

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

July 1998

AN APPEAL TO ALL ELDERS!

WCG TO SUNDAY

"We are waiting for God to correct these things." Those were the words of an elder in God's Church who is a dear friend. I have heard those words many times! You probably have heard them too.

There are those in WCG who are still waiting for God to correct matters in their organization. Yet the organization continues. WCG has to regularly downsize due to a continuing loss in membership and decline in income. The blessings of growth and increase, as a part of God's Church, were removed long ago.

Yet, far from being corrected by God's intervention, WCG has now become more blatant in distancing itself from God's command of the weekly Sabbath in favor of the observance of Sunday. The move in this direction has been apparent for several years, but now the drive to accomplish it has become more of a corporate thrust.

The July issue of *The Worldwide News* carries an article titled, "Should we meet on Sundays?" The article is not shy about expressing the answer, as the following quote shows. "*If a congregation wants to move its service to Sunday, that is fine. We have quite a few Sunday congregations, and many more considering the switch.*"

The article continues in the fourth paragraph saying, "*In WCG churches that have switched to Sunday meetings, the best transitions have been achieved by the pastor first educating the congregation 1) that Scripture permits corporate worship on any day of the week, 2) that Sunday has been the primary tradition of the Christian church, and 3) that in the specific community and culture, it has various advantages over Saturday as a*

day for corporate worship (including, possibly, evangelism)."

WCG has begun a distinct and calculated move away from God's command to remember the seventh-day Sabbath and toward worshipping on the first day of the week. Such a move should send chills up and down one's spine. WCG will begin a more concerted effort to validate Sunday observance. They have passed from one phase of tearing down God's commands concerning the weekly Sabbath and Holy Days into a phase of stronger cohesion with traditional Christianity. Yet, pastors are warned not to move completely away from the observance of Holy Days, for obvious financial reasons.

It would be wise for readers to consider the implications referred to in the January issue of *News Watch* (page 2). The Church has already experienced a great apostasy and WCG may have passed the fulfillment of a 1,260-day prophetic period on Pentecost of this year. If you would like to delve more deeply into part of this subject, please request a series of five taped sermons titled "The Final Stretch."

As an organization, WCG has lost all semblance of being part of God's true Church. She has simply become another of many existing harlots.

For those who yet remain in WCG, the only right thing to do is obey God, not sit and hope He will change things back to the way they were in former days. There are beloved brethren in WCG who have faithfully persevered in keeping God's Sabbath and Holy Days. They have hoped God would intervene and correct the direction of WCG. But God has not chosen to do so. As God's people, we must learn to be faithful to Him above any physical individual or organization. Individuals

and organizations are not above God. They are valuable to the degree they yield themselves in obedience and service to the will of God. Salvation requires obedience. Obedience is the *result* of living by faith. God says we are to flee fornication and idolatry. WCG as an organization is spiritually dead! She will never be the kind of spiritual organization she once was.

UCGIA?

"We are waiting for God to correct these things." My friend's words concerned the direction of UCGIA. Without massive repentance on the part of the administration and ministry (which includes ALL elders) of UCG, another organization will soon come to her end as a useful tool to the Body of Christ.

What kind of love shades the truth? What kind of love remains silent when danger is present? Yet most elders in UCG *choose* to deny reality or *choose* to be silent until God intervenes and corrects matters. Have the servants of God's people failed to learn their lesson? In such times, elders are to SERVE God's people by clearly *standing up* for what is true and right and exposing that which is not! It is every elder's DUTY before God to serve Him and His people faithfully, distinctly, with a clear voice.

This admonition is given in love and genuine concern, not in a spirit of criticism. God's people need clear and decisive leadership from their elders. Too many in the ministry act spiritually emasculated, afraid to speak out and afraid to take a stand. Some are more afraid of what others may think of them than what God thinks of them.

Pastors are not paid by the organization. They are paid by God through the faithful tithes and offerings of those who obey Him. The

organization only facilitates the disbursement of what belongs to God! When you forget that, you move away from God. Are you more faithful to the organization than to God?

ELDERS MUST CHOOSE

Come on elders! Where is integrity, principle and acceptance of your responsibilities before God? Are you *choosing* to live in denial and ignorance? Or are you simply *choosing* to remain silent about what you see, hoping that God will correct matters? Silence is not love and God will not be pleased.

Were you able to conscientiously read the recent letter from Les McCullough that was sent to the brethren and agree with its contents? Is your attitude toward such a letter zealous with support? Is your enthusiasm lukewarm and mixed with indifference? Or are you incensed by the audacity, arrogance and glaring errors of such a letter? These questions reflect a broad range of reactions. All the members of UCGIA fall somewhere within that range. Where are you? I submit that where you fall on the scale will reveal much about your spiritual state.

This article is not meant to be popular and politically correct. It is not an effort to walk the middle of the road, straddle the fence and try to appease everyone on the scale. Too many pastors are already doing just that! It is written out of sincere love in hope that some might listen and turn more fully to the faithful service of God's people and our loving Father.

You were told long ago of abuses and corruption within your organization. Some agreed that such things were occurring. Others denied it, saying the information was not true and that those who made such allegations were anarchists or even satanic. As an organization, you came to grips with certain realities and have worked to remove part of the cause of your problems. Was the Council of

Elders anarchist or satanic for finally taking action? What changed? Why did so many ministers change allegiance so quickly when these changes were made?

Such instability and rapid change in allegiance should cause one to ponder and ask what is wrong with such a picture. Do brethren find confidence in that kind of leadership or does it only breed greater doubt and confusion?

Sad to say, you only addressed part of the cause for your problems, and your problems did not go away. Instead they have only intensified. In God's Church, this cannot simply be blamed on Satan. Is Satan more powerful than God? The problem is from within and it is spiritual in nature. In God's Church, blessings will follow obedience. Rather than blaming those who have left your fellowship or blaming your own fellowship, perhaps you need to look more deeply within yourselves.

MARK THESE WORDS

When the faults and errors of ministers and the administration of UCG have been brought to light, people have often attacked the sources through whom the light has come. Pride is generally the culprit, but it is hard to see and even harder to admit.

People today can become virtually obsessed with matters of government, while failing to grasp the true issues concerning the subject. Many have forgotten what true government actually is. Too many tend to think the various administrations represent the sole power and government of God on earth. But government is such a basic concept, if we can only comprehend it. There is government from God which is to be in every family in the Church of God. Ephesians 5 speaks of that government. Too many husbands focus on authority rather than service and sacrifice. Relationships within a family should always be based firmly on true, godly principles.

The government of God is based on His law, which is based on love. This love is from God. God is the source. It can not be faked nor worked up, either in the family or in the Church. God's love is spiritual in nature and to have it we must yield to His Spirit. As in the family, the husband is directed to God's government, which is based on His law of love. The husband is commanded to serve his wife, reflecting God's love to the point of self-sacrifice. It is not about rank or position, but a matter of serving and giving. That is spiritual! Few seem to grasp it! A husband is to love his wife as Christ loved the Church and gave himself for it. Go back and read verse 2 of Ephesians 5 and see the depth of that love which no human can achieve except he have the life of God in him to make it possible.

That is the problem in UCGIA. The ministry has become spiritually weak and is failing to love the brethren the way Christ loves the Church and the way a husband is to love his wife. Elders should be servants! Such service can only be exercised to the degree we are yielded to God's life dwelling in us. The failure of UCGIA is of the spirit.

PRESIDENT'S LETTER

One cannot stand against God and His people and expect to prosper. The letter sent to brethren asking them to fast for UCG is a testimony against itself and a testimony to a spirit that has become prevalent in UCG. Only genuine, massive repentance can turn the tide. The letter is filled with a spirit that reflects what UCG has become.

In this *News Watch* we will look at only a few of the statements contained in this letter which stand out and expose the spirit of UCGIA.

"For the welfare of us all, we must ask a series of important questions--and answer them honestly. The whole body is truly involved in the outcome." The questions that follow do need to be answered. But are they really the

right questions to be asking? First of all, the whole body is not involved in the outcome, only those of the body who are in United. UCGIA is not all there is to the Body of Christ.

"Just how much do we believe in the system, or organization, of the United Church of God?" Is that what members have been called to believe in? Is the system or organization where brethren are to place their faith? A system or organization is only as beneficial as the conversion, integrity and spiritual faithfulness of her members, especially her leaders. The same is true of any family.

"Do we want above all for the United Church of God to succeed?" Asking such a question about WCG at any time in her past should sober us and make the answer plain.

"But I must ask, Can you do something more to get your work through this time of financial crisis?" Perhaps this was a slip of the tongue or poor wording, but it is revealing. We can work to build something of our own that is indeed "our work" and not God's. Is UCG dedicated to serving God's people? Are God's people first or does reaching out to bring others into the body come first? What is the priority? Jesus said that if Peter loved Him, he would feed His sheep. Once God has called individuals into the Church for the purpose of the first resurrection, do they then become secondary in importance? Or does God become even more concerned with their welfare—nurturing (feeding), training and protecting them—so they can succeed in their calling?

This matter alone cries out in anguish and lamentation due to our recent history. This is not a time to focus on bringing more members into a dysfunctional family, but to reach out to care for God's people who have been shattered and scattered. UCG has focused on her own goals, exercising greater manipulation and control over God's people than ever before!

PURPOSE OF FAST?

Isaiah 58 warrants further study by elders. Is the purpose of fasting to seek God's blessings on something we have already decided for Him? Or is the purpose, through deep introspection, to repent of our pride and human flaws that thwart God's ability to work in and through us? As we yield ourselves more fully to God's will through fasting and humility, then He will intervene to lead, guide and direct us more fully in serving Him as His people.

We do not decide first what His will is and then seek His help to bless our decisions so we can get our way. Carefully reread the letter. The cart is before the horse. These are spiritual matters and are discerned only through a humble, spiritual relationship with God. If pride is in the way, blindness to God's will prevails.

A further witness to the indecisive leadership and confusion over God's will is contained in another statement in the letter. *"Let us all ask Him to make known, as dramatically as He has in times past, whether He is with us now in fulfilling our, and we hope His, plans. His will be done."* He has been making known His will and will continue to do so, just as this statement requests. As with WCG, a continuing decline in membership and finances will testify to His will. What a shame when leaders are not deeply convicted as to God's will and purpose.

But rather than accepting personal responsibility, elders and administrators are more willing to make excuses or criticize and condemn their own membership. Is it any wonder brethren seek elsewhere for nurture and care?

The letter goes on to say, concerning tithes and offerings, *"They have fallen off for whatever reason. Why? Have some forgotten Malachi 3:9-10?"* Faithful, converted brethren never forget such commands of God. Was the budget set up according to the

faithful tithes or with the hope that the unfaithful would give more? Did some lose faith, hope and strength and then become unfaithful? Weren't they being fed well so such a thing would not happen?

In the present circumstances, Malachi 3 is a stern witness against the organization for not faithfully using the tithes and offerings of God's people. Have you robbed God? Did you "bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house," as God said? What priority do God's people have? Instead of reaching out to better serve the brethren, ministers are being shackled with \$250 per month expense accounts. This only serves to starve God's people, not feed them. Will you accept the blame and repent?

Elders! Is this what you support with your silence or unwillingness to search out what is factual? Factual information has always been right there before you if you were willing to look and ask God for help to see. Some seem to fear wading through information with an open mind, whether it comes from within or without, such as from a publication like *The Journal*. Instead, many of you not only refuse to look into the matters yourselves, you also work to prohibit others from looking. What do you have to fear? This is another of the reasons UCG will not prosper. How much punishment do you have to bear and how much do you expect the brethren to bear before you will repent and cease to support unrighteousness?

This edition of *News Watch* does not even dig into some of the half-truths and lies contained in the letter. They are there and they are blatant! But how many of you are willing to search them out? You will only be convinced if you search them out yourself. You will only become more angry with me if I point them out to you. The answers are not hard to find. Many of you elders know where the

errors lie. What are you going to do about it?

If most elders were not incensed by the attention drawn to the misappropriation of some \$4.5 million, it is doubtful Mr. McCullough's letter will incense many--perhaps none. What a shame! Yes, Malachi 3 needed to be referred to in his letter, but to the ministry and administration, not the brethren.

The most far-reaching indication of the continuing decline of UCGIA was manifested in a spirit of complacency within the General Conference of Elders and the Council of Elders. The current condition of UCG, with its devastating effect on the brethren, has its roots in the failure of the General Conference of Elders and the Council of Elders to stand firm against such heinous mishandling of God's tithes. This failure in leadership resulted in the beginning of a definite reversal of the growth and blessings that UCGIA could have enjoyed. How far would \$4.5 million go now?

GOD'S WORDS

We in the ministry have not done well in rebuilding what was torn down by WCG. We have not done well in seeking that which has been scattered or lost. Instead, it has been rather easy to simply "write off" brethren, so we could be about building "our own house" according to "our own vision."

The ministry has fallen back into the old, comfortable administrative style learned in WCG. Such administration is rarely one of shepherding, but of control, manipulation, politics and lethargy, all of which has been hard on God's people. Les McCullough's letter is filled with such a spirit. The blindness within the ministry is so great that many elders will not have the remotest idea what I am talking about. But there are humble, faithful brethren who do know and see clearly what is being said. That is why they will continue to look elsewhere to be fed. The

difference in perception is one of the spirit, not of human insight.

It would be wise for all ministers in all organizations to seek God's help to understand His warnings. Please look at the following scriptures as they apply to a spiritual people, not just to physical Israel.

"Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God to the shepherds: 'Woe to the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves [NIV--take care of themselves]! Should not the shepherds feed the flocks [NIV--take care of the flock]? . . . 'The weak you have not strengthened, nor have you healed those who were sick, nor bound up the broken, nor brought back what was driven away, nor sought what was lost; but with force and cruelty you have ruled them [NIV--you have ruled them harshly and brutally]' (Ezekiel 34:2, 4, NKJ).

"Therefore, O shepherds, hear the word of the Lord! 'Thus says the Lord God: 'Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will require My flock at their hand; I will cause them to cease feeding the sheep, and the shepherds shall feed themselves no more; for I will deliver My flock from their mouths, that they may no longer be food for them'" (verses 9-10). Are these words being fulfilled today? Haven't these things already begun? Deep repentance is the only thing that can alter this course for any minister. God's words are strong and direct! They should sober any minister to the core of his being.

Notice these words again from another translation. *"This is what the Sovereign Lord says; I am against the shepherds and will hold them accountable for my flock. I will remove them from tending the flock so that the shepherds can no longer feed themselves. I will rescue my flock from their mouths, and it will no longer be food for them" (Ezekiel 34:10, NIV). Isn't this what the Church has been experiencing on an ever-increasing*

scale? Can we not stand back and see what God is doing and be moved to tears for our part in scattering His Church? Only when we do will God be able to truly use us once more to serve His people. And God's people need faithful (to Him and His people) ministers who will serve them as shepherds, ready and willing to give all if need be. Where is that spirit today?

"Therefore thus says the Lord God: 'Because you have spoken nonsense and envisioned lies, therefore I am indeed against you,' says the Lord God. 'My hand will be against the prophets who envision futility and who divine lies; they shall not be in the assembly of My people, nor be written in the record of the house of Israel, nor shall they enter into the land of Israel. Then you shall know that I am the Lord God. Because, indeed, because they have seduced My people, saying, 'Peace!' when there is no peace--and one builds a boundary wall, and they plaster it with untempered mortar" (Ezekiel 13:8-10, NKJ).

These words should be intently sobering when one considers how we in the ministry can go about building a structure after the image we once knew and do so to the neglect of so many of God's people who have been scattered or lost. And when flaws in the structure are pointed out, every effort is made to secretly cover those flaws as hurriedly as possible, making declarations about false accusers or attacks from Satan. The flaws and weaknesses are denied by declaring stability, growth and the need to go forward doing God's work. Let's read the warning again in another translation. *"Because they lead my people astray, saying, 'Peace,' when there is no peace, and because, when a flimsy wall is built, they cover it with whitewash" (Ezekiel 13:10, NIV).*

Such audacious and unrepentant attitudes will not go unpunished. There will be a reckoning. The

correction started long ago, but it has consistently been ignored. What a sad and shameful thing, that God should have to address the ministers of His people in such a fashion. *"I will tear down the wall you have covered with whitewash and will level it to the ground so that its foundations will be laid bare. When it falls, you will be destroyed in it; and you will know that I am the Lord. So I will spend my wrath against the wall and against those who covered it with whitewash. I will say to you, "The wall is gone and so are those who whitewashed it"* (Ezekiel 13:14-15, NIV).

Sometimes it is hard for God's people--especially within the ministry--to see themselves realistically. We seem to believe we cannot be in error if we are His people, especially if we are His ministers. But God gives warnings to His people and to His ministers. There are passages in Revelation that should be sobering to all in God's Church.

"I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those [not in the world, but within the Church] who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; . . . Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place--unless you repent. . . . Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth [God to fight against His own people?]. . . . Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. And I will kill her children with death. And all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works" (Revelation 2:2, 5, 16, 22-23, NKJ). *"So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew*

you out of My mouth" (Revelation 3:16, NKJ).

All of these words should be sobering food for thought. We need to be jolted by the reality that we will reap what we sow, not deceiving ourselves that we are somehow exempt from judgment simply because we bear God's name. We must not deceive ourselves by thinking we are special as His ministers and somehow bear no accountability.

Elders! We are accountable for our service to God's people. We are not excused from accountability by remaining silent. On the contrary, silence brings swift judgment. Silence is a complete failure to love our brothers and sisters in Christ. It is actually an act of hate. Willful ignorance, because we are either too lazy to search out the truth or wish to escape the responsibilities of leadership by glossing over problems as though they do not exist, will bring even stronger punishment upon us.

Now is the time for deep soul-searching and heartfelt repentance! Continuing with "business as usual" or total denial of our problems will only bring swift punishment. God is giving us the opportunity to repent. Let us accept our responsibility as elders and seek more vigorously and more vocally to faithfully serve God and His people. NW

NEWS WATCH

This edition of *News Watch* has not been written to offend, but to stir to repentance. Our woes that have produced so much trouble and hurt in God's Church are not the result of our having done well and lived righteously before God. This is true especially of those of us in the ministry.

We have become a spoiled people. We are filled with pride and, far too often, filled with complacency. God's warning to us is clear and succinct. *"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).

Unlike similar sounding verses, this verse makes it clear there is a people who do have the ability to see and hear spiritually, but refuse to do so. We have a special calling from God our Father and He has given us the ability to see and hear! It is up to each of us to use what He has given us.

Our past is the cause of our present condition. Our suffering is the result of our own sins! Prayerfully we haven't become so filled with pride we cannot see ourselves realistically. We need to repent of our wrong ways and we need God's mercy more than ever. AND we need each other!