



United Church of God *an International Association*

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Dear ministers and brethren,

The Council of Elders (CoE) is about to begin a new cycle of meetings. The Council's calendar year runs from the May meeting of the General Conference of Elders (GCE) to the next meeting of the GCE—May to May. We have a tight schedule of agenda items, as you will note on the attached agenda. We are soliciting your fervent prayers for the success of our meetings.

Several longtime ministers and members have remarked to me how thankful they are for the stability of the Church and its membership at the present time. One of the principal goals of the Council is to guide each one of us in fulfilling one of the great missions that God has committed to the Church. That is the mission of reconciliation and restoration. Note the words of the apostle Paul: "To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:19, King James Version throughout).

One of the greatest missions of Jesus was to reconcile us to the Father. Once again, note the words of the apostle Paul: "For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life" (Romans 5:10). We can say with assurance that God the Father and Jesus Christ are totally committed to reconciliation and restoration, so much so that the Father was willing to give His Son as a ransom for our sins and the Son was willing to die on the stake that we might be reconciled to the Father.

We must be willing to follow in the examples set by God the Father and Jesus Christ in their unconditional love for us. Christ died for us while we were yet sinners. This is sacrificial love in the greatest sense. The apostle John writes, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). We too must be willing to lay down our lives for one another. We have been called to peace and God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ. They have given us the keys to the Kingdom and the way whereby we can be continually reconciled to God, Christ and each member of the Body of Christ.

In Matthew 23, Jesus takes the Pharisees to task, calling them into account for their gross hypocrisy. The Pharisees gloried and gloated in their own righteousness while omitting the weightier matters of the law: judgment, mercy and faith (Matthew 23:23). The exercising of judgment, mercy and faith before God, Christ and each member of the Body of Christ is the key to being continually reconciled to God, Christ, each member of the Body of Christ—and, for that matter, the peoples of the world extended.

Consider carefully these three requirements. Judgment, mercy and faith stem from the law. We judge ourselves by the Word of God. Now listen to what God inspired the prophet Micah to write: "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" (Micah 6:8). Jesus' instructions in Matthew 23:23 are basically a restatement of Micah 6:8.

Living by and doing the weightier matters of the law is the key to unity and peace among all parties. Unity built on any type of forced unity apart from God's instructions on unity is no unity at all. Dictators can enforce a type of unity through force. But true unity can only be achieved through loving

one another as Christ gave commandment. This requires obeying God's instructions for achieving unity. Unity is of the heart, mind and spirit. Unity is not achieved by just saying we must be unified. God through His Word and Spirit has revealed to us how we can live in a continual reconciled state with God, Christ and each member of the Body of Christ. The core requirement is to exercise judgment, mercy and faith in all of our relationships.

Let's first of all note the steps in personal reconciliation with God and Christ. We judge ourselves by God's immutable spiritual law. This step of judging ourselves is exemplified by Luke's account of the Pharisee and the publican going up into the temple to pray. The Pharisee praised himself for his own righteousness. In contrast, "the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner" (Luke 18:13). So step one is to judge ourselves.

After judging ourselves, followed up with heartfelt repentance and crying out for God's mercy, God says, "Go walk in faith," or "Go and sin no more." The apostle John writes in 1 John 1:9: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Some cry out for mercy without judgment. And some execute a penalty before they render righteous judgment. Neither of these are in accord with Word of God.

Jesus tells us that if we refuse to forgive one another then our Father in heaven will not forgive us (Matthew 6:13-14). The apostle James admonishes us to show mercy: "For he shall have judgment without mercy, that has shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoices against judgment" (James 2:13). How does mercy rejoice against judgment? In order for God's ultimate mercy to be extended, righteous judgment has to be rendered. Then upon repentance and faith in the sacrifice of Christ ultimate mercy can be extended.

Judgment, mercy and faith must be exercised in being reconciled to each member of the Body of Christ and the world extended. If our brother or sister offends us, then we are instructed by the Word of God to resolve the issue. The same steps that are followed in being reconciled to God and Christ must be followed. The conflict has to be defined and a judgment made. Then mercy and forgiveness can be extended with both parties being reconciled to each other.

Some confuse longsuffering with mercy. God may put up with disobedience for a long time, but sooner or later He does execute true judgment. It is incumbent upon us to exercise judgment, mercy and faith in our relationships with one another. This is one of the most neglected matters historically for God's people in the Old Testament and the New Testament. Are we doing what is needed to live and fulfill the ministry of reconciliation that has been committed to us? In short: Are we living the Word?

The Council of Elders, the home office administration and the ministry are committed to teaching us how to be continually reconciled in all of our relationships. We are committed to helping each person live the Word—not just give intellectual assent.

In the Church we have often shirked our personal responsibility with our brothers and sisters in Christ by telling someone in authority and putting it off on them to deal with it. This is not what the Scriptures instruct us to do. We must live the ministry of reconciliation and be our brother's keeper.

In the days that lie ahead we will must forge close relationships based on God's instruction and fulfill the ministry of reconciliation.

In Christ's service,



Donald L. Ward