

Does the Organization Matter?

By: Jim Josephsen

As a baptized member of the Church of God, no doubt you recall learning, the “building” is not the church, rather “the church” *is* a “collection of people,” all “baptized into the One Body of Christ.” Scriptures such as **Galatians 3:27**, **Colossians 1:18** and **24**, along with **Ephesians 1:22-23**, **Ephesians 4:4-5** and **Romans 6:3** were quoted. You no doubt, came to understand that “the Church” (of God) is a *spiritual entity*, a *spiritual organism*; it is not a building, nor is it even a physical organization. This teaching is strikingly different from that which is commonly understood by the average person today.

Today, when hearing the word “church,” the average person most likely thinks of a building on the corner, with stained glass windows and a steeple; such as the First Baptist Church, John the Baptist Episcopalian Church, St. Andrews Lutheran Church, the World Overcomers Church or the All Community Faith Church. Another concept commonly understood by the average person today is that of a church organization; such as the Holy Roman Catholic Church, the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A, the Mormon Church (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints) or even the Salvation Army. Perversely, but true, there is even an organization called the Church of Satan.

The English word “church” as found in the Bible is translated from the Greek word *ekklesia*. *Ekklesia* is a compound word, literally meaning *out (ek) calling (kaleo)*, or *those bid to come forth out of*. *Ekklesia* means *the called out ones*, the assembly. When Christ said *I will build my church*, He rightly stated, *I will build my assembly, my group of called out ones*. The Apostles frequently used terms such as “you are called,” “your calling;” “called;” “elect.” Consider **I Corinthians 1:9**, *God is faithful, by whom you were called unto the fellowship of His son Jesus Christ our Lord*. Notice how Peter admonished the brethren to hang in there, not to give up. *Wherefore the rather brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if you do these things, ye shall never fall (II Peter 1:10)*.

The church or those *called out*, are the elect of God (**I Peter 1:1-2**), who the Father draws (calls) out (**John 6:44, 65**) and gives to Christ (**John 10:29**). The **Church of God** (*called out ones* of God) from its inception on Pentecost, is a *spiritual organism* composed of individuals (from all over) baptized into the Body of Christ. “For by one spirit we are *baptized into one body*” (**I Corinthians 12:13**); we are *baptized into Jesus Christ* (**Romans 6:3** and **Galatians 3:27**). *There is one body, one spirit, even as you are called in one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism ... (Ephesians 4:4-5)*. That one body is *Jesus Christ* and *His body*, which *is the Church*, is the assembly of *called out ones* (cf. **Ephesians 1:22-23, 4:12; Colossians 1:18, 24**).

When Paul taught the brethren in the 1st Century about the Church of God, Paul used the physical human body by way of an analogy, to explain the reality of the *spiritual organism*, the ONE Body of Christ. As we can read in **I Corinthians 12** and **Romans 12:3-8**, Paul explained how that all the individuals baptized into the ONE Body had responsibilities, some specific, some which were set forth by God, all of which when put together, made the ONE Body of Christ operate effectively and efficiently, as coordinated and guided by ONE leader, the Head of the Church (**Ephesians 5:24**) – Jesus Christ.

One element that was obvious, Paul did not teach of a brick and mortar edifice, a physical, legal entity, an incorporated structure, for which Headquarters in Jerusalem had to file incorporation papers with the Roman Government. The Church of God did not have to file a petition for tribute-exempt status under Caesar's Internal Revenue Service. The 1st Century Church of God was not held to constraints of incorporation papers.

In Paul's day, there was ONE Church of God, composed of many distinct *church (ekklesia) congregations*, each located in a different city.

The Bible uses terms such as: the Church at Rome; the Church of God at Corinth; the Church in Ephesus, the churches of Galatia, the Church in Smyrna, the Church in Philadelphia, and the Church in Laodicea. We also read of "the church that is in their house" (speaking of Priscilla and Aquila). We read of the churches of Asia. We read of the churches of the Gentiles. And we cannot ignore another phrase found in the Word of God; the churches of Christ.

In cities scattered throughout Judea, Phoenicia, Asia Minor, Cilicia, Cappadocia, Galatia, and Phrygia, Greece and even up to Rome, would be found independent church congregations (*ekklesia*), groups of people who were baptized members of the ONE Body of Christ – the ONE Church of God. These congregations, these churches (*ekklesia*) would convene in their distinct local physical buildings, in local homes on the Sabbath. All these separate, independent, physical locations, these distinct congregations, all put together, consisted of the whole, the ONE Body of Jesus Christ, the ONE Church of God.

In the 1st Century there was no such idea of multiple organizations such as we see today. Yet as we can logically understand, in the 1st Century there was a similarity such as we have today.

Back then throughout the many cities, brethren met in homes. Today in many cities (located around the world), God's people meet in homes, but more commonly in hotels or conference centers.

Both generations (then and now) realize the ONE Church of God is not limited to one specific meeting place (one specific city or one specific organization); rather the church is a *spiritual organism*, the ONE Body of Christ and each location (today – each organization) is just one small part of, the larger whole.

The initial New Testament Church of God, as originating on the Day of Pentecost, the initial *ekklesia*, the initial assembly of called out ones, the select, elect of God, is not replicated today.

Back then, the ONE Body of Christ **was** ONE Church (organized) consisting of many distinct congregations (churches), each located in a different city. Today, the ONE Body of Christ **still is** ONE Church, yet now consisting of many distinct organizations (churches), and each organization consisting of many congregations. Today the Church of God is *one spiritual organism* composed of many distinct, unique organizations.

Is this configuration as evident today a problem? Do we then conclude that the Church of God today is not Biblical, is not of God?

Should all Church of God (organizations, paper-recognized, incorporated, IRS legitimized) entities today disband, fold up and throw away all their legal papers? Should they all dissolve their legal, organizational status?

Should you personally not be a part of any incorporated organization? Should you rest on the Scriptural fact that you are baptized into the ONE Body of Jesus Christ and that's all you need to do? Should you walk away from the "named" organization of which you now are a part?

Why incorporate? Why file papers? Why honor and utilize, taking advantage of the system of incorporation which the government of this country requires?

The reason we should, is justified by the principle found in **Matthew 22:15-22**. Likewise, the principle found in Paul's appeal to Caesar (**Acts 25:11**) reveals that Paul respected the government's authority in his day. Not only Paul (**Romans 13:1-7, Titus 3:1**) but Peter likewise (**I Peter 2:13-17**) taught the brethren to honor and utilize, stay within the requirements of the governmental laws of the land. By doing so will be to your benefit and God will be glorified.

To incorporate, as a recognized religious organization provides benefits which are right and proper, functional, effective and reasonable. To incorporate is generally required by state and federal governments.

If today there truly was only ONE Church of God – as a physical organization – over the whole face of the earth, then "headquarters" (probably out of Jerusalem) would be legally bound to incorporate and do so in accord to the laws and rules which each country's government would require. This is neither a problem nor an affront to Almighty God. As a matter of fact, to do so would be in compliance to the Word of God. The Worldwide Church of God in its heyday came closest to this reality.

However, today, there is not just one (*only*) Church of God, physical organization. Today there are many independent, unattached, self-regulated physical organizations. Each self-maintained and each insisting it is a part of the ONE Church of God, the ONE Body of Christ.

Suffice it to say the reality is, what we see today is just the way it is. Dozens, if not hundreds of independent incorporated organizations, each that bears the name **Church of God**, with an appellative descriptive either preceding or following the name **Church of God**.

Searching the Scriptures will avail no answers "specifically" as to why the ONE Body of Christ, the ONE *spiritual* Church of God is arranged the way it is today. Searching the scriptures will avail no answer "specifically" as to why there are so many Church of God groups and organizations today. ***But the Scriptures provide an understanding as to why this arrangement is important and necessary.***

A fact of faith, on which you can rest, is nothing is done on this earth without God's notice. *The eyes of the Eternal are in every place, beholding the evil and the good (Proverbs 15:3). His eyes are open upon all the ways of the sons of men; to give to every one according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doing (Jeremiah 32:19).*

A matter of truth on which we can rest is: whatever is, God is well aware of its existence. If He did not want something to happen, it would not happen. He may allow events and situations to occur, of which He disapproves but by so doing, there is a reason. By the experience, personal or organizational, whether it be good or evil, God will “know” how those involved will react, respond; what they will do. That is His prerogative as God. Will the pottery strive against the potter?

All that takes place in the Church does so ultimately for the development of a perfect man and woman (**Ephesians 4:12-13**) who are being fashioned into the similitude and glory of Jesus Christ; developing the character and mind of God in them. Our *works* are being tested and rewards will be issued according to our *works* (cf. **I Corinthians 3:12-15** and **Matthew 16:27**).

Regardless of the particular situation, God will see to it that the results are for good, **according to His will**, especially for His elect, those whom He calls, those who love Him (**Romans 8:28**), in spirit and in truth. He will never leave or forsake us, so is His promise. Consider the reality that for the elect’s sake *those days shall be shortened* (**Matthew 24:22**). Regardless of the degree of difficulty and despair in any given Church situation or personal dilemma, God will provide a way out (cf. **I Corinthians 10:13** likewise **II Peter 2:9**).

Although God chooses most often not to interfere (consider **Psalm 50:17-21**), God can and does intervene when He feels it appropriate and necessary to do so. With regard to the Body of Christ, the Church of God, Christ is the Head of the Church and He is in charge. He leads His Body and nothing goes unnoticed by Him.

With respect to the Church of God, Jesus Christ is completely, perfectly aware of and is firmly responsible for all that takes place **within His Body**. Jesus Christ arranges who will be set “in place” in His Church, with role and responsibility firmly assigned and managed and does so with a purposeful reason in mind. (Consider in totality **Ephesians 4:7-16**).

“God is not *the author* of confusion, but of peace in all the churches” (**I Corinthians 14:33**). This verse reveals a characteristic of God that is axiomatic, true and unwavering. Yet, when things go wrong; **when men go wrong**; Jesus Christ is well aware of what is happening in His Body and He awaits repentance. Jesus Christ wants to see what His people will do, how they will respond. He awaits to see what you will do; how His disciples (in training) will react to the wrong in the church.

When “corrupt” men are in charge, Jesus Christ is aware and will see how His servants will work it out. So often God does not work it out – ***he waits to see what his servants will do; what responsibility they will take on.***

This lesson is replete throughout the pages of the Bible – God’s history lessons, God’s tool to teach you what to do, how to respond. *The Eternal is a God of knowledge and by Him actions are weighed* (**I Samuel 2:3**). *I, the Eternal search the heart, I try the reins (heart), even to give every man according to his ways and according to the fruit of his doing*” (**Jeremiah 17:10**).

Every man will give account of himself before Jesus Christ. (cf. **II Corinthians 5:10** and **Romans 14:10-12**.)

Consider what the Apostle John (one who should have been honored at his very presence – although I speak as a fool in man’s wisdom) had to deal with (**III John 9-11**).

More sobering was the attack on the church (in Corinth), perpetrated by false ministers, who were the instruments of Satan. Notice what Paul warned. *For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the Apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their work.* (**II Corinthians 11:13-15**). (There’s that concept again –works.)

From this historical fact, we understand that even today, the possibility exists that men can be planted in the Church, looking righteous, teaching the brethren. Although fitting the part, talking smooth things, delighting the brethren, they are deceitful workers, servants of Satan. Did not even Jesus Christ reveal that the *enemy, who is the devil, sows tares in the field* (**Matthew 13:39**)?

Peter exposed evil men in the church for what they were. *But there were false prophets among the people even as there shall be false teachers among you For they speak great swelling words of vanity, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness ... while they promise liberty; they themselves are servants of corruption.* (Read all of **II Peter 2:1–3:7**. That was the real world Peter grew up in, **in the Church**. And today there is nothing new under the sun.)

Why does Jesus Christ allow this to happen in His Body? He allows this in order to prove the evil from the good and to test His people. *For first of all, when you come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you; and I partly believe it. For there must also be heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you* (**I Corinthians 11:18-19**).

Once again, we see a reason why “bad” things happen in the church. These things occur in order to reveal who are approved of God and who the heretics, the false ministers and teachers are.

This is a principle, bedrock and justified by the Word of God. God, Jesus Christ does not tempt (**James 1:12-15**); but He tries His servants. *God which trieth our hearts* (**I Thessalonians 2:4** see also **Revelations 2:23** and **Psalms 7:9**), tests us and proves us; doing so for the expressed purpose of strengthening us and preparing us for rulership in His Kingdom. He is testing us to know our worth and abilities. He does so to clean us up when we are wrong; to shape us into the likeness of His character (cf. **Hebrews 12:5-11**). Dozens of Scriptures clearly reveal that God and Jesus Christ test and try their servants. What does the parable of the talents reveal? Testing; seeing what you will do with what we’ve been handed.

One may ask: “why are there, as it seems, **corrupt** Church of God organizations?” Why do some Church of God organizations seem to get away with heretical doctrines?

An answer may lie in the principle found in **Romans 9:13-29**. The organization that is perceived as a corrupt, heretical Church of God organization (that perception may well be wrong; it may well be right), just may be allowed to exist by Jesus Christ, in His ONE Body, in order to test all His people; in order to prove, to test the worth of those individuals within that “corrupt organization;” and in order *to prove to all who is approved among you and who is the heretic* (organization).

It may well be that there are organizational tares, having been planted, just as *there are tares sown in the field*. The principle applies.

There are many incorporated, organized Church of God organizations in the ONE Body of Christ today. That is just the way it is today.

Jesus Christ spoke, as recorded in **Matthew 28:18-20** (cf. **Acts 1:8** and **John 17:20-21**) that His “called out ones” were to “go into all the world – to preach and teach.”

To do this requires a labor effort large in scope, organized in management and performance; structured in appearance. Organization is required and organizing under an incorporated structure, legalized papers and recognizable to the public as a religious organization, is required in this day and age. The Church of God is a religious organization; that is clear.

Now whether it be the Intercontinental Church of God or any other of the named Church of God groups, most all exist for the expressed purpose of fulfilling the directive given by Jesus Christ, “go into all the world – preach and teach.”

In our day and age, we can conclude that all these various and many Church of God organizations would not be (in existence) if Jesus Christ did not want them to be. If Jesus Christ did not want His ONE Body to be divided into many organizations, it just would not be – period!

Even if He is allowing some to simply exist or “play out their clock,” or exist for the purpose of showing their corruption, there is still a reason He is allowing this and has not “dismissed them as of yet.”

Consider the demise of the Worldwide Church of God. What a powerful witness of what will happen to any organization that rejects God, disrespects His laws and makes a mockery of His grace, mercy and blessings.

Just like Ancient Israel, the Worldwide Church of God fell away, was consumed by its enemies, fell in disgrace, infamy and foolishness. The Worldwide Church of God’s fall was applauded by many Sunday-worshipping “Christians.” Many Christian commentators (one in particular, a highly recognized evangelist of the 700 Club) “thanked the Lord for allowing this people to come back to the fold.” By fold he meant, the Sunday-keeping harlot fold.

What a sad commentary; what a shame; what a tragedy – God’s church (His people in that organization) **failed God** by going back to paganism, back to Baal-worship, Sun-worship.

What happened to the Worldwide Church of God, beginning back in 1979, can happen to any other of the many Church of God organizations today. The lesson is clear: if you forsake God, He will forsake you. If you dishonor Christ, if you forsake Him, He will forsake you. If a Church organization, leaders and membership, takes advantage, by applying carnal attributes, human thoughts and behavior, and false teachings in place of Scriptural Truths and Spiritual guided abilities, then Jesus Christ will reject that organization and the participants therein.

As a minister of Jesus Christ, having been baptized into the ONE Body of Christ, into the *spiritual organism*, the Church of God, and serving within the physical organization called the Intercontinental Church of God, it is my responsibility to the membership of the ICG. (And so it is with any minister who serves within the confines of the organization in which he is a part; he is responsible to his organization's people.)

The ministry of the ICG is first accountable to Jesus Christ. The ministry of the ICG is likewise responsible to the membership of the ICG, to facilitate their conversion process, to teach, correct and direct the baptized members (and related individuals) within the organization called the ICG. The laymembers are accountable to Jesus Christ; to respond to the Word preached, to the teaching and the instructions Christ gives them through the ICG ministry.

In simple terms, the minister must teach the truth, the spirit-inspired truth which comes from the Word of God. The individual, the laymember must listen to and respond to the truth. If either fails in their responsibility, Christ will take that individual to task and call for repentance. If the individual, minister or laymember alike, fails to obey Christ, to heed His instructions; if either fails to repent, their fate is sealed. This fact is a reality, regardless of the organization one attends.

The minister is responsible to preach the truth and the individual is responsible to "check it out;" to *prove all things*, always. And both are responsible to converse with each other in love, respect and humility. The minister is afforded a degree of respect (consider **Hebrews 13:7, 17** and **24**). Ministers of Jesus Christ have a responsibility not to be taken lightly; not to be preformed in abuse (cf. **I Peter 5:2-3**).

If the organization fails as a whole, or its leadership fails to keep the laymembers attuned to the truth, and the organization as a whole fails to respond to Christ's corrections, then the consequences are dire. Once again, we have the witness of a once vibrant, expanding, purposeful Worldwide Church of God as the example of what Jesus Christ will do to any organization that does not measure up to His standards.

Every Church of God organization has the witness of the Worldwide Church of God to keep them in check. Never again will there be an organization as expansive as the Worldwide Church of God once was. Why?

There will never be a global outreach Church of God, the likes of a Worldwide Church of God again, to ensure that there will never again be such mockery of God Almighty and Jesus Christ as did occur when the Worldwide Church of God fell, when it apostatized, denying and departing from the Living God. *Be not deceived; God is not mocked (Galatians 6:7)*. In the end, the Worldwide Church of God reaped what it sowed. We now have a witness of God being faithful to His word – *He is not mocked*.

That once strong and powerful organization fell because men, the leadership and ministry, gave glory to themselves and not God. The once strong, global Worldwide Church of God began to feed off the strengths of carnality and human wealth and not the strength of God's spirit.

The ministry of the Worldwide Church of God began to use their intellect, diminishing from the Word of God; they led the laymembers astray by teaching commandments of men and rejecting the Word of God. The ministry and leadership of the Worldwide Church of God began to teach Protestantism, Catholic doctrines and secularism in the place of God's word.

The membership of the Worldwide Church of God became lazy, disrespectful to the Word of God and the requirements of Jesus Christ. They followed men and not Jesus Christ. They forgot they were “called out of the world.” They forsook the admonition to *prove all things*. They listened to and accepted the lies of Satan, as taught through Catholic and Protestant doctrine. They lived in the world and became entrapped, ensnared and obedient to the lusts, carnality and foolishness of the world. They forsook Jesus Christ. They lost!

From that failure forward, there is not to be a large, ubiquitous, singular organization. The work of God will be accomplished by spirit-filled, spirit-led individuals within the organizations which humble themselves under the mighty hand of Jesus Christ. Christ is working with these remnant groups. The preaching of the gospel will prevail through the organization that is faithful and is serious in its obedience to Jesus Christ and His directives.

Each organization matters and the organization you are in, a part of, matters for you. It matters to you personally, for it is through the organization in which you are placed, Jesus Christ is able to judge your works, attitudes, behavior, character and faithfulness.

From the scriptures, we can understand sound Biblical and Spiritual principles, which members within the ICG (and any of the Church of God organizations) should practice, along with behaviors all members should avoid. When I say members, I mean Ministers, leaders and laity alike. There is no separation, no distinction, no free ride, when it comes to the fact that Jesus Christ is judging the lives, evaluating the performance of each of His servants. It is within the ICG the Father has placed you, where your works are being judged.

Jesus Christ while speaking to His “selected” disciples said: *other sheep I have which are not of this fold: them must I bring and they shall hear my voice and there shall be one fold and one shepherd*. The principle revealed is clear. As members of the ICG, we must keep in mind that we are not the only Church of God organization in the ONE Body of Christ. As such, He will guide, direct, instruct, correct and work with each of the other organizations as He sees fit, with the ultimate purpose of bringing all into the unity of the faith (**Ephesians 4:7-16**); ultimately fulfilled at the First Resurrection.

Consider the seven churches of Revelation. Seven different *ekklesia* located in seven different cities; each church (each congregation) being distinct, unique from the others. Each city was a distinct, unique, separate *ekklesia*, yet all seven congregations had within them God’s “called out ones,” all baptized into the ONE Body of Christ. Each distinct city was guided, corrected, and judged by Jesus Christ. He did this by working with each location separately, providing a distinct message, basically unique for each distinct city.

The responsibility of the membership in each city (each group, each organization - today) was to individually (and collectively) repent and get back to the business at hand, get back to faithful living, obedient and faithful to Christ. The seven messages were provided to the seven distinct locations. Each message was distinct to its own location.

Sardis was not to worry about Ephesus. Philadelphia was not to worry about Thyatira. (You get the picture). Sure there was a couple overlapping concerns such as the doctrine of the Nicolaitans (**Revelation**

2:6 and 2:15). And we do understand the hearer was to *hear what the spirit says to the churches* - but the reality was Christ worked with each unique church and the individuals within that church, dealing with their own specific problems. Each church was unique. All had some good; all had issues to resolve, sin to overcome, character to get right. All had the responsibility to repent. If they did – if they overcame – blessing would follow and assurance of being accepted into the Kingdom was promised. If they failed – their fate was sealed.

As Peter taught, “*it is with much difficulty, hard effort, much work* (the KJV word *scarcely* is an inappropriate translation for the Greek word *molis*) *the righteous be saved*” (**I Peter 4:18**). “*For the time is [now] that judgment must begin with the House of God*” (**I Peter 4:17**). As Jesus Christ said “*strait and narrow is the way which leads to life*” and as Paul taught “*work out your own salvation with fear and trembling,*” we understand we have work to do. Jesus Christ is judging us by what we do and what we do in the organization in which we’ve been placed.

We can see, it is the responsibility of each 21st Century’s Church of God organization, including the ICG, to obey and honor the Master, Jesus Christ and to take His teachings, given to each group specifically, to heart and maintain the business each is called to do. We are to repent when guided to do so, when our Master chides and rebukes us. We are to fulfill our responsibility to feed the flock with the TRUTH and not half-truths. We are to protect the flock, our flock (this sheepfold) from the wiles of Satan and from false ministers within.

When John and the disciples recognized *one casting out devils in thy (Christ’s) name*, John told Jesus “*we forbid him because he did not follow with us.*” But notice Christ’s response. Jesus told John, *Forbid him not: for he that is not against us is for us*” (**Luke 9:49-50**).

If another organization is not “against” our work, then our responsibilities as a Church of God organization is to leave them alone and not interfere. In essence, let them do their work; we are not to be concerned with their work. If they are against us; that’s their problem, the reality is obvious. We are to bless them that curse us; pray for our adversaries, not attack them. Either way, *leave them alone*. We are to get on with (keeping our hands to the plow) and focus on our responsibilities, our duty to Jesus Christ, on our work; staying on the road to salvation, teaching repentance and forgiveness of sins (cf. **Luke 24:46-48**).

If others attack, God will protect our work. Why answer back in kind? Why waste your time, effort, money or energy on the fools?

When Peter was given his commission, Christ commanded him to perform his duty and not worry about anything or anyone else. Read **John 21:15-22**. Peter was commanded to feed the sheep Christ would entrust to him. Christ told Peter he had a work to do and in the end, Peter would suffer as a martyr. That all understood, Peter was concerned about John; maybe John’s responsibilities would be better. Peter then asked Christ, “*What shall this man do?*” Christ’s response was simple and direct: in essence Christ said, what is this man’s work and life to you? *You, follow me*. In this event, we find a principle rich with meaning for all Church of God organizations. Stay committed to your own work and do not worry about the other guy. If some tarry until Christ returns, what business is that of yours?

Peter and John were good buddies. They remained that way (**Acts 3:1, 4:13, Galatians 2:9** are scriptures that quickly come to mind). But even in the face of devout friendship, Jesus Christ's command was clear to Peter –“*You follow me.*” I come first.

Notice too, Paul was painfully aware of the possibility that he might step on some other apostles' works. He told the Church at Rome (**Romans 15:20**), *so I strive to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build upon another man's work.*

Through Paul, we understand the principle of not proselytizing or attempting to gain a foothold into other organizations' membership. Once again, their work is theirs and if Christ is working with that entity, they will be judged by the fruit of their labors. We and you will be judged and rewarded by the fruits of our labors.

An individual called into another organization is the product of that organization's labors and should not be imposed upon. As Paul understood, so the ICG understands that the *field is ripe* and the work is to be directed toward those *who are sick and in need of a physician*, those “*out there in the world.*” The work of the ICG is not for those who are already within other organizations. Our work is directed toward the sinner, teaching repentance.

And as having that responsibility, it is imperative that the Ministry and the laymembers alike be shining lights of righteous living, examples of the truth, exemplifying what Jesus Christ requires and what he can do through us. Our works and life style must be honest and representative of the life of Jesus Christ. Most of all, our teaching and way of life, doctrine and religious activity must not conform to the world, must not be sprinkled with Protestant beliefs, practices or accoutrements. Our faith is not the faith of worldly, pagan-Christianity. Our lives must be transformed by the renewing of our minds – being converted, righteous people.

If we fail our duty, why then would Jesus Christ allow sinners (who are repentant) into this church? Why would Christ allow “babes” to be brought up with tainted “spoiled brats” who are rebellious and disobedient to Him?

Let's not make excuses for foul behavior. We are to have “*no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them. For it is ashamed to even speak of those things which are done in secret.*”

If the church, any organization calling itself Church of God, is not a welcoming place of consistency, righteousness; a place where the ministry teaches God's truth, then why should God bring people into it? He would not.

The Church of God must be the repository of repentant sinners, all being taught the Truth of God, being given the knowledge of the truth; encouraged to overcome their flesh, to conquer their struggles, ever growing into the likeness of Jesus Christ. And the Church of God must be a harbor of righteousness, protecting God's people from the violent seas of false, deceitful religious practices of “nominal” Christianity.

Now, as it is one thing to *not interfere* with another organization's work; it is equally important to *not desire to combine with* another organization's service. Church of God ecumenism is counter-productive to growth. But why; can't we all get along? Can't we worship together as one strong Body of Christ?

Are there spiritual, Biblical principles that can inform us one way or the other? Should we or should we not combine with other organizations?

Perhaps what Jesus Christ is teaching one organization's membership is not the same as what He is attempting to teach another's. Perhaps those in one organization, as being placed in that organization for a reason, have other lessons and certain characteristics to learn which are different than what others in other organizations have to learn.

Consider again the seven churches in revelation and translate their experiences into the 21st Century's presentation of the Church(es) of God. From this we can understand that one organization's problem is not necessarily the other's problem. Christ worked uniquely with each different location (i.e. organization).

When we consider the real physical world of employment, we can understand another potential pitfall of Church of God ecumenism. In business, there are often competing companies selling the same product. Say for instance, cars. The car is of itself not the problem. It is a means for transportation.

You could have one type of car, one make and model for every driver. But the reality is we don't. The car gets us to our intended destination, and there are different makes and models.

Rather than one car manufacturer or dealership satisfying all drivers, there are dozens of manufacturers and dealerships. Yet all are selling the same means to an end, the car.

Now an individual looking for a job in the automotive industry, selling, promoting, and advertising cars, answers an ad for employment and accepts a job position in a specific company. He enjoys the company, loves his co-workers, appreciates the benefits, loves the product and believes his company presents the very best car to the general public. He defends his company. "Why, everyone should buy his company's car!" He goes to his company's trade shows, annual sales meeting; is privy to his company's problems and pitfalls; is aware of its strengths and weaknesses. His performance is judged by his manager; he is corrected, directed and is given encouragement by his boss. His manager rewards him in accordance to his loyalty and stability.

Can you imagine how foolish this man would look if he went to his competitor's annual sales meeting and there attempted to promote his company's car? Why he'd be kicked out on his (hind-end), scorned and ridiculed. The other company would not tolerate this interloper.

Can you also see the folly if this man, while working for his company, decided to promote the competitor's product?

How foolish this man would look, if while working for Cadillac, he attempted to bring a Honda into his showroom.

And if this man wandered back and forth, or was a transient worker, non-committed, floating from job to job, what would his worth be; what would be his reward? How could anyone judge his performance? What values would he promote; **who would believe him or take him seriously?**

If carnal man does not accept this kind of behavior, how do you think Jesus Christ feels about the individual He is working with, in the organization in which he or she has been placed; if that individual were to wander uncommitted to any particular work or attempts to involve himself or herself, interfering with another organization, into which Jesus Christ did not place him or her?

You cannot work two jobs simultaneously. You do not dedicate your daily activity, commit to, and grow in, committing to your company's policies and mission, only to go to your competitor and devote time with that company.

An IBM Account Rep does not promote Apple Mac computers. A Ford Salesman does not sell Pontiacs. For one to be held as an esteemed and respected employee, one has to prove commitment, dedication and show value to the employer, the company for which one works.

There is wisdom and spiritual soundness to the commitment principle. We are being judged as we dwell in the Church of God, involved with the organization in which we are.

We understand that once baptized, we are involved in a new walk of life, a new way of life; we are in the Church, the ONE body of Christ. Because we are now in the Church of God, we are required to live a different life style, a repentant and converted life style. We practice works of faith, good works, and righteous works; *no longer being conformed* to this world's ways, but *transformed by the renewing of our minds*. We experience lessons and are learning each day as Jesus Christ directs and corrects each one of us personally. This we do; this we are involved with, because we are in the Church of God, the Body of Christ.

And not only are we in the Church of God, we are involved with the organization into which God has placed us. This is our reality; this is how we show Christ the character of commitment to a cause. We do not weaken by blending and waffling or promoting another's work. We deal with what we've been handed.

Although there should be peace and harmony, oneness of doctrine throughout all the Churches of God, the fact is there is not. Whereas all should be preaching the same things, the reality is all do not. Sure there are many similarities among the many organizational Churches of God, but there are differences. That is a 21st Century reality. Whose doctrines are correct, whose are in error is the challenge you must resolve, personally. Once again, we learn that Jesus Christ is judging to see who will be faithful to Him and His truth; those who faithfully *grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord, Jesus Christ*.

There were times in the history of the Church of God, when individuals had to leave the group or organization in which they were a part because the truth was no longer being taught or worse yet; the ministry was promoting false doctrines and heresies. That possibility always exists and one is to make a move if necessary.

However notice and consider this fact; it is interesting how that Jesus Christ commended the Ephesus Church for their ability to stand up and fight; to confront the problems and put certain individuals to the test. Notice **Revelation 2:2-3**: *I know thy works and thy labor and thy patience and how you cannot bear them which are evil: and has tried them which say they are apostles and are not and has found them liars (false). And have persevered and have endured hardship for my name and have not fainted.*

When we consider the history of the church at Ephesus we realize, as Paul warned, that some of those within the Ephesus congregation would rise up to levels of leadership, perhaps positioning themselves as ministers. (Maybe implying they have special knowledge that they just have to teach. “Let me come to your Feast site and reveal special knowledge.”) Doing so, their goal was to destroy the church, to take disciples unto themselves (**Acts 20:28-30**). They did this subtly, over time. (Consider **II Corinthians 11:3-4, 13-15**).

So by the time John wrote to the church at Ephesus, perhaps some of these “self-promoted” ministers that Paul warned about were in place. But these men were “called on the carpet” and revealed for what they were – false. And who tried these men? Those individuals, laymembers and ministers alike, who stayed with the church at Ephesus, who were true and faithful to Jesus Christ; the members of the Ephesian church who “knew their Bible” and knew the truth; these are the ones who tried the false apostles.

Christ was pleased that these people, His people in the church (organization) in Ephesus, were able to stand up to the challenge, to spot out “the rat.” This they did because they were involved with Ephesus; not church hopping. They understood the good and the bad of the congregation. They cared about their brethren. They understood the people in their own congregation, because they stayed, worked and grew there. They were involved with their brethren. The battle was in their “home base” and they met the challenge. They were dedicated to the truth.

You, we, all need to be vigilant and on the defensive against those that would attempt to pervert the organizational structure of the Church of God in which we are placed.

Jesus Christ’s directive to Ephesus was not to flee from that church and go to another city; rather His directive was to stand up and defend. The Ephesians were not to cower in fear and “book.” Jude reminds us of our responsibility in the organization in which we reside; *you should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.*

Throughout the New Testament, we are reminded that all in the Church of God are being judged now (**I Peter 4:17**); that Jesus Christ will *reward every man according to his works* (**Matthew 16:27**). Jesus Christ admonished His disciples to be faithful in the little things, in order to prove one can be faithful in greater responsibilities (**Luke 16:10-12**). The Church of God, and the organization in which you dwell, as long as Christ allows it to exist, is the proving ground, providing opportunity for the development of God’s children - you.

Responsibilities, talents, and opportunities are provided in varying degrees, to all of God’s elect. **I Corinthians 12** and **Romans 12** reveal the particulars. This reality becomes crystal clear with a physical organization involved in the Work of the Church. There has to be organization and degrees of responsibility within God’s Church and God’s Church organizations. Within each are ministers, teachers,

pastors, deacons, helps, administrators, and members. Even the most feeble (however you want to define that person to be) have a purpose, are needed. God has tempered the body together. As an organization, it is essential that we work together as a team, responsible and accountable to one another.

Notice Paul's admonition to Timothy, speaking words we must all take to heart. "... you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the Living God, the pillar and foundation of truth" (**I Timothy 3:15**). Are there not standards that God has established by which His children are to live?

The ICG has doctrines and teaching that are (in some cases) different from those of other organizations. It is true that the ICG takes a stand against many doctrines found in other Church of God organizations and counters them with the truth from the Bible. It is true other organizations do not respect the work of the ICG, nor its founder.

Our work and our commitment to the truth and the commission in which we labor is that which we do. These are realities we face. In our organization, it is essential for the ministry and leadership to resolve its own problems and work out this organization's troubles when they arise. This too is the responsibility Jesus Christ lays on all individuals within this organization, of which Jesus is the Head. If he has rejected us, we would not be. If he is guiding the ICG and correcting us along the way, we are to heed, lest we fail.

One final guiding principle, which is revealed in the Scriptures, is found in **I Kings 13**. In summary, God gave a commission, a work to a prophet, *a man of God*. This *man of God* was to travel from his hometown in Judah, north to Bethel (in Israel) to confront and prophesy against King Jeroboam. As part of his commission, the *man of God* was told to eat nothing, nor drink anything in Israel but rather, after you prophesy to the King of Israel, just go back home. In addition, the *man of God* was to go back using a different travel route. This *man of God* had a work to do, a commission to fulfill. He had direct communication from God: "You do your work and don't let anything get in your way; nor dally along the way."

The *man of God* did as he was told, up to a point. Now enters the lesson for us today. Along the way back to Judah, the *man of God* was confronted, interfered with by, as the Scriptures called, *an old prophet in Bethel*. This old prophet (in Bethel) was once a prophet of God and was acknowledged as such by the *man of God* from Judah. The *man of God* from Judah recognized the old prophet's credentials, so to speak.

The turning point is found in **I Kings 13:18**. *The old prophet lied*. The *man of God*, who was given a commission, listened to *the lying prophet* and as a result was *killed by a lion*. Read all of **I Kings 13**; the lesson is fascinating.

What we gain from this example, this admonition, is clear. The principle applied is, there is no need to listen to or get involved with "another prophet of God," from another organization. Although it may seem that the other individual is speaking the truth, his words may not be true at all; or worse yet, his words may be half truthful, having a little truth in them, but not all the truth. His words may well seem innocent, yet duplicitous meaning in what he teaches. Another teacher from another organization, although sounding faithful to the Word of God, preaching words from the Bible, maybe even having been

given due respect in the past as a minister of Jesus Christ, may now be nothing more than a *lying prophet*, a preacher of guile. His words may well entrap those less knowledgeable of the Word of God.

The irony is, the *man of God*, after listening to the words of the *lying prophet*, could have simply fell to his knees and asked God, "is this true?" A simple prayer; a request for reaffirmation was all that was necessary. If the *man of God* had done that, his life would not have ending the way it did.

What a lesson for us. Not only with regard to our every day life, but also when it comes to other organizations and other "ministers," we are to *be sober and vigilant; because the adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking who he may devour*. Like the *man of God* if we let our guard down, the consequences can be disastrous.

That does not mean that everything every other organization teaches is in error. As mentioned before, there are doctrines which are shared among most of the various COG organizations. And there are doctrines which are not. Still, there is no reason to take a chance. Jesus Christ has placed the teachers and ministry in this organization as it pleases him. The organizational leadership and ministry, which Jesus Christ set in the ICG, is responsible to teach the truth to those who are set in the ICG. The membership is responsible to prove all things and to talk honestly with the ministry. Together they work out the concerns.

And if the ministry fails in its responsibility, Christ will take us to task. If we don't repent; if we don't continue to prove all things and converse in the Words of Righteousness, Jesus Christ will step in and provide for the membership, as He sees fit, as He so desires.

No others need to be involved in teaching the members of the ICG and there is no reason for the ICG membership to mingle with any other group, especially when it comes to serving and worshipping God during His commanded assemblies.

Each organization is accountable to Jesus Christ, if Christ is leading them. Each organization is given the tools needed in order to reasonably take care of its own. Each organization, from its ministry to its membership is accountable for the labor it uniquely performs. Each organization should not be spliced into any other, especially in a worship service. The organization matters and all within the organization are directly accountable to Jesus Christ for the duties and works each performs.

If a minister errs, the error needs to be called out, whether it be by a fellow-minister or by a laymember. If a fellow-member is in error, a brother or sister is obligated to say something. James admonished the brethren in saying (5:19), *Brethren if any of you do err from the truth and one convert him, let him know that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his ways shall save a soul from death and shall hide a multitude of sins*.

The example of Peter when confronted by Paul should set the example for all in God's church. He made a mistake; was called out for being a racist and learned his lesson.

No minister or laymember is so big as to think they can't err or make a mistake. Laymembers and ministers alike should take heed lest they fall. For one to think one cannot learn from either a minister or a laymember or for on to think he or she is too big to not be called on the carpet and have an error called out

is dangerous indeed, showing lack of humility, lack of respect. Such an attitude may be close to showing *despite* to the Holy Spirit of God.

The work of the Church is a work of salvation, saving sinners from error. Regardless of the position of the person in the church, when error is clear, the obligation is to help. The first step in that process is to show the error. Paul emphasizes “*we are to admonish one another*” (**Romans 15:14**); “*count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother*” (**II Thessalonians 3:15**).

Jesus Christ gave instructions; informing us of the various ways to help a brother or sister in the Church. Consider **Matthew 18:15-20** and **Luke 17:3-4**. We would not have been given these and many other examples unless Jesus Christ felt it necessary for His servants, His brethren to learn how to handle problems in the Church, in the organization in which they reside.

Now in the 21st Century, in the organization in which we are placed, as servants of Christ, called and elect of God, we are held accountable to take care of the responsibilities laid before us.

The New Testament and just as equally the Old Testament, is filled with guidance and lessons, teaching us how to behave in the Church of God and how to deal with problems not only within the Church but within our lives. Nowhere do we read we should run away and hide from the church or our personal battles. To run and cower in fear is the kind of character Christ will not accept in His governmental structure, in His Kingdom, when He returns.

Does the Organization Matter? Yes it does. The organization is necessary for you. It is the means by which Jesus Christ is judging your life in the faith. Certainly, what you do “outside the church” is just as critical and important. But what you do with your brethren, in the organization in which you have been placed and are actively involved, is often very revealing.

At the last, reflect on the words of Paul. “*Do you not know that the saints shall judge the world and if the world be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters. Know you not that we shall judge angels; how much more things that pertain to this life?*” (Read all of **I Corinthians 6:1-8**.)

The organization is the place where it matters. Both strengths and weaknesses abound in the Church, in the organization in which you are. Ministers and laymembers alike (you) have their strengths, their weaknesses and their personal battles. Mistakes are made. How the mistakes are dealt with is the bigger concern; is what Christ is really concerned about.

Our responsibility is to remain faithful to Christ first. When matters need to be judged, when problems are evident in the church, we are to look to Christ first. We are to **seek His guidance**; doing so through Bible study, prayer and fasting. We are to commit to His directions and come to understand from His will, what we are to do. The last thing to do, what we are to never do, is gossip, fret and agonize. That is not the kind of character Christ will allow in His Kingdom. When it is necessary to do, we are to admonish those at fault, humbly and honestly; privately, respectfully and patiently. We are to use the Word of God and not our emotions when confronting people and issues.

When we are admonished, having a fault of ours pointed out (either through a sermon, article, etc., or through a personal conversation with a co-member), we are to take it patiently and repent.

As long as there are faithful servants within the organization Christ is guiding, who are true to Him and not to man, He will direct that organization. If and when the organization becomes a hollow shell, an empty work, with faithless, fearful people, Christ will remove its candlestick.

In the example of the dying church, Sardis, we find a glimmer of hope. Notice **Revelation 3:1-5**, specifically the following: *I know thy works, that you have a name that lives and are dead. Be watchful and strengthen the things that remain that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God ... thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy.*”

As Sardis lay dying on the table, Jesus Christ still offered hope. He encouraged Sardis to repent. But notice what He did not do.

Christ **did not tell those** *who were still acceptable in His sight, who had not defiled their garments*, to run away, to get out of Sardis, to go to some other city. Those that were acceptable in the eyes of Christ, during the heat of the battle, suffering the pains of Sardis, remained faithful to Christ and did not defile their garments. They were witnesses of Christ’s righteousness as they lived among their brethren of Sardis. They kept to the truth and did not conform to error. They were watchful and strengthen the things that remained. And because they remained faithful to Christ, they will walk worthy and they shall walk with Jesus Christ in white.

What happened to the rest of Sardis? What happened to all those in the other cities (organizations) who while in their city, did not repent, did not heed the words of Jesus Christ?

Does the organization matter? Absolutely! It matters to the ONE Body of Jesus Christ and it matters to you, personally. The organization with which you are involved, in which you have been placed, matters to you, personally. It is in that organization, you experience the necessary elements and responsibilities by which Christ can try you, judge you and understand just exactly what you’re made of.

Certainly, your everyday living, the events you experience each day of life, the behaviors, the attitudes, the reactions and actions you perform each day are being judged. You are being brought through a life of testing, a salvation, which is leading you to your ultimate fulfillment as a soon to be *born-again* child of God; *born again* of spirit into the Kingdom of God at the 1st Resurrection.

The life you live, your calling into the Body of Christ has its privileges. Your destiny fulfilled (short of you opting out, through neglect; by failing to live up to your responsibilities and commitment to Christ) will be as a co-ruler with Christ when He sits on His throne.

Each Church of God organization is not a business for profit. Yet, each organization (and all its members) should perform its duties in a business-like manner, with a sense of professionalism, competence, respect and dignity. An organization is organized and Jesus Christ expects His servants to maintain organized control and honor in all they do. This goes without saying. The Scriptures are filled with examples of proper, honorable behavior and attitudes God requires not only of His people, but of any organized effort that takes on His name - the Church of God.

When the brethren meet together in Holy Convocation, all should be done; everything the minister and laymembers do and say should be done as though Jesus Christ were actually there in the room with them; for in truth He is.

Jesus Christ is looking to see how you respond to adversity; how you handle problems and how capable you are to handle the “little things.” From time to time, the “big problem” occurs in the very organization, in the very congregation you are a part of. When that happens, in the organization you are a part of, your response to the situation is what Jesus Christ is judging. If your response is incorrect, Jesus Christ will give you the opportunity to see yourself for what you are, repent and adjust; to learn and to do it better the next time. If your heart and attitude are wrong, you can repent. Christ will help you develop the right heart and mind. When you “get it right” – then you can be assured of hearing, “well done, good and faithful servant!”

When you do the right thing in the organization in which you have been placed, you have done the right thing in the Body of Christ. You have proved to Christ you care about His Body and you are concerned about what He thinks of you, personally. You have shown faithful respect and have aided in the success of the organization in which you have been placed. Consider once again the principle found in **Luke 16:10-12**.

The organization in which you are now a part, matters for you personally! The reasons are all too obvious!