

# Interview with Garner Ted Armstrong – Program 3

By: The John Ankerberg Show  
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By: **Garner Ted Armstrong**; ©1983

Does being born again mean that you change literally from being human to being divine?

## What Does it Mean to be Born Again?

### 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 Editor-in-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.

### Program 3

**Ankerberg:** We have just the nicest guest with us, the famous Garner Ted Armstrong. I am sure that you have probably listened to him somewhere across the United States, somewhere across the world. At one time you were on 300 radio stations and 165 TV stations. But I read some articles that said that more people listened to you a few years back than they did to the evening broadcasters on ABC or CBS or NBC.

**Armstrong:** Well, that's media exaggeration. I doubt that very much. I really do.

**Ankerberg:** Well, they were non-Christians that said it. I think it was *Penthouse Magazine* in an article they did on you, so.... (laughter)

**Armstrong:** John, never confess to reading magazines like that!

**Ankerberg:** That's it! One of my staff members gave it to me. I'll have to talk to them (laughter). We are talking about what Garner Ted has been talking to you folks about on the radio. And we want to put into a real capsule form some of the beliefs that he holds, and we are comparing that with what many of you hold concerning the Bible. I hope you will join us during this evening while we are talking about it. Let's get right to a topic of, man, the word "born again" has been thrown all over the place and the Gallup Poll takes surveys on it, the President of the United States wants to get in his words on that, and that word has come to mean so many things. I want to know what you mean when you say "born again?" What do you think the Scripture is saying?

**Armstrong:** I believe the Scripture when it says "born again" means a literal change from human to divine. I think that 1 Corinthians 15 is the most instructive chapter, together with John 3 and Romans 8, in all of the Bible about that subject. When Christ said, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh" [John 3:6 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John%203.6>)] we all dig that, we understand that, we relate with it. "That which is born of the Spirit is spirit" [John 3:6 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John%203.6>)] I don't know why that is difficult for people but just blows their minds.

To me the most beautiful analogy of that is human birth, and there is nothing more miraculous and we take it so for granted. And it's such a vast sociological and socioeconomic and moral subject today dealing with everything from single parent families to abortion. But the awesome reproduction of human life that can take place with the incredible pattern in a tiny microscopic spermatozoon, to be clinical for just a moment, which will attack and

penetrate a tiny human female egg which is barely visible with the human eye, which can impart a life in the womb of a mother which could include height, shape, weight, texture of skin and hair, color, color of eyes, timbre and tenor and tone of voice, perhaps even a little bit of the appearance of the paternal grandmother for pity's sake. And here nine months later a human little creature, the identical counterpart of its parents is born.

Why can't we come to understand that the great God in heaven above that gives us every breath of air we breathe into our sweet lungs created that process and by that process is teaching us what He is doing on a much higher level in the same way? When He begets us and we become a new creature we are only begotten. And we grow in the womb of the mother, if you will, by the analogy Jerusalem above the mother of us all, the church, teaching, preaching, studying the Bible, praying overcoming. "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne," said Jesus Christ. [Rev. 3:21 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev.%203.21>)]

Gradually over a period of time, even as the mother is imbibing nutrients and foods and keeping her body healthy and exercising, and the fetus grows from all of its various stages to the moment when it can come into full-fledged birth of its own at the moment of either (a) an instantaneous change as quick as the batting of an eye it says in 1 Corinthians 15:50-52 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1%20Cor%2015.50-52>), or (b) at the resurrection it says in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1%20Thess%204.17>) to the end of that chapter: "Then we which are alive and remain [shall not prevent or precede them which are asleep (or are dead), but] shall be caught up together with them in the clouds and... meet the Lord in the air," [1 Thess. 4:17 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1%20Thess.%204.17>)] who is coming back. We will experience an instantaneous shocking change and it will be so quick that you can't, I mean when you look from one side of the room to the other and you bat your eye you are really unaware of it, and that is exactly the time lapse to people who have died centuries ago and never even felt it maybe, an explosion or whatever.

**Ankerberg:** If I could cut-in here because you are flowing real good here and I appreciate that. But as I have read your book on this, if I could recapture this, you are saying the new birth is **process** and that we are conceived here and that's the start. God implants a seed into us and then after the process, which includes at least six steps as I understand you: one's calling, repentance, then you are baptized, laying of hands or getting the baptism of the Holy Spirit, you've been conceived and then you must have a life of faith and obedience, and then when you die then you are fully born again, you are recreated there, you are given spiritual...

**Armstrong:** No, you are one of the dead in Christ when you die now. Or you, if you are not yet converted, the rest of the dead live not again until the thousand years are finished.

**Ankerberg:** What Garner Ted has been saying is exactly the same as what he has written in his magazines. For example, in the *Twentieth Century Watch*, July/August 1980 edition put out by the Church of God International, Tyler, Texas, in Garner Ted's own article "Was Jesus Born again?" he writes: "Could any explanation in the Bible be plainer? Jesus Christ of Nazareth said those who are ultimately born of the spirit, born again, will become spirit, become literally composed of spirit. They will become spirit beings."

When does this take place? He goes to 1 Corinthians 15 and tells: "Notice that afterward, at the resurrection and not one split second before, the old body which was natural will actually become spiritual." He goes on to tell us: "When was Christ born again or born of the spirit to become the firstborn from the dead? When He was resurrected. When can you become born again or become a spirit being?" He tells us: "Just as Jesus told Nicodemus when we are born again – born of the spirit – we shall become spirit as invisible as the wind and that great change will not occur until the time of either the resurrection or that instantaneous change for those still alive at Christ's coming."

**Ankerberg:** When you die then you are fully born again, you are recreated there, you are given spiritual...

**Armstrong:** No, you are one of the dead in Christ when you die now or you, if you are not yet converted, "the rest of the dead live not again until the thousand years are finished." [Rev. 20:5 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev.%2020.5>)]

**Ankerberg:** Okay, but the rub comes in here, I think, do we think that the term "born again" is synonymous with immediate mental or emotional change that we call regeneration while we are living, or do we have to wait until we get to heaven to be fully born again?

**Armstrong:** The expression "born again" I think has been used by modern evangelicals. I don't know when it first began to be used. It is never used that way in the Bible. Never once is a person spoken of as being "born again" when they receive the Holy Spirit. "You must be born again" that's there in John 3:7 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John%203.7>), but it also says when you are, you will be like the wind, you can hear

the sound of it but you can't see where it comes from or where it goes. [John 3:8  
(<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John%203.8>)]

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**Ankerberg:** On this point Garner Ted and his dad are in agreement. Herbert W. Armstrong in his book, *Just What do You Mean Born Again?* states: "What most religious people call being born again is simply misnamed. Actually the term "born again" does not apply at all, nor refer to the experience of a true conversion – the receiving of God's Holy Spirit. Nearly every error is based on a false assumption taken carelessly for granted. The universal error in this case is the untrue assumption that when one is converted, when one has fully repented, accepted Christ in faith, and received God's Holy Spirit, that he has been born again."

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**Armstrong:** The expression "born again" I think has been used by modern evangelicals. I don't know when it first began to be used. It is never used that way in the Bible. Never once is a person spoken of as being "born again" when they receive the Holy Spirit. "You must be born again" that's there in John 3:7 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John%203.7>), but it also says when you are you will be like the wind, you can hear the sound of it but you can't see where it comes from or where it goes. [John 3:8 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John%203.8>)] Don't be afraid of the process of growth. Christ said, "To him that overcometh will I grant power over the nations." [Rev. 2:26 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev.%202.26>)] And we are to overcome even as He overcame, so there is definitely a process.

But that process is a process of growth and development of character and is not a "process of salvation." Salvation is complete at the moment you receive God's Holy Spirit. There has never yet been a little girl that came home and said, "Mom, I am half pregnant. I am in terrible trouble." And you either have a child on the way, boom, I mean there is a full-fledged human being there that has been begotten and unless abortion happens, which is murder in my opinion, but that's another subject.

**Ankerberg:** Yes, the question is, are we talking about the fact that God is saying it's a process or can He do it immediately while we are living? If He can do it when we die, why can't He do it when we are living?

**Armstrong:** Well, He can; and He will at the time of the second coming of Christ.

**Ankerberg:** We've got to get a definition of terms here, because I think what you are saying is that the born again experience is when God changes our fleshly bodies into a spirit body and that is the born again experience. People that are looking at their Bible are going to verses where you also have the word "saved" which can be synonymous for regeneration or the rebirth according to the Greek lexicons. For example, let me give you verse. "For by grace **you have been saved**," [Eph 2:8 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph%202.8>)] past tense.

**Armstrong:** First John 5.

**Ankerberg:** Okay, now to be saved is to speak of having eternal life. John 5:24 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John%205.24>) talks about "we **have** eternal life" right now and we have been passed from death into life. We have it now, and the words that are used are indicative of the fact that we now possess it, right now. Now that doesn't mean that we are not going to have a spirit resurrection, a change in body later on.

**Armstrong:** You are saying the same thing, John, beautiful. Right on. We have it. I believe that a 1000%. Nobody can take it away from me. I am afraid of nobody because I have **been saved, past** tense.

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**Ankerberg:** To see what Garner Ted means when he says that, "he has salvation, past tense," we need to go to his writings. In his article *Was Jesus Born Again?* he states: "By receiving Jesus Christ as personal Savior, repenting of one's sins and being baptized and receiving God's Holy Spirit you become like an adopted child – not born again." He goes on to say: "We are His own begotten children and we become potential heirs."

Why does he say "potential?" He tells us: "Just as Jesus told Nicodemus when we are born again, born of the Spirit, we shall become spirit as invisible as the wind, and that great change will not occur until the time of either the resurrection or that instantaneous change for those still alive at Christ's coming."

His father, Herbert W. Armstrong, agrees in his book *Just What do You Mean Born Again?* Herbert Armstrong states: "The very life and nature of God has entered into him, impregnating him with immortal spirit life, exactly as the physical sperm cell from the human father enters into the ovum or physical egg cell when a new human life is first conceived, impregnated or begotten. Notice this is the start. But just as that tiny ovum, as small as a pin point, is merely begotten of its human father, not yet born, so the converted human is at what we properly call conversion merely begotten of God, the Heavenly Father, not yet born. Here is the potential. He is still material flesh even though God's spirit has now entered into his mind. He is still visible. A newly converted human is

actually begotten of God. Such a person is already an actual begotten son of God. He can call God, Father." But notice this statement. Herbert W. Armstrong says, "But he is not yet **born** of God."

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**Armstrong:** You are saying the same thing, John, beautiful. Right on. We have it. I believe that a 1000%. Nobody can take it away from me. I am afraid of nobody because I have **been saved, past** tense. God has me in His hands, I am His. He has begotten me with the power of His Holy Spirit. I have been saved, past act.

Now, I am still flesh – I will prove it if I cut myself tomorrow morning shaving, and I can still fail. Paul said, "I beat my body daily lest after preaching to others I should be found a castaway." [1 Cor. 9:27 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1%20Cor.%209.27>)] Was he "born again?" He was as "born again" or begotten again or regenerated as any Christian you have read of and yet he knew he could still fall. We can still fall. We can fail. Satan the devil can't, God won't, and the world is unable. Only we can make that choice. But when we have salvation as a past act it is like a mother showing in her seventh month. You know, she has a baby.

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**Ankerberg:** The mother with a baby on the way is a clear illustration of the difference between us. For Garner Ted, his having salvation means he is **on the way** to becoming born and there is the possibility, the chance he might not make it. The mother's baby will be born, so to speak, only when we die and that which was conceived or started on earth is finally born again in heaven. We change from physical, material being to a completely new invisible spirit-being.

But the Bible states that the full birth "born again" experience happens the moment one places faith in Christ, asking forgiveness for sins. First Peter 1:23 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1%20Pet%201.23>) has nothing to do with the resurrection after death. Peters says: "For you have been born again [past tense], not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring Word of God."

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**Armstrong:** But when we have salvation as past act it's like a mother showing in her seventh month. You know, she has a baby.

**Ankerberg:** Well, let's take a break and we'll come back we'll talk more about this when we do.

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**Ankerberg:** Okay, let's just kind of finish up with, when do you believe... and tell me a little bit more about how a person receives the Holy Spirit. I am not sure that I have read anything or even know what you are talking about when you say that the Holy Spirit is gotten after a person is called, after a person has faith and then is baptized and then there is another step before he gets the Holy Spirit. Would you exemplify that for us?

**Armstrong:** Well, the examples I see in the Bible, the primary examples, the very first one, of course, is Acts 2. The disciples probably were all baptized by John. Peter and Andrew we know were both John's disciples, so baptism had to come earlier, and it was baptism **unto** repentance. I think they were not converted. Obviously Peter when he grabbed Christ and shook Him was not converted. So the first occasion and the very first historical part of the New Testament where human beings on this earth receive the Holy Spirit of God, they received it unanimously, all 12 – Mathias replacing Judas – in a literal physical manifestation like flames or a little leaping tongues of fire, like a fiery crown. It was obvious, because they began speaking with other languages that dozens of people of foreign tongues understood. [Acts 2:3-4 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts%202.3-4>)]

Very quickly, however, on the very same day 3,000 human beings came forward, it was the world's greatest evangelistic campaign, and were baptized. Baptism had a part in it. And it was not until they were baptized that apparently they received the Holy Spirit. There is a unique case when, I believe it was Apollos had been preaching, Peter and John came along. Apollos had caused a lot of people to repent and to be baptized and Peter and John said: "Have you received the Holy Spirit since you believed in Christ?" They said: "Well we haven't even heard whether there was any Holy Spirit." So they then laid hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit. [Acts 19:1-6 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts%2019.1-6>)]

So I think I am correct in saying when it says in Acts 2:38 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts%202.38>), "Repent, and be baptized every one of you for the remission or the forgiveness of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." And then I see the example of the apostles and the disciples laying hands on people as they are baptized or just as they come out of the watery grave which it symbolizes. But I think that is the divinely ordained process. And I believe in that process and our ministry practices it that way. There have been exceptions. John the Baptist had God's Holy Spirit from birth. He was anointed in a sense in the womb. I believe Jeremiah was and certainly Christ was, but I don't believe God makes that exception very often in history.

**Ankerberg:** Let me ask you this, in terms of when you talk about John the Baptist's baptism, it was a baptism **of** repentance, not **for** repentance. But the fact was that the people had the repentance and the baptism was the sign.



**Armstrong:** Symbol of the fact, sure.

**Ankerberg:** What I am saying is, do we have to go through the outward acts, any kind of ceremonial acts? Is there anything more needed than to place our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ which only He knows if it's a true one or not? But if it is a true one does He reciprocate by giving us His Holy Spirit at that moment?

Now we can go through the baptismal ceremony and so on and, demonstrate outwardly what has happened inwardly. I will give you another example in Acts that you were talking about there. Peter, when he was preaching to Cornelius and that whole crowd, when he got to the point of telling them basically, if you place your faith in Christ, all of a sudden the Holy Spirit came upon them. [Acts 10:44 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts%2010.44>)] And from the text it seems that everybody was astonished but that was the key namely to saying, God would work among the Gentiles, and all the ceremonies were off, and it was faith in Christ.

And later on at the church conference Peter said, "Listen we've got to drop some of these ceremonies, we've got to drop this other, because the Gentiles over here. God is rewarding their faith and giving them the same Holy Spirit that we have without the ceremony. [Acts 15:5-12 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts%2015.5-12>)] Because after he had the Holy Spirit in Acts 10:44 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts%2010.44>), then he was baptized.

**Armstrong:** Well, Romans 6 is the famous baptism chapter. And it is, of course, one of the Prison Epistles.



**Ankerberg:** We've got about one minute.

**Armstrong:** Okay. Romans 6, that goes very deeply into the analogy of burial, the watery grave and so on, is very hard for me to get around. I agree with you that there are exceptions, there may have been many exceptions in that day. There may be exceptions today. There may be individuals in isolated areas who really come to an overwhelming sense of their worthlessness, of their carnality, their acknowledgement and realization of the greatness of a Creator God who simply call out to God. I mean, how do I know somebody in a trench or a foxhole didn't do that in WWII or in Vietnam? And God will give them His Spirit. I am not about to say He can't. God is not bound by ceremonies, He Himself.

**Ankerberg:** I understand. We are out of time here, and next week we want to jump to another topic and that would be this; now, you made some pretty strong statements on the soul and we want to pick those up, and I think you folks won't want to miss that. Please join us next week.


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