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Frank W. Nelte

BEWARE OF KEEPING GOD'S FEAST OF TABERNACLES IN A WRONG WAY

Beginning in 1927 Mr. & Mrs. Herbert Armstrong kept their first Passover, and then all the annual Feasts and Holy Days. The knowledge of the annual observances was being restored to the Church of God. Prior to Mr. Armstrong's time the Church of God had lost the knowledge of God's annual observances. This means that when Mr. Armstrong came to realize that God requires us to observe His annual Feasts and Holy Days, **there was nobody Mr. Armstrong could turn to for advice and guidance** regarding **how** God's Feasts are to be observed.

How does God expect us to observe His Feasts? **What** are we supposed to do at the Feast of Tabernacles? **How** do we spend our time? How do we find out **where** God has placed His name for His Feast? What constitutes "a Feast" in the sight of God ... church services ... festive meals ... singing ... activities ... what? **How many** church services would God want us to have every day for His 7-day Feasts ... one, two or three? (I've been to a Feast with three services on one day of the Feast back in the 60s.) **Who** should be the speakers at the Feast? Besides having church services, **what else** can we or should we do at God's Feasts?

There were no ready answers for these and other questions when Mr. Armstrong and his wife began to keep God's Feasts almost 100 years ago. Mr. Armstrong had to do his own research into these and similar questions. And he obviously also prayed for God's guidance in all these matters.

By trial and error, and with the experience of seeing how things turned out, Mr. Armstrong came to establish the general format for the observance of God's Feasts and Holy Days. And then over a period of many years certain **corrections and adjustments** to Mr. Armstrong's initial understanding and ways of doing things in connection with the Feasts were implemented.

For example:

1) **For the Feast of Pentecost** Mr. Armstrong initially observed this Feast on the Jewish date of Sivan 6th. Later Mr. Armstrong came to see that this Jewish date does not involve any counting. He then counted incorrectly and decided that Pentecost must always be observed on **a Monday**. Only in the early 1970s was he eventually persuaded that Pentecost must always be observed on **a Sunday**. That was after he had already been observing the annual Feasts for about 45 years. In other words, **it took 45 years** for Mr. Armstrong to come to understand how to count correctly for the Feast of Pentecost. That is a long time.

2) **For the Feast of Unleavened Bread** Mr. Armstrong initially followed the Jewish custom and referred to it as "Passover". As late as 1945 in his "Good News Letter" for the Feast of Tabernacles that year he still referred to the Feast of Unleavened Bread as "Passover". **It took about 20 years** for Mr. Armstrong

to correct this wrong name for the Feast. That was also a long time.

3) **For the Passover** Mr. Armstrong recognized the correct name “Passover”, but also wrongly accepted the term “The Lord’s Supper” as an alternate New Testament name.

In 1952 Mr. Armstrong wrote the booklet “How often should we partake of THE LORD’S SUPPER?”. This booklet was then re-published in a new format in 1974. In this booklet Mr. Armstrong always used the term “Lord’s Supper” in quotation marks, though the actual title of this booklet does not contain any quotation marks. And he did accept this wrong term as a valid alternate name. The last sentence of that 1952 (and re-published in 1974) booklet reads:

The "**Lord's supper**" **or New Testament Passover** should be observed after sunset on the evening before the Jewish people of today celebrate their feast. (last sentence of Lord’s Supper booklet, written by Mr. Armstrong)

That statement is wrong!

“Lord’s Supper” is absolutely not a name for “the New Testament Passover”. The Passover must **never** be called “the Lord’s Supper”. Accepting the name “Lord’s Supper” as an alternate name for the Passover in New Testament times identifies a lack of understanding, regarding what Paul was actually saying in 1 Corinthians 11:20, and why Paul used this expression “Lord’s Supper”.

Paul did not refer to the Passover as “Lord’s Supper”. Paul used the term “Lord’s Supper” to identify **the name which the Corinthians had given to their totally unbiblical practice of bringing their own evening meals to the Passover Service**. That eating activity was not in any way a part of the actual New Testament Passover observance.

Paul was in fact condemning the term “Lord’s Supper”! And from the late 1950s onwards Mr. Armstrong completely stopped referring to “Lord’s Supper” as an alternate name for the Passover. It is just that he himself never clearly stated that “Lord’s Supper” is not an alternate name.

And so in 1974, when the publishing arm of the Church decided to re-publish this 1952 booklet in a more modern format, they did so without doing any editing. And Mr. Armstrong did not read his own old booklets. Thus, while Mr. Armstrong himself had not used the term “Lord’s Supper” for over 15 years, the term “Lord’s Supper” nevertheless remained in the text of that re-published booklet.

(Comment: On a different subject, that last sentence in the 1952 booklet regarding “the Passover should be observed after sunset on **the evening before the Jewish people of today celebrate their feast**” shows that in 1952 **Mr. Armstrong understood nothing at all about the Jewish calendar** and how the Jewish feasts are established. He had no idea how that calendar is constructed. His was a very naive statement; just take the evening before the Jewish people celebrate their feast.)

The point is that **it took about 30 years** from Mr. Armstrong’s first observance of the Passover, before

the term “Lord’s Supper” was completely dropped as being a valid alternate New Testament name for the Passover. That was also a long time.

3) **For the Feast of Tabernacles** Mr. Armstrong initially invited guest speakers who themselves did not observe the Feast of Tabernacles. He invited such non-Feast-keeping guest speakers because ... “**we all need their earnest, sincere, spiritual fellowship and messages**”. See “September 22-29, 1945 Good News Letter, Feast of Tabernacles At Belknap Springs with Brother Kiesz and Brother Walker from Church of God Seventh Day”. (This letter is available for downloading from certain websites on the internet.)

However, God’s people assuredly do not need any spiritual messages from people who don’t even keep God’s Feasts. In a sermon in 1978 Mr. Armstrong said the following about “the Church of God Seventh Day”:

“I presented this truth (i.e. about the annual Feasts and Holy Days) to the brethren of the Church of God in the Willamette Valley in Oregon. **They laughed me to scorn!**”

This quotation is similar to information Mr. Armstrong presented in his Autobiography. That incident was back in 1927. Yet in the 1940s he is bringing ministers “from the Church that laughed him to scorn” to speak as inspiring guest speakers at the Feast of Tabernacles, which Feast those ministers themselves did not keep.

The point is that under no circumstances should any man who does not himself keep all of God’s annual Feasts and Holy Days ever be invited to be a guest speaker at a Feast of Tabernacles for the people of God! How can we possibly invite any unbeliever to present “spiritual messages” to the believers? **People who themselves do not keep God’s Feasts** are most certainly “unbelievers” as far as God’s Feasts are concerned, even if they are members of the Church of God Seventh Day, and even if they are inspiring speakers.

With inspirational speakers in that type of situation it is always a case of “**what you are** speaks so loudly that **I can’t hear what you’re saying**”.

At some point during the mid-1950s this inappropriate practice of inviting guest speakers who themselves did not accept God’s annual Feasts was stopped completely. **That took over 25 years** from the time when Mr. Armstrong first started keeping the Feast of Tabernacles.

Here is the point I am making:

God’s Church had completely lost the keeping of God’s annual Feasts and Holy Days. So when Mr. Armstrong then re-established these teachings in the Church of God, then that involved **a learning process**. Not everything is immediately understood correctly, or implemented correctly. The desire is to please God, but new understanding doesn’t always come all at once. It takes time. For **some of these things it took 20 or 30 or 45 years** before we finally had it correct. Finding things that were completely

lost is not an easy process.

We have to keep growing in understanding. And growth always means that we lacked some understanding in the past.

It wasn't that easy for Mr. Armstrong. He had to come to see one point at a time. And sometimes he could see a problem, but he didn't get the perfect answer to that problem the first time around. Sometimes something didn't work out and he then made further changes to avoid future problems.

I mention these things because it is not my intention to find fault with Mr. Armstrong. Short of God inspiring someone with a "thus says the Lord" message regarding Feast observance, anyone else in the same position, including you and me, would also have made some decisions that later needed to be modified or corrected. In the late 1970s Mr. Armstrong was teaching some things that were different from what he had taught in the 1930s and 40s. That is growth in knowledge and understanding.

I have done the same thing. Today I have a different understanding regarding a few things than the understanding I had 25 years ago. This means that my previous understanding had been flawed to some degree. Growth in understanding always implies that previously some understanding had not been correct. That principle applies to all of us, including to Mr. Armstrong.

One additional major point we should keep in mind is this:

When Mr. Armstrong studied the Bible there were no personal computers. When he wanted to find out the meanings of any Hebrew words in the OT, or any Greek words in the NT, then that was a difficult and very time-consuming task. All he could do is search a printed version of Strong's Concordance for further insights. Searching through all the places where a specific Hebrew or Greek word is used was an arduous process. I understand that.

When I prepared my first sermonettes (and later sermons) starting around 1970, my only research tools were the King James Bible and one massive Strong's Concordance. Oh yes, I also had a Nave's Topical Bible. It also took a lot of reliance on having before then already read through the whole Bible a couple of times, to find Scriptures that fitted together. Once it took me two weeks to locate a Latin Vulgate version of the Bible, because I wanted to check how a specific NT Greek word had been translated into Latin.

Access to scholarly Jewish works (e.g. the Talmud, The Jewish Encyclopedia, etc.) was virtually impossible. When I wanted to learn more about the Seder Olam, a Jewish work, I went to the Hebrew Studies Department at the University in Cape Town, and I spoke with the Head of the whole Department. It turned out that they didn't have access to a copy of the Seder Olam. Today a huge volume of information about the Seder Olam is just a mouse-click away on the internet.

Research into specific subjects was very labor-intensive, looking things up in Hebrew and Greek dictionaries. Yes, my original biblical research, including visits to public and university libraries, consisted

of using the same tools that Mr. Armstrong had been using since the 1920s.

But **that all changed** when I bought my first personal computer in the late 1980s and then obtained my first Bible software (the Online Bible by Larry Pierce in Canada). And then getting access to the internet further increased my research abilities.

Today I can search through any of around 100 different Bible translations (all on my own computer) in a number of different languages, including ancient Hebrew and Greek versions, in a matter of a couple of minutes. Access to various Hebrew, Greek and Latin dictionaries is just a mouse-click away. Today in 10 minutes I can search through more information, many more translations and more scholarly dictionaries than I was able to do in 10 hours back in the 1970s. On the internet I can quickly find resource material that 50 years ago would have taken me weeks to find, if at all.

Mr. Armstrong, on the other hand, never had access to any of these powerful research tools. That put Mr. Armstrong at a huge disadvantage when compared to anyone doing biblical research today. Yes, since Mr. Armstrong died in 1986 "**knowledge has been increased**" (see Daniel 12:4). But while here or there some understanding from Mr. Armstrong's time may need to be corrected, the foundation of most of our Church of God understanding nevertheless still goes back to the understanding God gave Mr. Armstrong.

I hope this makes clear that what I will present in this article is not intended to be a criticism of Mr. Armstrong. If he was still alive today, Mr. Armstrong himself would undoubtedly also have come to a better understanding on many issues, than the understanding he had when he died in 1986.

In this article we'll focus on how the Feast of Tabernacles should be kept.

GOD CHANGED THE ORIGINAL NAME

When God brought Israel out of Egypt, He made a covenant with Israel, which we today refer to as "the Old Covenant". This Old Covenant starts with **Exodus 19:17**, where Moses brought the people of Israel out of the camp to meet with God. And it concludes with **Exodus 24:3**, when all the people "answered with one voice and said, all the words which the Eternal has said will we do". Everything from Exodus 19:17 to Exodus 24:3 is a part of the Old Covenant.

The Old Covenant is founded on the ten commandments, recorded in chapter 20. Also embedded in the Old Covenant are all of the three annual Feasts. Twice the Old Covenant referred to these three annual Feasts in chapter 23.

Three times you shall keep a feast unto Me in the year. (Exodus 23:14)

Could God have said "3" any plainer than to say "3"? Yet most of the CoGs today teach that there are "**4 Feasts**". How do they get that? They get that by claiming that the Day of Trumpets is supposedly

“**the Feast** of Trumpets”. But if Trumpets is supposedly “a Feast”, then there are “4 Feasts”. Just add them up: Unleavened Bread + Pentecost + Trumpets + Tabernacles = 4 Feasts. I mean, we can all add up simple numbers, right?

So if the Day of Trumpets really is “a Feast”, then Exodus 23:14 is not true!

Why would God have said that we are to keep a Feast “**3 times**”, when God really meant “4 times”? Three verses later God repeated this “3 times” instruction.

Three times in the year all thy males shall appear before the Lord GOD. (Exodus 23:17)

Anyway, in verse 16 God named the third Feast “**the Feast of Ingathering**”.

And the feast of harvest, the firstfruits of your labors, which you have sown in the field: and **the feast of ingathering**, *which is* in the end of the year, when you have gathered in your labors out of the field. (Exodus 23:16)

(Comment: The expression “in the end of the year” is a mistranslation which is explained in Part 2 of my 7 articles about the “Mistranslations in the Bible”. This expression really means “at the proceeding forth of the year”. See that article for a more detailed explanation.)

This name for this Feast is repeated in the only other place in Exodus where the Feasts are mentioned.

where God has placed His name?

<u>WHO HAS THE AUTHORITY TO SELECT FEAST SITES?</u>

Since God has not told us where Feast Sites should be located, it means that in this age some human beings must make the decisions regarding where we should go to keep the Feast.

Well, if human beings are going to make the decisions regarding where **God** will place His name, then the next question is: **who has the authority** to make such decisions? Can anyone just decide to keep the Feast in any location of his or her own choosing?

All of the established Church of God organizations today establish Feast Sites for their members every year. But in addition to the established Church of God organizations having Feast Sites, there are dozens, if not scores of sites around the world every year that have been established by various individuals. People have simply decided: **this is** where I am going to keep the Feast, and anyone who wants to join me/us is welcome.

Is that acceptable to God? Has God actually given the people in those circumstances the authority to place His name in the location they have selected for their Feast observance?

If they themselves are not ordained ministers, **who will give the sermons?** Do they just decide that they themselves will prepare some messages? Or do they give various people at their site turns to present sermons? Or do they obtain recorded sermons from someone else? Or do they tune in to live sermons from some other Feast Site? What are they going to do?

And for such Feast Sites, which of the above options, if any, has **God's approval**? Let's look for some answers.

My 26-page article "WHATSOEVER YOU SHALL BIND ON EARTH" thoroughly examines Matthew 16:19 and Matthew 18:18. See that article for the details concerning these two verses.

In our context here the point is that in Matthew 18:18 Jesus Christ gave authority to His apostles to make binding decisions for the purpose of ensuring the smooth running of the non-doctrinal affairs of the Church of God. Here is this verse.

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. (Matthew 18:18)

Here in Matthew 18:18 this authority to make binding decisions applies to the non-doctrinal functions of the Church. This is different from the authority conferred in Matthew 16:19. See the article for an explanation.

Jesus Christ said this to His apostles, the men He himself "ordained" to be the ministers in God's Church. Talking to the exact same group of men (but without Judas), Jesus Christ said:

You have not chosen Me, but **I have chosen you, and ordained you**, that you should go and **bring forth fruit**, and *that* your fruit should remain: that whatsoever you shall ask of the Father in My name, He may give it you. (John 15:16)

The Greek verb here translated as "ordained" literally means "to appoint to service". So to be "ordained" basically means "**to be appointed to serve in the ministry of God's Church**", with the emphasis being on "being appointed".

So Jesus Christ in Matthew 18:18 gave certain authority to the ministry of His Church to make binding decisions. The article presents various areas in which such binding decisions may be made. One of the areas the authority of Matthew 18:18 applies to is **the matter of selecting Feast Sites**.

Question 1:

So **who has the authority** to decide where God will place His name for observing the Feast of Tabernacles? Who has the authority to establish Feast Sites?

Answer:

Those who are **the ministers of Jesus Christ**. Matthew 18:18 is only addressed to men who were all "**appointed** to serve as ministers", and to no one else.

Question 2:

Can people who are not ministers of Jesus Christ also establish Feast Sites?

Answer: **No, they cannot establish Feast Sites**, because God has not given them the authority to do so. Now ordained ministers can instruct non-ordained men to establish a Feast Site (typically in some outlying area), and that site will then be established on the authority of the ministers or minister who instructed that Feast Site to be established. But without an ordained minister approving the establishment of a Feast Site **no unordained man has the authority to establish a Feast Site**. Unordained men have simply not been "appointed" by Jesus Christ.

Claiming the right to establish a Feast Site is tantamount to claiming the authority conferred in Matthew 18:18. People who set up Feast Sites are claiming that God has given them the authority to decide where God will place His name.

Question 3:

So what is the status of any "Feast Site" that has been established by an unordained man or woman, and without the instruction/endorsement of an ordained minister?

Answer:

It is simply not a Feast of Tabernacles Site! Matthew 18:18 is quite clear. Jesus Christ simply did not give the authority to select Feast Sites to any unordained men. And giving or playing a sermon or two every day does not somehow convert a place where God has not placed His name into a place where God has placed His name. The sermons are not the key in determining whether some location is a Feast Site or not.

Question 4:

If God really has placed His name in a specific location for the Feast of Tabernacles: can a fire or flood or cyclone or hurricane or tornado or earthquake or tsunami or a monsoon storm or riots and civil unrest or a war or a COVID-19 outbreak or any other "natural disaster" disrupt that Feast observance, so that the site has to be abandoned or else moved during the Feast to some other location?

Answer:

No! If any of these “natural or man-made disasters” disrupt the observance of the Feast at any location, that is **a clear sign that God had not placed His name there in the first place**!

There is no power in the universe that can disrupt God’s decision to place His name in a specific location. So when God has placed His name in a specific location, then absolutely nothing can prevent the entire Feast from being completed in that location.

Do we still believe that God is all-powerful? Or do we believe that “natural disasters” and “man-made disasters” are able to disrupt God’s plans for a Feast to be observed in a specific location where God has placed His name? Let’s not forget: the plans for the Feast are **God’s plans**, not ours. It is **His name** that is placed there, not our names. And we have a responsibility to seriously seek to establish where God will place His name.

It is important to recognize that if a Feast Site has to be abandoned for any reason before the conclusion of the Feast, then that is a very clear sign that God had not placed His name at that location in the first place. And that, in turn, reflects on the individuals who made the decision to establish a Feast Site at that location. God is showing that **God had not given those people the authority** to place His name anywhere.

Question 5:

What about church groups establishing Feast sites with the proviso that “we need 100 or 200 transfer Feast-goers into the area to make this site viable”? We’ll even provide simultaneous translations. Does that make it okay? Is that how God places His name somewhere?

Answer:

No, that is not how God places His name somewhere!

A basic principle here is: **nobody should ever attend a Feast Site** where he/she is not able to understand the language in which the sermons will be given! Such a Feast Site choice is only an option if the person is not able to go to a Feast Site where the sermons will be given is his own language. If he cannot do that, then he might have to opt for a Feast Site where translations into his language are available.

But as long as there is a Feast Site available to the person (i.e. within a reasonable traveling distance), where his language will be used in the preaching, he should never go to a site where the preaching will be in “tongues” which he does not understand, even if simultaneous translations are provided. **The motivation for going** to a Feast Site where a foreign language will be used for the preaching **is wrong**.

On the other hand, it is certainly fine to send an English-speaking minister to a foreign country to conduct the Feast there, if the church members in that country don’t have ministers who can preach to them in the local language. In this case simultaneous translations into the local language should be provided. The motivation in this situation is to provide a service for people in a foreign land, who would otherwise

not have the opportunity to attend any other Feast Site. This is a different motivation from the previous situation.

One key to keep in mind: Our motivation for doing something is always a major factor in all matters that involve the establishment of Feast Sites, and also when it comes to attendance at Feast Sites.

Question 6:

When two or more churches have their Feast sites within 30 or 50 miles of one another, **has God placed His name at all of those Feast Sites**? For example, sometimes as many as a half a dozen different churches and groups all have their Feast sites in a small popular area (e.g. in Florida), where they are all within an hour's drive from one site to another. In that situation has God placed His name at all of those half a dozen different Feast sites?

Answer:

Obviously not!

Does anybody in their right mind really think that God will place His name in half a dozen different locations within a small area that anyone can drive through in an hour or two? To claim that God has placed His name at all of 2 or 3 or 4 or 5 or 6 different locations would imply that God can't really make up His mind as to where He wants to place His name in that part of the country.

So when two or more Feast sites for different groups are in relatively close proximity to one another, it means that **at the most one of those places can be the location** where God has placed His name. But that also means that **at all but one of those sites God has most certainly not placed His name**.

What other conclusion can we reach?

When there are two or more Feast Sites in close proximity to one another **it implies that Jesus Christ "is divided"**. But that is not possible. See Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 1:13. So if there are six different groups with Feast sites relatively close to one another, then at least five of those groups are not meeting with God's approval.

Let's call a spade a spade.

Now let's ask another question.

SO WHERE CAN WE KEEP THE FEAST?

There are **only two options** available for you and for me and for everyone else, when it comes to

deciding where we should keep the Feast.

The clear instruction is for us to go to a place **where God has placed His name**! That's option one. This is the main option.

But if for any reason we are not able to go to a place where God has placed His name (and I myself have been in that situation, with taking care 24/7 of my elderly Mother who had Alzheimer's), then the only other option is for us to keep the Feast **in our own homes**!

There is **no other option**. Any other option is not a form of keeping the Feast. Either we go to the place where God has placed His name, or we stay at home. Is that clear?

So if for any reason someone is not able to go to a Feast Site where God has placed His name, then the person should not go to some other location, away from home, and still call that "observing the Feast of Tabernacles".

That approach does not have God's approval! It is a selfish way of reasoning.

It is wrong because the person who goes to some other location "to keep the Feast" is saying: God has also placed His name here where I have decided "to keep the Feast". While I am not able to go to a real Feast site where God has placed His name, **at least I am away from my regular home** for the whole period of the Feast. And that is surely a good thing, isn't it? I think that I'll just keep the Feast here in this nice nearby location.

That approach is basically the same as saying: I really have to work for 6 hours on the weekly Sabbath days, But **I can at least keep the other 18 hours of the Sabbath** the right way. All of us know that that line of thinking is obviously wrong. We either keep all 24 hours of the Sabbath, or we are simply not keeping the Sabbath.

The focus for the Feast is not on going away from our homes! The focus is on going **to** a place where God has placed His name, and there we will dwell in temporary dwellings. The focus is not "going away from somewhere"; **the correct focus is "going to somewhere"**.

So "**going away from**" doesn't identify keeping God's Feast. It is "**going to**" the place where God has placed His name that identifies the keeping of God's Feast. And if we are not "going to" a place where God has placed His name, then we shouldn't be going anywhere for the time period of the Feast.

God does not place His name on "**private little Feast Sites**"! And any site that has not been established or approved by an ordained minister of Jesus Christ is nothing more than "a private little Feast Site". And some of you have been to such "private little Feast Sites", right?

It all comes back to not realizing that **the greatest deciding factor** for a Feast Site, any Feast Site, **is that God has placed His name there**!

If God has not placed His name in a certain location, then there is absolutely nothing that can turn that location into a Feast Site. God's name being placed there is the foundation for any Feast Site establishment. That is very clear from the verses in Deuteronomy 14 and 16 which I quoted earlier. And people who are not ordained ministers simply don't have the authority that was given to the ministry in Matthew 18:18.

So let me put this very plainly:

If you are not an ordained minister of Jesus Christ, and you decide to establish your own Feast Site, **then your site will not be a Feast of Tabernacles Site**! It will not have God's approval.

Anyway, there are only two options for where we may keep God's Feast of Tabernacles: at a place where God has placed His name, or in our own homes.

SO WHICH FEAST SITE SHOULD YOU GO TO?

Okay, so there are only these two options. But many Church of God organizations establish a number of different Feast sites for their members. The intention is to provide opportunities for their members in different parts of the country, and in different countries around the world, to have relatively easy access to attend at a Feast Site.

And that intention is good!

However ...

In addition to those church people who have a Feast Site that they can easily attend, there are also people from other parts of the country, or even from other parts of the world, who say: this year I'd like to attend a Feast in Italy, and next year I want to keep the Feast in South America, and the year after that I'd really like to go to Hawaii.

And because they are rich and increased with goods, the costs of such trips are not a problem for them. So they travel around the world "keeping the Feast of Tabernacles" in exotic locations. How cool is that?

Question:

Are such people really keeping the Feast?

Answer:

No, of course not! They are not keeping God's Feast at all, even if they do dutifully listen to a sermon every day.

Question:

So what are such people doing?

Answer:

They have turned God's Feast of Tabernacles into **a Laodicean Vacation!**

A LAODICEAN VACATION

Here is what has happened.

In the actual instructions for keeping God's Feast of Tabernacles **God tells us** where we must go to keep the Feast. In the actual instructions **we are not given a choice** regarding where we would like to keep the Feast. We either go to the one place where God has placed His name, or we're simply not going to a Feast Site.

Throughout the whole Old Testament **there was only one place** where Israel could keep the Feast of Tabernacles. That was in spite of the fact that the total population of Israel before the captivities was around two to three million people. It would never have been possible for all of those people to go up to Jerusalem every year.

Back in the 1970s and 80s we used to have great logistical challenges at Feast Sites with a mere 15,000 people (Lake of the Ozarks, Big Sandy, etc.). Increase that **one hundredfold** and you have one and one-half million people, or roughly half of Israel's OT population. It would not have been possible for half of the country to keep the Feast in Jerusalem.

Yet God never made any alternate Feast Sites available!

From the time of King David onwards the people of Israel were instructed to keep the Feast in Jerusalem. They were not given any choices. That should at least make us think.

Now whereas God in **OT times** placed His name in **only one location**, we **in this age** have decided to place God's name in **many locations**. And that decision to have multiple Feast Sites around the world I believe God has accepted, based on Matthew 18:18. Our motivation in doing this is to make keeping the Feast possible for more people, by having Feast Sites within reach for more people.

However, that does not mean that any one specific person from any place on earth can go to any Feast Site of his own choosing.

The motivation for providing many different locations for keeping the Feast should **never** have been "**to give people a choice**"! None of the Feasts of God, including Tabernacles, are about having a choice!

And having a choice of where to go is not why we have many Feast Sites! **God does not want His people to have a choice regarding** where they will keep His Feast! The reason we have many Feast Sites is to provide opportunities to attend the Feast for people living in different areas of the country, and in different countries. But that is not the same as giving people a choice as to where they must go to keep God's Feast.

At no point did God ever give people "a choice" regarding where to keep the Feast. When the churches today, starting with Mr. Armstrong's time, have given people "a choice" regarding where they want to keep the Feast, then **control has been taken out of God's hands** and placed in the hands of the people. That is very bad! That has turned the Feast into a Laodicean Vacation.

So here is the point:

While, for the purpose of serving people's needs, it is fine for a church to establish many different Feast Sites around the world, that is not to provide a choice for any specific church members who happen to be rich and increased with goods. **For every church member there really is only one option** (and thus no choice at all):

You go to the Feast Site that has been established for people living in your area! That is the decision God has accepted in heaven. But if you want to go to any Feast Site other than the one that has been established for people in your area, then you're really looking for **a Laodicean vacation!** And actually keeping God's Feast has been relegated to second place in your mind.

You have decided where you want to go, **rather than God telling you** the one place **where you have to go**, if you really want to keep God's Feast.

For example:

You live in the eastern part of the USA, and some of your adult children live in the western part of the USA. Theoretically you should be attending different Feast Sites about 2000 miles apart. But you want to get together for the Feast. And so your children come to the Feast Site you should be attending, or else you go to the Feast Site they should be attending. And that is really "a valid reason" for going to a Feast Site that wasn't really established for one of your two parties, **is it?** (For this specific example **we assume** that God has placed His name at both of the potential Feast Sites involved, but at times that may in fact not necessarily be the case.)

Wrong!

In this example, the primary motivation is to do what we want to do ... we want to see our families! This means that going to the place where God has placed His name **for us** becomes a secondary consideration. But God never places His name in two locations for us to choose from. And so we manipulate God's instructions to fit in with our desires.

Feast attendance should never be about making choices as to where you want to go.

Look at what God tells us about **the millennium** regarding the Feast.

ZECHARIAH 14

This is a well-known Scripture.

And it shall come to pass, *that* **every one that is left of all the nations** which came against Jerusalem **shall even go up** from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and **to keep the feast of tabernacles**. And it shall be, *that* whoso will not come up of *all* the families of the earth unto Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, even upon them shall be no rain. (Zechariah 14:16-17)

And if the family of Egypt go not up, and come not, that *have* no *rain*; there shall be the plague, wherewith the LORD will smite **the nations that come not up to keep the feast of tabernacles**. (Zechariah 14:18)

This is speaking about the millennium. And still God mentions **only one Feast Site**. Now it is not possible for all people on earth to go to Jerusalem for the Feast every year. So can't all these nations in the millennium keep the Feast in their own countries?

Since all people on earth cannot come to Jerusalem at the same time, therefore **there must be some instructions regarding who and how many are to come up to Jerusalem every year**. But such instructions are not revealed. And even if it is only "the rulers over 1000s" (plus their families?) from every nation that come up, once the world's population again reaches one billion people, that would then mean that one million people or more would have to come to Jerusalem for the Feast period.

So I take it that there are certain "doors" to understanding God's intentions, which doors God has not yet opened to our understanding. I am referring to doors that will reveal how Jesus Christ will instruct human beings in the millennium to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. Clearly there are some things here that we do not yet understand correctly.

But **one thing is very clear** from this millennial reference to people keeping the Feast of Tabernacles. And that is this:

Once again **God is not giving people a choice** regarding where they must keep the Feast. God is in full control and **God tells people** where they are to keep the Feast.

So when we today want to have a choice as to where we will keep the Feast this year, then we are approaching God's Feast of Tabernacles with a Laodicean attitude. **At no time, not in the Old Testament, and not in the millennium, does God ever give people a choice as to** where they must keep God's Feast.

This should be so simple that a child should understand it!

When anyone decides to establish a secular, non-religious Feast, then obviously the individual establishing that Feast also has **the authority to decide** where that Feast will be established. So when John Brown decides to establish a non-religious Feast, then John Brown gets to decide **where** he will establish that Feast. It is his Feast, and that entire Feast is under the control of John Brown.

The same is true when God establishes a Feast!

So when the feast-goers to God's Feast want to decide for themselves that they'll keep that Feast in Florida or in Acapulco or in Hawaii or in Italy or in France, etc., then **God has lost control** over who will keep His Feast in which location.

That is not right!

The purpose for having more than one Feast Site around the world is not to give you a choice, as to where you might like to go. The purpose is to serve people who would not be able to go to any other Feast Site. And you are not to misuse the existence of more than one Feast Site.

So **if you want to have a Laodicean Vacation in Israel**, then go ahead and sign up for a "Feast observance" in Israel. Some CoG organization is bound to offer you that Laodicean Vacation option!

You can have all kinds of shallow non-biblical justifications for such a vacation. So go ahead, and treat yourself ... or are you beginning to understand Deuteronomy 14 and 16 more correctly?

BUT WE'VE ALWAYS HAD A CHOICE

Almost everybody today who attends one of the CoG's, that establishes two or more Feast Sites every year, has never known a time when there wasn't a choice for where to go for the Feast. Now back in Worldwide in the 50s and 60s, once there were several Feast Sites established every year, the Church told people to which Feast Site they had been assigned. So people back then theoretically didn't have a choice.

But even then people could approach their pastors and request to transfer to a non-assigned Feast Site. If people explained some “valid reason” for wanting to transfer (e.g. wanting to get together with family, etc.), then permission was usually granted. The point is: even when each Church area (or State) in the U.S. was assigned to a specific Feast Site, **that was not a hard and fast rule**. Permission to transfer to other Feast Sites was readily granted.

The only time when no transfers at all were possible was when the Church only had one single Feast Site, as in 1945 at Belknap Springs, for example.

Since only a very small number of people in the Church today go back to 1960 or earlier, therefore almost nobody has experienced a time when some kind of choice for which Feast Site to attend wasn’t available.

So the idea that God is not going to give anyone a choice for where to keep the Feast of Tabernacles isn’t particularly attractive, right? It goes a bit against the grain. If it was alright during Mr. Armstrong’s time, why isn’t it right for us today?

It isn’t right today because it was never right at any time in the past. It is just that we didn’t understand that. It is just one more thing that has taken a long time to understand.

Not calling the Feast of Unleavened Bread “Passover” took over **20 years** to understand. Not inviting guest speakers who did not keep God’s Feasts themselves took over **25 years** to understand. Not seeing “Lord’s Supper” as an alternate name for the Passover took over **30 years** to understand. And it took **45 years** to understand how to correctly count for Pentecost.

What do these statements show us? They show us that coming to correct understanding is **a never-ending process**. It is a progression towards a constantly better understanding. If some things took 20 years to understand correctly, and other things took 25 years and 30 years and 45 years to understand correctly, that tells me that **this progression will surely continue**. There will be some things that will take a further 10 years or 20 years or 30 years, etc. before we understand them correctly.

The past shows us the pattern for the future. And this pattern must surely continue right up to Jesus Christ’s second coming.

So why should it seem strange that it has taken almost **100 years** from when Mr. Armstrong kept God’s Feasts for the first time, to understand that God has never intended for anyone to have a choice of location, when it comes to keeping the Feast of Tabernacles? **God tells us** where we must go to keep His Feasts. We don’t get to choose a location that we would like to go to.

The Scriptures are not at all ambiguous on this subject.

We need to recognize that once people “who had good reasons” were given approval to go to a

different Feast Site than the one that had been established for them, starting around 1960, then that was **one of the first tenets**, if not the first tenet, **of a Laodicean spirit being inserted into this era of God's Church**. And that was 60 years ago.

Wanting to have a choice for where to keep God's Feasts represents an element of selfishness. And we should understand that all aspects of a Laodicean spirit will always have universal appeal. A Laodicean spirit always gives us what we want to have. A Laodicean spirit dislikes restrictions, like God telling us: this is what you are to do, and this is what you are not to do.

So the seeds of a Laodicean spirit were introduced into this era of the Church at least a quarter of a century before Mr. Armstrong died. For us ourselves to want to choose where we will keep God's Feast of Tabernacles is a very emphatic expression of a Laodicean spirit. It is selfish thinking.

And that brings us to the next point for a great Laodicean Vacation.

DO YOU SWITCH TO ANOTHER GROUP FOR THE FEAST?

We've already referred to keeping the Feast in Italy (though you don't speak Italian) or in France (though you don't speak French) or in South America (though you don't speak Spanish or Portuguese) or in Hawaii (where you at least won't have a language problem).

However ...

While you are a regular member of UCG (for example), UCG doesn't offer a Feast Site in Italy (or whatever your choice of location happens to be) this year. But you'd really like to go there. So you search around to see if another organization has a Feast Site in the place where you really want to go. So you look at Living and COGWA and at a lot of the smaller groups. And eventually you find some organization that actually has planned to hold the Feast at the location you really want to travel to this year.

Now you don't normally attend services with that group for the rest of the year. That's because you don't actually agree with some of their teachings or practices. But hey, they've got a Feast Site in the exact location where you really want to go.

So you make plans to keep the Feast with that group in your exotic location. After all, they also trace their roots back to Mr. Armstrong's time, and they do believe in keeping the Feast. So what is the problem with attending their site for the Feast?

The problem is that in this situation you're not really looking for a place where God has placed His name. You're really just looking for a great Laodicean Vacation ... going where you want to go, rather than seeking to know **where God wants you to go**.

Switching to another group in order **to go to** where you really want to go is blatantly Laodicean. It's you getting your own will. And you are manipulating God's instructions to keep the Feast, in order to get what you want to get. Switching to a group you usually don't associate with just makes that manipulation more blatant.

Understand that the Feasts of God are not about choice! God tells us **when** to keep His Feasts, by giving us the dates in the year. And God tells us **where** to keep His Feasts, by placing His name in one specific location. Yes, there are many locations around the world, where in this age God places His name for a people who are scattered around the world; but **only one place is intended for people living in each area**.

Thus, for example, when God places His name in a certain location in California, then that is not so that people in California should then want to keep the Feast in Hawaii or in the British Isles or in South Carolina. The Feast Site in California has been established explicitly for people living in California, while the Feast site in Hawaii has been established explicitly for people in Hawaii. At least, that is how it should be.

SO WHERE HAS GOD PLACED HIS NAME?

As already mentioned, when two or more different groups have their Feast Sites "in spitting distance" to one another, then it is absurd to believe that God has placed His name at all of those sites. The sites are so close to one another that theoretically a family could attend services in the morning with one group, then attend afternoon services with a second group, before in the evening socializing with a third group.

Just because (in the above scenario) all three groups call their sites "The Feast of Tabernacles", that doesn't mean that God recognizes all three gatherings. In fact, in this situation God does not recognize all three as His Feast Sites!

So when you attend a Feast Site, where one or more other groups are also observing their Feast of Tabernacles in the same general area, then you should understand very clearly that **they cannot possibly all be places** where God has placed His name!

In any small area (e.g. within a 2-4 hours' drive of one another) God is simply not going to place His name in more than one location! **God will not establish His name for keeping His Feasts every few hundred miles across the country**!

In biblical times, when Jerusalem was the only Feast Site, it took people from Galilee several days of walking to go to the Feasts in Jerusalem. Today we can travel 500 miles by car a lot quicker than families back then would have walked 50 miles to keep the Feast in Jerusalem. Yet God only provided them with one Feast Site back then. There were no Feast Sites up in Galilee or on the Mediterranean coast.

In fact, King Jeroboam took just this approach of multiple Feast Sites to keeping the Feast. His line was:

Look, **it's too far for you** to go to the Feast in Jerusalem. So I am establishing **two Feast Sites** for you, at both extremes of our country, one in the north, and one in the south. That will make it much more convenient for you. And while we're at it, **let's just change the date for the Feast** to one month later.

Here are the relevant verses for these **additional Feast Sites**:

Whereupon the king took counsel, and made two calves *of* gold, and said unto them, **It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem**: behold your gods, O Israel, which brought you up out of the land of Egypt. And he set the one **in Bethel**, and the other put he **in Dan**. (1 Kings 12:28-29)

And Jeroboam ordained **a feast in the eighth month**, on the fifteenth day of the month, **like unto the feast that *is* in Judah**, and he offered upon the altar. So did he in Bethel, sacrificing unto the calves that he had made: and he placed in Bethel the priests of the high places which he had made. (1 Kings 12:32)

Jeroboam wanted to break the people's loyalty towards the true God. He did this by making the religious requirements easier and more convenient. Why spend three days or more walking all the way to Jerusalem, when I've established these two sites for you, which sites most of you can get to with half a day's travel? This is much more convenient for you. And **you can even choose your own Feast Site**.

Jeroboam had introduced paganism into the Northern Kingdom. I have presented these verses here to show that introducing additional Feast Sites had already been tried in ancient Israel. Jeroboam's motive was to entice the people to develop a loyalty towards him and his dynasty. And enticing the people into pagan beliefs and rituals was Jeroboam's modus operandi. Obviously God did not place His name at either of Jeroboam's Feast Sites.

God only ever offered Israel one single Feast Site, and that was Jerusalem. At no point did God give people a choice for where to keep God's Feast, even if some Israelites did live a greater distance from Jerusalem.

So when we today establish multiple Feast Sites around the world, that is not to give people a choice for where to keep the Feast. Today it is indeed "too much for us to go up to Jerusalem", because most of us live thousands of miles from Jerusalem. But that doesn't mean that we therefore should have a choice for where we want to keep the Feast.

Today for every part of the world where there are members of God's Church, there is **only one applicable Feast Site**, where God has placed His name. Every other place where God has placed His name is for people living in other parts of the world. That is the way it should be!

Getting back to our situation of having a number of Feast Sites for different Church of God groups in the same general area:

If God has indeed placed His name at the site you are attending, then God has not placed His name at the other site down the road from you, even if that is 200 miles down the road from you. But if God has actually placed His name at one of the other sites down the road from you, then **that means that you are attending a site** where God has not placed His name!

You can't have it both ways!

God does not place His name for keeping His Feasts in more than one place in basically the same part of the country. That's because God has never at any time offered people a choice as to where they would like to go for the Feast.

So if there are two or more Feast Sites by different organizations in your area, **which one** is the one where God has placed His name?

That is for you to figure out and to decide for yourself!

But understand that when you select to go to one specific Feast Site, **you are saying that you believe that God has not placed His name at any of the other sites in that area**! That is what your attendance is saying.

And if God has not placed His name at any of the sites around you, then during the Feast you also should not have anything to do with any of those other sites around you. If you seek any form of contact with any of the other sites around you (e.g. listening to their sermons, social activities at their sites, visiting for one sermon, etc.), then you are saying that **you really want to be involved with the sites** where God has not placed His name.

The Feasts of God are not a game where everybody can play. In our age God will only place His name in one location in a certain part of the country, to provide access to a Feast Site for people living in that part of the country. And then God provides one site in each of certain other parts of the country. But never, never will God provide two Feast Sites in close proximity to one another, where those two sites would compete for Feast attendees.

Or do you really think otherwise?

HOW ABOUT LISTENING TO THE SERMONS FROM OTHER SITES?

Here is the situation:

You have decided to attend a Feast Site with "Group X" in a certain location. You have your own personal reasons for going to that location. But you're not totally comfortable with the preaching of "Group X". So you plan to stay in your accommodation during services, and instead you plan to listen to tapes or to live internet transmissions from a different Feast Site. Those sermons are from the group that

you really would like to attend with, but they don't have a Feast Site in the area where you wanted to go.

And then after services you may or may not fellowship with the people attending at that site. But you don't want anything to do with their church services during the Feast. So you attend at a site with one group, but listen to the messages from another group.

Is that what God wants to see you do?

No, that approach does not have God's approval!

That approach is just another form of manipulation, wanting "the best of both worlds".

If you say that this, including some of the points I have discussed earlier, is a rather tough and difficult approach to keeping the Feasts of God, then you are beginning to understand that "**narrow is the way that leads to life**" (Matthew 7:14). Or, to paraphrase an old song, God "never promised you a rose garden" if you "take up your cross and follow Christ" (Matthew 16:24). At times the going will be difficult and challenging. But that's what Jesus Christ told us to expect.

Your presence at a specific Feast Site says that you accept that God has placed His name there for the duration of the Feast. If you don't believe that, then what are you doing there? But if you are listening to sermons from some other site, then you're saying that you believe that God has placed His name somewhere else ... and therefore you need to listen to the sermons from that "somewhere else". Such listening says that with your body you are at one Feast Site, but with your mind you are at a different Feast Site.

That's not a good situation to be in. You're not hot and you're not cold. Looks to me like someone in that situation is engaged in a very delicate balancing act between two options.

Let me spell out something else very plainly:

If you have decided to attend the Feast at a certain Feast Site, then your presence there says that you accept that God has placed His name there. However, if you then go ahead and listen to sermons from some other Feast Site, then you are discrediting the Feast Site where you are attending. If you want to hear the messages from some other Feast Site, **why aren't you attending there?**

God expects you to attend His Feast at a site where God has placed His name. And if you go to a site where God has indeed placed His name, then you should be content with the sermons that are provided at the site where God has placed His name.

FEAST SITES FROM DIFFERENT GROUPS

Question:

Has God placed His name at Feast Sites for all of the different Church of God groups out there?

Answer:

No, God has not placed His name at all of the Feast Sites that are established by all the Church of God groups out there.

Question:

Then can you tell me which groups have Feast Sites where God has placed His name, and which groups have Feast Sites where God has not placed His name?

Answer:

No, I can't tell you that! **That is something that you will have to work out for yourself**.

I've given you one key already. That is, when several Feast Sites are in close proximity to one another, then assuredly God's name will be placed at most at one of those several sites.

But another key that you yourself should also apply is this: **any church group** that has, since Mr. Armstrong's death in 1986, accepted any new teachings (i.e. not any teachings that were inherited from Mr. Armstrong's time) that are **clearly contrary to the teachings of the Bible**, such a group is not going to have any Feast Sites where God will place His name. Therefore you should not attend their Feast Sites.

This requires you yourself to be able to distinguish between biblically correct teachings and teachings that are contrary to the Bible. Now **if you yourself cannot distinguish between new teachings that are true, and new teachings that are false** (how many **decades** have you been in God's Church?), then there is no point in me spelling out the false teachings in certain groups for you (i.e. spoon-feeding you); and therefore you might as well go to a site where God has **not** placed His name, and tell yourself that you really are keeping God's Feast. You are shirking your God-imposed responsibility if you cannot correctly identify new teachings that are false.

You know what Jesus Christ said to the Smyrna era, right?

I know your works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but you are rich) and ***I know*** **the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but *are* the synagogue of Satan**. (Revelation 2:9)

The expression "of them which say they are Jews and are not" is simply code language for "**of them which say they are God's Church and are not**". And the word "synagogue" in this context means "church".

Today we are inundated with people like that!

So let's read this verse in our context for the 2020s:

I know your works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but you are rich) and ***I know*** **the blasphemy of them which say they are God's Church, and are not, but *are* the church of Satan**. (Revelation 2:9, adapted to our age)

So Jesus Christ warns us (all seven messages have applications to every era) that there are many groups out there that claim to be a part of God's true Church. And then Jesus Christ warns us that **those people are lying**, because they are nothing more than a part of Satan's churches. They simply present a facade of being a part of God's Church. And keeping the Sabbath and the annual Feasts are **the most convincing parts of that facade**. It is the other teachings they espouse that reveal that they are a part of "the synagogue of Satan".

How can we know that any specific group is a part of Satan's churches?

We can know this from **the things they teach**! After all, it is Satan who seeks to tear down Jesus Christ's supreme position (under God the Father) in all of God's plans. So, for example, any teachings that demean Jesus Christ's status, that question that He has always existed, teachings that insult Jesus Christ, etc. are unmistakable signs of Satan's influence in those teachings. As Jesus Christ said in John 15:16, we are expected by God to bring forth fruits. "The fruits" which different churches bear must be examined and evaluated.

Notice that the people who falsely claim to be a part of God's true Church are in fact guilty of "**blasphemy**"! You certainly should not be attending the Feast Sites of people who are guilty of blasphemy, or, for that matter, listening to their messages. But if you can't see the blasphemy they are committing, then you, who have been around for decades, are not doing your due diligence before God.

Now to something else.

What about attending two different Feast Sites established by your own church group? That is, you keep the first half of the Feast at one site, and then for the second half of the Feast you travel to another Feast Site. Put another way, you keep half of the Feast in one location where God has placed His name, and then you keep the second half in a different part of the country, where God has also placed His name.

Is that acceptable before God?

No, that is not acceptable before God!

If God has placed His name at the site you attend at the start of the Feast, **how can you possibly walk**

away from a place where God has placed His name? That is offensive to God!

When you leave to go to the other Feast Site, do you tell God:

"Good-bye, Lord. I am now leaving the place where You have placed Your name. So it is **good-bye until I get to the next place** where You have also placed Your name. I hope You don't mind, Lord, but I couldn't possibly spend the whole Feast at this one site. So I'm going to another place where You have also placed Your name."

The official name for this type of activity is "**Laodicean Feast-hopping**".

Changing Feast Sites during the Feast should never be done by any unordained church members. When God established His Feasts, it was never God's intention that during the Feast people would actually leave a place where God has placed His name, in order to go to some other place.

WHAT ABOUT "SPECIAL GUEST SPEAKERS"?

Changing Feast Sites should never be done by ordained ministers either, unless there is **a real need** for someone to give sermons at another site. This possibility only exists when there are not enough ministers at "the other site" to take care of all the speaking. But if there are several ministers already at "the other site", then no additional ministers should be going there during the Feast!

The actual 8 days of the Feast (i.e. including the Last Great Day) were not intended by God to be traveling days for anyone!

Shouldn't that be obvious to any converted mind?

When you're traveling, then you are not attending the Feast, and you're not at a place where God has placed His name. Isn't that obvious? When you're traveling **you're back in the world**, at least until you get to the next place where God has placed His name. **Is it because some people** (i.e. certain ministers) **are so important**, that they need to spend a part of those 8 days traveling from one site to another? In the process **they too are going away from a place** where God has placed His name. That is not a light thing. Whether or not their reason for doing so is justified or not before God is a moot point.

Understand that traveling between Feast Sites during the Feast is not based on anything in the Bible! Traveling between Feast Sites during the Feast never happened at any time from the time of Moses until we come to the time of Mr. Armstrong.

Traveling between Feast Sites during the Feast is something that was established by Mr. Armstrong. Why? Let's just be honest about this.

While **initially** it was established to meet a need, because not enough ministers were available to speak at all the Feast sites, **it later degenerated into an opportunity to showcase certain top ministers**!

So the question then is:

Is the purpose of God's Feasts "to showcase the top ministers"? Is the purpose of the Feast to signal to all the church members that "these are the important top speakers in our Church"? We want you to become familiar with them because they are the next ones in line for top leadership positions in the Church. And the more Feast Sites at which they get to speak, the more important they are.

I know that this custom goes back to Mr. Armstrong. But that doesn't make it right. I was at **the one Feast Site** in the U.K. in 1968 or '69 when Mr. Armstrong spoke at the Morning Service of the First Day, after having spoken at **the one Feast Site** in France the previous evening, and he was then still going to speak in the afternoon (or early evening?) of the First Day at a Feast Site on the East Coast of the U.S.A. (i.e. he was flying out right after that service in the U.K.). He told us that he was scheduled to speak 12 or 13 times during the 8 days, more than any of the other ministers. He was bragging about how often he was going to speak.

where there are already several ministers present is just a huge load of vanity! They make guest appearances because **they are important people**! And the brethren at all the Feast Sites are supposed to be aware of the importance of these guest speakers. And once again, the material the guest speakers present in their sermons is not nearly as important as people later saying "we had Mister X as our guest speaker", while actually remembering very little of what Mister X had said during his guest sermon.

There is no biblical precedent for sending men as guest speakers to other Feast Sites during the Feast. Understand also **the shift in emphasis** that took place.

Originally, when there weren't enough speakers available for all the Feast Sites, it was **the lower-ranked ministers** who were sent out to fill that need. And that sending out was limited to the less-important Feast Sites, typically outlying areas with smaller numbers of people in attendance. There was no status or importance attached to such speaking opportunities. So the lower-ranked ministers were the ones who were given those responsibilities at the time when the Church membership was still small.

But once the Church membership greatly increased, and Feast Sites had attendances of multiple thousands, then there were now many Feast Sites that were seen as very important. Then going to speak at one or two or three more Feast Sites during the Feast became a matter of prestige. It became a point of being recognized as an important minister in the Church. It became a bit of a status symbol. And now the men who went out as guest speakers were **the higher-ranked ministers**, the inspirational speakers.

The original reason for guest speakers (i.e. to fill a need where not enough speakers were available) had been abandoned. Now guest speakers went to Feast Sites where there already were a number of other ministers in attendance. So the original reason for guest speakers was ignored.

For example:

If a specific church organization establishes 6 Feast Sites, and the organization has 20 ordained ministers, it is terribly bad planning if 10 of those ordained ministers attend the important HQ Feast Site, while the other 5 sites have only two ministers each. And then some of those 10 ministers at the HQ Feast Site go out during the Feast as guest speakers to the other five sites for a couple of sermons each; but they return to the HQ site before the end of the Feast. **They are important**, and it's okay for them to spend a part of the Feast as traveling days. God understands that, right?

Now that organization could have planned to have 3-4 ministers at each of their Feast Sites, and they would be quite capable of handling all of the speaking responsibilities, without needing any guest speakers to travel during the Feast. But that's not an option, is it? I mean, the people at all 6 Feast Sites need to hear from the really important speakers, right? And with the alternate approach all the important speakers would only get to speak at one Feast Site; so that's not a desirable option, right?

If we are honest, when some of the "top men" are sent out as guest speakers, then that is to promote those "top men" for the church members to recognize. And who they are is in many cases far more important than what they actually say in their sermons. They may present material that has been presented before, material that many of the people in the congregation already understand fairly well, but they are important guest speakers.

Far too often what the guest speakers actually say is not nearly as important as who they are. **It shouldn't be that way**. God did not provide His annual Feasts for showcasing the leading ministers in the Church. The focus of the Feasts must always be on God and not on the important guest speakers. These are after all God's Feasts. So when guest speakers become the highlights of the Feast, that is not a good focus.

WHAT ABOUT "INSPIRING SERMONS"?

In years gone by, especially back in the 60s and 70s, the focus of the Feast was often on "inspiring speakers" and "inspiring sermons". After returning from the Feast, church members would often talk about "the inspiring sermons" they had heard at their Feast Sites.

In fact, the main consideration that determined a minister's promotion within the ministry (i.e. from Local Elder to Preaching Elder to Pastor to Evangelist) was the man's ability to give "**inspiring powerful sermons**". Those were the sermons that impressed people. And the men who gave those impressive sermons usually moved pretty quickly up the promotional ladder. Within a couple of years after graduating from Ambassador College they were already "Preaching Elders" (and still in their early 20s) or even "Pastor rank ministers". And a few "powerful speakers" even made it pretty quickly to becoming "Evangelists".

(COMMENT: "Pastor rank" was to be distinguished from "pastor" referring to the man's **job description**. A man might have the job description of "the pastor of congregation X", but because he wasn't a

powerful emotional speaker, his **rank in the ministry** might initially only have been “Local Elder”, and after a few years he might have been promoted to “Preaching Elder”. This hierarchy was established by the men Mr. Armstrong originally ordained as “Evangelists”.)

The ability to give powerful impressive sermons was taken to mean that God was showing the leadership of the Church that these powerful speakers needed to be promoted to a higher status in the ministry.

But there was a major problem with this system!

Time has shown that **the majority of those “inspiring speakers” were themselves not actually converted**! They were great speakers who could move an audience; but they were not repentant, and God was not involved in their “inspiring sermons”. They were skillful at using speech techniques to influence people’s emotions, in the same way that worldly speakers seek to move an audience’s emotions. The sermons they gave were performances. And 50 years ago I myself sat through many of those performances.

With many of these “inspiring speakers” from the 60s and 70s it was a case of “**mistaken identity**”. Powerful speaking is not proof of conversion.

Jesus Christ said that “**the tree is known by its fruit**” (Matthew 12:33). So what are “the fruits” that those inspirational speakers from the 60s and 70s produced? Many of those men had left God’s Church altogether before they came to the end of their lives.

Many didn’t live by the things they preached in their inspiring sermons. Others amongst them accepted heretical teachings after Mr. Armstrong had died. And, most importantly, the powerful sermons they gave had **no lasting effects** at all. The people who came into the Church through hearing their inspiring sermons later mostly left the Church. In the 30+ years since Mr. Armstrong’s death far more than 50% of church members subsequently left the Church. And all the fruits of the inspiring powerful sermons back then have long since evaporated.

Inspiring sermons are always popular with the audience. People like to hear inspiring sermons, much like people would love to see real miracles. But **inspiring sermons actually have very little value**! And inspiring sermons don’t lead unconverted people to repentance. I want to repeat that:

ng sermons do not lead unconverted people to repentance!

That has been demonstrated over and over and over again.

What would you say was the most inspiring sermon **ever given** by anybody?

where they were before they heard that inspiring sermon. Their conscience about not praying regularly

no longer makes them feel guilty. They are again like the Israelites three days after they had walked through the Red Sea.

So let's put it this way:

1) People who are already fully committed to God, and who don't need an inspiring sermon to stir up their commitment to God, those people are encouraged by inspiring sermons. It is with their minds, rather than with their emotions, that they process those inspiring sermons.

2) But people who don't pray on their knees every day, people who have not made that kind of commitment, are the ones who actually need the information presented in the inspiring sermon. But unfortunately **they process that inspiring sermon with their emotions and not with their minds**. And by the third day their emotional state has returned to what it was before they heard that inspiring sermon. The good intentions to change for the better in their personal relationship with God have disappeared. So they have not really benefitted from the inspiring sermon they had heard.

Another inspiring activity is to sit in a congregation in a foreign non-English-speaking land, and to hear the visiting minister fluently speak the local language, when it is clear that the visiting minister had never before been exposed to that local language. In the New Testament this type of situation is known as "speaking in tongues". And we don't have any examples of this in our age. But if we did have an example of this happening, that would absolutely be the most inspiring thing those Feast-goers had ever experienced.

The Apostle Paul had this gift of "speaking in tongues" more than any other person in the Church. See 1 Corinthians 14:18. Now notice how Paul referred to this inspiring activity of "speaking in tongues".

Yet in the church **I had rather speak five words with my understanding**, that *by my voice* I might teach others also, **than ten thousand words in an *unknown* tongue**. (1 Corinthians 14:19)

What Paul was saying is:

"I had rather speak five words, which my audience can clearly understand (and five words would obviously not be enough to inspire anyone), than give an inspiring 10,000-word sermon in a foreign language, which language everyone in the congregation would know I had never learned in the past." (the meaning of verse 19 in today's language, amplified somewhat)

Paul made this statement **to make a point**. He did not mean this statement to be taken literally, because at no time was Paul ever going to restrict his preaching to a single five-word statement. The point Paul was making is that **all preaching must appeal to the mind, rather than appeal to the emotions**.

Regarding Paul's comparison in verse 19:

It is obvious that the 10,000-word sermon is going to be far more impressive than the five word message. Nobody is going to get excited about a five word message he heard from a minister. But that longer message, even if it goes over the heads of many people (that's the effect speaking in tongues tends to have, people don't really understand what is being said), might well create some excitement amongst the listeners. It is the occasion and what is taking place that creates the excitement, rather than the meaning of the message that is being presented creating that excitement. And that is not good.

Also understand that **the world loves inspirational sermons / messages**. Inspirational messages manipulate our feelings and emotions. Movies and entertainment in general also do that ... manipulate our emotions. I am **not** saying that inspirational messages are a form of entertainment. But I am saying that inspirational messages have **the same effect** on our emotions as have a number of our most popular forms of entertainment.

TWO WAYS TO MAKE CHANGES

We all know that God wants us to change our ways, and to seek to understand the ways of God more fully. Now there are two ways in which we can reach the decision in our minds that we need to make some changes in our lives.

Option #1:

A fiery, inspiring sermon can move us so powerfully that we reach the decision: I must change these things in my life. **Our feelings provide the motivation** to want to make those changes. It took **no effort** on our part to reach that decision. That decision was really thrust upon us by the emotions which that inspiring sermon created within us. Our decision-making process was very quick, almost spontaneous.

Option #2:

We are given information and understanding, which we then have to process with our own minds. We have to seriously think about the information we have been given. We have to process that information, analyze it, evaluate it, think it through, recognize what the consequences will be, consider the alternative consequences if we don't act on the information we have been given. We may have to do some research. **This is hard work!** It may take us quite a while before we reach a decision, because we have come to see that there is a price we'll have to pay, if we make the decision to change certain things in our lives. And with our minds we understand that such a decision will require serious commitment from us. So we do a lot of thinking before we make our decision to make those changes in our lives.

In this process it is **our minds that provide the motivation** to want to make those changes.

Now both of these options can lead to some people making permanent changes in their lives. However, "the drop-out rate" for "Option #1" is likely to be north of 95%! By comparison, "the drop-out rate" for "Option #2" is likely to be less than 20%. (These percentages are my guesses, presented for illustration purposes only.)

In other words, people who evaluate something for themselves, and then with their minds reach the conclusion to change in certain ways are far more likely to stay with the commitment they have made, than people who reached the same decisions based on the feelings and emotions another person (i.e. the inspirational speaker) was able to instill within them.

Feelings are great if they are guided and controlled by the mind. But when the mind is not involved in the process, then emotion-based decisions are of no value at all.

And that is why “inspiring sermons” never achieve lasting changes in the lives of people. And **“inspiring sermons” are always far less valuable** for the Christian life than are sermons that give us a better understanding. But sermons that give us understanding require us to use our own minds to process that new understanding. And that means that we have to do some work.

So much for “inspired sermons”.

At this point I want to dispel one wrong conclusion some people may draw from the things I have mentioned in this article. And that is this:

I DON’T WANT MORE PEOPLE AT THE FEAST SITE I ORGANIZE

I have no desire whatsoever to persuade more people to attend the Feast Site I organize every year. None whatsoever!

Yes, I do conduct a small Feast Site every year. But I do not want more people coming to that site! Why? Because I have not started another Church of God group. And I have no intention of starting any such group in the future. I am not competing with any CoG group out there.

Therefore I also don’t like the idea of having to use a hall for church services at the Feast. As long as the group can fit into the living room area of a house that I rent for the Feast, that is fine. So I am quite comfortable with a group of 10-20 people. Once the group gets towards the upper 20s, I become a little concerned that everybody will fit in, and that we’ll cope at our social activities. And I don’t really like the prospect of more than 30 people wanting to attend the Feast Site I conduct. That is just how I personally feel about this.

Fact is: the larger any Feast group is, the more unconverted people are going to be in that group. That’s what our experience in Worldwide should have taught us. Once Worldwide really grew from the mid-1960s onwards, that growth was due overwhelmingly to more unconverted people attending as (officially) baptized members of God’s Church. The vast majority of those people left again, because **they had never been converted**.

As the Apostle John tells us:

They went out from us, but **they were not of us**; for if they had been of us, they would (*no doubt)* have continued with us: but *they went out*, that they might be made manifest that **they were not all of us**. (1 John 2:19)

This verse describes fairly accurately the process that took place very forcefully after the death of Mr. Armstrong.

And I am not interested in trying to somehow get a larger group to keep the Feast of Tabernacles with me. A smaller or larger group is immaterial to me, provided the group does not become too large.

So rest assured that I do not have any kind of ulterior motive for the things I have said in this article. How you process and deal with the information I have presented here (i.e. with your emotions or with your mind) does not in any way involve any kind of benefit for me personally. And, for that matter, I have never (since leaving Worldwide) taken up any Feast Offerings (wrongly called “Holy Day Offerings” by most churches) at any time. So at the Feast Site I conduct no offerings have ever been taken up, because I don’t want people’s money, and I wouldn’t know what to use such Feast Offering money for, since I have no church expenses.

I am saying these things about the correct ways to keep God’s Feast because **somebody has to explain to God’s people how God’s Feasts ought to be kept**. I suspect that many of the issues I have presented in this article are things to which in the past you have never even given any thoughts. Now you are in a position to think about these things for yourself and to evaluate them for yourself.

Yes, there are valid Feast Sites out there, sites where God will place His name. It is just that you will have to do some serious searching and investigating to find them. And you need to realize that there are also many Feast Sites out there where God has **not** placed His name. That should be no surprise, since the wheat and the tares have been mixed together for a very long time. The foolish virgins are together with the wise virgins for a very long time.

So there are **two aspects** to keeping God’s Feast of Tabernacles correctly. One aspect involves you personally, and the other aspect involves the site at which you will attend.

1) Make sure that your personal motivation in selecting a Feast Site is not the desire to have “a Laodicean Vacation”. Be clear in your own mind that you don’t look upon the Feast as an opportunity to be a tourist. Make sure that your choice of Feast Site is not grounded in selfishness. Seek earnestly to find out where God would like you to keep the Feast. Typically that would be the closest place where you believe that God has placed His name.

2) Conscientiously examine all the Feast Sites you might consider attending from the perspective of: do I believe that God has really placed His name here for the duration of the Feast? **This is a question that almost nobody in the past few decades has asked themselves before deciding** where to keep the Feast. Yet this is the most important criterion for any Feast Site.

It is a mistake to assume that every Feast Site from every CoG group is somehow automatically a place that God has chosen for His Feast of Tabernacles to be observed. That is simply not the case. And beware of Feast Sites that have been established by unordained (i.e. not selected by God) people, because God has not given them the authority to establish any Feast Sites.

Now let's look at one more matter.

WHO SHOULD BE SPEAKING AT THE FEAST?

This affects especially the smaller Feast Sites. Today we have the situation where any number of men feel they have some good ideas, and they would really like to present those ideas as sermons (or at least as "spiritual discussions") at the site they will attend.

But here is the situation:

Who's Feast is it? It is God's Feast of Tabernacles. How is it identified as God's Feast? What identifies it as God's Feast is the matter that **God has placed His name there**.

Now if God has placed His name there, then **who does God want to do the speaking at His Feast?** Does God decide who should be instructing His people at the Feast? Or is God looking for volunteers by saying: if you have any good ideas for sermons, then just step forward and you can speak at My Feast of Tabernacles?

Or, having selected the Feast Site location, does God also select the people who will do the speaking? What's the point of God ordaining (i.e. selecting) a ministry if unordained (i.e. non-selected) men are going to do the teaching at the places where God has placed His name?

(COMMENT: By "unordained" in this specific context I mean men who are not in any way working in any ministerial capacity, men who are not employed by the Church and who are not being considered for ordination, and they are not being considered as spiritual teachers.

However, there are also other men who at this point may not be ordained ministers (i.e. they are what we used to call "Ministerial Assistants"), but they are being trained in performing ministerial responsibilities. And part of their training involves opportunities to preach sermonettes and sermons to the congregation. The indications are that at some point these men are likely to be ordained into the ministry. In this context here I am not including this group of men in the category of "unordained men who should not be the teachers".)

As far as unordained men looking for opportunities to speak at a Feast Site are concerned, the Apostle James issued the following warning:

My brethren, **be not many teachers** (Greek “didaskaloi”), knowing that **we shall receive the** greater condemnation (i.e. **stricter judgment**). (James 3:1)

In plain language: Here the Apostle James was **discouraging unordained men in the Church from wanting to give sermons** at the Feast, or at regular church services for that matter. Ministers are judged more strictly by God because of the responsibilities God has enjoined upon the ministry. That’s the principle of “to whom much is given, of him shall much be required” (see Luke 12:48).

So all preaching and teaching at the Feast should be limited to ordained ministers and those men who may be “ministers in training”. God’s Feasts are not intended to be a free-for-all, where everyone has the opportunity to present their own personal ideas and opinions.

No doubt there are other things about the Feast of Tabernacles that we could also discuss. But this should do for now. So do your due diligence, and then try to establish which Feast Site God would like you to attend at His Feast next year, a place where God will place His name.

Frank W Nelte