

United Church of God *an International Association*

Clyde Kilough
Chairman

Roy Holladay
President

Letter From the Chairman December 31, 2003

Greetings everyone,

I hope this letter finds you in good health. The flu outbreak finally seems to be waning a bit here in North America, but not before hitting a lot of people and affecting Sabbath attendance. May those of you in the Southern Hemisphere enjoy your summertime and escape these ailments!

As I was scanning the car radio dial today, the last day of the year, the themes for two talk shows caught my attention and sparked the thoughts for the subject of this letter. One moderator invited listeners to call in and offer their opinions about the question, “Was 2003 a good year for America?” The other host asked, “What do you think will be the big stories in 2004?” At the turn of a new year, people do seem inclined more than usual to analyze the past and predict the future. By what measurements, though, do you think most people conduct such an analysis? What standard would God have us use?

The people of God analyze the past and future probably far more often than the average person does, due to our concern about world affairs in the light of Bible prophecy. We are especially watchful for the important events that will precede the return of Jesus Christ. Most of these prophecies specify occurrences, personalities, nations or time frames. For the most part, where these prophesied events are concerned, we are only spectators to the developing stories being played out on the world stage. We have little, if any, control as to when they will occur and how they will affect us; nevertheless, we are to be keenly observant and to be alerting the world to what is coming.

There is another type of prophecy, however. It is not one that concerns the events that will be manifested in the end times, but the conditions—the state of the human spirit and character. The spiritual condition is certainly the major standard by which God measures the quality of our lives, and it certainly throws a different light on our analysis of the year past and the year ahead.

So, aside from the events that took place last year, let me rephrase the talk shows’ questions: “Was 2003 a good year, *spiritually*, for the world?” And, “What do you think lies ahead, *spiritually*, in 2004?” Let’s answer these questions by looking at a list of spiritual standards that is given to us in the form of a prophecy. This rather ominous prediction of the spiritual state of affairs comes from someone we do not usually associate with prophecy, the apostle Paul. Beginning the book of 2 Timothy chapter 3 he wrote, “But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come.”

The Greek word for perilous means hard to deal with, or hard to bear; the marginal reference in the New King James Version says, “times of stress.” What constitutes these perils—wars, economic problems, natural disasters, globalization or religious movements? No. While all of those things are developing in other arenas of end-time prophecy, Paul didn’t mention a single event. Instead, he listed 19 separate conditions that will be steadily worsening, and all 19 are spiritual in nature, and they pose great threats to all humanity. Here they are in verses 2 through 5. Men will be:

- | | | |
|-------------------------|-------------|---------------------------|
| 1. lovers of themselves | 3. boasters | 5. blasphemers |
| 2. lovers of money | 4. proud | 6. disobedient to parents |

- | | | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| 7. unthankful | 13. brutal | 18. lovers of pleasure |
| 8. unholy | 14. despisers of good | rather than lovers of |
| 9. unloving | 15. traitors | God |
| 10. unforgiving | 16. headstrong | 19. having a form of |
| 11. slanderers | 17. haughty | godliness but denying |
| 12. without self-control | | its power. |

The skeptic might argue that some people have always been this way, that this is the worst side of human nature. But the intent of Paul's writing was to look at the trend. As he wrote a few verses later: "But evil men and imposters will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived" (verse 13). Take this list and give thought to comparing these traits today to where we were a few years ago. Do you see any trends? Are things changing? Was 2003 a better or worse year, according to these spiritual standards, than 1993, or 1983? Do you see the spiritual state of affairs improving or deteriorating in 2004 and beyond?

Equally important to consider are the effects. Ask yourself, "How and why do these 19 spiritual trends present perils to my life? When people act this way, how does it affect society as a whole? Why do these increase 'times of stress' and how is that manifested?" Interestingly, every one of these issues has a serious affect on our relationships—first with God, then with other people. They erode the character of individuals, and eventually their communities and nations. They turn people inward. They directly impact other people and evoke reactions from them (strangely, polar opposite reactions of either emulation or retaliation). Unless deliberately countered, they subtly creep into a society's behavior. They appeal to the baser instincts, and are key reasons why "the love of many will grow cold" (Matthew 24:12).

This is a powerful and important prophecy, one deserving much more meditation, study and prayer. It should lead us not to a new year's resolution, but a spiritual resolution, the same one Paul offered at the end of his list of the 19 perils: "And from such people turn away!" (verse 5).

We cannot control the world events that will occur in the coming year, but those do not pose the greatest threat to us. The greatest peril to us concerns the 2 Timothy prophecy that will continue to unfold in 2004: the rapidly decaying spiritual condition in society around us. Paul, writing about the day of the Lord, said, "You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober" (1 Thessalonians 5:5-6). In other words, we can see the spiritual conditions surrounding us, and we must exercise control over our own.

The last year seems to have flown by, and with so much going on in the world, we can be guaranteed that 2004 will as well. We continually move closer to the Kingdom of God, so let's be caught up in and focused on being about our Father's business. Thank you as always for your faithfulness and support. The prayers and concern of the Council of Elders is with you as well.

In Christ's service,



Clyde Kilough
Chairman, Council of Elders