

NEWS WATCH FOR the CHURCH OF GOD

News in the world and church — to give warning and help for God's people — by Ron Weinland

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THE DEATH OF OUTRAGE

The Death of Outrage is the title of a new book by William J. Bennett, former U.S. Secretary of Education and well-known editor of *The Book of Virtues*. The title also seems appropriate for this month's *News Watch*.

The following quotation from the jacket of this new book summarizes Dr. Bennett's message: "Explosive and hard-hitting, powerful in its logic, carefully reasoned in its conclusions, 'The Death of Outrage' is directed at a shameful chapter of American history. It is an urgent call for American citizens to repudiate the deep corruption of Bill Clinton, and the corrupting arguments made in his defense."

The purpose of this column is not to promote William Bennett's book, but rather to draw attention to several striking statements from the book that are relevant for the Church today.

The attitude and spirit prevalent in the United States can also be found in the Church. We too are experiencing a shameful chapter in our history. It is indeed urgent for all brethren to acknowledge our scattered and weakening condition, as well as the unrighteousness that has led to our current state.

Sad to say, we find many within the scattered organizations who are coming to the defense of "the church of their choice," justifying and excusing the errors, false teachings, unrighteous behavior, and corruption of some of their leaders. Our condition has deteriorated to the point that many brethren not only justify, but also lend strong support that enables such leaders to strengthen their hold and become more deeply entrenched in their wrong practices. This is not a small thing before God, and He holds both the supported and supporter responsible.

Matters of morality and right judgment are not well received by the American public. Lacking moral strength and a clear understanding of right and wrong, most feel no sense of outrage over the reprehensible conduct of their president.

The spirit of pride and complacency that grips this nation also has a powerful grip on the Church. When we are under its sway we have a hard time seeing or admitting the

problem. Nevertheless, it is a spirit that we must all recognize and repent of. This gets to the heart and core of why the Church is being spewed out and scattered in so many directions. It is a shameful chapter in our history, yet few seem willing to acknowledge the truth of what is happening. As a result, the victims of this spiritual malady are unable to zealously and steadfastly uphold God's righteous ways.

JUDGMENT

"Judgment is a word that is out of favor these days, but it remains a cornerstone of democratic self-government. It is what enables us to hold ourselves, and our leaders, to high standards. It is how we distinguish between right and wrong, noble and base, honor and dishonor. We cannot ignore that responsibility, or foist it on others. It is the price—sometimes the exacting price—of citizenship in a democracy" (Bennett, page 9).

We must not fail to discern the spiritual parallels between what is happening in the nation and the condition of the Church. Exercising *righteous judgment* is not easy, but it is a vital part of our duty before God. We are in training to become kings and priests. One day we shall judge angels!

It is easy to let others, especially ministers or other leaders, make our judgments for us and tell us what is right and wrong. There is a tendency to derive a sense of comfort from the size of an organization and to trust in the credentials of those who preach to us. Yet those are some of the very pitfalls that our experience in the Worldwide Church of God should have taught us to avoid. The credentials of an individual (or a group of leaders) or the size of an organization are no substitute for following the Word of God. The mistake of the past was to place those very things above God's clear instructions.

In too many cases we have been taught "what" to think, not "how" to think. As a result, when individuals do begin to accept their personal responsibility to exercise judgment, they can lose their bearings and go off on unbalanced and doctrinally-errant tangents. This newfound responsibility often begets a false sense of freedom, which in turn

can lead to other deadly traps. Of course, we have always been personally and individually responsible for exercising judgment, but pride and complacency led us to abdicate this vital spiritual obligation.

Judging righteous judgment is an integral part of God's government working in our lives. It is the exercise of righteous judgment—in agreement with God's Word—that enables us to truly distinguish between right and wrong, noble and base, honor and dishonor. Indeed, such judgment within the Church would enable us to hold ourselves and our leaders to high standards, the high standards of a truly converted life, led and empowered by the very Spirit of God.

Such judgment by God's people has been proving almost null and void. It is easier to ignore personal responsibility, choosing to be ignorant of misdeeds or to simply excuse them for the greater good, which is often called "the Work." When this happens, the death of outrage becomes a reality as brethren surrender their will to complacency and oppression. Over time our ability to repent diminishes and God's punishment, as a loving Father, must be even stronger.

Through Isaiah God issues a stern warning: "Therefore thus says the Holy One of Israel: Because you despise this word, and trust in oppression [Hebrew: extortion, oppression, fraud] and perversity [Hebrew: craftiness, cunning, lies], and rely on them", punishment will come (Isa. 30:12, NKJ).

There is a cause for every effect. The fruit of oppression and perversity is continued fragmentation and further scattering. But who will admit that this condition is the result of disobedience and being in disfavor with God? Righteous living produces blessings and direct involvement by a loving Father, with the result being strength and stability.

OUTRAGED BY LIES?

Brethren need to analyze events that have been occurring in some of the larger church organizations over the past few months. *News Watch* has been saying for some time that scattering and continuing troubles will beset the Church, but that brethren will be hearing a message of "peace, peace."

Brethren are not being told the truth! Instead they are being lied to by leaders who seem to put corporate concerns ahead of Godly principles. There have been repeated assurances that leaders are in agreement and working well together to serve the brethren. Planning, growth, peace and unity are described in glowing terms. Yet brethren continue to be dismayed as they learn that peace is an illusion, and that instead of growth, attrition and further scattering are the harsh reality.

Have you noticed over the past several months, especially since the Feast, the messages trumpeted by a number of groups? They say "peace, peace." We are asked to believe that everyone is finding more peace and that the organizations are becoming stronger than ever. That is a lie! Such tactics should kindle righteous indignation! There is a time for outrage over unrighteousness, lying and deception. Yet many hardly flinch as they casually overlook or magnanimously excuse such matters.

Just as William Bennett urges our nation to repudiate corruption, it is also high time for the people of God to *repudiate* spiritual corruption and the deceptive arguments made in its defense. To repudiate means to refuse to accept or support, disown, cast off, avoid all contact.

The truth is, we are not at peace. Brethren continue to be scattered and often abandon the faith in disillusionment and despair.

So what is the truth? Are we going to see peace, prosperity and growth, or will there be further scattering with more downsizing? What have we seen to this point? What has proven to be true thus far? Will God's people admit that we are in a time of great tribulation and lamentation for the Church? When will leaders stop promoting personal and corporate agendas and address the true condition of the Church? Do the overwhelming numbers of people who have given up completely or returned to spiritual Egypt mean nothing to them?

We may be at the juncture where only 10 to 15 percent of the brethren are still holding to the commandments of God and being faithful to the testimony of Jesus Christ. Does the possibility of such a figure reflect peace and prosperity for the Church of God? Now, of all times, brethren should be able to see our poor condition, but many choose to focus on a false prosperity and false hopes. (If you have not already received it, you may wish to

request the sermon tape "Attesting to Revelation 12:17.")

Is the Church witnessing "the death of outrage" on a spiritual plane? Has the obstinacy of pride become so deeply ingrained that complacency now reigns among the people of God?

Because of pride and rebellion against God, more and more brethren are going to be confronted with two choices. One will be to take personal responsibility for their relationship with God, listen to His warnings and repent. The other choice will be to listen to lies and suffer more for it.

To whom do you choose to listen? Do you listen to a loving God who warns you of real danger so you can repent and receive His help and strength in these troubled times? Or do you listen to fables that gloss over the reality of our troubled times so you can live in your own world that appears more trouble-free and prosperous? That is exactly what physical Israel is doing. It is like those who prop up the stock market, choosing to bolster their world with a false sense of security and prosperity. It is not real! It will not last! One day it will come crashing down. Too many in the Church prop up their own artificial world, not wanting to hear what God really says.

News Watch has said it before, but it bears repeating: "Now go, write it before them on a tablet, and note it on a scroll, that it may be for the time to come [mar-gin—Hebrew: 'for the latter day'], forever and ever: that this is a rebellious people, lying children, children who will not hear the law of the LORD; who say to the seers, 'Do not see,' and to the prophets, 'Do not prophesy to us right things; speak to us smooth things, prophesy deceits'" (Isaiah 30:8-10, NKJ). The language in the Living Bible is quite direct and conveys the sense very well: "They tell my prophets, 'Shut up — we don't want any more of your reports!' Or they say, 'Don't tell us the truth; tell us nice things; tell us lies. Forget all this gloom; we've heard more than enough about your "Holy One of Israel" and all he says.' This is the reply of the Holy One of Israel: Because you despise what I tell you and trust instead in frauds [Hebrew: extortion, oppression, fraud] and lies [Hebrew: craftiness, cunning, lies] and won't repent, therefore calamity will come upon you suddenly, as upon a bulging wall that bursts and falls; in one moment it comes crashing down" (Isaiah 30:10-13).

In the Church, as in the nation, people do

not want to hear God's instruction, but choose to listen to lies and live in their own artificial world. It seems easier. Addressing reality means we must address personal responsibility and that means making uncomfortable changes in our lives.

Let's make it perfectly clear! There is only *one* message that is true within the Church. God's message to us today is either one of peace and prosperity or of troubles and woes. What does the Holy One of Israel truly say? Either *News Watch* is carrying a message that is true or one that is false. It cannot be both. Conversely, either some ministers are delivering a message to God's people that is true or one that is false! It cannot be both. As God's people it is *now* time to accept our responsibility to judge these matters. Time is not on our side!

Paul's words could not be truer than what they are for right now! "For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), proving what is acceptable to the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them. [TLB: 'Take no part in the worthless pleasures of evil and darkness, but instead, rebuke and expose them.'] For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret. But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light. Therefore He says: "Awake, you who sleep, arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light." See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is" (Ephesians 5:8-17, NKJ).

"And thou shalt speak my words unto them, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear: for they are most rebellious. But thou, son of man, hear what I say unto thee; Be not thou rebellious like that rebellious house: open thy mouth, and eat that I give thee" (Ezekiel 2:7-8, KJV). Will you hear what God tells you concerning the Church and the time in which we live or will you believe lies that contradict God's clear warnings. We should open our mouths wide and let God feed us His true words.

The warning being quoted here is from Ezekiel. Some understand there is an Ezekiel warning that must go out, but focus entirely on the physical while overlooking the

spiritual. There is also an Ezekiel warning that must go to the Church of God at this very time. We can receive it and help give it or we can reject it altogether by believing and supporting lies. Brethren, please analyze carefully and judge righteously. There is an Ezekiel warning that must go out to spiritual Israel now. When God's time comes, the message will also be given quickly and powerfully to physical Israel and they will receive their warning. God's word is true and He will perform it!

"And when I looked, behold, an hand was sent unto me; and, lo, a roll of a book was therein; and he spread it before me; and it was written within and without: and there was written therein lamentations, and mourning, and woe" (Ezekiel 2:9-10, KJV). Ezekiel's prophecies concerning both physical Israel and the spiritual Israel of God are for the end of this age. These prophecies will first be accomplished upon the Church and afterward upon physical Israel. The message is not one of "peace, peace." Notice the wording in the Living Bible: *"He unrolled it, and I saw that it was full of warnings, and sorrows, and pronouncements of doom."* This message is not popular in Israel and it is not popular in the Church, but it is true and it applies to the Church now!

It is vitally important for brethren to judge what is true, and to embrace and support it. The time has come to repudiate the lying and stop supporting it. Will you enable lies to be perpetuated? Can you discern clearly between what is true and false? What will you embrace and what will you repudiate? We should have learned our lessons long ago in the Worldwide Church of God, but sadly, many have not learned them yet. Meanwhile, the Church continues to scatter and shrink.

IT IS TIME TO JUDGE

William Bennett's words, quoted earlier, are just as applicable to the Church as they are to the nation. He said, *"Judgment is a word that is out of favor these days."* In his new book he shows how people are quick to justify, ignore, or even condone lies within the presidency of the United States. People have become so immoral or amoral that lying simply does not incense them; or they claim we should not judge our leaders so harshly, but should be quick to forgive. Others advocate overlooking the evils for what they perceive to be the greater good of the nation.

It is much the same in the Church. For

some, lying is apparently justifiable if it is deemed to be for the greater good of an organization, for unity, or for the sake of "the Work." Some abdicate all responsibility saying it is not our place to judge our leaders, regardless of their actions. Of course, complacency is so prevalent that many are unconcerned about lies and either are unable to see them or choose not to see them. Some simply give blind support.

For many brethren, the mere suggestion that some ministers perpetuate or preach lies is unthinkable. False ministers? Yes, the Scriptures warn repeatedly about false ministers, especially for the end of this age. Some church leaders would rather believe their troubles and continual attrition are attributable only to Satan. This rationale depicts the devil as being more powerful than God or His ability to preserve and bless His people.

Is it any wonder we continue to be punished for our sins and stubborn pride? God is not unable to strengthen His people! God's ears are not too heavy to hear the prayers of the righteous and lift them up. Our problem is our own unrighteousness, not that Satan is greater than God! How hideous to think that some would support politics, lying, and unrighteous behavior of ministers, and at the same time, diminish and denigrate the great power of our loving Father and God!

"Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save [TLB — 'Listen now! The Lord isn't too weak to save you.']; nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear. For your hands are defiled with blood [A failure to love others is to hate and hate is the spirit of murder. — 1 John 4:20-21 & 3:14-15], and your fingers with iniquity; your lips have spoken lies, your tongue has muttered perversity. No one calls for justice, nor does any plead for truth [NIV — 'no one pleads his case with integrity']. They trust in empty words and speak lies; they conceive evil and bring forth iniquity" (Isaiah 59:1-4, NKJ).

"The way of peace they have not known, and there is no justice in their ways; they have made themselves crooked paths; whoever takes that way shall not know peace" (Isaiah 59:8, NKJ). The Living Bible captures this same verse quite well: *"You don't know what true peace is, nor what it means to be just and good; you continually do wrong and those who follow you won't experience any*

peace, either."

"For our transgressions are multiplied before You, and our sins testify against us; for our transgressions are with us, and as for our iniquities, we know them: in transgressing and lying against the Lord, and departing from our God, speaking oppression and revolt, conceiving and uttering from the heart words of falsehood. Justice is turned back, and righteousness stands afar off; for truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter. So truth fails, and he who departs from evil makes himself a prey [NIV — 'and whoever shuns evil becomes a prey']. Then the Lord saw it, and it displeased Him that there was no justice" (Isaiah 59:12-15, NKJ).

Righteous judgment seems to have escaped God's people. Can we repent and receive the power of God that enables clear and sound judgment — that gives true peace of mind even in troubled times?

Let's consider another relevant quotation from William Bennett's book. *"To the contrary, we live in an era when it has become unfashionable to make judgments on a whole range of very consequential behaviors and attitudes. . . . In the view of many people today, it is imperious to be judgmental. But judgment is not bigotry; and tolerance may just be another term for indifference. If to make judgments of better and worse, good and bad, fit and unfit, sound and unsound, competent and incompetent is to be judgmental, then there is a need to be judgmental and no need to apologize for it. For a free people, the ordeal of judgment cannot be shirked. To try to shirk it is not to be sensitive or tolerant, it is to avoid responsibility. Teachers judge the work of their students, and students the work of their teachers. Parents judge their children's study habits and viewing habits, their friends, teachers, and baby-sitters, their manners and appearance, their deportment and language. . . . People judge fallibly, with uncertainty, on the basis of the facts; but if they will not judge, they can be rightly suspected of being without convictions. And people without convictions cannot be counted on. And a democracy, more than any other form of government, needs a people on whom you can count" (pp. 122-123).*

A growing number of brethren also hold the view it is imperious or arrogant to exercise judgment. The tendency is to look down on others who are willing to stand up and stand firm, seeking to uphold integrity,

INVITATION TO FAST

truth, and strong moral principles within the Church. When some brethren refuse to accept, support or fellowship with others who are tearing down the moral fiber and sound biblical teachings, they are often considered self-righteous, insensitive or intolerant, perhaps even exclusive. Bennett's comment is very apropos for the Church. For a spiritually-free people *"the ordeal of judgment cannot be shirked. To try to shirk it is not to be sensitive or tolerant, it is to avoid responsibility."* Brethren, we need to be alert, because it is very true that *"tolerance may just be another term for indifference."*

How much more should we, begotten children of God, be able to clearly and righteously judge what is true? How much more does God's government need a people who can be counted on?

It is an absolute reality that we will all become known for the convictions we hold. This is a time of refining, sifting, and testing for God's people. Our convictions—or lack thereof—will be made manifest. Lies, double-speak and compromise will be shown for what they are; nothing will remain hidden. What we are, what we believe, how we live, and how we judge will all be revealed. None of us will escape our personal responsibility before God for the judgments we make. We are being compelled to exercise judgment!

We would be wise to take look at the state of our nation and the parallels for us. We are witnessing "the death of outrage" both in this country and in the Church. William Bennett's words on page 133 are sobering when we consider their application for us: *"One temptation, the very modern temptation, is not to care, or at least pretend not to care; to suspend judgment, avert our gaze, minimize what is happening, hope the . . . scandals will soon pass, having wrought minimal damage. But that is something we ought not allow. It is a flight from reality."* He continues by saying his hope for the American people is that *"they will declare, with confidence, that a lie is a lie, an oath is an oath, corruption is corruption. And truth matters."*

What are the chances of that happening in this nation? Brethren, let's wake up and recognize the spirit that is affecting the Church of God. Ezekiel 22:30 says that God is looking for men and women who will stand in the gap before Him. What about you? Are you lending your voice and efforts to support what is true? How much does truth matter to you? NW

In writing this issue of *News Watch*, I have had a heavy heart, and I know that many brethren share those feelings when considering the condition of the Church. It is truly disheartening when you think about the majority of brethren who are no longer in fellowship. Remembering those friends is sobering and painful, and is not lessened as we look at the condition of the rest of the Church. Something would be very wrong if we did not have such feelings, especially upon reading Ezekiel 9:4: *"And the Lord said unto him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof"* (KJV).

We should all be able to sigh and cry for what continues to happen to the Church. In hope there are many who share that same love and concern for the Church, brethren are being asked to accept an invitation to join together in a day of fasting for the scattered body. To allow time for study and preparation, the Sabbath of **January 30, 1999** has been set aside for brethren to humbly come together in fasting before our great God.

This is not a fast to ask corporate efforts to be blessed, but to ask God to forgive our sins which have brought such destruction upon us. Our sins have separated us from the favor and blessing of our Father.

The parable of the 10 virgins should ring in our ears. All 10 were either nodding off or already fast asleep. No one did as they were charged. All had failed to keep watch. They were not ready! As Matthew 24:45 shows, we are to be *faithful* and wise servants. We must be *faithful* to the charge God gave each of us when we were invited to the marriage of the Lamb. We are to be making ourselves ready, but we have slumbered and slept. From time to time we have been jolted awake, but much of the Church is now falling into deeper sleep than ever. Jolts and chastening do not seem to be awakening brethren any longer.

The Church needs deliverance. God has promised there will be a faithful remnant, but has made it clear it will be a people who humble themselves and repent of their sins. Can we recognize and admit our sins and our

guilt?

Please invite others to join in this fast. We need each other more than ever!

The Temple of God needs cleansing! We must focus on getting our lives right with God. Let's beseech Him in repentance and humility and ask Him to reveal His will to us more clearly. Our sins, individual and collective, are hindering clear vision.

Consider the spiritual implication for the Church when reading Nehemiah's concern over physical Jerusalem. How much more should these words ring true for us?

"And they said to me, 'The survivors who are left from the captivity in the province are there in great distress and reproach. The wall of Jerusalem is also broken down, and its gates are burned with fire.' So it was, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned for many days; I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven. And I said: 'I pray, LORD God of heaven, O great and awesome God, You who keep Your covenant and mercy with those who love You and observe Your commandments, please let Your ear be attentive and Your eyes open, that You may hear the prayer of Your servant which I pray before You now, day and night, for the children of Israel Your servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel which we have sinned against You. Both my father's house and I have sinned. We have acted very corruptly against You, and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, nor the ordinances which You commanded Your servant Moses. Remember, I pray, the word that You commanded Your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations, but if you return to Me, and keep My commandments and do them, though some of you were cast out to the farthest part of the heavens, yet I will gather them from there, and bring them to the place which I have chosen as a dwelling for My name'" (Nehemiah 1:3-9, NKJ). NW

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