

Measuring the Altar

When He was on earth, Jesus gave His Church the authority to conduct itself in whatever way it thinks best.

And within the limits of the New Covenant, Jesus backs up what His Church decides, even if He doesn't agree with the way the Church decides to do things:

"Truly I say to you, Whatever you shall bind on earth will be bound in Heaven; and whatever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in Heaven." (Matthew 18:18)

This wasn't anything new, because God had treated His Old Covenant church in exactly the same way: God allowed the leaders to decide the rules and regulations which the people would be required to keep, and then God backed up whatever the leaders decided:

"Then Jesus spoke to the crowd and to His disciples, saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, observe and do." (Matthew 23:1-3)

But on more than one occasion Jesus made it perfectly clear that He, and therefore His Father in heaven, did not agree with the rules and regulations the leaders had imposed on the people. Jesus left no doubt that He thought many rules were silly and some were even wicked. But nevertheless, they were the rules.

Similarly in the various Churches of God, beginning from the very first days until now.

The Church of God, of course, is not one single group of people; that is, not one cohesive group administered by one authority.

Rather, the Church of God consists of all those on earth in whom dwells the Spirit of God. And those having the Spirit of God may be a person alone, or two or three people together, or a group of hundreds or thousands.

So there is not just one Church of God on earth, but as many Churches of God as there are groups of people who choose to consider themselves as a Church of God.

In God's eyes of course, all those individual Churches of God make up one single Church of God, having Jesus as Head of all. That is, all those people on earth with the Spirit of God are, in God's eyes, one single group.

Historically, from the earliest days of Christianity, many Churches of God have coexisted together, scattered distantly in various places over the earth. All these Churches, often being widely separated from each other, perforce decided their own way of doing things. But as long as the Churches decided things in sincerity and good faith, and within the confines of the New Covenant, then God backed up their different ways of doing things.

The Book of Acts relates the activities of the earliest Churches of God, and describes how they decided to administer themselves.

However, the way those first churches did things was just the way they did things. What they did was not a law to be followed by all the later Churches of God.

Later Churches of God were free to conduct themselves as they deemed right, according to their circumstances. They did not have to follow the rules set out by the leaders of earlier Churches of God.

But there is one unchanging rule for the conduct of the leaders of the Church of God. And of course the conduct of the leaders of a Church of God determines the conduct of the whole Church.

The rule, laid down by Jesus Himself, measures the leaders of a Church of God:

"But Jesus called them and said, You know that the rulers of the nations exercise dominion over them, and they who are great exercise authority over them. However, it shall not be so among you. But whoever wants to be great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever wants to be chief among you, let him be your servant; even as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." (Matthew 20:25-28)

Firstly, an example from the Head of the Church of God:

"Then when they went up on the land, they saw a fire of coals there, and a fish lying on it, and bread. And Jesus said to them, Bring from the fish which you have now caught...Jesus said to them, Come, break fast...Then Jesus came and took the bread and gave to them, and in the same way the little fish." (John 21:9-10,12-13)

Who gathered the wood and tended the fire? Who cooked the fish? Who served the food to the men?

Their Servant was a King. A King who was a Servant. Because the nature of this King is to be a Servant. And if their King is a Servant, can His people not be servants?

The night before He died, Jesus gave an example to His closest disciples that His Church was to be not a hierarchy, as the world governs itself, but His Church was to be a group of servants equal to each other in authority:

"Jesus rose up from supper and laid aside His garments. And He took a towel and girded Himself. After that He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded." (John 13:4-5)

And then He explained: "Do you realise what I have done to you? You call Me the Teacher, and Lord, and you say correctly, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and the Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet." (John 13:12-14)

Many Churches of God, from that time, have adopted this ceremony and conduct it regularly. Which is commendable, except it is easy to forget that washing

someone's feet is merely a ceremony meant to remind God's people of what Jesus said.

Remind them to be humble? No, to remind them how the Church of God is to conduct itself.

To remind them that the Church of God is not a hierarchy, with each person being subject to the authority of the person above them, on up to the person in complete charge who makes decisions binding on all.

Or is that not what Jesus said?: "You know that the rulers of the nations exercise dominion over them, and they who are great exercise authority over them. However, it shall not be so among you." (Matthew 20:25-26)

Jesus brought a revolution and bequeathed freedom to His people.

But there has never, in all history, been a revolution that endured. There is always a counter revolution which restores power to those who formerly wielded it.

And so it was with the Church of God. The freedom which Jesus gave to the people of the Church of God was quickly taken away by people with ambition.

And thus is the Church of God today.

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