

NEWS WATCH FOR *the* CHURCH OF GOD

News in the world and church — to give warning and help for God's people — by Ron Weinland

May 1998

DO YOU LOVE ME?

Do you know the difference between love and hate? Most people think they do. But scripturally, you may be surprised!

It's high time we all asked ourselves the same question Jesus Christ asked Peter. After His death and on His third appearance to His disciples, Jesus asked Peter if he loved Him. He asks the same question of us.

Do *you really* love Jesus Christ and God the Father? Are you doing as He commanded? What are *you* doing to feed the flock? Perhaps your answer is, "Yes, but I am not a pastor." Is this a job reserved only for pastors? We are not all pastors and we do not all have the same functions within the church, but we have all been called to be servants, especially in service toward one another in His Body. Jesus said, "Feed my sheep." That is *my* job and it is *your* job!

COLD HARD TRUTH!

Facing the truth about ourselves is not a pleasant thing for God's scattered people today. As a church we are in pitiful condition, yet no one wants to face that fact. Your love for Christ is being tested. Will you "feed my sheep" as He instructed?

The church today is filled with false ministers, hirelings, deception, heresies, rebellion, politics, pride, and complacency. Christ is being denied! Is it any wonder so many brethren are confused and many are simply giving up?

Recently, more tremors have shaken the body of Christ. The Church of God International was scattered again when more of her people could no longer support a minister who continued to live a life of moral turpitude. God is forcing all of His people to make decisions which reveal their true convictions, even when it involves removing leaders of a church.

Before a minister is ordained, his life is examined for evidence of moral integrity. If that evidence is absent, he cannot be expected to lead God's people by personal example. His ability

to teach God's word is compromised. Once ordained, if a minister reverts to an old sinful habit or commits some other serious sin, he disqualifies himself from the ministry just as readily as he would have been disqualified for ordination had the sin been discovered earlier.

To our shame, the church has covered sin within the ministry, protecting its own while judging the brethren by different standards. This hypocrisy has caused immeasurable harm to the people of God. Ministers have been transferred when they should have been removed. They have been slapped on the wrist for such problems as alcoholism, adultery, rebellion, heresies, dysfunctional families, marital discord, a lack of compassion for God's people, failure to feed God's people, and much more.

Politics and the "politically correct" way of dealing with this elite body has caused much of the church to lose total respect for the ministry, while the ministry has acquired an elevated view of itself. Sinful actions do not deserve respect! One can repent and remain in the church, but not remain in the ministry.

Sin, however, exists in all quarters of the church and though these abuses within the ministry are hideous, it doesn't mean there should be no ministry, or that the ministry itself is bad. A ministry which practices humility, righteous judgement and moral integrity DOES deserve respect, just as that respect is due to anyone else in the church who practices God's way. The church is challenged to make such distinctions and judge such matters. Each member must be mature enough to discern wisely and to exercise that discernment. How can anyone claim to love Christ while tolerating heinous sins within the body?

"For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is

unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil" (Hebrews 5:12-14, NKJ). Are you actively discerning between good and evil?

LOVE THE CHURCH?

If we truly love God's Church, and desire to help feed the sheep (and we are all sheep), then shouldn't we hold the ministry to the same standard as the rest of the Body? Is it so hard to address such matters? Have we *lifted up* the ministry to a level God never intended? If we deeply love Jesus Christ and love His sheep, we will want to protect one another from the harm and injustices of such practices.

But if you speak up for righteousness, beware! Not everyone wants to hear the truth or see their idols pulled down. What have been the results of God's people allowing the ministry or a corporation to become their idol? Are there blessings? Or do we see confusion and destruction within the body? Is there peace? Or does turmoil and conflict abound? Is everyone holding fast to the trunk of the tree? Or is there watering down, heresy, and Protestantism creeping into fellowships? Blessings or cursings are the result of either following or denying God -- of yielding ourselves to Christ living in us, or denying Him.

"Hate the evil and love the good, and establish judgment in the gate: it may be that the Lord God of hosts will be gracious unto the remnant of Joseph" (Amos 5:15, KJV). When you follow such an admonition, understand its consequences. You will not always be loved for obeying God's instructions to live righteously and exercise righteous judgement toward others. The practice of a *form of religion* has become second nature to the church, but the spiritual application of God's Word, in judgement, mercy, and faith, has been found wanting.

Sadly, even within the church, Amos' words apply. *"They hate him*

that rebukes in the gate, and they abhor him that speaks uprightly" (Amos 5:10, KJV).

RECENT SCATTERING

Another scattering occurred during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. David Hulme left the United Church of God, *aIA* to form another organization. He said, "a start is made on a viable Work once more."

Brethren want explanations, but once again, UCG,*aIA* is only giving lip service to openness. If our actions and decisions are not open for evaluation and personal discernment, why not? How can brethren judge without necessary information? It is our duty to prove all things and try the spirits. Total transparency is a must if brethren are to be kept from being injured, weakened, and scattered by covert practices.

Jesus said, "if you love me, feed my sheep." To love Jesus Christ and be willing to feed His sheep is a high calling of service to the true Shepherd. Feeding the sheep is synonymous with actively loving brethren with the same kind of nurturing care a shepherd shows his sheep. What lengths will you go to protect the flock? What will you sacrifice and where will you stand and fight? Can you help turn brethren from dangerous, withered or polluted pasture to truly green pasture where it is safe to graze? Safe pasture is becoming increasingly difficult to find.

Some have believed they were not required to take action for their own protection, let alone the protection of their brothers and sisters. They felt God would somehow intervene to correct matters for them. But God allows people in the church to sin, including ministers and administrative leaders. Doing what's right, even within the church, is not easy. Often it requires us to take a stand and act on our own convictions. It requires us to seek and support righteous acts and righteous living.

Silence or secret love endangers, rather than protects the flock. "*Open rebuke* [correction, reproof] *is better than secret love*" (Proverbs 27:5, KJV). Consider these words from the Moffatt Translation. "*Better a frank*

word of reproof than the love that will not speak. Wounds from a friend are honest, but an enemy's kisses are false" (Proverbs 27:5-6, Moffatt).

UCG's STRUGGLE

UCG,*aIA* has been spinning its wheels in mire from its inception. It has been struggling to get off the ground, but has not quite been able to do so. In an April 15 letter addressed to elders and the Church of God, David Hulme says, "I could no longer support a governance structure that I believe has failed." In May of 1997, I too resigned from UCG,*aIA*, but my reasons were different from those cited by David Hulme.

There are many forms of government or administration in cities, counties, states, corporations, families, and countries. The notable distinction for the church should not be the specific form of government or administration, but the fact that it conducts itself according to the laws and government of God. Any government or administration will only be as good as the integrity, honesty, and morality of those who administer it. When members, and especially those leading them within the church, fail to yield themselves to the higher laws and principles given by God, there will be confusion, unhappiness, unrest, instability, lack of direction, and spiritual sluggishness. If members and those leading them yield themselves to what is right, there will be order, happiness, peace, stability, and direction, coupled with spiritual alertness, growth, and excitement for God's Word. When our ways are pleasing to God, He will bless us.

As early as the Cincinnati Conference of Elders Meeting in December of 1995, UCG,*aIA* started an unethical practice of governance and politics in a struggle for power. The Conference of Elders was manipulated through a meeting format. Elders were simply given the opportunity to say "yes" or "no" to a few administrative matters. This was not in keeping with the Constitution or Bylaws which outlined their responsibilities and functions. To answer "no" in this environment was perceived as defiant

and threatening to the steady growth and development of UCG,*aIA*.

Even in those early days, spiritual consensus carried peer pressure to conform or even compromise for the sake of an appearance of unity, which most felt the membership and other churches of God should see. For example, we could either pass the budget or not. We were not permitted to change or alter it at this meeting. Only a handful had the integrity to say "no" to some of these items. The pressure was on and "no's" were looked upon as being divisive and uncooperative in spirit.

By December of 1996 it was being brought to the attention of all the elders of the church and the Council of Elders that the Constitution and Bylaws were not being followed. The ratified budget of the 1995 Cincinnati Conference had been ignored by the President, David Hulme and the Treasurer, Steve Andrews. The reserves for April 1, 1997 had been set at over \$5 million. What a boost this would be for reaching out in a more powerful way to serve God. But it had become apparent, unauthorized use of over \$4 million in reserves had been diverted to other areas. This was the first most obvious and blatant misuse of authority by David Hulme and Steve Andrews.

After this point, their struggle for power against the Council of Elders only intensified. But what were the members of UCG,*aIA* told of these matters? The complete story wasn't even being given to the ministry, let alone the church. There was no openness. Only a few council members spoke out behind the scenes, but never on record. Anyone who did speak out to the church was attacked as being divisive, an anarchist, or of Korah or Satan. Numerous calls went out to the Council to correct the abuses of power in the Home Office. But the council didn't act, at least not until the struggle for power began to infringe upon the Council itself. When the battle between the Home Office and the Council had become intense, with closed session after closed session, David Hulme and Steve Andrews were finally addressed and dismissed.

What are the fruits of the Council of Elders? What impact has indecision, sealed lips, compromise for the sake of unity, and declarations of unity and cooperation had on the church? What were the fruits of the Home Office under the leadership of David Hulme and Steve Andrews? Do God's people have peace and green pastures? God holds His people responsible to discern!

What priority has been given for the welfare of the sheep? Do we exercise love for Jesus Christ by actively loving His sheep? Fruits of righteousness are discernable. God's Spirit cannot not be hidden and neither can the fruits of unrighteousness. Anyone failing to act or speak out for His sheep against sin is as guilty as the one who is sinning against the flock.

TEST YOURSELF!

Does addressing such matters make you uncomfortable. Do you feel anyone expressing such things is in error, reacting from wrong motives, or unbalanced spiritually? Put yourself to the test. What is your true reaction? Are you discerning between good and evil? Are you living God's way, obeying His Word and yielding to His Spirit in you? Then consider the following!

Some embrace the false concept that addressing negative matters like those in this article is ungodly. But what determines Godly behavior. God in us! If the source of motivation is the result of God living in us and through us, then there will be matters in life we must address. Ignoring God's Word and God's way of dealing with difficult circumstances in life (especially within the church) is to deny Jesus Christ. If we love Him, we will follow His admonition to *feed His sheep*.

Keeping silent with secret love and failing to obey or yield to God's Spirit in us, is just as *sinful* as speaking out from anger, jealousy, or hurt. Today, there is too much of these reactions within the Church of God! Both extremes are wrong!!! We must exercise righteous judgment based on yielding to the life of Christ in us.

A neglected area of love which needs to be exercised more than ever

within God's scattered church today is the need to *warn!* Parents grasp the need in today's world to warn their children. The world is worse than ever and the church is no safer than our children are. We live in tumultuous times. It's hard to believe the betrayal and sins which weaken the sheep are coming from within.

Christ's warnings and other warnings in God's Word should not be given to us in vain. Some scriptures should be quite plain, but we've come to see them as directed toward the world, and not toward the church. But these warnings are nor are they easy to live, but with God's help, we can do it. "*And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove [Gk.--expose] them*" (Ephesians 5:11, KJV).

IN THE CHURCH???

"*Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves*" (Matthew 7:15, NKJ). These are God's words! He is talking about the church! What has our history taught us? How many in the ministry have already led away Christ's sheep? Is this process over? Are we to close our eyes and simply believe God has now made all hearts right?

The admonition of Jesus Christ continues in these same verses. "*You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them*" (Matthew 7:16-20, NKJ). As uncomfortable as it is, these words are admonitions for today's church.

"*And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many*" (Matthew 24:11, KJV). Within the Church of God?

"*But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon them-*

selves swift destruction" (2 Peter 2:1, KJV). Within the Church of God?

"*Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world*" (1 John. 4:1, KJV). Within the Church of God?

Often, brethren read scriptures like these and believe they apply to false teaching in this world. The warnings are for what can happen from within the fold which is a greater threat to the sheep. If a minister yields to sin, he must repent or continue on a course that will eventually weaken and lead brethren astray. Our desire should be to see repentance and change in our brothers.

Ignoring sin is itself a sin. Tolerating, supporting, and covering unrepented sin, is sin. It is a failure to love Jesus Christ, because it is a failure to love our brother God's way. Sometimes sin can be addressed privately, before it affects others in the body. Sometimes sin affects many in the body and is no longer private. Indeed, great discernment and reliance on God in such matters of judgment should be foremost in our lives.

When a minister or group of ministers starts on a course producing bad fruit, the situation should be addressed speedily and privately if possible. Too often it goes too long without repentance and it affects so many in the body, it must be dealt with more openly and sometimes in public.

Godly love toward a brother isn't easy to practice. Consider Matthew 5:22-25 and Matthew 18:15-17. You probably know these by heart, but it is another matter to live by them. When such scriptures are used to defend one position or attack another, it reveals a lack of understanding.

Love toward a brother often requires we reach out, cry out, and pray for the proper response and final desired result. It isn't easy. Covering unrepented sin or whitewashing its effect on the church is not God's way. God's way requires active participation in exercising love toward a brother and toward Jesus Christ. "*Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner*

from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins" (James 5:19-20, NKJ).

BALANCE FROM GOD

Herbert W. Armstrong was able to simplify complex ideas. He reduced the motivations of life to a simple "give" or "get" way. We will seek to live one or the other. There is no middle ground. We either exercise love toward a brother or we don't. If we are not loving, we are hating. God's Word makes this plain. There is no such thing as secret love, because inactive love is only pseudo-love, even though people deceive themselves into believing otherwise.

"In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love [fails to love] his brother. For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another" (1 John 3:10-11, NKJ).

"We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love [fails to love] his brother abides in death" (1 John 3:14, NKJ). Why? Because, "Whosoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (verse 15-16).

"If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him; that he who loves God must love his brother also. Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments" (1 Jn 4:20-21, 5:1-2).

Anyone who abides in Christ cannot help but exercise love toward others in today's scattered body. One of the most challenging areas for discerning how to exercise God's love in today's church is

in the matter of the conduct of the ministry and its impact upon the brethren. We must search our hearts and *know* our motives. As we go through this process we must learn to discern righteously and respond according to God's direction.

Being secretive instead of being transparent in the guise of protecting others or the church has had devastating consequences for the church. When there is consistent and unrepentant sinful behavior practiced by the ministry or other leadership of the church, brethren have a need to know. Such behavior, because of the visibility of such men, is not a private matter.

People often err in one of two ways when dealing with sin. They follow the Protestant, "feel-good" approach by white-washing sin or by being secretive about the sin. This approach gives the appearance of righteousness and religiosity. People can also go to the opposite extreme, dealing with unrepented sin (and sometimes even repented sin) by being hurt, begrudging, vindictive, spiteful, hateful, condemning, jealous, bitter, etc. People with such feelings become quite vocal and some fellowships are known for such behavior, especially in their bitter attitudes toward Herbert W. Armstrong.

Between these two extremes there is a balance. This can be achieved when motivated by God's love. This balance was described to us in the book of Leviticus.

"You shall not go about as a talebearer [slanderer] among your people; nor shall you take a stand against the life of your neighbor [falsely accuse]: I am the Lord. You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your neighbor, and not bear sin because of him [failure to rebuke makes you as guilty of the sin]. You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord" (Leviticus 19:16-18, NKJ).

Jesus told Peter that if he loved Him, he would feed His sheep. This has everything to do with the love of God

abiding actively in us. The task before us is urgent. It is not easy. And it requires humility of spirit coupled with being actively yielded to God living in and through us.

GOD'S HELP

This warning is bold and filled with straight talk, but it's not meant to be audacious. These words are sincerely offered in love for anyone who will hear. Unfortunately the church has become so weak that a spirit of apathy and complacency prevail. There are many who would find these words too strong. Instead of considering with humility, many could only respond with pride and condemnation.

God's charge is that YOU discern. We are being and will continue to be tried to the depths of our being. Don't let the prophetic times we live in conquer you. The warnings being given to us are not to be considered lightly. They must not be ignored!

"Son of man, you dwell in the midst of a rebellious house, which has eyes to see but does not see, and ears to hear but does not hear; for they are a rebellious house" (Ezekiel 12:2, NKJ).

"But they refused to hearken, and pulled away the shoulder, and stopped their ears, that they should not hear" (Zech. 7:11, KJV).

Each of us can only control ourselves to insure we don't turn away nor close our eyes or ears to God's warnings. We need to respond as Peter admonishes. *"Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you. Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: Whom resist steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world. But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you" (1 Peter 5:6-10, KJV). NW*