will "look good" or do they baptize only those that are serious about making a lifetime commitment? Further compounding the issue, the baptism practices may vary greatly in an organization—some Pastors may be pushing for growth, others may be serious about baptizing only people that are ready.

One last point to throw into the puzzle. There are several hundred Sabbath-keeping groups out there. We are sending you Alan Ruth's paper which details the WCG splits. The Directory of Sabbath-Observing Groups lists more (send \$10 to Bible Sabbath Association, RD 1 Box 222, Fairview, OK 73737). While some of these groups are way off doctrinally, others appear to do a better job of Biblically defending their doctrinal position than the major groups do. Also, there are little groups of 30 or so that baptize a few new people each year. Proportionally, they are growing much faster than the big groups!

So do we have the impossible task of

continued from previous page
evaluating all of these groups for doctrinal correctness and gospel-preaching effectiveness? If you are about ready to give up reading please do not!

What scriptures tell us that our salvation, reward, or happiness depends upon us being "in the right group?" Paul makes it clear that we should not try to align ourselves with certain teachers, but that "every man's work will be made manifest" (1Cor 3). Revelation two and three list seven congregations that were within a few days journey of each other, each having different doctrinal problems. Did the Messiah counsel the people to all move to Philadelphia? No! He says "To him who overcomes..." and then states a reward. He also says: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." Other scriptures agree with this principle (Isa 66:2, Matt 16:25, 24:28, Luke 21:36). It is what the individual does that is important, not what organization he is a part of!

It is a lot easier to feel we are in the "right" organization than it is to feel we are living a righteous life. To satisfy an organization, all we have to do is attend regularly, contribute, and avoid offending the pastor. Living a righteous life extends from our hair to our toenails—a continual need to seek the power of the holy spirit to lead us in everything we do. Our Father in heaven sees everything, where the minister is often easily swayed or fooled. But if we are to serve in the Millennium, we must be thoroughly righteous, not just a person that speaks a "party line."

We suggest you visit which ever congregations are available to you, and try to determine where you can learn the most and also be of the greatest service. Our experience has been that local congregations vary greatly within the same organization. Some pastors loudly proclaim their organization to be the only right one and will not allow anyone to serve in any way unless they advocate the same view. They may send "spies" to listen to other's conversations before and after services to find out if anyone is disagreeing with the pastor or headquarters. Another pastor in the very same organization may take a completely different approach. I personally know of pastors in hierarchical organizations that believe the hierarchical system is wrong, but they continue to work within it because of the other truth that is taught.

After visiting the available congregations take some time to pray and possibly fast about your decision. Romans 14 shows that it is not necessary to agree on all points of doctrine, but that we can be tolerant. The

main question: can the goals of learning, growth, and service be fulfilled in a given congregation? If it appears that there is no satisfactory congregation in your area, you may have to work with others to form a new congregation. The paper Assembling on the Sabbath will help in this matter.

I hope this has been a help to you, and I have prayed that you will find a place where you can grow and serve.

—Norman S. Edwards

Check Into The Calendar

LETTER:

Sept 26, 1995

To: Dear Sir,

Please send your publication. I understand that you keep up with the various splinter groups that have come out of WCG. I began listening to the World Tomorrow broadcast and getting literature in 1962, began attending in 1975 and was baptized in 1976. I got out of WCG in Dec 1992 because of the doctrinal changes. Then I was with the church of the Great God until August 1994. After this I was with the Global Church of God and the Church of God, In Truth at the same time. Now it looks like I will be with the Church of God, In Truth alone.

They are teaching the truth about the [Hebrew calendar] postponements. Anyone who believes that the Holy Days should be kept should look into this. It seems that Judaism has added a lot of rules apart from the scriptures that cause many of the Holy Days to be delayed one or two days. Sometimes a 13th month is added one year too soon which causes all of the Holy Days to be one month late. This will occur in 1997. In 1996 all of the Holy Days are postponed except Pentecost. We have some interesting times ahead, don't we?

—E. G., South Carolina

RESPONSE: We commend your diligence in seeking truth and acting on your convictions. It is unfortunate that some congregations will shun or put out individuals that act on their sincerely held understanding of the scriptures.

It is possible to demonstrate that the Jewish calendar we have has evolved over the years and that there is no direct scriptural command for the Rabbinical practice of delaying the start of the year so holy days will begin on certain days of the week. The main questions we hope to investigate and write about are: Have the sincere Jewish leaders been assigned the task of setting the calendar? (See Lev 23:2,4,2, Matt 23:2-3, Rom 3:1-2, Phil 3:5-6.) Hundreds of pages, both pro and con, have been written on this point. If we con-

clude that the Jews do not have that responsibility, then we must ask, "Who should set the calendar?" We know of at least six different calendar systems in use by people that have studied the scriptures on the subject. Do we need a uniform system or should each group or individual determine it for themselves? We hope to write on this subject in the near future.

—Norman S. Edwards

Look into Passover and Pentecost

LETTER:

Sept 30, 1995

To: Friends of the Brethren,

I came out of Worldwide Church of God the Spring of 1995 wanting to cling to truth. With all the changes I was trying to make sense of, I could have given up and said, "What is truth anymore?" Well, I know God's word is truth. After months of studying the basics again, using Strong's Concordance, works of Josephus, quotes from Jewish historians, Bacchiocchi's "From Sabbath to Sunday," etc., I realize that there is much more to understand. Change can be good, the right kind of change. I feel more humility and love because of what I have been through. God's Spirit does work with our own weak human spirit so we can submit to his guidance. In humility I have come to see a few biblical principles in a different light. I tried to study with an open mind and without bias, asking God, "If this is true, help me to understand and not be deceived." I know many are searching the scriptures daily to show themselves approved.

I respectfully request that the ministry look into the Passover and Pentecost issue. Through study I feel that the Lord's supper was not a Passover service; especially since I found the Hebrew [probably "Greek" was intended here —SN Editor] for bread in Luke 22:19, Mark 14:22, 1Cor 10:16, 1Cor 11:23,28 and other scriptures in the New Testament referring to Christ's body as *artos*, meaning loaf or leavened bread. Christ broke and shared leavened bread with his disciples. I understand it was against Jewish law to eat unleavened bread before the feast of the Passover which starts the first day of unleavened bread on the 15th. Christ did desire to eat the Passover with his disciples but knew he would die before he could. Could his last meal be a special fellowship meal, a love feast (Jude 12) that was a continued practice with the early church? (1Cor 10:16, 11:18-29). It looks as though in verse 18 of 1Cor 11 the brethren were coming together as a church but in an unworthy manner (v 29) to remember

Christ's broken body. See *Adam Clarke's Commentary* regarding "feasts of charity" which shows the Council of Laodicea prohibiting the early churches' love feasts. Also see *Jamieson, Faussett and Brown Commentary*, and *Jewish New testament Commentary* on the Last Supper.

Paul does say in 1Cor 5:7-8 that Christ was our Passover sacrifice (sacrificed late afternoon on the 14th) therefore, let us keep the feast. What feast? The feast of the Passover which begins the first day of unleavened bread on the 15th. This is the feast that God tells us to keep in all our generations. It all fascinates me spiritually, especially learning Christ was breaking regular loaf bread with his disciples during the Last Supper. Also see Samuel Bacchiocchi's book *From Sabbath to Sunday* pp 81, 162. There are other references, but too numerous for a letter.

Christ told us to follow the Pharisees in Matt 23:2-3. Paul was a Pharisee perfect in the law (Acts 22:3, 26:4, Phil 3:4-6). Both followed the Holy Days handed down through the Jews to whom were committed the oracles of God (Rom 3:2).

Correct observance of the Passover season also brings us to Pentecost which we may have been keeping on the wrong day. Easter Sunday to Pentecost Sunday is the Catholic Chaldean observance of Floralia (see "the Age of Faith" by Will Durant p 75). I've read that the Catholic "Pentecost" corresponds to the Sadducean and Samaritan "Pentecost" in ancient times, and these Samaritans carried their false beliefs from Babylon (2Kngs 17:23-34). I understand the official Jewish practice during Christ's time has always been to count the fifty days beginning with the day after the first high holy day of unleavened bread (see Josephus *Antiquities of the Jews Bk 3, X, 5-6*). Josephus was a Pharisee, Paul was a Pharisee, and Christ told us to observe and do what the Pharisees did. The wave sheaf offering, compose of individual grains, offered together, made possible by the sacrifice of Christ, seems to represent true Christians—those called of God as his firstfruits. We are the firstfruits offered to God by Christ our high priest (see "The Temple" by Alfred Edersheim, pp 257-259). If the date of the Holy Days were changed by Christ or the early church, it seems the Bible would mention this great controversy just as it did with the controversy over circumcision.

In closing, I ask the ministry to please look into these two holy days, as I have definite questions. I am a homemaker wanting to humble myself before God and

grow in grace and knowledge. If you think this is in error, please send me more information to study. There are more brethren, I am finding, who are discovering this information also. To me, it gives more in-depth meaning and closeness to God to learn more wonderful understanding about his holy days.

—P.M., Washington

RESPONSE: We commend you for your study into these Scriptures. We hope to write on Passover and Pentecost some time next year. Now, we are working to build an environment where questions like these can be openly discussed without fear of disfellowshipment.

—Norman S. Edwards

Hard Time with GCG Gvmt' Article

LETTER:

October 19, 1995

Mr Edwards;

Upon reading your very opinionated article on the GCG, I feel I must answer you in the spirit of Proverbs 26:5 [Answer a fool] according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit.

I read a book recently that I would like to recommend to you, the book is entitled *The Road Less Traveled* by M. Scott Peck, M.D. I would like to direct your attention to Page 46, Subtitled Transference: "The outdated Map"

It begins: "This process of active clinging to an outmoded view of reality is the basis for much mental illness."

Dr. Peck's definition of "transference" is that set of ways of perceiving and responding to the World which is developed in **childhood** and which is usually entirely appropriate to the childhood environment (indeed, often life-saving) but which is **inappropriately** transferred into the adult environment.

In a case history of one of his patients, he related a story that I personally believe applies to **you!!**

This particular patient had frequent changes in employment, his life since adolescence had been markedly unstable, and he dropped out of college, because he said "My teachers were a bunch of hypocrites, hardly different from the police". Because of his brilliance and creativeness in the field of computer technology, his services were in high demand by industry. But he had never been able to advance or keep a job, because, he quit jobs after disputes with his supervisors, whom he described as "**Liars and cheats interested only in protecting themselves.**" His most frequently used expression was: "You can't **trust** a soul!!!!"

He arrived at this conclusion because his Parents did the following: they promised him a bike for his birthday, but they forgot about it and gave him something else. Once they forgot his birthday entirely, but he saw nothing drastically wrong with this since "**they were very busy**". They would promise to do things with him on weekends, but then were usually "**too busy.**" Numerous times they forgot to pick him up from meetings or parties because "they had a lot on their minds." As a child he suffered painful disappointment after painful disappointment through his parents lack of caring. At some time he came to the agonizing realization that he could not **trust** his parents!!!! This belief extended to everyone in authority, Hence; The Outdated Map, it seems to me, that you are suffering the same "**transference,**" the same **outdated map,** and cannot stand the possibility that there may be someone in authority over you!!!!!!

You use scripture to prove what you already believe, because you don't want anyone in authority over you!!!!

"He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things." (Eph 4:10)

HE IS Jesus Christ!!!!

And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; (Eph 4:11).

[Original letter contained Strong's definitions of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers.]

All of the above positions of authority, were **given** by Christ for the [perfecting of the saints], for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ (Eph 4:12).

No group of believers, choosing, presenting the ones they believe are qualified, or those who appoint themselves as **teachers**, such as yourself, But, Jesus Christ is the only one doing the choosing!!!!!!

Remember Hebrews 13:8: "Jesus Christ [the same] yesterday, and to day, and for ever."

Your ranting about Mr. Meredith prompted me to write this letter to you. He (Mr. Meredith) is a dedicated, humble, man who was trained at the feet of the apostle Armstrong, and his efforts are bearing fruit in the **work** of the Living God!!! That's the only thing that counts! Giving everyone a forum for disagreement is not doing God's work!!!!

Sincerely

—Massachusetts

RESPONSE: Thank you for your letter. It was the only one we received with more than a sentence in opposition to this article.

continued from previous page

I think you have made some mistakes.

I was not a deprived child growing up. My parents put their lives into raising their three boys. One of the main reasons I moved from San Diego to Arkansas was to be nearer to my parents. My wife, children and I are going to visit them and pluck turkeys as soon as I finish this letter. I feel that my father was outstanding in keeping the promises that he made. You could call or write my parents or brothers if you want to know these things.

As far as stability of employment, I have had only three employers during my 21 years of work. I left my first two jobs by my own choice—my supervisors were sad to see me go. You could talk to them if you would like to.

For many years I believed what I had been taught: God worked through a hierarchical government and He would correct the men at the top if they got “out of line.” When it became obvious that Mr. Tkach was not being corrected, I wondered if God had failed or if my beliefs were wrong. I studied government in the Bible—going back to the Greek in many cases to find the truth. It took several years to study, understand and accept all of what I found.

I agree completely with your quotes from Ephesians. It is our Father that places men in his service, not a human hierarchy. A spiritual teacher is a spiritual teacher only if the Eternal grants him that gift: not if he appoints himself, is appointed by a hierarchy, or elected by a group. Whether or not I claim to have the gift of teaching is unimportant. You must compare what any teacher says with the scriptures and decide whether that teacher is helping you learn truth or misleading you.

You said a lot of good things about Mr. Meredith. I worked with the man for two years and he certainly has a lot of powerful strengths—and like all of us—some weaknesses. If you see that the Scriptures back up what he teaches, then learn from him. I do hope your impression of his character is based on more accurate information than your impression of me!

When it is time for each of us to “stand before the judgement seat of Christ” (Rom 14:10, 2Cor 5:10), I doubt He will ask us about the character of other teachers. He will ask us about what we learned from the Bible and how we obeyed it. We should concentrate our study on the scriptures and not on each other. If there are errors in our understanding of the scriptures, then please write and let all our readers know.

I understand how difficult it is when someone shows you from the scriptures

that you have misunderstood a doctrine for many years. It has happened to me. I felt somehow cheated and like my life had been wasted. It is easy to feel angry at the person that showed you the truth. We must also realize that our Savior allowed us to believe the false doctrine all those years—He could have used His power to show us the truth at any time. We cannot “undo” all of the years of wrong understanding. What is important is that we thoroughly understand new truth and put it into practice.

May the Eternal grant all of us wisdom.

—Norman S. Edwards

Our Mother Isn't a Corporation!

LETTER: November 1, 1995
Dear Friends of the Brethren,

Thank you so much for the service you have been providing which to us has been the very best spiritual food we all need. It's the kind of spiritual food necessary to grow.

The WCG did have and teach God's truth, but became as a “Noisy gong or a clanging cymbal” (1 Cor 13:1-3) to use Paul's words; mainly because that main ingredient “Love” wasn't being displayed from that top-down government. I also thank God for delivering us from that form of unjust governance.

I would like to relate one bit of humor out of all this.

When we wrote our minister to let him know we were leaving WCG because of the confusion entering our teaching, his reply to us put the blame on people like us who were leaving their sick mother when she needed us the most. So a couple of years later when he left WCG to go with United we wanted (but did not) to send our former minister a sympathy card letting him know how sorry we were to hear that his mother had finally died.

What does that say about top-down government?

We hope your work, (with checks like we have enclosed) will continue. Thanks again.

Would you please send to us:

1. *How Does the Eternal Govern Through Humans*
2. *The Worldwide Church of God Splits*

Thank you,

— J. L. F., Texas

RESPONSE: Thank you for your encouragement. It is amazing how many “unordained” brethren had the spiritual discernment to realize they were being taught error, and how many “ministers” continued to accept or even teach the error. And these same “ministers” expect to again be com-

pletely trusted and given control over the same people that they misled?

It has been during my past few years of study that I realize I know a lot less Bible truth than I formerly thought I knew—so much of my understanding has been based on a verse here and there but mostly some “headquarter's teaching. There is a lot of learning left for all of us to do.

—Norman S. Edwards

“Take Me off Your List!”

LETTER: October, 1995
Mr. Edwards, Having received your last copy of SN, and reading how you corrected everyone plus the letter of William Washington disgusted me. H.W.A. was one of the greatest ministers of God that ever lived.

Mr. Washington needs to read the Bible and apply what he reads instead of cutting those who do God's work.

Please don't send me any more of your SN.

Thanks,

RESPONSE: We are sorry that you are unhappy with our publication. We tried to think of another way of discussing these important government articles other than inserting comments every few paragraphs, but could not find any other good way that was effective and easy to follow.

We did not agree with Mr. Washington's letter 100% but neither do we agree with yours. We print a diversity of opinions and hope that all of us can learn from each other and be more like our Elder Brother.

We believe that Herbert Armstrong was a great servant of God, but we also believe he had human faults and weaknesses. We should imitate the good and not the bad.

We will not send any more SN.

—Norman S. Edwards

‘Keep Reading the Literature

LETTER: July 27, 1995
Dear Friends

I just finished reading Eric V. Snow's paper on “Does the New Covenant Do Away With the Letter of the Law?” and I must say is an excellent paper on convincing almost anyone who wants to prove if the Sabbath is binding that it is!

Thank you for all the literature you have sent & continue on your labor of love to get God's truths out to His people as the Holy Spirit guides you in that direction.

I am now reading The Worldwide

Church of God Splits: Their Triumphs & Troubles by Alan Ruth and it's an excellent description of what has happened, is happening & can happen with any organization who claims to be God's Church. It is also a warning to all baptized Christians to beware of the wolves among the sheep & how much damage can occur if we are not deeply rooted to God's truth & have not placed our total faith in God rather than men.

Thank you,

—Angel Gonzalez

60 Surrey Lane, Colonia, NJ 07067

RESPONSE: Thank you for your many letters of encouragement and the sound scriptural points that you make.

—Norman S. Edwards

Getting in Contact with Brethren

LETTER: 'Servants' News is more interesting and instructive with each issue. Thanks so much for sending it. I'm enclosing a "widow's mite" in the hope it will cover the cost of postage. I'm living on very small income and moving is expensive as you know. My family is helping me with that.

You mentioned, Norman, that you have a letter you send to those on your list when someone else on your list wants to contact them. This does seem to be a perfect way for people to get in touch without you having to give out addresses of those who might not want to be contacted. I hope you found the time to give my name and address to these three. However I've not heard from any of them.

Thank you for printing the letter to all WCG churches by Angel Gonzalez. I'm sure there are many, many who were saying "Amen" to that. I read the letter to our group a couple of Sabbaths ago and at several places they started clapping their hands or saying "right on."

[Literature request and Personal section deleted.]

I think often of the huge amount of work you have undertaken with *Servants' News*, etc. You are doing an horrendous job!

Agape,

—J.W., California

RESPONSE: [Response was largely personal.]

—Marleen Edwards

Concerned About UCG Government

LETTER:

Sept 16, 1995

Dear Mr. Edwards,

A good friend of ours, Robert Bodkin gave us a copy of "How Does the Eternal

Govern Thru Humans?" in Seattle last Sabbath. Today he suggested that we might be able to be on your mailing list.

We are very much impressed with what we read in this article. We left WCG last spring, and are now attending United Church of God. We, like so many are acutely concerned about our newly forming Church, and how it will be governed. Your article is very timely.

Please accept our offering to help you with your work.

In God's Love,

—P. & B. C., Washington

RESPONSE: Thank you for your help and your letter. It is important that leaders realize that there are many "normal" people that are interested in the form of government of their congregation. It is only a minority of people that are raising the "government issue" to cause strife or to gain a following for themselves.

How can a parent today teach their child "you must follow the church government no matter what"? I have met plenty of parents that taught that for years in the past. They have since left the WCG, but their grown children are still in what they "know" is the "one true church."

—Norman S. Edwards

We Are All Changed People

LETTER:

'Dear Friends,

Thank you so much for all the reading material you sent to us, dating back to April '95.

We are just another example, among so many, who came out of the WCG after many years and are now attending the UCG in Seattle.

Although it is so wonderful to be nourished once again by the real Meat of God's Word, **we are all changed people**, paying close attention to what is being said...thinking about, discussing, **evaluating all announced decisions.**

We are so grateful to be receiving The Servant's News. Thank you.

In brotherly love,

RESPONSE: This is a good point! We realize that we should never again sit in a congregation and say "because it is coming from headquarters, it must be truth." Our Father has shown us the error of that way and we must continue to look to the Scriptures for all that we believe and do.

—Norman S. Edwards

Hope for UCG

LETTER:

Nov 2, 1995

Dear Norm;

Just a note to keep telling you how much I appreciate "Servant's News"

I believe the Lord is leading me to the United Church of God, *An International Association*, but I am waiting to hear what their Dec. conference will bring forth. I only hope and pray you will not put any misleading material into your "Servant's News". Misleading material is as bad to me as an outright lie, and I am so glad Jim Franks sent a response back to Alan Ruth. Alan Ruth's material had misleading remarks, and I am so glad U.C.G. had sent me Brian Orchard's wonderful message "Government of God". As for the trinity doctrine, I don't know where he got that. U.C.G. has sent me some wonderful tapes as I am not able to get to services as the nearest meeting place to me is in Wellesley, Mass. I have never heard even an inkling about the U.C.G. embracing the trinity doctrine. There isn't a church in the world that is perfect and undoubtedly there will be a heavy handed approach by some ministers. The poor guys have come from a heavy handed ministry in W.C.G. so they will have to learn about humility. Hopefully they will learn God's way. A good start would be if they listened to Gerald Seelig's message "Humility," something we all need more of. I am thrilled to pieces to have these tapes and I listen to them over & over. I am praying that the U.C.G. will soon be able to get their wonderful messages out to the world. I don't ever want to become part of a church organization with a pope at the top again.

My Messiah is the Head and Chief Cornerstone of the UCG and others, I pray.

I have a friend who would like to get "Servant's News. Her address [deleted]

—R. M., Maine

RESPONSE: Thank you for your comments about the United Church of God. It has been a blessing to many people that had no other place where they felt they could keep the Sabbath. We print primarily articles that differ from the "official" UCG opinions because we feel they have important points and we want to help work for positive, Biblical change.

Regarding the Trinity doctrine, there are some ministers that are currently in the UCG that did teach this doctrine in the past. Some did talk about whether or not it should be taught in the future. As far as I know, there was never any "official" UCG teaching on the Trinity, but the discussions about it could have led some to believe that some UCG ministers might have desired to teach it. That problem seems to be over now, let us get on with the task at hand.

—Norman S. Edwards

"Godly Unity", from page 1
"the truth". But each draws followers to himself and the church splinters.

To be a part of God's church, we must love the truth. Without the love of the truth, there is no salvation. "Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me'" (John 14:6). Jesus is the truth. "However, when he [it], the Spirit of truth, has come, he [it] will guide you into all truth.... And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 16:13; 8:32). Truth must be revealed to us before we can understand it.

Is there a conflict between truth and unity? Is there something about the truth which causes a lack of unity? Is there something inherent about the truth which precludes unity? Which is more important: truth or unity? Should we strive for one at the expense of the other? Both are vitally important. How do we balance truth and unity?

Truth Versus Unity

How far should one go in search of unity? Some would have us give up the use of our rational minds and the understanding given by the Spirit within us (1Jn 2:27) and simply agree with whatever is the "official line" of their organization.

One organization, calling itself a church of God, has published an article entitled, "Truth or Unity?" The author covers a lot of the scriptures on truth quoted above and then writes that another verse is just as compelling. He quotes, "Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (1Cor 1:10). The author then concludes: "Any time a seeker of truth introduces a 'new truth' to a friend in the church—unless the truth he has just discovered also agrees with church doctrine—he finds himself in conflict with the plain scriptural command that all in the church must speak the same thing." This man is twisting the writings of Paul—trying to bring Paul's authority in line with what he wants to teach. He is saying that if you understand a truth in the Bible that happens not to agree with the organization you are in, and you share that with

a close friend, you are now in conflict with what Paul said about us speaking the same thing.

This author would have you believe that if you discover some truth—right there in the Bible, truth that God may have revealed to you—you must reject that truth for the sake of "unity" because it is not "speaking the same thing," does not agree with "established truth" or the organization's doctrine. The church "leader" continues: "The one who introduces a new truth often conveniently chooses to ignore this troublesome scripture, and in the name of 'truth' and 'love of truth' ventures to speak something that is not 'the same thing' as what all the rest of his brethren speak! As soon as he accepts this new truth, he no longer agrees with his fellows—he no longer satisfies the godly requirement of being 'perfectly joined together in the same mind.' Through his departure from established truth, he has effectively removed himself from God's called out ones who all speak the same thing." If you would believe this man, you cease to be a part of the body of Christ the moment you share that new truth. He even says, "Seeking 'truth' may cost a Christian his eternal life." What kind of heresy is this, that a child of God should avoid seeking the truth? This is especially revealing when you remember that Jesus is the truth! This church leader is advocating that you follow him rather than Jesus!

Truth is truth even if it disagrees with "established truth"!

What Is "Unity"?

Still, in some people's minds there is a conflict between truth and unity. So, once again, which is more important—truth or unity? Should we strive for one at the expense of the other? How do we balance truth and unity? What is unity?

Since many others use 1 Corinthians 1:10 as the hallmark scripture for unity, it is in order to re-examine this scripture and its context. "Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's household, that there are contentions among

you" (1Cor 1:10-11). What was the division that Paul was focusing on? They were not speaking the same thing because of certain contentions. What were these contentions? "Now I say this, that each of you says, 'I am of Paul,' or 'I am of Apollos,' or 'I am of Cephas,' or 'I am of Christ'" (1Cor 1:12).

The context clearly shows that the problem was that members of the church at Corinth were starting to follow various men (see 1Cor 1:13-16; 3:4-23). The church at Corinth was split into several factions. One little group held up Apollos as their favorite man. Paul was another group's favorite. Other groups had their own favorites. They started having contentions between them as to who was the best leader and through whom God was primarily working. The church at Corinth, as a whole, was losing unity. They were no longer speaking the same thing regarding who they were following and who was the true leader. That is the context.

Regarding this section of I Corinthians, Halley's Bible Handbook says: "...many small congregations, ...it seems, were developing into rival, competing units, rather than cooperating units, in the general cause of Christ.... And, in addition..., they were rallying as partisans around one leader or another. Thus the church was split into factions, each trying to stamp Christ with its own little trademark, a practice which still prevails in frightful proportions."

The context of 1 Corinthians 1:10 demonstrates that the contentions were based on partisanship. Each group was following its own particular leader, possibly even with disdain for other leaders, which has nothing to do with seeking truth or with truth seekers.

Herbert W. Armstrong and Unity

Did Herbert Armstrong bring unity to the church? In a February 1984 sermon, Herbert W. Armstrong proclaimed, "TODAY WE NOW HAVE UNITY!" This was in reference to the divisions and problems in the Worldwide Church of God in the '70's. He further stated, "We will no longer tolerate division or dissension and if anybody comes with a different point of view and does not speak the same thing, they will be dealt with VERY STRICTLY." Clearly,

Herbert Armstrong equated "unity" with speaking the same thing. But, is that true, godly unity?

He also wrote in a Plain Truth editorial: "The one great barrier that separates professing Christians into denominational bundles—that keeps them apart—that promotes rivalry, hatred and causes continued new splits and divisions—is this insane insistence that the other fellow must see 'eye to eye' on every little point of doctrine." **Armstrong recognized that the insistence that we all see eye to eye on every little point of doctrine is a primary cause of division.** It causes rivalry. He continued, "...As long as DOCTRINE is employed as the basis for church unity, every so called 'church' will continue to suffer strife, division and separation into more divisions." How true that is! Armstrong wrote this editorial in March, 1938. Seeing the changes in administration, attitude and organizational structure in the intervening 50 plus years helps us to understand what went wrong in WCG and why it has gone the way it has today.

The context of the unity scriptures mentioned at the beginning of this article shows that none of them is about everyone being 100 percent in agreement on every little point of doctrine (see also Phil. 1:27; 2:2; 1Pet 3:8).

If we look at the recorded life of Jesus, how much time did he spend on picky points of doctrine? The Pharisees tried to trap him on small points of doctrine, and, more often than not, Christ's general approach was to step back and look at it from a broad point of view—not from a "nit picky" point. Yet, he knew exactly what the truth was—**every** little point. Paul's instructions to Timothy tell him to avoid the picky stuff and the contentions. Yet, he was encouraged to study and to take heed unto doctrine. The Bible says, "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have **love** for one another" (John 13:35).

We must truly seek godly unity. Seek unity and base it on love, not doctrine. Truth is important. Doctrine is important. Apostasy is vital to watch out for, but we do not all have to agree on every little point of doctrine to have godly unity. If one believes in a place of safety and your brother does not, does that qualify as apostasy and a reason to boot him out? What about Passover?

You believe in the 14th and your brother believes in the 15th or vice versa. We are all still trying to keep the law, still trying to follow Christ and God to the best of our understanding. If one has a personal understanding that differs from a brother's, can we still not have love one for another and have godly unity? What about church eras, make-up, tithing, prophetic points, the Work? The list is endless. Are any of these issues big enough to throw people out of a fellowship and cause division?

The answer is "no", and, surely, most of God's people will agree. But with the "leaders" of the various organizations—a resounding "yes" is the answer! **Because they must have the power to remove those who disagree with them in order to retain their preeminence.** These "leaders" are no different than Diotrephes (3Jn 9-10). In fact, these "leaders" revel in their differences with other leaders, call these differences to public attention, and then try to claim that these differences signify that they—and only they and their organization—are "God's true church".

No unity is possible as long as God's people continue to follow men and their hierarchical organizations which use these often small doctrinal differences to retain their power and authority over God's people.

Political Oneness and Godly Unity

The confusion lies in a basic misunderstanding of two very similar concepts: political oneness and godly unity. Political oneness, however, is **not** godly unity. Political oneness is harmoniously following a man and his ideals. Being forced to follow some man or group of men is not godly unity. Political oneness is where that has been achieved. Herbert Armstrong believed he had achieved **unparalleled** unity in the church in 1984 and that it was only going to get better. Since his death, the rate of splitting has increased with each passing year! Observing the events of the church since then, how much godly unity truly was there? There was political oneness for a time, but, not godly unity.

So, what is the basis of true godly unity among members of God's church? "Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous;

not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling,..." (1Pet 3:8-9). The whole basis of this is love—to have compassion for one another, be tenderhearted and courteous—be of the same mind. "Fulfill my joy by being like minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself" (Phil. 2:2-3).

The basis for unity is love, not doctrine!

Is there a time when personal doctrine can be a cause for division? "It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles—that a man has his father's wife! ...In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus" (1Cor 5:1, 4-5). In this example, an individual obviously had a personal doctrine about sexual morality which was wrong and disagreed with scriptures such as Leviticus 18:8, 20:11; Deuteronomy 22:30, 27:20. His personal idea of what was right was obviously a cause to get him thrown out.

It was an area of obvious, open immorality that brought shame on the church (1Cor 5:1). Is that equivalent to a disagreement about keeping Passover on the 14th or the 15th? **What does the Passover disagreement have to do with immorality? Absolutely nothing!** Openly breaking the 10 commandments, obvious lawlessness or demonism would also qualify for causes of division. If someone goes around stealing or killing, that individual should be separated from the body, keeping Matthew 18:15-17 in mind as a guide to dealing with our brothers and sisters in the church. Don't worry about differences in doctrinal points. Study. Be diligent. Be a truth seeker. But leave the wrongful judging (Matt 7:1-5), the strife and the "finger pointing" behind.

Do Groups Create Division?

We have seen numerous Church of God organizations in which there is a doctrine of exclusivity—with the claim that the only way to God is through

Continued from previous page
 them or that they are the only ones through whom God is working. Is this Biblical? “Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all” (1Cor 12:4-6). The Greek word for “activities” is “energematōn” which means “things wrought; effect, operations or workings”. In contemporary terms we would say “there are different works, but it is the same God who works all in all.” **God is not limited to one exclusive organization. There are different works.**

When we consider other groups and the work that they do, what goes through our mind? Do we compare their fruit with the fruit of our group? Do we boast of how many members we have? Do we feel superior to those in other groups? “For we dare not class (rank) ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise. We, however, will not boast beyond measure, but within the limits of the sphere which God appointed us.... For we are not extending ourselves beyond our sphere..., for it was to you that we came with the gospel of Christ; not boasting of things beyond measure, that is, in other men’s labors, but having hope, that as your faith is increased, we shall be greatly enlarged by you in our sphere, to preach the gospel in the regions beyond you, and not to boast in another man’s sphere of accomplishment. But ‘He who glories, let him glory in the Lord’” (2Cor. 10:12-17). There would be much less boasting and judging and unity would be vastly improved if the various groups would apply the above verses to their mode of operation.

Jesus also said, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives his life for the sheep. I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. **And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring,** and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd” (John 10:11, 14, 16). There are differing works and Christ has sheep “not of this fold” but of other folds. When we get into this “exclusive”

frame of mind, unity is impossible!

Look at it from God’s point of view. Take a step back and imagine looking at the church body scattered on this planet earth. You have people called out here and there in different countries. You notice that there is one man standing up and yelling, “Hey! Follow me! These other guys are no good.” Another guy elsewhere stands up and says, “Hey! Follow me! We’re doing the work!” Yet another man in another place stands up and says, “The others aren’t following the truth and are heading into the tribulation. You all better follow me!” They all have essentially the same doctrines with only a few differences, but still, “Follow me! I’m the truth. I’m the way. God is here!” What is happening?

The church is being divided, is it not? **And who is causing that division? Is it the scattered individual truth seekers or is it the men standing up and drawing lines in God’s body, in Christ’s *ekklesia*?** Who is dividing the body? And what are we supposed to do with those men? “Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them” We are told to avoid those men. “For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple” (Rom 16:17,18). We can see that actually happening when we look at it from God’s point of view.

Partisanship obviously causes division. It does not cause unity. When unity is based on doctrine, it does not promote godly unity: it promotes political oneness, which is of this world.

Conclusion

The Feast of Tabernacles pictures God’s kingdom on earth, when God will reign, not man. People gather in their various feast sites to practice godly unity. More often than not, it is political oneness that is practiced, but yet we do strive for godly unity. When we go visit other brethren of different walks of life and from different organizational backgrounds, **it is an excellent opportunity to exercise godly unity based on love— not political oneness based on doctrine.** But we really need to study and learn the lesson of the Feast of Tabernacles: When Jesus is reigning,

we will truly begin to learn what godly unity is all about.

What will it be like in the millennium? “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who proclaims peace, who brings glad tidings of good things, who proclaims salvation, who says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns!’ Your watchmen shall lift up their voices, with their voices they shall sing together; for they shall see eye to eye when the Lord brings back Zion” (Isa 52:7-8). Then, and only then, will we, as a human race—without man made organizations—see eye to eye on every little point of doctrine. But that is because God himself will be our God and will write his laws in our hearts and minds. Eventually we will get there, but such agreement on every iota of doctrine and understanding of the scriptures is simply not possible today.

Let us pray for the return of our Christ and his kingdom, but in the meantime, let us put aside this insane insistence that we agree on every little point of doctrine and see eye to eye on all these things. Jesus only gave us one new commandment while he was here on this earth: “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. **By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another**” (John 13:34, 35).

Does anyone really believe that the disciples of Christ even knew enough to agree with him on every point? Do we not read of the contentions as to who was going to be first in his kingdom? Did they not ask questions of Jesus in regard to restoring the kingdom of Israel just before he ascended (Acts 1:6)? It is easy and natural to be on the “let’s see eye to eye” side of the coin. But that is not right. Focus on true godly unity and not on political oneness.

Jesus loved his disciples and they loved him. They experienced godly unity. We must have love for one another. If we can love each other enough to allow for differences of opinion without it affecting that love, and if we will work harder and love our Lord and Master, Jesus the Christ, and follow him as the only head of his church, then we, too, will experience godly unity!

—Norman Brumm III
 PHMF81A@prodigy.com

“Role of Church Members”, from page 1 this discussion. Of critical importance is how Jesus Christ used the term. What did He mean when he said *Ekklesia*?

The first usage of the term *Ekklesia* or Assembly is found in Matt 16:18. Jesus said I will build my Assembly. Here Assembly means Jesus' gathering, His group, His body of collective believers. There is absolutely no connotation of hierarchy in this statement or in the term *“Ekklesia.”* People read the concept of hierarchy into the verse because of their belief that the Church, the Assembly, is a hierarchy. It is not. Christ said he was going to build an Assembly, a gathering of people. It would be His. His people, His gathering, His Assembly. He said that the gates of hell, would not prevail against it. Nothing could destroy it. He would take care of this Assembly of His!

In verse 19 He further defines what His Assembly would do. He would give this Assembly the keys of the Kingdom of God. That means He would grant them an understanding of the Kingdom of God. He would give the disciples access to the Kingdom of God now and in the future. He had already told His disciples to pray for the Kingdom of God to come and He would later tell the disciples to preach the Gospel of the kingdom of God into all the world and make disciples of all nations.

Jesus goes on in verse 17 to say that the disciples would have the authority to make binding decisions within the Assembly. They could not change His laws. They could not bind what He has loosed. Nor could they loose what He had bound. But in those areas where the disciples had been given responsibility and authority they would be able to make decisions that would be binding on the Assembly.

To whom did He give this authority? It was not to Peter. It was not to the apostles. There were no “ordained ministers” at this time, so it was not to them. He gave the authority to bind and loose to the entire Assembly, all of his disciples collectively which included the apostles. In verse 19 we clearly see that Jesus was teaching all of his disciples. The disciples were the audience to whom He addressed these statements. He ends this very first discussion on the Assembly by instructing His disciples that they should tell no man that He was Jesus the Christ.

MEN AND WOMEN ARE TO HAVE A VOICE IN THE ASSEMBLY

In Matt 18:15-21 Jesus used the term *Ekklesia* for the second time in the New Testament. Jesus shows that inevitably there would be problems and controversies within His Assembly. Here He provides the principles of how to handle problems that arise within the Assembly. He uses a specific example of one member of the Assembly, a man or woman, in some manner hurting another member of the Assembly, a man or woman.

Over time the severity of the hurt would cover the entire gamut of possibilities. We have tended to think these verses apply only to men. Being hurt by others of course is not limited to the male gender. This involve both sexes. It would include a man hurting a man, a woman hurting a woman, a man hurting a woman and a woman hurting a man.

He says we are to take the matter before two or three fellow members of the Assembly. This would include men or women or both. In verse 16 we read “But if he will not hear you, then take with you one or two witness more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.”

In the past some had assumed that this meant only men. This is an incorrect assumption. Jesus is not addressing a specific gender. The individuals could be any member of the Assembly, man or woman or elder or prophetess.

In fact a woman should probably take a personal matter to two or three other women. If the group of women solve the problem there is no need to take it before the entire Assembly. Many sensitive problems can be handled very privately in this manner.

If, however, the person causing the problem does not hear this small group, Jesus says these two or three individuals, men or women, are to be witnesses to establish the truth of what was said and they are to take it before the entire Assembly.

NOT JUST THE APOSTLES AND “MINISTRY”

Let us look at verse 17 (Matt 18) in detail, it reads “and if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the Assembly but if he neglect to hear the Assembly, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.”

This small group was not to take such matters before just the apostles. There was no church hierarchy to take them to either. They are to take problems to the entire Assembly of converted men and women who comprise the Church of God.

Major questions, major issues, major problems, major changes in direction, major question of doctrine need to be taken before the entire Church membership. Even the apostles did this, when there was no direct revelation, as is evidenced by the Jerusalem conference.

“He” the offending individual is to hear the Assembly. It does not say “he” is to hear the apostle or the leadership. The Assembly of men and women are to “bind or loose”. “Verily I say unto you, whatsoever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven”, verse 18 (Matt 18). Note that “you” the Assembly is doing the binding and loosing. This is exactly the same thing that we read in Matthew 16.

THE FATHER DOES THE BINDING

Going onto verse 19 (Matt 18) we read Jesus goes on to say that if two or three men or women are gathered together in His name and seek His guidance in making a decision for their Assembly, He will be with them and the Father will bind and loose what they decide to do.

Jesus Christ is the head of the Church. He leads and guides it. That is His job. But at this point the Father gets personally involved. He wants men and women from all levels of society to work together and discuss the matter, led by His Holy Spirit. He cares deeply about the problems and discussions. He cares so deeply that He personally binds their decision.

WOMEN TO HAVE A VOICE

Women are to have a voice with men in the Assembly in this type of judgment.

Some Churches of God may in reality consist of only a small number of righteous women. There may be no men at all. This was in fact the case in Acts 16:13 where Christ raised up a small group of righteous women in Philippi. These women in Philippi were empowered by Jesus to make decisions on behalf their Church. When these ladies

continued from previous page
made such decisions the Father in heaven would bind or loose those decisions. It was a promise!

This inclusion of women should be no different in a congregation of mixed sexes. There would be the same kind of voting in a mixed congregation as there would be in a congregation that consisted solely of women. In fact when the Philipian congregation grew to include both men and women do you think that the women were pushed aside and stopped from being a part of the decision process in Christ's Assembly there in Philippi. I think not!

Paul says, in Galatians 3:28, that before God "...there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus." Women have a voice in the Assembly with men. Jesus gave them a voice in the administration of the Church. Women do not preach in the Assembly, they are not to usurp authority over men, and they are to be in subjection to their own husbands. Yet they are to help lead and govern the Assembly. They provide a much needed balance to the singular perspective and biases of men. They can also deal much more knowledgeable and justly with women's issues and problems.

WOMEN ARE TO PROPHESY

In Acts 2:17 were read "that in the last days your sons and your daughters shall prophesy." The Greek for prophesy is "προφητευσω" (propheteuso) and means telling forth the divine council (see Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words). Since women are not allowed to preach in the Assembly, this may in large part refer to women being moved by God's spirit to vote as part of the Assembly of God as Jesus Christ said should occur in Matt 16 and Matt 18.

We as a Church need to let women assume the role Christ wants them to have in the Assembly, the Church of God. If we do not allow this liberty in Christ, if we do not allow the Spirit of God to work in them as the Father desires, we as a Church will be quenching the Holy Spirit. The Father provides the inspiration. He gives gifts of His spirit to those He chooses in the Assembly (Eph 2). Women have been given and will be given the gift of prophesy.

The Church must allow for women to receive the gift of prophetic judgment. This won't occur if the entire congregation, including women, is not given its rightful voice in governing the Church.

MEN ACCEPTED WOMEN'S POSITIONS IN THE ASSEMBLY

In Acts 21:9 we read that Philip the evangelist "had four daughters, virgins which did prophesy." This gift of prophesy appears to be different than participating in the Assembly. But notice the language. This is a very matter-of-fact statement. As if there is nothing unique or special about women prophesying, it was taken for granted. Men apparently were not threatened by women having this gift. Nor was the entire first century Assembly threatened by it.

In Rom 16:1-2 is a reference to Phebe. Paul commends unto the Romans "Phebe our sister, which is a servant of the Assembly which is at Cenchrea: That you receive her in the Lord, as becomes saints, and that you assist her in whatsoever business she has need of you: for she has been a succourer of many, and of myself also."

The word servant here is "διακονων" (diakonon) in the Greek. This is exactly the same word that is translated as deacon and minister. It is translated 3 times as deacon, 8 times as servant and 20 times as minister. Phebe was a servant, deacon, minister of the Assembly.

Paul told the Romans to do "whatsoever" she asked them to do. The "them" is men and women. Here a woman is given significant authority by an apostle and both men and women are to follow her direction. They are to do what she asks them to do. They are to heed her instruction. Paul told them to listen to her. The point is that women can exercise significant authority in the Assembly. They of course are not to usurp authority. But they can function as servants of the Assembly, the Greek implies they can function in the same manner as a "deacon" or "minister."

THE CHURCH IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

There was a Church in Old Testament Israel. It existed in Moses day. Stephen refers to it in his discourse with the high priest (Acts 7:37). It was a

genuine Assembly, a congregation. It was this Assembly after which the first century Church was patterned. When Jesus used the term Assembly in Matthew 16 he spoke to people who were just like Stephen. They were schooled in their national history. They knew what an Assembly was. They knew Moses led one in the wilderness, and that their fathers were a part of it. They also knew a good deal about how it functioned.

When Christ said He would build His Assembly, they had a good idea of what He was referring to. Jesus went on however to define how His Assembly would differ from that of ancient Israel and the assemblies of first century Jews.

After Christ's death the apostles continued to define how the Assembly was to function. The Church was built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Jesus Christ the chief corner stone (Eph 2:20). The apostles had a unique role. They were eye witnesses of Christ's life, his death and his resurrection and they were taught directly by Him.

THE UNIQUE ROLE OF THE APOSTLES

The apostles set an organizational structure within the Church that was based on existing scriptures, the direct teaching and revelation of Jesus, and the guidance of the holy spirit. Men were selected to tend to physical duties in the congregation when the need for this function became apparent (Acts 6). Synagogues were run by elders (older people) and pastors or overseers (rendered "bishops" in some translations). This practice was continued in the governing of the Assemblies of the believers.

The first century Church was filled with dynamic change. It grew rapidly. There were all sorts of problems and issues with which to wrestle. The apostles were required to lay the foundation of the Church. They were required to make decisions based on the Scriptures to resolve all major issues. These decisions would reflect the instructions Jesus gave the Apostles and the direction of the Holy Spirit on converted minds.

The apostles finished the task. When John the last of the apostles died, the Church had the structure Christ wanted

it to have. After John there were no longer any apostles.

The two remaining groups, i.e. the Assembly and the elders were expected to continue what Jesus Christ, the apostles had set in motion.

PATTERNS FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT

It is extremely important to realize that the new structure that the apostles put in place was based on Old Testament patterns. The institutions of the Old Testament were modified to serve the needs of this new spiritual Assembly.

In Matthew 16 and 18 Jesus begins to make distinctions between the responsibilities of the assemblies of the nation of Israel and responsibilities of the Assembly that would be the Church of God.

The Church of Moses day, the Assembly in the wilderness, made decisions for the collective Assembly. Jesus Christ assembled the nation of Israel and He asked them if they would live by the Covenant that Moses presented to them. The people said they would. The ancient Assembly was asked by Jesus Christ to decide on the direction it would go. Would they abide by the terms of the Covenant or not. The Assembly chose to follow Jesus Christ and live by the terms of the Old Covenant.

THE PEOPLE LOSE THEIR VOICE

This calling of an Assembly to make local and national decisions was present during the period of Moses through the time of the Judges. It later goes away when Israel insisted on having a king, instead of being ruled by Jesus Christ. A rigid hierarchy was created. Starting with Saul, the kings of Israel and Judah ruled the people in hierarchical fashion. It was a manner of rulership not found in Israel prior to Saul's reign.

The people lost their voice when this hierarchy was established. They lost the ability to give their community and their nation direction. Christ gave this back to His Assembly. He once again gave His group, His called out ones the voice that the monarchy took away. He wants the Church to exercise this decision making role just as the Church in the wilderness was made to do.

THE CHURCH AS DISCUSSED IN THE EPISTLES OF PAUL

The role of the Assembly in Paul's

writings is not as clear. He writes assuming that the reader understands how the Assembly is to function, how it is to make decisions.

Paul and the various churches he raised up must have applied Matthew 16 and 18. They must have, because Jesus said to convene an Assembly and make judgments on Church matters. We have no clear example of that occurring in the epistles. But there are strong indications that Paul addressed how the Assembly was to function in at least three places in the Paul's epistles and also in Acts 15.

We can safely assume that the Assembly's role and voice are therefore not diminished by Paul's epistles. Paul would not do away with Christ's instruction. One would expect Paul to develop the concept of how the Assembly is to function more completely. That is in fact the case in I Cor 5, I Cor 6 and I Tim 5:19-20. Each one of these sections of scripture will be discussed in detail later in this paper. Each one must be viewed in the context of Matthew 16 and Matthew 18.

HOW THE CORINTHIAN ASSEMBLY SHOULD HAVE DEALT WITH SIN

In I Cor 5 Paul deals with the question of a major sin in the Assembly. The Assembly should have met and dealt with the problem. They should have put the individual out of their fellowship. It was their responsibility. They had not done their job and they were puffed up. Paul as an apostle corrects them (v 2). The man doing these things should have been removed from their fellowship through a meeting of the Assembly and through their collective action. He is telling them to use the process Christ gave us in Matthew 16 and 18.

It is important to realize that pastors, overseers, elders or any other function are not mentioned separately. They are not the ones who had the responsibility to put this man outside of the Church's fellowship. They were not to act unilaterally. Their primary responsibility in the first century church was that of an "overseering" (Acts 20:28), i.e. a coordinator or facilitator in modern language. They made sure that the affairs of the Assembly were properly carried out.

So here the Assembly had not done its job and Paul instructed them on what they should have done, and he corrected

the problem.

ASSEMBLY IS TO JUDGE CIVIL MATTER AND ANGELS

We read of similar situation in which the Assembly should have acted, in 1 Corinthians 6. This chapter also shows how the Assembly is to function. Here Paul states we are not to take our controversies to a civil court. The Assembly, the "saints," the plural "you," the entire congregation, are to judge these matters as a group. "You" will judge angels, Paul tells them. The plural "You," the members of the Assembly, should be able to judge these small matters.

In verse 4 he tells them not to abandon their collective responsibility. He tells them not to delegate these matters by choosing some who were "least" esteemed to do this job for them. They, the Assembly, the group, the congregation should judge the matter just as Jesus told them to do in Matthew 16 and 18.

In verse 5 Paul asks is there not a wise man among you who can judge between His brethren, men or women, "I speak to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you? No, not one that shall be able to judge between his brethren." Again he does not tell the elders or designate some "official" to do the judging. It is very important to realize this. The elders do not act as a body on their own separate from the Assembly. The Assembly which includes the elders is told to consider the matter.

PAUL ADDS TO CHRIST'S TEACHING REGARDING THE ASSEMBLY

Those who are wise within the Assembly should give advise and council to the whole Assembly. This is a part of the process that Christ did not address. Paul adds it under inspiration. This wise council is done within the Assembly and is probably the result of the Father giving gifts to various members.

Judging in this way is not to be delegated and handled apart from the Assembly. What we see hear is exactly what Christ addressed in Matthew 16 and 18. The Assembly on a local level needs to handle its own problems. A hierarchy is not to do this. The elders are not to do this separately. They are to be a part of the process, and function within the Assembly.

continued from previous page

HOW TO CORRECT AN ELDER

In I Tim 5:19-21 Paul discusses how to deal with an elder if he sins. This is a classic Matthew 18 type of situation. Did Paul change the way Christ said to deal with the problem? No he did not. He did not have the elders judge the sinning elder. That would not be scriptural. Paul had the Assembly judge the elders. Note that virtually the same language that is used in Matthew 18:16 is used in I Tim 5:19!

Matt 18:16 reads "But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established (Matt 18:16). Paul writes in I Tim 5:19 "Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses."

Elders are not to receive any special treatment. They are to be accorded the treatment Christ outlined for anyone who sins against a brother. In verse 20 Paul says that those who sin are to be rebuked before the entire congregation. They are not to be judged by other elders but by the Assembly as Jesus said. They are to be corrected publicly before the entire Assembly so that all will fear.

In verse 21 Paul goes on to tell Timothy not to show partiality, not to give elders special treatment. Even at that early point in the Church's history, there was a strong tendency to give elders preferential treatment.

THREE GROUPS INVOLVED IN CHURCH GOVERNMENT

There are of course many broad issues that go beyond the scope of the local congregation. There are issues that all of the congregations need to address collectively. An example of this is in Acts 15, the Jerusalem conference. The Jerusalem conference involved the three main groups. The apostles, the elders and the Assembly.

It is these three groups that are involved in governing The Church of God. They are mentioned throughout the New Testament, but they are mentioned together most often in Acts 15. For example we read "then pleased the Apostle and elders with the whole Assembly to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch..." (Acts 15:22).

Notice the involvement of the Assembly in Acts 15 events. These scriptures show that the Assemblies in both Antioch and Jerusalem were involved in apparently most every step of the conference. The apostles acted as spokesmen, the elders were involved in the discussions, but the Assembly in Jerusalem was also involved. The Jerusalem Assembly and the Antioch Assembly had the option to concur or object, to rejoice or reject. The following scripture highlight their involvement.

Verse 2 - "...they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question." The "they" is the Assembly. The Assembly sent Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem.

Verse 3 - "And being brought on their way by the Assembly, they passed through Phenice...." The apostles were brought on their way by "the Assembly."

Verse 4 - "when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the Assembly, and of the apostles and elders and they declared all the things that God had done...." The delegation from Antioch was received by the "Assembly". The entire Church in Jerusalem was present and involved.

Verse 12 - "Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul...." Here "All the multitude" heard the discussion, which included the Assembly in Jerusalem.

Verse 22 - "Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole Assembly to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch...." After James made his pronouncement, the Assembly was very much a part of the deliberation and action.

Verse 23 - "And they wrote letters by them after this manner; the apostles the elders and the brethren send greeting...." Note that this includes the brethren. They helped write the letters.

Verse 30 - "...and when they had gathered the whole multitude together, they delivered the epistle." This was sent and was read to the "gathered multitude" the Assembly in Antioch. The Assembly "rejoiced."

What we see here are bits and pieces of a process that has been hidden by time, and that was not meant to be a

minute detailed description of how to conduct a conference. Paul deals with the main players and shows that all three groups were involved every step of the way. This is what would be expected in light of Matthew 16 and 18.

WE NO LONGER HAVE THE APOSTLES

The apostles, who were to be the eye-witnesses to the resurrection, have all died, the last who died was probably John near the end of the first century. Now the governance of the Church falls on the remaining two groups, the elders and the Assembly.

The apostles had a unique level of revelation and authority. The other two groups appear to have different functions but equal authority. Where there was no direct revelation even the apostles were subject at times to the other two groups, the elders and the Assembly.

In matters of conscience, matters of mutual concern, where there is human need, in controversies, and in question on the direction the Church should go, they all have equal authority. If any one of these three groups or any individual within them sees a human need in the Church, or realizes there is a problem, or is given a special revelation, that group or the individual is expected to speak and act according to the way God's spirit leads them. The matter then needs to be brought before the entire Assembly.

A FLAT ORGANIZATION WITH CHRIST AT THE HEAD

What Christ created is a flat non hierarchical form of government. Implicit in this organizational structure are strong checks and balances. Christ is the head of the Church. This flat organization forces all the groups to look and see where and through whom He reveals where His Church should go. He expects the rest of the Assembly to consider what His direction and then collectively follow. Peter wrote that we all should be subject to one another and clothed with humility (I Pet 5:5). It is through this humility and this subjection that the checks and balances work.

These three groups interacted with one another within the Assembly, and together they governed the Assembly. In the first century Church Jesus Christ chose to whom he would reveal truth,

i.e. apostle, elder, or member. He chose how He wanted to correct problems in the first century.

Today, we have elders and the Assembly. Our method of determining who is an elder may be somewhat different than that used in the first century when the word simply meant "an older, experienced person." Nevertheless, the people we call "elders" are largely recognized as the leaders in our congregations. Christ still works the same way. He continues to choose how He wants to reveal things. When that choice is made the two groups are expected to submit to the individuals or to the group through whom the Spirit of God is working.

CHECKS AND BALANCES

The entire Assembly must recognize that a flat organizational structure allows for checks and balances to ensure that Jesus Christ (and not men) lead the Assembly. The following are examples of the dynamics of these three groups working together within the first century Church. Notice how there are no distinct lines of authority, but Christ works where He chooses and the body follows.

1) The Assembly chooses deacons:

The members of the Assembly were asked by the apostles to choose men to be deacons (Acts 8:5). This is probably an example of Matt 18. The Assembly met as Christ commanded and chose men to be deacons.

2) An apostle corrects an apostle:

Paul corrected Peter regarding the matter of eating with gentiles (Gal 2:11). The apostles, though special, were not above making mistakes and needing correction.

3) A future church member gave a message to an apostle: Cornelius, a gentile Jewish convert whom we can safely assume became a Christian, was given a revelation by an angel. The message was passed onto the apostle Peter. Peter was then given even further revelations (Acts 10:22). You do not even have to be a Church member to be used by the Father to reveal truth to the Church.

4) Apostles send other apostles on a mission: The Apostles sent Peter and John to baptize those in Samaria. The apostles were subject to each other. They gave each other tasks to perform and they reported back to one another on what Christ had done (Acts 8:14).

5) The Assembly sent two apostles

on a mission: The Church at Antioch "sent forward" Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem over the question of circumcision. This was done in conjunction with the apostles (Acts 15:2-3). But apparently the Assembly was very much involved in the process.

6) Apostles, elders, and Assembly sent prophets: Judas and Silas, both prophets, are chosen to go with Paul and Barnabas on a mission to Antioch. All three groups agreed on the decision and took the action collectively (Acts 15:22).

7) A prophet tells an apostle what to expect: the prophet Agabus in Caesarea told Paul what was waiting for him in Jerusalem. Paul went on his way with a awareness of what to expect (Acts 21:11).

8) Disciples inspired to give advice to an apostle: In Tyre the disciples were moved by the spirit to tell Paul not to go to Jerusalem. Paul had the choice of whether or not to follow the inspired advice. He chose not to (Acts 22:4).

9) Scattered members preached and baptized: One of the scattered members, Philip a deacon, decides to preach Christ in Samaria and also to an Ethiopian Eunuch, he baptizes the Eunuch. He apparently does this without asking anyone's permission, being led by the spirit of God (Acts 8).

THE ASSEMBLY IS TO JUDGE THE PROPHETS

Notice in I Cor 14:29 those who are prophets and who speak under inspiration are to each speak in turn. The Assembly is to judge the correctness of the preaching. Paul acknowledged that during the service Christ may reveal something to a person sitting in the audience, this individual who was moved by God's Spirit was to be quiet until it was his turn to speak. Paul said that the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets (v 32). Women of course were not permitted to speak in the Church.

The point of this example is that there were no restrictions on who was to speak to the Church during their services. We do not function this way today. Through that freedom and openness there was a vehicle for the Holy Spirit to use a variety of individuals to reveal truth to the Church. There was the admonition to watch out for heresies, and to reject a heretic after the sec-

ond admonition (Titus 3:10).

Paul wrote to the Ephesian Assembly. He addresses all the members and not just the elders. He is hopeful that God the Father would give them, the Ephesian Assembly, a spirit of wisdom and revelation to understand Jesus Christ (Eph 1:17). There appears to be a definite spirit of revelation that we should desire and ask for. With regard to Church services, this spirit of revelation would be allowed to function if the members were allowed to speak as the Spirit moved them.

In some cases the members speaking were prophets and in some cases they were not. The members of the Assembly to whom God the Father gave the gift of prophecy may have been made prophets for only a temporary period of time. It appears that members were inspired to preach or prophecy at some points in time and not at others.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Church needs to follow the first century example as closely as the legal environment in various countries will allow. The Assembly needs to be allowed to exercise the authority that Jesus Christ gave it to assist in governing the Church. The following is a list of recommendations based on the information in this paper.

1) We should not reestablish a hierarchy where elders and the board of directors assume the responsibilities Jesus gave to the congregation as a whole. The current Constitution and By Laws give the Board of Directors too much power. They should not make major decisions for the Church. They should make recommendations to the Church. They should coordinate and facilitate a unified Work of preaching the gospel. The Assembly should make all major decisions.

2) The Assembly needs to be given a voice in all major decisions in the Church. This could take the form of a yes or no vote within local congregations on local and Church wide issues. This could be done simply and in a very orderly manner.

3) There needs to be a process for a referendum by the membership. If a major question arises and the entire congregation is upset, there must a process

continued on back cover

Our goal is to bring worthwhile information to as many people as want it at the lowest practical cost. This loose-leaf format is inexpensive and allows this non-copyrighted publication to be easily copied. You might wish to bind it with a 3-ring binder, staples, brads or a paper clip.

"Role of Church Members", from page 27 by which the Assembly can call a vote on the issue that has disturbed them.

4) There should be a dialogue initiated within the Church as to how the Assembly should function. The Assembly needs to define what decisions it should address on a local level and what decision it, the Assembly, should address on a Church wide level. These should just be guidelines. This process should be initiated by the Board of Directors. They should request input from all Church members. The results of the Board's actions should then be put before the membership for a vote.

5) The entire subject of the roll of the Assembly needs to be studied in greater detail than I have addressed here. I think the scriptures speak for themselves. A

committee should review the scriptures on the role of the Assembly and also on the role of women voting in the Assembly. This review should be reported to the Board and to the entire membership.

6) The issue of women voting in the Assembly is so important that it should be addressed quickly and separately. The Church needs to define the role of women in the Assembly. We need to move with courage to begin to allow women a voice in the Assembly, and to allow them to vote in the Assembly.

7) The role and responsibilities of the Assembly need to be incorporated in the constitution and by laws of the Church. This would also include an additional section on the rights of the members of the Assembly. The specific

functions and rights of the membership need to clearly stated.

8) The Assembly should be invited to participate in the Conference in December. How this is done should be discussed by the Board of Directors and presented as an option to the membership. The membership should vote yes or no and members should be asked for input if there is a no vote.

9) There needs to an openness on major issues affecting the Church as a whole. The information should be discretely presented. But the information should be complete and it should not be filtered. A hallmark of our old fellowship was incomplete and filtered information with the attempt to manipulate the members of the Assembly.

—Toli Bohonik

Literature List

Friends of the Brethren continues to be flooded with requests for existing literature and new literature for publication. The Servants' News mailing list is now at 800. We have made considerable improvements to our literature cataloging and filing process and have added some items for publication this issue. We now have three categories of literature:

Mature Literature

The Apple of God's Eye by Jim Rector, 13 pages. God's love for us is far greater than we imagine and we often take it for granted.

Assembling on the Sabbath by Norman S. Edwards, 16 pages. An exposition of the scriptures regarding our need to fellowship on the Sabbath and how to do it.

A Call to Arms by Jim Rector, 16 pages. Lessons for today from Revelation 2-3 including the oppressive doctrine of the Nicolaitans and the doctrine of Balaam.

Does the New Covenant Do Away with the Letter of the Law? by Eric V. Snow. 32 pages. A "must read" for those who feel it does.

Did Christ Reorganize the Church? by Herbert W. Armstrong in 1939, 8 pages. Very different than his later approach: Christ never set up a hierarchical government.

The Heart of the Matter by Jim Rector, 31 pages. Our calling is to spiritual growth, not just attendance, socializing, politeness or legalism.

How Does the Eternal Govern Through Humans? by Norman S. Edwards, 34 pages. How the KJV translators altered Scriptures about government to please King James and an analysis of what the Bible says about how

we should govern in today's congregations.

Just What Does the New Covenant Do? by Joseph Chunko, 18 pages. Explanation of the difference between the law, the Old Covenant and the New Covenant.

The Letter to the Galatians, a Paraphrase with Built-in Commentary by John McCauley. 18 pages. Lively vernacular paraphrase with some notes on book of Galatians.

The Worldwide Church of God Splits: Their Triumphs and Troubles by Alan Ruth, 56 pages. Facts and analysis of the last 20 years of church history.

Basic Literature

The Bible Sabbath: Seventh Day or First Day? (From the Bible Sabbath Association) 2 pages. Basic Sabbath tract.

God's Purpose for Your Life by Fred McGovarin, 40 pages, half-size booklet. A "first booklet" for people just becoming interested in the Truth. It introduces Hebrew names (Yahweh and Yashua) for God and Jesus.

The Resurrection of Christ—Is It a Fact? by Don Hudgel. 2 page tract for those skeptical of the Bible & resurrection.

Study Resources and Information

Barnabas Ministries Mission Statement by Alan Ruth. 2 pages.

Commonwealth Publishing Order Form by Kirk Gearhart. 11 pages. Religious books, including Darrell W. Condor's.

Friends of the Brethren Statement of Income and Expenses, 2 pages. (Automatically sent to contributors)

Giving and Sharing Order Form by Richard Nickels. 3 pages. Has many excellent free items, low prices on hard-to-find religious books, and fine literature on floppy disk.

History Research Projects Order Form by Craig White. 6 pages. Hard-to-find books on the origins of nations.

We want to send this newsletter only to people who want it! If you are not interested, please send us a postcard or give us a call: 501-872-1003, fax: 501-872-1004, eMail: 75260.1603@Compuserve.com