

Church of God a World Wide Association splits from United Church of God
United Brethren no longer United

To: My Friends and Brethren who have departed the United Church of God

Even though I am no longer a part of your fellowship - we have many ties and bonds that reach back for some 40 years. Several have called or written me to ask for advice in this present situation so - in that spirit - I offer these comments:

REMEMBER: When the two mothers came to Solomon to each claim the baby (the brethren in this case) one of them was willing to "divide" the baby in two but the TRUE MOTHER was not. One mother was clearly self-serving and one was clearly self-sacrificing. Ask yourself carefully -- who was willing to divide the baby in this case? Why do you think this story is in the bible?

You must carefully ask this question as painful and as difficult as that might be. Jesus is NOT happy with this present behavior - I can promise you. Do we respond to the manipulations of an angry spirit or do we respond to the clear instruction and example of Jesus Christ? The lessons of scripture are very clear - division is way against the will of GOD in cases like this and there simply is no way to justify it despite how cleverly people try. Those who can't learn to work together in the Church and be in submission "one to another" will NEVER be allowed to be leaders in the Kingdom. One thing I know for sure that the right way is most often the most difficult way.

I fear that few among you have actually heard the "whole story". As closely and as objectively as I could, I have followed the letters and postings. I can objectively say that - in my view - "both sides should carefully review their actions comparing them to the "yard stick" of the fruits of GODS Holy Spirit. I'm guessing that each side may have some regret in this. Read the list again in Galatians - were these spiritual elements apparent in the things you read or in the attitude of those who spoke to you or lobbied for your support? You know this brethren - Jesus Christ is clear that HE does NOT endorse division unless you are being forced to violate HIS laws as in the case of the break-up of the old World Wide Church of God. That did not happen in this case. Though a "well orchestrated" attempt was made to feed brethren "one-sided information" in an attempt to make it appear this was the case. No - this was clearly a "squabble" over who would be in charge - and who would hold the power. However, after a review of the circumstances- in particular with regard to Sabbath observance and the "Chilean incident" - this was nothing more than "the skin of a reason - stuffed with an exaggeration" - a political "wedge" issue and a ploy to lend a false credibility to the actions of those who were fighting the changes the new council was making. The reality and the plain truth is that - in no way - is UCG turning its back on the Sabbath - if they made you think that - or if someone hyperbolically emphasized this as a key element in the decision - someone is obfuscating.

Another "manipulative ploy" was to pejoratively label the new leadership as "liberal" reminiscent of our countries present political rancor. If people tried to make you believe one side was "liberal" and one side was "conservative" - again - people are mischaracterizing the debate on purpose and for "effect". The labeling of one side or the other is done purely to engender hate - nowhere supported in scripture.

The disagreement is NOT about Liberal vs. Conservative - it's about the

"type" of governance in the church. One side favors an Old Testament hierarchical structure and the present council favors a New Testament "congregational" approach. The "congregational" form of governance uses and empowers local people to be leaders and the present ministry felt threatened by that. That is the true crux of the argument - which was largely KEPT from local brethren where a hierarchical Pastor was in charge. That has always been the crux of the debate going back to the time of the original Indianapolis Conference.

It was common for me to hear a break-away member quote something the present UCG leadership is supposed to have said inaccurately. The internet is full of misquotes and quotes out of context. I sincerely hope you have not fallen prey to allowing this misinformation to guide you in your decision - one way or the other. One particular statement was quoted to me so inaccurately as to have a complete opposite meaning than what was originally intended when spoken. Its anger that does this!

The wisdom of scripture speaks directly to the situation: Each side had a "predisposition" to facts that supported their view. I am amazed how people who claim to be "the royal priesthood of Christ" have fallen prey to half-truths, gossip, hyperbolae, and exaggeration. From my conversations with the break-away group I have found only a few know the whole story - yet so many were ready to participate in this division. It continues to baffle me - why people take the clear teaching of scripture against such behavior and so willingly divide friends and family on the word of others who (frankly) were very angry. Pray tell - just what are we learning about how to LEAD in Christ's Kingdom? It's never a good idea to make a decision like this in anger. But that is what has happened in this case.

If I may say so - I personally know a good deal about this subject as you may know -I wrestled for 5 years to make my decision to leave UCG - but when I did so I did so ALONE and without causing division. There was no treachery or meetings with brethren to try to pull a following away with me. Even my family did not know when I finally made the decision to walk away. I announced that I was leaving and I left. It was hard and even some of you persecuted me for doing so. But I stand firm in my conviction that GOD hates division of the brethren and so do I!

To those who felt threatened, felt "their hand was being forced", or felt they had no other choice in this present debate over church leadership - I can tell you clearly there WAS another choice.

I personally can offer no advice but the scripture clearly does in so very many places: But I think that Peter says it best: 1 Peter 2 18 à21 "Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward. For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully. For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? But if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps:"

The newly elected leadership has chosen a course which takes the church in a direction away from the leadership style of the past and seeks to empower local congregations to a much higher degree. This new emphasis has been viewed by some as a "threat" to the culture, viability, and livelihood of the professional ministry in the organization - a direction those men vehemently

oppose. However the history is clear. When their group had the control of the organization (the past 15 years) - no less than 22 congregations had been divided in an attempt to eliminate local councils, local building funds, and advisory groups in favor of a more hierarchical approach to church governance. Hundreds of elders left the organization as a result. This divisive and heavy handedness caused countless independent groups to form outside of the United Church of God and United's ranks were substantially eroded. Ultimately, the General Council of Elders saw the need to change this. Therefore, the GCE legally and in full accordance to their constitution and approved rules elected a new council more sympathetic to a less autocratic governance style. This change has left the former group with a high sense of uncertainty about their professional career in this ministry. Angry with this new direction - they now accuse the present leadership of being heavy handed and have engaged in a carefully orchestrated plan to discredit them and divide the church to preserve and regenerate an organization in the model of the past World Wide Church of God well known for its hierarchical structure. They have even chosen a similar name to the old WWCG. However, history shows us that GOD allowed that organization to fall because of a failure to administer the church according to HIS word.

The United Church of God cradled a hope that church leaders with different ideas could actually USE the principles of scripture and follow the clear instructions of Jesus Christ speaking through Peter as noted above. Had they done so in faith and confidence in the knowledge that Jesus Christ actually IS leading HIS church, certainly, a solution would have been found and division WOULD NOT have occurred. Sadly, that did not happen.

Anger always clouds our vision and when it does we tend to act as though "our wisdom" is more valid than the powerful wisdom of GOD given to us in His very word. It's as though we have forgotten what we've learned and even what we preach - odd! Don't we know - don't we preach - that situations JUST Like this one are allowed to come before us purely and simply as a test. It's the quintessential point of this physical existence. Did we pass this test?

If you see these as strong words - I hope you will hear them in the spirit of Proverbs 27: 5à6 that ("Open rebuke is better than secret love. Faithful are the wounds of a friend. . . ") for that is the way I mean them to all who have GOD's Holy Spirit and endeavor to live according to HIS word.

I love all the brethren in the church and always will - but I am terribly disappointed in those who have caused and facilitated this division - regardless of position.

Ed Szalankiewicz

40 Years now
Your Brother