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Interview with Garner Ted Armstrong – Program 1

By: The John Ankerberg Show

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By: Garner Ted Armstrong; ©1983

Did Jesus cease to be God during his earthly lifetime? Did he have to live a sinless life entirely in his own power? Who is Jesus Christ for the Church of God International?

Introduction

Tonight on the John Ankerberg Show we will be interviewing Garner Ted Armstrong, son of Herbert W. Armstrong, the founder of the Worldwide Church of God. Garner Ted is best known as the popular radio and television speaker of the Worldwide Church of God's "The World Tomorrow" broadcast. Before his break with his father, Garner Ted was President of Ambassador College in Pasadena, California; Executive Vice President of The Worldwide Church of God, and Editorin-Chief of *The Plain Truth* magazine which reached a circulation in 1982 of 5 million. In 1978 Garner Ted broke with his father and founded a new organization, the Church of God International in Tyler, Texas. He is now rebuilding his outreach. Tonight we will examine the teachings of Garner Ted Armstrong in light of the Bible. We will ask him if he still believes God is a family; does he still hold that every believer is a potential God; does he still believe that the Holy Spirit is not a person but a divine force and that the new birth occurs after believers have died and are recreated for eternal life. Join us for this discussion.

John Ankerberg: We are glad you joined in tonight and we have as our guest Garner Ted Armstrong, and it is a privilege for us to have him here. Garner Ted, we want to get right down to what we are talking about. We said that we wanted to have a program on "What is the Gospel?" People all across the country listen to you and you are telling them things from the Bible. We want to find out in kind of a quick short capsule form tonight some of the beliefs that you are teaching from the Bible. Tell us, who do you think Jesus actually is?

Garner Ted Armstrong: That is difficult because it is such a vast subject. Jesus Christ of Nazareth – and I hasten to say that none of the disciples who were with Him for 32 years ever called him in the familiar the way we tend to do – you cannot find in Matthew, Mark, Luke or John one of them who ever referred to Him as Jesus. They all referred to Him as the Lord, or Raboni, or Master, or the Lord Jesus Christ, was born of the virgin Mary by a divine miracle. I believe He was the original Creator who said, "Let there be light." [Gen. 1:3

(https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen.%201.3)] And I think there is ample proof of that in John the first chapter and also in Hebrews 1 as well as other verses.

Ankerberg: Okay, so if we could kind of divide it up here.

Armstrong: You want to capsulize it a little bit?

Ankerberg: Yes, before He came to this earth you would say He was the Creator?

Armstrong: The Creator. Right. I believe that Jesus Christ of Nazareth was the Creator, or the Logos, or the spokesman – executive member if you will – of the Godhead or the divine family who came to this earth by one of the greatest miracles that our minds could ever even try to fathom. He was born of a virgin, became a human being, lived in the flesh for 33 years approximately, and proved that He could overcome Satan the devil and his environment and his human nature which he had, and was brutally murdered by an illegal kangaroo court. He then spent three days and three nights – I believe that implicitly – in a tomb and was just as dead as anyone else is dead, and was resurrected by the Father after those 72 hours to ascend to the Father where He has remained ever since, not only as the soon coming world ruling king who is going to rule all nations with a rod of iron, but as a day-to-day intercessor and high priest for each individual. And we recognize, in my religion, no other priest.

Ankerberg: Okay, let me ask you this, when you say He became a man, in reading your book it seems to me that you were saying He ceased being God while He was man where most of the Christians in the churches would hold that He (God) took on human flesh and that while He was here He gave up or He hid the divine prerogatives that

He had, not all of them though, and He remained God while He was human at the same time. He was both God and man in one person.

Ankerberg: Christians reading their Bible find in Philippians 2:6 (https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil%202.6) the words, "Who being in the form of God..." applied to Jesus. The words "the form of God" *morphe*, means Jesus had the outward manifestation of the genuine article, namely God, all the way down to the core. It indicates that Jesus Christ was genuinely God all the way through. The present participle *huparchon* for the word "being" comes from the word exist. It indicates that Jesus remains and does not cease existing as God. It states that He constantly is, always has been, and will be in the future the complete actual nature or essence of God. That is, Christ is God himself. Christ never did cease to be God. We find that from the words "He was equal with God." The *isa*, equal, indicates something that is of the same substance and structure. Jesus was equal – was God.

The words, "But made himself of no reputation" can also mean He emptied Himself. The word "emptied" can mean "to divest oneself of one's prerogatives." Jesus divested Himself of the use of the prerogatives of deity. Jesus voluntarily chose to limit Himself in the use of the powers He possessed as God. When the Bible says, "And was made in the likeness of men" the word likeness is the word *homoiomati*, from which we get our word homogenize. It indicates that true God, Jesus, was inseparably united with the flesh of man and was fully God and fully man. That's why we say that the two whole, perfect and distinct natures, the Godhood and the manhood, were inseparably joined together in one person. So Philippians 2:6 (https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil%202.6) shows us that Jesus retained all the attributes of full God and full man.

Ankerberg: Now is that what you are saying?

Armstrong: I believe that is quite technical. The way I would state it is that He was almighty God **changed into** human flesh and unless He could have fallen, unless He could have sinned, unless He was not superman, unless this life was far more difficult for Him than the world champion weight lifter tossing off a 100 pound weight, then we have no Savior. And I believe that He was God in the flesh; but while He was in the flesh He was in the flesh at great supreme risk and that risk was the risk of eternity. And He succeeded. It says, "When He had by himself cleansed our sins He sat down at the majesty on high." [Heb. 1:3 (https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb.%201.3)] Few people understand what He really did **by himself**. I pointed that out as the absolute shock when He was on the cross and He said what He did, "*Eli, Eli, Iama sabachthan?*" or "My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" And I take that to mean that He didn't expect it, and that He was shocked and surprised when He felt the strength from the Father as if it were ebbing or flowing away from Him and saw God walk through the universe.

Ankerberg: What I am getting to is what Paul would say, because what I told you before the program, and I want the folks to know this, that we want the evidence. When we disagree, we don't disagree personally we just are disagreeing on the evidence that we have come to realize.

Armstrong: Of course, sure.

Ankerberg: I would like you to comment on what Paul is saying in Colossians 2 about this matter when he says, "For in Christ all the fullness of the deity lives in bodily form." [Col. 2:9 (https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col.%202.9)] This is why I think most Christians are saying that while He was man He was still God. He didn't cease being God during that time.

Ankerberg: Christians reading their Bible find from John 1:1 (https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John%201.1) the fullness of the Godhead was in Christ before the incarnation. Why? The Bible says, "The Word was with God and the Word was God." Matthew says, "He is **the** God (*ho theos*). John 1:14 (https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John%201.14) tells us that, "The Word then became flesh and dwelt among us." What was His makeup? Colossians 2:9 (https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col%202.9) we find the answer. Paul says, "For in Christ all the fullness of the deity lives in bodily form." The word fullness is the word *pleroma*, it denotes that of which a thing is full. Jesus is in essence God and the completeness of His being. The Bible says, "The word godhead, all the fullness of deity – or all the fullness of the godhead – lives in bodily form." Godhead or deity comes from the Greek word *theotetos,* which comes from the word *theos*, "deity." It's the state of being God. It's a very technical, precise term. It is not a quality of divinity. It is in essence God. Here Paul is saying the "fullness of the Godhead dwells from everlasting to everlasting **in Christ**." The indwelling essence and glory of God is concentrated in Christ and this fullness of the indwelling essence of God is embodied, given concrete expression, fully realized in Jesus.

Ankerberg: Would you comment on what Paul is saying there?

Armstrong: Well, you can't kill God. I think we are saying the same thing and I believe 100% the Scripture you read, but I also believe other Scriptures which flesh that out and which give it weight and substance, including the forth

and fifth chapters of Hebrews where He took not on himself the seed of angels, but the seed of Abraham. And John the first chapter, that He "became flesh and dwelt among us and whom our hands have handled. He was subject to perspiration and sneezing and coughing and laughing and the normal bodily processes. He could be injured, He could bleed when He was cut. You can't kill God, but they did kill Christ.

Audience: In many references in the New Testament Jesus takes on... He is indeed God in the flesh, and He has all the benefits, He uses all the facilities of God, He receives deity, He forgives sin, He brings those back to life from the dead and all of these give an indication that He indeed is God in the flesh, in the very flesh while He is walking on this earth.

Ankerberg: Okay, what is the question?

Audience: The question is, I don't believe that Mr. Armstrong believes as we do accordingly concerning this.

Armstrong: Well, would you explain to me, please, how did God die?

Ankerberg: He didn't.

Audience: He did not die.

Ankerberg: The human part of Jesus died.

Armstrong: But there was something there that wasn't dead?

Ankerberg: Sure, God didn't die. That's why I can't figure out when you say Jesus was actually a man and that He actually died.

Armstrong: Why does He tell me in His own first person quotation in the red lettered Bible in the first chapter of the book of Revelation, "I am the Alpha and Omega, I am He that liveth and was dead"? [Rev. 1:8 (https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev.%201.8), 18 (https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev%201.18)]

Ankerberg: I hope so.

Armstrong: Why does He tell me that?

Ankerberg: I hope so, because He had both a human part and He also had ...

Armstrong: He said, "I was dead."

Audience: He died in the flesh.

Armstrong: He died!

Audience: Not as God.

Ankerberg: You mean that God couldn't take on...

Armstrong: If He didn't die, you have no Savior. He either died for you or he didn't.

Audience: Okay, Mr. Armstrong. I am not disagreeing with that at all. He indeed did die for us and He has to in order that we might obtain salvation.

Armstrong: He did, He doesn't have to, I know. But he did.

Audience: Yes, I know He did and only once at that. But He had to from the flesh standpoint in that He was the second Adam.

Ankerberg: Maybe you are not familiar with the words "the second Adam" or the "last Adam." This has reference to the character of Jesus Christ. In the Ambassador College correspondence course, lesson 9, you will find these words, "Jesus Christ became perfect through the trials and tests of human experience. He overcame the temptations of the devil, His flesh, and the world around Him. In spite of opposition and temptation He kept God's commandments perfectly. In so doing He developed the perfection of spiritual character which enabled Him to become our Savior and Elder Brother." Garner Ted's father in an article entitled "Millions do not Know What Christ Really Was" stated: "Christ, one of the beings in the Godhead had now been changed into flesh; had become human having human nature with all of its desires weaknesses and lusts and subject to death just like any other human. Yes, Jesus had sinful flesh."

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Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:45 (https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1%20Cor%2015.45) teaches something contrary to that. He uses the phrase "the last Adam" and by using it teaches that Jesus Christ had a perfect human nature and character and was never under obligation to achieve it or to be perfected, finished as a perfect character. He **was** perfect as the "last Adam."

Audience: He has perfect nature.

Armstrong: Well, I understand that analogy, too.

Audience: He was sinless.

Armstrong: I know where you are going, but it's not going anywhere where I am concerned because I do know that He was very God in the flesh, but I also know that He was human, as human as you are human and as human as I am human. And He overcame sin in the human flesh having to fight His own human nature, He was tempted in every point the way we are.

Audience: Exactly.

Armstrong: He was not superman, He was man. He was all man and a yard wide, but He wasn't superman.

Ankerberg: I appreciate it. I would like to say that if you could go that far, why don't you say that God was actually there with a real man in one person? We can't explain that anymore than we can light which has mass and non-mass.

Armstrong: Well, I think the Bible explains that very, very clearly. I think that God the Father was in heaven and Christ the Son was on this earth risking eternity on our behalf.

Ankerberg: Would you see John 1:1 (https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John%201.1) then being, "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was with God" and then a few verses later it says, "The Word became flesh..." that at that point you would hook that up with Philippians 2 and that....

Armstrong: That He emptied Himself and became of no importance.

Ankerberg: And you are saying that He actually ceased to be God?

Armstrong: No. I can't say that. I think that might be blasphemy on my part. He was very God in the human flesh.

Ankerberg: I may be wrong, but see what you think. I seem to hear Garner Ted saying that God the Son, who is an omnipresent spirit, became converted (changed) into solid human flesh so that there was no more omnipresent spirit, just the man Jesus. And this man Jesus remembered that He had been God. He was God in the sense that He had a memory and personality that went back to His pre-existent state. But His attributes were not there. Garner Ted calls this one the Son of God. But Colossians 2 says the omnipresent Spirit did not cease to exist but had inseparably united Himself with a man. In Garner Ted's book *The Real Jesus* chapter 20, page 257, he states something along this line. He says, "Now Jesus was back in that other dimension again. The spirit world of spiritual essence. Jesus had once again become a spirit being with all the divine powers of the universe at His disposal." My problem with this is this: if God is immutable, that is He is an unchanging, ever present, omnipresent spirit, He does not cease being that. He can add to himself a man without ceasing to exist as the omnipresent God. Please listen carefully now and see what you think.

Armstrong: He was very God in the human flesh, but He was a human being, a divine human being.

Ankerberg: Was He God because He was granted that by the Father or was He because He was inherent in Himself always God?

Armstrong: That is a mystery I am not sure we understand...

Ankerberg: Why John 1:1 (https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John%201.1)...

Armstrong: ... of those divine beings as to where their divinity and their eternity comes from.

Ankerberg: See, that's where I think John 1:1 (https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John%201.1) and in Colossians 2, Colossians 2:9 (https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col%202.9) is a great verse, not the one where it says that He was in the form of God, but the fact that He **always was**. That "in Him dwelt" and that phrase there means He always was, is, and always will be.

Armstrong: Yes, exactly.

Ankerberg: The essence of God. And He took on himself.

Armstrong: For three days and three nights He was dead. So says the Bible.

Ankerberg: The human aspect.

Armstrong: However you want to say it. I say He was dead. Christ was dead.

Ankerberg: Okay, question?

Audience: You made the statement that a man could not by keeping all of the law in spirit and letter earn salvation.

Armstrong: Right.

Audience: Alright. Christ as a man, no different than us died, and let's say He as a man, complete as a man, lived that kind of life. What power did He have in saving other men through that? In other words, if I did that all that means is I went, I died, lived a good life, had no power for anybody else.

Armstrong: Good question, Excellent question. It's at the very heart of the Christian salvation. If He was not God then His one life would be like if you lived an absolutely perfect life and went up to the nearest courtroom and said, "I want to die for this convicted child-killer." And that's all you could do is die for one person if the judge would allow it. And that is at the very heart and the core of why Christ is our Savior because He was **the** Creator and His one life was worth more than all the rest of our lives put together.

Ankerberg: Garner Ted, let me just bring up again, you know, old Colossians, that's exactly the argument that Paul was hitting there. The fact is the reason he listed the fact that Jesus **was** the Creator of all these things and He names angels and principalities and dominions and all of this; the bottom line is, don't go to any of these others because He, God in Himself, has the scoop. He is the one that created all of this. There is nobody else that you need to go to.

Armstrong: Exactly, sure.

Ankerberg: But you are giving me the fact that because He was God before and gave that up that somehow that life that He gave up gives Him brownie points to pass on to the rest of us. I like the theory, but the thing is, it doesn't swing biblically.

Armstrong: I think it does. I think it is very biblical.

Ankerberg: I think it contradicts Colossians.

Armstrong: It very clearly says that He left heaven, came to this earth, was transformed, if you will to be clinical, into that male spermatozoon which actually became a little baby. It wasn't just formed through spiritual essence of some sort.

Ankerberg: We are not denying His humanity.

Armstrong: And He became a baby, born of the natural parturition after nine months of a virgin and was God in the human form, but He was as human as we are human. He took upon Himself the seed of Abraham and it said, "He learned by the things which He suffered." [Heb 5:8 (https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb%205.8)] He bleed when He got cut and He perspired, and He was cold, and all of these things. And when He died, **He died**! And he risked everything and He could, **He could** have lost it all. I say we are getting into very sacred areas here. We are really getting a little over our heads. But I say in my mind that if He had lost it, I am saying, there would have only been one member of the God-family remaining.

Ankerberg: And, of course, then He wouldn't be immutable?

Armstrong: Well, God the Father is immutable, of course.

Ankerberg: Well, there wouldn't be two, then?

Armstrong: Well, no. And, of course, if Adam had partaken of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil then he could have been saved in the Garden of Eden, too.

Ankerberg: That's why it's so contradictory – the God that is immutable, that doesn't change, that it says in the Old Testament in Psalm 90:2 (https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps%2090.2) that He is "from everlasting to everlasting," and James 1 says that He does not change. [Jas. 1:17 (https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James.%201.17)]

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Armstrong: I agree with all of that.

Ankerberg: But you just told me that Jesus changed from being true God to stopping being God and just being a man.

Armstrong: No, I didn't say He was just a man. I never have. You are putting words in my mouth.

Ankerberg: I heard you say that before!

Armstrong: I have said He was God in the human flesh.

Ankerberg: Are you saying the fact that He was God and He took unto Himself human form so that He was both man and God who would not cease to exist...?

Armstrong: He called Himself the "Son of God," called Himself the "Son of Man...."

Ankerberg: That goes fine with Isaiah 9....

Armstrong: And He was the son of Mary, but He was not the son of Joseph. You know he was the Son of God.

Ankerberg: Okay. We are out of time, Garner Ted, and next week we want to jump to another topic and I think you folks won't want to miss that. Please join us next week.

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