



United Church of God *an International Association*

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Chairman

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Dear fellow elders and brethren,

We have just observed the annual holiday of Thanksgiving. We all have so much to be thankful for at a time in which the world is in great turmoil. One of the keys to receiving the peace of God that surpasses all understanding is that of thanksgiving (Philippians 4:6-7). Indeed we are thankful for the great bounty of physical things that God has blessed us with. But the greatest blessings that we should be so very thankful for reside in the spiritual domain. The apostle Paul writes: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ” (Ephesians 1:3, King James Version throughout).

Perhaps our greatest spiritual blessing is our calling. In order to enter into the covenant of sacrifice with God and Christ we must hear the word and respond to it (Romans 10:10-17). That is, we must repent, exercise faith in the sacrifice of Christ, be baptized and receive the laying on of hands. Do we remotely grasp, understand and appreciate the significance of our calling? We have been called to: (1) the great battle of the ages; (2) the hope of the ages; (3) the work of God; (4) the Church of God; and (5) the body of Christ, the family and Kingdom of God. Do we remotely grasp, understand and appreciate the significance and importance of our calling?

According to the apostle Peter we were chosen according to the foreknowledge of God, “Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:2). This means that God has personally called you. It is sobering to realize that we have been called according to the foreknowledge of God. Our calling is a holy and sacred calling and we must never take it for granted or take our eyes off the goal of becoming a glorious, radiant spirit being in the family of God. Note the words of James: “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures” (James 1:17-18).

It is because of God’s love and grace that he has called us. Because He loves us, He has called us into the work of God and the body of Christ. God’s great care and concern for us and all of His creation is beyond our comprehension. His thoughts are ever toward us (Psalm 139:17-18). The hairs on our head are numbered. Not even a sparrow falls to the ground without His knowledge. He calls the stars by name. God is acutely and keenly aware of every facet of His creation (Matthew 10:29-30).

You must never get the idea God has gone off somewhere—or fall into the trap of ancient Israel by asking where is the God of judgment (Malachi 2:17)? God is on His throne where He has

always been (Malachi 3:6). Jeremiah writes, “It is of the Lord’s mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is Thy faithfulness” (Lamentations 3:22-23).

We are involved in the hope of the ages. You are the apple of God’s eye (Zechariah 2:8-12). God has called you personally—given you the *pearl of great price* and placed His great truth in sacred trust in your heart and mind. Do you count it an honor to be called now?

God has called you to bear fruit. Every person has been given some gift. Never underestimate the gifts that God has given you—to do so would be to take your calling lightly. God has not called you to just sit on the sidelines and watch the world go by. He expects you to be in the arena fighting the good fight of faith with all your might. He expects us to use whatever He has given you to edify, exhort and comfort others. In fact, the purpose of spiritual gifts is to edify, comfort and exhort the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 14:3). Never discount just your presence at Sabbath services. Through fellowship we draw strength and encouragement from each other.

Some might ask, How can I bear fruit seeing that I have no talents? To say that you have no talents is to deny the graciousness and generosity of God. God gives talents to every person (1 Corinthians 12:4-11). God expects us to use our gifts and talents to bear fruit: “Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; or ministry, let us wait on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching; or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness. Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good. Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another” (Romans 12:6-10).

Usually the first question that I am asked when I go to church anywhere, if it is not readily apparent, is: “Is Mrs. Ward with you?” Her gifts are totally different from mine—but just as important, or more so, than mine.

A touch, a pat on the back, a good word and a smile may make all the difference in a person’s life. Remember God has called us to bear much fruit. The fruit you bear is best measured by how much you can help another person to achieve his or her God-ordained potential. Christ said greater things than He has done, we shall do (John 14:12). That is what Christian leadership is all about. That is, helping another person achieve his or her God-ordained potential. Our God-ordained potential is eternal life in the Kingdom of God.

You must never draw back. To do so is to begin to deny the one who redeemed you and blessed you with spiritual gifts—so you could bear much fruit and fulfill your God-ordained calling. We must not let so great a salvation slip. The apostle Peter admonishes us to make our calling and election sure. He writes: “According as His divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him that hath called us to glory and virtue: whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness

brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth” (2 Peter 1:3-12).

The apostle Paul writes in Romans 8:31: “If God be for us, who can be against us?” God commands us to walk worthily of our calling (Ephesians 4:1-6; 1 Thessalonians 2:10-14). The God and Creator of the universe through Christ has called us to the marriage supper of the Lamb (Matthew 22:1-14). We are now espoused to Christ (2 Corinthians 11:2). The espousal will be consummated at the marriage supper of the Lamb (Revelations 19:6-11). We all look forward to the day when we hear the words: “Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord” (Matthew 25:21).

In Christ’s service,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Donald L. Ward". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Donald L. Ward