



United Church of God *an International Association*

Donald L. Ward
Chairman

Victor Kubik
President

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Dear fellow elders and brethren,

As we prepare to travel to the Feast sites around the world where God has placed his name, we are witnessing one of the most troubling times in human history. In the United States we see a country that is divided on just about every major issue in the land. We have been shocked in no certain order by a continuous barrage of tragic events. When people are shocked in no certain order time after time, they react in unpredictable ways—ranging from anger to becoming inured—which often leads to apathy. They tend to throw up their hands and say “what’s the use” as they hunker down and become self-absorbed. And by so doing, they abdicate their God-ordained role to stand for truth.

We are indeed in a period of history that is described by the prophet Isaiah where truth is fallen into the streets and there is no justice in the land. If any one stands up for truth he becomes a prey and a target for cutting criticism and even bodily harm (Isaiah 59:14-15). And as Isaiah prophesied in another place, evil is called good and good is called evil (Isaiah 5:20). It is indeed a time to sigh and cry for all the abominations that are being committed in the land.

In Ezekiel 9:4-6, God commands the one with the writer’s inkhorn to mark everyone who is sighing and crying for the abominations that are being committed in the land. After marking those who are sighing and crying for the abominations, God commanded him to slay everyone that did not have the mark on their foreheads. Are we sighing and crying with understanding and at the same time maintaining a clear focus on the Kingdom of God?

The reality of the world in which we live is graphically portrayed *live* and *in color* before our faces. With these tragic events in view one can easily become discouraged. But on the other hand, as we see these events unfold as prophesied, we are admonished to lift our heads because our redemption draws nigh (Luke 21:28). I guess the question of the day is: How can I lift my head high and be positive and at the same time sigh and cry for the abominations that fill the earth—especially in view of the fact that we have little or no control over the tragic events that trouble us? In addition, to cope with living in this present evil age we are faced with the daily struggles of survival in both spiritual and physical terms. If we are not on guard, the immediate issues we are facing in our personal lives, coupled with the state of the world, can leave us in a state of hopelessness and despair.

The tendency is to feel sorry for ourselves, which gives an opening for vain imaginations through which we are prone to fall deeper into the pity pits of despair. These kinds of thoughts and attitudes give Satan an opportunity to pull us deeper and deeper into despair. So, we must never allow ourselves to go to those dark places of the minds and hearts of those who have no hope.

The apostle Paul faced unbelievable trials and troubles as he courageously went forth with great determination to fulfill the mission God had given him of taking the gospel to the world. We get a vivid description of this in 2 Corinthians 4:5-8: “For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus’ sake. For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us. We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair” (King James Version throughout).

In all of Paul's trials you won't find one ounce of self-pity in him. Time after time he picked himself up off the ground, shook off the dust, licked his wounds and continued with great faith and confidence in God and Christ. Paul knew and taught that the ultimate warfare was against Satan the devil. We see this clearly in Ephesians 6:12 where he states, "We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but...against spiritual wickedness in high places." In view of this Paul admonishes us to put on the whole armor of God that we may stand against the wiles of the devil (Ephesians 6:13-19).

Paul further expounds on this admonition in 2 Corinthians 10:3-6 where he writes, though we live in the flesh we do not war after the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are mighty to the pulling down of strongholds. What are the strongholds? The strongholds are negative thoughts and imaginations that come into our minds and cloud our vision of the Kingdom of God. Satan would have you believe that the way is too difficult. He would have you believe that the odds are against you and you can't make it. The anecdote to this kind of thinking is to meditate, pray and claim the sure promises of God. We must through faith and hope continue on the path to eternal life. Note Titus 1:2: "In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began."

God has promised never to leave us or forsake us. He promised to be with us even to the end of the age. Let these inspired words ring in our ears, hearts and minds: "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31). God who cannot lie has promised the faithful a crown of life that never fades away.

Furthermore, we must keep our eyes on the captain of our salvation who endured so much humiliation—from His own brothers and sisters, to the leaders of the land. He was accused of being born of fornication. He was accused of being demon possessed. He was accused of being an enemy of the state, ad infinitum. Yet, He courageously endured it all for our sakes.

At this critical, crucial time in the course of human history, and in the plan of God, we need to carefully consider and internalize the words of the apostle Paul: "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds." (Hebrews 12:1-3).

Please meditate carefully on the following phrase in verse 2, "for the joy that was set before him." What "joy" do you think He is referring to? It is the joy of seeing you and I in the Kingdom of God as glorious radiant spirit beings. Remember the words of Paul in Romans 8:17: "And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together."

So, as we go to the Feast—which pictures the joy we will experience in the Kingdom of God—let us focus and meditate on the precious promises of eternal life and peace in the Kingdom of God. The apostle Paul writes, "For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy [Spirit]" (Romans 14:17).

In view of all of these things let us not grow weary with well doing, let us not draw back and become apathetic. Let us go forth in full faith and assurance. Let go forward with hope in our hearts with the big picture of the Kingdom of God burning brightly in our minds and hearts,

In the service of God and His Christ,



Donald L. Ward