

United Church of God *an International Association*

Clyde Kilough
Chairman

Roy Holladay
President

Letter from the President April 10, 2003

Dear Brethren,

In just about a week now, we will be observing the Passover, the Night to Be Much Observed and the Days of Unleavened Bread. The spring Holy Day season is a time for introspection and renewal. It is a time that we are commanded to examine ourselves and then take the Passover. As 1 Corinthians 11:28 states, "But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup." On initial thought, perhaps self-examination is "not our favorite" part of our spiritual lives. Actually though, self-examination can be a very positive experience.

As we look back over the past year, I am sure that we will see many areas of growth and progress. Perhaps we established a goal last year of becoming more involved in the local congregation. Maybe we took the initiative to help one or two people who were having difficulties. Then there is the progress that we have made on a certain habit. Or, perhaps we have seen growth in the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). Maybe our prayer life or Bible study program has taken a turn for the better. By reflecting over the past year, we are able to see how much God has been working with us. After all, God is the One who gives spiritual growth and increase.

Of course, there are always areas of our life on which we need to work—and it is right and good that we consider those areas seriously, repent and initiate changes accordingly. However, even here we can maintain a perspective that is forward-looking and proactive. Just because we have not yet overcome every fault is not a reason to become discouraged. We don't disown our own children when their behavior doesn't always measure up to required standards—neither does God disown us. In fact, after several chapters (Romans 5, 6 and 7) of deep, sometimes exacting reflection about sin and the life of a Christian, Paul begins Romans 8 with this encouraging statement: "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit" (verse 1). In other words, if we remain on the path of life, following our Savior, God is willing to help us get out, and stay out, of the ditches we may fall into.

Each one of us has been handpicked by God to be a member of His family. Out of the billions of people on earth, God chose you and me. We are special to Him—we are His sons and daughters. When we see areas in our spiritual lives that need upgrading, it demonstrates God's love for us. It shows that He is still working with us and has not forsaken us. We should become concerned if God *stopped* revealing to us where we need to change. First Corinthians 11:32 states, "But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world." Hebrews 12:5-7 says, "And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: 'My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the LORD loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives.' If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten?"

In the Epistles of Paul class at Ambassador Bible Center, I am now discussing with the students the book of Romans. There are a number of passages and chapters that relate to this festival season and our need to renew, strengthen and deepen our relationship with God. These scriptures remind us of our need for the life and sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and what our response should be to Him.

In Romans 3:23-24 we have a summary-type statement of where we were, and where we are now, spiritually. “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.” All humans, including each one of us, have sinned. Even more than that, other scriptures tell us that we were slaves to sin—that our nature was inclined to sin. At this time of the year, we are reminded that it is only because of God’s grace through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ that we are freed from sin and the death penalty (Romans 6:23). God the Father and Jesus Christ willingly and freely extend mercy and forgiveness upon repentance. So, our situation was indeed desperate, but God intervened. That is sobering to consider—but hopefully it is one way we are motivated to change.

Romans 5:8-11 is another sobering, yet inspiring, passage about God’s love towards us and the power of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.”

It was God who first took the initiative while we were still sinners, still ungodly, still enemies of God. The sacrifice of Jesus Christ puts away our sin and the death penalty. It puts us on the track with God. Yet, that is only half of the salvation process. The other “half” is the life of Jesus Christ and Christ living in us that brings salvation (Galatians 2:20), that produces a son and servant of God with whom God can be well pleased. During this Passover season, we need to examine ourselves to see where we need to repent and seek God’s forgiveness. At the same time, we can see where Christ has been living His life in us, and be fully persuaded that we are in the faith (2 Corinthians 13:5).

Romans 6 emphasizes that being a reconciled child of God means that we are living as Jesus Christ would live. The Days of Unleavened Bread focus our minds on remaining without sin, and living by that living Bread, Jesus Christ.

Romans 8 provides us with a summary of sorts to these chapters. In verses 12-17, Paul gives us more encouragement and inspiration—we are God’s children if we have His Holy Spirit. Many of us are parents. How do we view our children? They are very dear to us. We love them deeply. We want to do anything we can to help them grow and succeed. We crave spending time with them, talking with them, sharing our lives with them. If we do all of this as imperfect human parents, how much more does God’s heart go out to each of us as the Perfect Father? That is *real* hope! He has already given the ultimate sacrifice, His Son, so that we can be in His family.

In the final verses of Romans 8 is one of the most encouraging, positive, inspirational sections of the Bible in discussing our walk with God now, the help we receive from God and our hope of a better, eternal future. Please notice especially verses 18 and 26 through 39. Yes, we have a real spiritual war on our hands. Yes, we have progress to make, sins to repent of and changes to make in our lives. But let us not forget, as Paul reminds us, who is fighting step-for-step with us. Let us not forget how God has already worked with us. Let us not forget the great future that God has prepared for us—which means He is counting on us being there! Our fight is with the enemy, but that enemy cannot separate us from God.

The spring Holy Day season gives us a special time to focus on how to become more like God in our attitudes, our relationships, our words and our actions. It is an excellent time to “take stock” about where we are and where we are going. It is a vital time to review the tremendous deeds God and Jesus Christ have done for us—and continue to do for us.

During this festival season, there are a couple of areas for which we would like to request your prayers. First of all, a number of our ministers will be traveling overseas to—sometimes—dangerous areas of the world to serve and be with our brethren. Melvin Rhodes will be spending the Days of Unleavened Bread in Ghana. Fred Kellers and Todd Carey will be traveling to Nigeria. John Elliott will be going to Kenya. Leon Walker will be flying to Bolivia, Peru and Chile, while Joel Meeker will be in French-speaking Europe. Various other ministers internationally and in the United States will be traveling by car to congregations in their circuits. Travel of any type has its risks, and some of these countries have significant unrest that poses other problems. Your prayers for the safety of these men and our brethren would be greatly appreciated.

We would also like to ask for your prayers for the Holy Day offerings, that God in His mercy would bless the Church and provide for our needs to do the work we have been given. As most of you know, a significant portion of our income comes from the annual Holy Day offerings. Your prayers for God's will and blessing would be greatly appreciated.

And now, a couple of updates from the home office. Clay Thornton arrived in Cincinnati this week to begin to look for housing. As we mentioned in previous reports, Clay will begin his new duties as video producer and editor next week. Clay has a high level of expertise in this area which will greatly enhance our efforts in the media area. Welcome to Clay and his wife, Stephana!

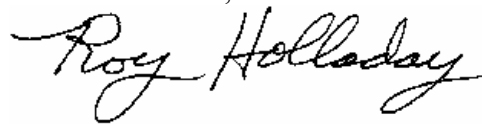
One of the most encouraging "items of news" that we have in the Church is the baptism of a new member of the Body of Christ. For the last several months I have been sending out letters to those individuals who recently have been baptized (as well as a different letter to people who are already baptized, but just recently have joined United), welcoming them to the United Church of God. Usually, I send out one such letter every few days. However, in the past two days we have mailed 15 letters! Some of this is probably due to the usual increase in baptisms prior to the Passover. Nevertheless, it is encouraging to see growth in this way. Let us pray that God continues to add more growth, as He sees fit.

As a final item, we wanted to let everyone know (especially the pastors in planning your speaking schedules) that a videotaped sermon by Jim Franks titled "Godly Modesty, a Vanishing Virtue," will be mailed out to all pastors next week. Enclosed with this videotape is a CD that contains a PowerPoint presentation, sermon notes and various handouts for the congregation. We encourage pastors to personally utilize the PowerPoint presentation and give the presentation live after reviewing the videotape and all the material. Those who would rather not give the sermon presentation themselves should show the entire video and provide the handouts to the brethren.

We want to have this material presented to all congregations sometime between the last day of Unleavened Bread and the Day of Pentecost (although we understand that translations may cause a delay in some non-English countries). I am confident that you will find this sermon to be an excellent and balanced presentation on this important subject. This video is the first one in an occasional series of sermons that we plan to produce for all congregations, addressing some key doctrinal and Christian-living topics.

Norma and I wish all of our brethren a joyous and inspirational spring festival season!

In Christ's service,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Roy Holladay". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Roy Holladay