

Church Organizations

Dear Christians,

Are we to "get church members" or to make disciples??

Are we to "make" disciples by calling them to be "in" our church meaning our organization, because we are doing a "work"? Or are we rather to share the hope that lies within us with others and assemble together in order to build up one another in the faith?

Knowing that where two or more are gathered in Christ's name He will be there with them?

Many men would have you believe that to be a Christian you should be "in" their organization when in reality Christianity involves being "in Christ" and allowing Him to dwell "in" us as Christians.

When someone comes to you and talks about how their organization is doing the work, the one thing that we all must know is that no organization can "do the work". No man. No group of men. The "work" is being done by the Holy Spirit of God and it is being done in the hearts and minds of those that God, The Father is calling at this time. We are called as Christians to serve and have a very minor part in the most incredible process and "work" of God on earth.

Organizations are a myth. They are but words on paper and any person that tells you that you should be "in" them to be a Christian is a liar and has no truth "in him".

Certainly there is nothing wrong with being organized. But never confuse that with being "in" an organization as "in" THE Church of God. The problem comes when an organization establishes itself as *the* church of God or even *a* church of God, AND misleads others into thinking that they must be a "part of" or somehow "in" that organization.

And it is further compounded by the fact that any organization is even considered to be "Christian". Only those with the Holy Spirit of God can be Christians and organizations do not have God's Holy Spirit. Certainly not the United Church of God, an Alabama Non Profit Corporation. And certainly not any other such organized man-made entity.

With whom a Christian fellowships is a personal choice between each person and God. But that is what that choice involves: Fellowship. It IS NOT a prerequisite to being a Christian to be "in" ANY organization.

Many already understand this. But many of our brethren do not and remain entrapped in a cultic mindset that allows the thoughts and demands of some organization to control and dominate their Christian lives and thinking.

It is simply not necessary for anyone to ever believe or teach that organizations and being a "part" of them are required to be faithful to God and Jesus Christ.

We have a wonderful thing in America. It is called freedom of religion. Freedom cannot be sacrificed by any Christian for the apparent security that some feel lies within an organization and its ability to "do the work".

Organizations have failed for the last 2,000 years of Christian history. They have all become corrupted and Apostate within a relative short period of time.

Christianity is in the hearts and minds of the people of God and nothing can or will prevail against the only "organism" that matters: The Body of Christ!

As long as we keep this in mind, then all the braying about this or that organization will fall where it belongs --- on deaf ears. And any talk about comparisons about who is accomplishing this or doing that as some great "work" will be filed neatly where such talk belongs -- on the dung heap of 2,000 years of corruption and futile attempts by men to define and represent the "work" of God on earth.

They never have and never will.

That privilege is reserved for our Savior and High Priest, Jesus Christ.

Warm Regards,
Gary Mercer
6/13/96

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4/20/97, Todd Drawbaugh wrote:

"As a broad generalization Sabbath keeping Christians are very intolerant people. The more detailed the doctrinal package they feel is required for salvation the more intolerant they are of others. The very vehicle of salvation which is ***Grace*** is a term that many get defensive about. The idea of bringing interactive biblically modeled assemblies into such an environment is as risky as our Lord coming to minister in a corporately controlled environment."

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Intolerance is the unfortunate state of almost all religions! Carnal humans feel the reassuring need to exclusively band together to validate and justify themselves.

While I have in the past and will continue to speak up for what I understand to be sound doctrine and the faith once delivered to the saints, in no way do I mean to advocate condemnatory and malicious attitudes towards those who don't share my convictions in part or whole. Some differences in beliefs do limit or even preclude regular fellowship, but there should be open and amicable agreement to graciously disagree on both sides when this occurs rather than the entrenched defensiveness that so often occurs (and even contributes to warfare).

On the final day when the crowds thinned out at the Friends of the Sabbath conference last week in Bend, some of the difficult questions regarding differences in convictions were lightly and cautiously discussed: communion, Holy Days, trinity, vegetarianism, state of the dead, human 'prophets', and the Millennium. As you might imagine, the contrary feelings on these issues run strong between the SDAs and CGers, and you could see different ones bristle with defensiveness as they stated their positions. Fortunately, the situation never exploded and much understanding was fostered as were bridges of mutual respect.

It is so important for Christians to also emphasize the weightier matters of the law and the fruits of the Spirit, not just doctrinal points. (It is readily apparent to me that religion has been a male dominated business that is generally void of application of basic principles of love to which females are more naturally inclined.. I am not advocating

ecumenism or the amalgamation of religious convictions as the end- time Beast and False Prophet will impose on the whole world.

However, I am supporting open-minded sharing and loving acceptance of those who disagree with you without forsaking your own proven convictions.

1Cor.1:24 Not for that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy: for by faith ye stand.

Rom.14:4 Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand.

We must inspect the fruit relative to scripture, but leave the ultimate judgement to God. We must behave like we understand that God calls and gives understanding in His time to whomever He decides. We must respect that God ordained free moral agency so that humans could love, and therefore use persuasion rather coercion in all our relationships. This is what I mean by *Free Association* which has become my broker record.

Unfortunately, email forums are such a deficient method of communication and often favor defensiveness in the absence of genuine personal communication. For these problems unique to this electronic medium, certain guidelines and standards are required to maintain orderliness. Fellowships likewise need to be orderly as those that share common convictions assemble together. However, let us never use religion as a justification for hating anyone.

1John 2:16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.

1Cor.5:8 Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

Be greatly renewed to your commitment to Christ and His Way on this Passover,whenever you keep it.

Sincerely,

Rick Stanczak
Salem, OR

Over the past 2 years I have visited many congregations in several states, affiliated and unaffiliated with the various COG church organizations. Sadly, one common denominator that we've inherited from our collective past, is still in unfruitful operation today in many different settings: ostracization.

There is a great need being met in the cases of thousands of our brethren, by the various church organizations that continue to provide basic training for God's saints. However, unfortunately, a common adjunct to this basic training is that our brethren are led to believe that they have already "arrived" when they have really only re-arrived...at the beginning! If only this basic training was available to everyone who needed it regularly, or occasionally as a refresher, with no strings attached! Then, God would be served, because <ALL> spiritual growth is to His glory, and for His purposes and pleasure.

If it was more common for those who offered this basic training to do so because they truly wanted to further God's purposes for His people; instead of that end being obviously secondary to preserving their own prestige, and encouraging God's people to remain dependent upon the organization to preserve the comfortable status quo...then we would have a win-win-win situation and God would probably be more inclined to call more individuals into His Church. Is it really any surprise why most of us can count on one hand the number of people who have come to a saving knowledge of God's Truth during the past few years?

Instead, today most of our brethren--though many of these could be aided by a little basic training refresher--have been forced to conclude that the cost is just too great; the politics too thick; the implications of even being a guest necessitate too much disclaimer; and frankly, the atmosphere just too devoid of uplifting, constructive, inspired content to partake of such basic training.

In today's situation, men "lead" various <divisions> of the Body, and abhor the potential for further division within their division, but are quite comfortable with upholding the "distinctions" of their division by discouraging fellowship across organizational (imaginary) boundary lines--because the existence of their division, justifies themselves and their role.

Another, even sadder, division of the modern Church is a <chronological> division of all things! Since the now largely discredited cultic culture of the past exuded an implicit <ownership> of God's Truth, and His People--those who wised up to the systemic spiritual paralysis at different times, were ostracized by those still under the sway of organizational group-think. The tragic result of this is that the COG landscape is littered with outcasts, of whom the world is not worthy. However, even today when a vast number of the spiritual organism is ex-WCG, the perfunctory ostracization cultural response has resulted in a little-acknowledged mountain of judgemental sins to be repented of--and has created a most difficult barrier to fellowship and worship in large assemblies for the earlier outcasts especially.

Are these 99 sought out? NO! They're regarded with suspicion because there's a HUGE likelihood that they've discovered some of the skeletons in the closets during their sojourn in the wilderness! There's also the chance that they might remember a remark or two from the pulpit from earlier years that the speaker wishes were wholly forgotten. Perhaps most tragically, the days out outcast-production are not over! When it is expedient to further corporate goals of uniformity (commonly mislabeled as "unity") more outcasts can be readily made simply by the pronouncement of a few choice inuendos from the pulpit, and PRESTO! the old practiced pavlovian ostracization reflex fires nearly as well as it did a decade ago and the basest cultural force in our collective COG memory churns out another fresh batch of outcasts. Yet another schism in the Body being accomplished--those outward bound are now probably tarred with one of the most stinging of COG epithets: "they sought to cause division!" The organizational imperative is allowed to play out to the detriment of the spiritual organism as relationships are ruptured as the leaders of the larger division (church organization) congratulate the shunners for their discernment and faithfulness ...never mind that some day their day will come as God continues to grant discernment to His people.

May the Almighty strengthen the hands of those who seek to serve his people with no spiritual conflict of interest or agenda of their own! May He raise up more and more of such that will not concern themselves with turf battles over the Lord's heritage! Then perhaps places will emerge where our Father CAN call new people into where they and their calling really WILL count for something more than statistics. Places where the lessons of the past will have been internalized but baggage such as what I've written here won't be part of what the new converts need to vicariously navigate! May God speed the day of the truly empowered end-time Church (which appears to be taking shape on the horizon) and then the coming of His Kingdom!

In hopes of a future better than the past,

Jon D. Pike
Phoenix, AZ