

***Just Judgment Important for Local Congregations (9-16-00)***  
***by Darwin Lee (Bismarck, North Dakota)***

**LETTER (Darwin Lee):**

September 16, 2000

Members, **United Church of God-IA:**

Dear Church of God Brethren,

The purpose of this letter to you dear brethren is for a conclusion of this matter as of the date of this writing.

**RESPONSE (Norman Edwards):**

This letter was included with about **100 other pages of correspondence** between Darwin and Laura Lee and various ministers within the **United Church of God, an International Association**. In briefest summary, the **UCG-IA** became involved in their **divorce and remarriage (D&R) case**, and the Lees felt that they were treated unjustly and were not dealt with honestly in their efforts to resolve the difficulties. The **UCG-IA** felt the Lees were uncooperative and rebellious toward the ministry.

Judging just judgment is a very important issue in the scriptures (Deut. 16:18, John 7:24, Acts 17:31). So often, people 'do not like confrontation' and the popular idea is to leave the issue of judging to 'the government' or 'the church authorities'. Those who hope to reign with Christ should be learning to judge righteously, now.

The Lees believe that they have exhausted the possible remedies within the **UCG-IA**, so they are attempting to continue the Matthew 18 process and take the issue to the Church. The rest of the **documentation** for this case is available from Darwin & Laura Lee, PO Box 2333, Bismarck, ND 58502. **Paul Luecke**, the primary **UCG-IA** minister involved, may be reached at PO Box 7453, Bismarck, ND 58507. The **UCG-IA** headquarters address is PO Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254.

**LETTER (Darwin Lee):**

Laura and I also appeal to all of you who read this letter and the material sent to you--see 1 Corinthians 6:1-8. Is there a wise and just man or woman as well in our midst out there? '...no not one that is able to judge...'? (1 Cor. 6:5). Most of you have been in God's Church for many years. Are you not able to judge righteous judgment? If Laura and I committed a sin by getting married without the ministry's permission, then hang us on the gallows. If the ministry has the right to do what they did with us (suspend them from services) because we asked brother **Steve Nutzman (UCG-IA minister)** to set up marriage counseling with us because, as he put it, 'We already made up our minds', then we will hand you the stones that you may stone us. Also, as a reminder, the **letter** sent to Laura by brother **Richard Pinelli** (head of **UCG-IA** ministry) regarding her **D&R decision** clearly says that marriage counseling was recommended. Yet, we asked and brother **Steve Nutzman** refused.

**RESPONSE (Norman Edwards):**

In general, I feel that the Lees have done a better job at sticking to the facts and documenting the facts than the **UCG-IA**. However, the language about 'hang us on the gallows' and 'stone us' is a mistake. Judgment should be about facts and intent, not about emotion stirred up later. Neither the **UCG-IA**, nor the New Testament, nor our present civil government executes people for adultery or other marital problems. Anyone who would attempt to kill you for such a reason (even if you handed them the stones), would find themselves guilty of a crime under our country's laws.

However, I believe that you are right about the basic issue. If the **UCG-IA** ministry felt that your sins were so bad that they had to suspend you from services, then they should publicly state why, just like Paul did when he told the Corinthian church to put the man out who had his father's wife in 1 Cor. 5. The **UCG-IA** letters continually stressed the need for **confidentiality in D&R cases** and how they did not want the Lees to have witnesses or tape recordings of conversations with their ministry. The **UCG-IA** approach seemed to be a continuation of the **WCG's** method: we are the ministers of God, if you oppose our decision, you are opposing the Church of God and ultimately God Himself.

They forget that the same logic was used for years by tyrants: we are the authorities established by God, if you oppose us; you oppose God. This thinking led to secret court sessions and trials where the authorities could simply threaten the person on trial with death or some other punishment in order to extract a confession, then go away from the trial saying, 'see, we are in agreement, the person confessed to their crimes.' And nearly everybody who heard the news believed it. How can the victim prove that he was coerced into signing the confession? The USA and many other modern nations have enacted many laws to make trials public, to guarantee that a person does not have to testify against themselves, etc. (We are gradually losing many of these blessings, but that is a separate issue.) I am not

saying that the **UCG-IA** is behaving as an evil tyrant, I think they have the good of their church and the people in mind. However, their ministry is probably not used to thinking cases through and attempting to treat everyone similarly. They certainly don't feel comfortable with laying out all the facts so that others could make a judgment.

**LETTER (Darwin Lee):**

If we sinned because we dated before Laura's **D&R decision** was final, then judge us so having sinned, but the same judgment you use on us be sure you use on (Couple X, names removed) who also dated and got married without even going through a D&R process. Yet brother **Steve Nutzman** and Brother **Gary Petty** together conspired to marry them and went ahead and did just that in spite of what they preach to us that everyone has to go through the D&R process. Then brother **Paul Luecke** in his **September 13, 2000 letter** to us said no less than four ministers were in agreement on this matter (suspension) with us and says we were cynical, insulting, had angry accusations towards the Bismarck brethren, issued ultimatums, threatened and had disdain for the local pastor, other ministers and **UCG** administration. If what we have presented to you in all this **material** proves these things, then Judge it so.

**RESPONSE (Norman Edwards):**

I think there were places where your letters were cynical, insulting and showed disdain for the **UCG** administration. In some cases, I think they deserved it. It is very hard to uphold good character when in an important disagreement, but we can learn to do it--Christ did it and He should be in us. On the other hand, I think most of the substance of your disagreement was poorly addressed by the **UCG-IA**.

**LETTER (Darwin Lee):**

We were called adulterers. We are not just making an angry accusation. It was something that took place and a lie that was started by none other than brother **Paul Luecke** who, in our 5 1/2 hour meeting with him and brother **Gordon Gueller** on March 6, 2000, said that (Woman's name removed) said that in confidence to someone not in **UCG-IA**. That is all he could say about that lie and rumor that he and he alone could have started and the defamation of our character and he thinks absolutely nothing of it. What a travesty of justice and in his own words 'at least none other than four ministers are in full agreement'. All of the other things that took place mentioned in this material are not angry accusations either, they are things that took place and we went to the **home office** asking that this conduct be put to an end. If the ministry feels that was a demand from us, then so be it. The very spirit that God gave us demands us to love one another 'as I have loved you' (John 13:34; 15:17). Taking care of that problem would have been love in action. 'My little Children, let us not love in word neither in tongue; but in deed and truth' (1 Jn. 3:18). If we have disdain for the ministry, then we truly are guilty because that conduct and other non-Christian conduct by ministry throughout this ordeal is disgusting to us by those who stand up and claim they are ministers of Jesus Christ. Is this truly what Jesus Christ ministers? You judge.

**RESPONSE (Norman Edwards):**

Big church organizations frequently take the approach that they need to 'support their ministry'--which all too often means that if a minister makes a mistake, the headquarters will claim it was not a mistake or even say it did not happen. This is contrary to 1 Timothy 5:20: 'Those (elders) who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all (everyone), that the rest (of the elders) also may fear.'

Church organizations also tend to 'support their leaders'. The **UCG-IA's** claim that all four of their ministers agreed would be more meaningful if ministers regularly gave independent decisions. But the mood of most hierarchical churches is that whatever the highest-ranking minister says is right and the others ought to go along with him. I simply cannot recall ever seeing a disfellowshipment or disciplinary letter of some nature from a CoG group that acknowledged that some minister(s) disagreed with the action being taken. Yet this concept has worked for hundreds of years in USA appellate courts where a "dissenting opinion" will be written by a judge who disagreed with the majority.

**LETTER (Darwin Lee):**

As far as brother **Paul Luecke** claiming we issued ultimatums and threats, again, you judge. We brought the things mentioned in this material to church administration's attention in the name of decency to do something to straighten out the lie that the Bismarck Brethren were told and other issues, yet all we got from **UCG** church administration was agreement that what brother **Paul Luecke** was doing was O.K. with them and had their backing. They are all in agreement. Read it for yourself again. See the **letter** by brother **Paul Luecke** dated September 13, 2000, paragraph 2, line 3. One thing needs to be corrected here. Paul's next words: '...your response to our

communications to you...". The correction here is that we communicated to the ministry what was going on here in Bismarck and they refused to do anything about it. Now they turn around and try to claim they can't teach us anything any more and that we're bad-mouthing the ministry. They created this problem and they refused to fix it and turn and twist the whole mess to make it look as if we were creating division. We ask you at this time, "what was the division?" Getting married? **They said Laura was free to remarry.** Not getting marriage counseling? We asked them to set it up and then we were refused by them because 'we decided we were going to get married.' Dating before Laura's **D&R process** was final? (Couple X) was free to date and get married without ever having to go through a D&R process. We did not appreciate being called adulterers and being told that our conduct made the brethren do it (TREAT US BADLY), so we are responsible. And brother **Paul Luecke** said we were causing division. Is this the real **'twilight zone'**? Now I suppose that is being cynical.

**RESPONSE (Norman Edwards):**

Yes, I think you are being cynical. Your case would be better presented if you concentrated on clearly stating the facts, and stayed away from name calling (i.e. **'twilight zone'**). Your organized set of letters (you could add a 'table of contents') is what states your case.

**LETTER (Darwin Lee):**

They never came to us about anything since we got married on April 10, 1999. Neither did brother **Paul Luecke** come and talk to Laura and myself about anything, let alone comply with the recently adopted **Suspension and Disfellowshipping Policy** of the **UCG-IA** dated August 30, 1999, before **Paul** suspended us. And he says we have disdain for the ministry! Any clues as to why that might be? Brother **Paul Luecke** never once at any time had any meetings with Laura and myself about any problems he had with us before he suspended us. Yet the twelve council of elders clearly gave him a directive not to suspend someone without two prior meetings with those he has a problem with. If we have disdain for the ministry, it's for a cause (**MISPRINT IN SERVANTS' NEWS AND THROWS OFF MEANING--IT SHOULD READ 'FOR CAUSE'--IT WAS MEANT AS A PLAY ON WORDS, WE INTENDED TO USE THE SAME TERM ON MINISTRY WHICH THEY CONTINUALLY USED ON US.**) If they want us to respect them, then maybe, just maybe they should have respectable conduct while claiming to be ministers of Jesus Christ.

**RESPONSE (Norman Edwards):**

I cannot help but think, again, about the efforts of those who founded our country to insist that if a person were accused of a crime, that the charges had to be specific and made known to him. When I first studied this in school, I remember thinking, how silly, leaders wouldn't accuse someone unless they had a good reason--and of course they would tell the person. Not so. If someone is making life difficult for a leader, but has violated no laws, leaders often have a tendency to punish the person. If there are no specific charges, or if it is a vague charge like 'causing division', then it is difficult to defend oneself. Church leaders may say, 'Your actions are causing members to think about leaving the Church, but we cannot tell you who the members are because that would be betraying ministerial confidence.' Again, how can one refute such a charge when they don't know whom they have offended? This is why all parties and witnesses to a dispute must be made known to all -- our nations' forefathers understood that.

**LETTER (Darwin Lee):**

So in closing, just one more thought. You are all being trained by Jesus Christ in and by God's word to be future judges as well as now. God and Jesus Christ will be watching how you judge this one and whether you will be capable to judge in His Kingdom. Also, for the record, we bear no ill will towards brother **Paul Luecke**, his wife, the Bismarck brethren or any ministers or church administration personnel of the **UCG-IA**. What was done by them was wrong. Why can't those who claim to be servants of Jesus Christ (ministry and member alike) admit error, and that to their own brethren? Is pride so deep within us that we just won't do it even if it puts our salvation at stake?

The ministry wants to be respected, trusted, honored, and held in high esteem by those he serves. Well, let me say this. I have a dog of five years. I'm its master. It respects me, trusts me implicitly. Why? Because I treat it with respect, love and care for her; indeed as Jesus who is our master treats us with respect, great love, and care, so in turn we trust and respect Him as our true Master. If the ministry wants and feels they deserve that position of master, then they need to fill Jesus Christ's shoes and live and walk as He walked and live the life they profess to teach others. Jesus the Christ said judgment is one of the main points of what He wants from His leaders to display and practice. He also said to judge righteous judgment (John 7:24). So now it's in your hands. Will you judge righteous judgment?

Sincerely,  
Your brother and sister in Christ's Service

Darwin Lee and Laura Lee  
PO Box 2333, Bismarck, ND 58302  
(701) 258-7172

### **RESPONSE (Norman Edwards):**

I have written a number of letters and send many articles to various Church of God organizations about their methods of governance and/or specific cases, and rarely ever received a response. The root of the problem has been around for nearly 2000 years: denominationalism. Church groups seem to believe that their doctrinal statement and/or their organization are somehow just a little bit better than all groups and therefore as long as they are internally satisfied with whatever they have written or done, that it matters little what the rest of the world thinks about them. I could spend a lot of time reading everything available and talking to people about this case, but I do not see any value if the UCG-IA is not ready to listen. I wrote them a letter asking if they were interested in the brethren's opinions of your case, but have not received a response in two weeks.

The reason why you have had all of this difficulty in the first place is twofold:

1) The UCG-IA has replaced the instructions of Matthew 18:15-17 and related scriptures with their own policies. These policies allow a few ministers to decide to remove a person from their local congregation, rather than letting the brethren in that local congregation decide. The only way to solve this problem is for either the leaders or the brethren to insist that it be done.

2) The Bible does not give authority to ministers, priests, rabbis or anyone to bind marriages. Marriages in the Bible were handled by agreement of the parties or the parents of the parties. There is no Bible example of any kind of spiritual leader counseling someone for marriage or performing a wedding. Leaders should teach what the Bible says, and, when brethren come together, they may need to remove someone from the congregation who has an obviously incorrect marriage (a man was married to his father's wife in 1 Cor. 5:4-5).

No matter how the brethren judge, it will probably not make much difference in your relationships with the **UCG-IA**. It may be hard to leave a congregation where you have many friends, but that is often the only solution when a specific case of non-biblical decision-making separates brethren. After everyone has learned what they can from this case, you will need to leave it rest until the eternal Judgment. In the meantime, you will need to look at the talents that God has given you, and see how you can serve other brethren until then.--**Norman Edwards**

### **COMMENTS FROM THE EDITOR:**

The above LETTER, was written by Darwin Lee, and is part of a **111 page document** titled: **WHY WERE WE DISFELLOWSHIPED BY THE UNITED CHURCH OF GOD AN INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION**, by Darwin & Laura Lee, and is available free of charge to anyone who asks for it. **Norman Edwards** of **Servants' News**, PO Box 107, Perry Michigan, 48872-0107 received this **document**, and chose the above letter to respond to. **Norman Edwards** did edit the above letter slightly, and in one area it did change our meaning, so I inserted a note in that spot, in one other area, it made a point unclear, but over all he did a very good job with the way in which he presented the entire letter. The above letter with RESPONSE written by **Norman Edwards** appeared in **Servants' News, Vol. 6, No. 5, September/October 2000**, starting on page 26. As I said, we felt Norman Edwards presented this fairly, and publicly pointed out why we were unable to get any place with the **UCG-IA**. He did state that we should not use name calling and then listed **'twilight zone'**. Actually this term wasn't used for nor intended to call anyone a name. Most people maybe wouldn't remember this any longer, but the **'Twilight Zone'**, was actually a science fiction show which was on TV back in the 50's or 60's. This show was about the weird and unreal, unimaginable, and the music that went with the show was different (weird). Some of the things which we saw and heard while dealing with the ministry in the **UCG-IA**, was like the **'Twilight Zone'**, weird, unreal, and unimaginable, and many the times we sat discussing how they ever came to the conclusions they came to if they were truly using their Bibles. After a time we understood clearly that none of this was going anywhere, and that is when we took it to the Church as stated in Matthew 18:15-17. We thought maybe our brothers and sisters would go to ministry on our behalf, however, to date, we only know personally of 1 person who has written to the home office of the **UCG-IA** on our behalf, and that is **Norman Edwards**. We thank you for the time and energy you used in trying to help your brother and sister.

When Darwin was speaking of 'hang us on the gallows', and handing people the 'stones', Darwin meant this to be a metaphor, and not a reality. It was a rewrite on '...he that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her...' (John 8:1-12) and no one could honestly throw the first stone based upon that statement.

As far as our character goes, neither Darwin or I have reached perfection, nor has anyone else at this time. We all strive to overcome, and we as others try to do the right things on a daily basis. It is really, really hard however to straighten any problem out with anyone, when you are not allowed to speak to the other person or persons. Try it

sometime. So yes at times cynical may have come into play, and usually happened at the same time we heard the music playing in our minds from the **'Twilight Zone'**. It is my opinion that in these situations, being cut off from other church brethren, can create an unbalance at least at first in those who are cut off, because in most cases you then have no one to discuss what's going on right now. We feel for anyone who is thrown out alone, at least we had each other to get the balance back.

Norman Edwards really did a good job in showing why we could not get any place with the **UCG-IA** ministry, and I believe it should be shocking enough to make those who are sleeping at least sit up and take notice. There is nothing in the Bible any place that gives ministry or anyone else the authority to change God's doctrines, such as Matthew 18:15-17. God put that in the Bible for a reason. It is clearly in there so that we as God's people know how to straighten problems out among ourselves, and if we actually were allowed to use this instruction given by God, there wouldn't be all of this splintering within the Church of God. I know of several cases where the **UCG-IA** ministry told the people they were suspending or disfellowshipping that Matthew 18:15-17 does not apply in your situation. Matthew 18:15-17 applies in every situation where there is a problem between brothers and sisters.

If there is one major lesson to be learned here, it should be that just because a minister says it, doesn't always make it true. I believe we have all been conditioned to think that ministers teach the things of God, and some do, but many do not. We are not to follow men blindly, for if we do, our fate will be the same as the one we followed. We are to search the scriptures to see if a matter is true, All this shunning and avoiding going on among brethren is not of God. God wants us to show love towards each other, but some how, some ministers have led brethren to believe that disfellowshipping people and banishing them from their midst is an act of loving kindness. How they conclude this is beyond me. We have **Bible Studies** here, and one gentleman said that if I would let him know that So and So wouldn't be there he would come. I said forget it, that isn't going to happen. He wanted to come, however, he couldn't because the other person was disfellowshipped from his group. This just isn't love in action and deed, and as long as the brethren in the Church of God sit by and let ministry teach doctrines of men, rather than doctrines of God, this splintering and in fighting among God's children will continue. Laura Lee

PS--The music from the **"Twilight Zone"** television show is playing in the background on this web page.