# Should You Ever Leave God’s Church?

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##### by Raymond F. McNair

#### Did Herbert W. Armstrong err when he left the "Oregon Conference of the Church of God"? Is it incorrect to leave a corporate body that refuses to preach major, vitally important, fundamental truths of the Bible?

What has caused tens of thou­sands of brethren, during the past few years, to leave the corporate church body which **Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong** pastored until his death in 1986?

Multiple thousands of our separated brethren can't seem to recognize the monstrous doctrinal changes at our for­mer affiliation for what they really are—­yet, the world's religious commentators have no problem seeing, and sometimes understanding, the watershed nature of these *massive* doctrinal changes.

"The *theological conflict* began coming to a head in December [1994] when the Church's leader and Armstrong's successor—Pastor General Joseph Tkach Sr.—announced in Atlanta that **tithing was no longer mandatory.** At the same time, he also declared that it **was no longer manda­tory to observe the Sabbath on Saturday.** A year earlier, the church moved closer to traditional Christian teaching about the *Trinity* as three dis­tinct personalities—God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit in one Godhead.... **The changes in the church's teachings have been seen as bringing the church closer into the mainstream of Christianity"** *(Los Angeles Times,* Feb. 9, 1995).

This same *Los Angeles Times* arti­cle says, "`I was as shocked as anyone else. I thought if they upheld anything it would be the *Sabbath...and* the *tithing.* **When he** [Tkach] **ripped out all of those cornerstones I was as shocked as anyone else,'** said Philip Arnn of the Arlington, Texas-based *Watchman Fellowship,* which keeps track of non-traditional faith groups.”

Also, the *Pasadena Star-News* ran an article, "A Church in Crisis" which said, "Followers and funds [are] swiftly eroding **as the Worldwide Church of God shifts from rigid biblical teachings to mainstream Christianity**.... Many of the doctrines including the *Saturday Sabbath* and *tithing* have been made less harsh or *voluntary* by Joseph Tkach, the pastor general who replaced Herbert Armstrong" (Feb. 12, 1995).

Yes, outside journalists now clear­ly see that the LEADERS of the corpo­rate church body which Mr. Armstrong pastored until his death in 1986 have, in just a few short years, made virtually a complete flip-flop of that church's doctrines. In fact, U.S. church history provides no parallel of such massive doctrinal changes by any church in the 219 years of America's existence. Never in the history of God's Church have so *many* been deceived by so *few,* so quickly—thanks to instantaneous worldwide communication!

Thousands of brethren have become so turned off with the many massive, pernicious doctrinal changes—and the seeming acquiescence or compromise by many of that organization's ministry—­that they have *left that corporate church body,* either out of discouragement or disgust! Sadly, many of these disillu­sioned brethren have become so discour­aged that they have simply given up and gone back into the world. Others, an esti­mated 15,000-20,000 people, have joined other churches—mainly Sabbath­-keeping churches.

### Some Question: "Why Did You Leave God's Church?"

From time to time, members in our former association ask us ministers, "Why did you leave God's Church?" "Didn't you always teach us to be *loyal* to, and remain *in,* the Church?" The answer is simple: **"We didn't leave God's Church!"**

Obviously, those who ask such a question somehow fail to understand what really constitutes the true "Church of God." Is God's Church restricted to some specific corporate organization or corporate entity throughout all time?

Many have forgotten—or else never understood in the first place­—that **God's true Church is not a cor­porate organization; rather, it is a spiritual organism—**the very "Body of Christ" (Rom. 12:5). One can't, of himself, join that spiritual body (John 15:16)! Only God the Father can draw us into His Church through the influ­ence of the Holy Spirit (John 6:44). God has to grant one salvation before an individual can receive it (Acts 11:18). And the Father only gives sal­vation to those who truly *repent* of their sins, are *baptized,* and *receive* His Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38).

The Bible declares there is only ONE BODY of Christ (Eph. 4:4; Rom. 12:4-5). That is, there is only ONE TRUE CHURCH—only ONE DIVINE SPIRITUAL ORGANISM.

When we ministers and brethren refused to continue following the deceived human leadership of our previ­ous church affiliation—**did we really leave the "Church of God"?** Or did we leave a mere "corporate body.” organized and incorporated according. to the laws of a secular state? Didn't we remain, in fact, with a continuing body of faithful believ­ers who remained true to the spiritual "BODY OF CHRIST" those who wor­ship in spirit and in TRUTH (John 4:24)? We didn't leave the "church"; the "cor­porate church" left us!

We were *constrained* by con­science to take a strong stand for the Truth because, in recent years, certain deceived ministers came to power in Pasadena and unceremoniously cast aside crucially important biblical doc­trines! Those heretical leaders, by their own admission, **no longer believe many of the major doctrines taught directly from the Bible by Mr. Herbert Armstrong**—doctrines which were taught diligently by that church for many decades! Who moved?

Yet, in August 1986—only seven months after Mr. Armstrong's death­—*The Worldwide News* published an arti­cle entitled "God Restored These 18 Truths: How Thankful Are You For Them?" Sadly, most of those "18 Truths" are no longer official doctrine of our former affiliation. Yet that same arti­cle asked, less than nine years ago, "Where would we [the Worldwide Church of God] be without these truths? **Without them—without Herbert W. Armstrong's legacy of these 18 restored truths—there isn't much left!"** How true! How prophetic (2 Tim. 3:13)! How pathetic! These Pasadena leaders have rejected the doctrines which they once *professed* to be vital truths.

*In principle,* we did precisely what Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong did in 1933 when he left the "Oregon Conference of the Church of God" so he could be "free" to preach the Truth after that church organization's leadership refused to do so.

In order to better understand what we really did when we refused to go along with the MONSTROUS FALSE DOCTRINES now being carefully spoon-fed to many of the people of our former affiliation, we should take a good look at what Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong actually did in 1933 when he left the "Oregon Conference of the Church of God."

Did Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong ever leave the true "Church of God"? Or did he merely leave one corporate organiza­tion so that he could establish another corporate organization, the "Radio Church of God," in order to do the Work of the Church—preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of God, warning the descendants of Israel of their covenant obligations, and raising up congregations in order to obey Christ's commission to "Feed My lambs" (John 21:15)?

### Fellowshipping with the "Sardis" Churches

When God began to call him, Mr. Armstrong immediately started looking into numerous Bible truths—proving them one by one! After coming to under­stand about *repentance* and *baptism,* he looked around to find someone to bap­tize him. Mr. Armstrong says he "became acquainted with a small group of `Church of God people' in Salem and near Jefferson, Oregon. One day when we were in Salem we learned that a preacher of the *Church of God* had just arrived...an Elder Unzicker.... Mrs. Armstrong and I walked across the street to this neighbor's house to see him. I wanted to ask him questions about *water baptism" (The Autobiography of H. W. Armstrong,* 1973 ed., Vol. 1, p. 281).

Mr. Armstrong then checked with "a Baptist minister in Portland," "went to see a Seventh-Day Adventist minis­ter," and also "went to see a minister of the Friends Church" *(Auto.,* p. 282). Eventually, he decided to have the Baptist minister in Portland baptize him. "Finally the study of the subject of baptism was completed. There was no longer doubt.... And so I was *bap­tized* forthwith and without delay" *(Auto.,* pp. 284-285).

"My intensive study had revealed one thing plainly: `the commandments of God' mean `Sabbath keeping' to most traditional denominations. They say, `The commandments are done away!' They reject `the commandments of God.' **That automatically ruled out all churches observing SUNDAY. [Note. Mr. Armstrong never believed it was immaterial whether one keeps the Sabbath or Sunday!]** So far as I could learn, it reduced the search [for God's true Church] to three groups—the Seventh-Day Adventists, the Seventh-­Day Baptists, and a little, almost unheard-of church called the CHURCH OF GOD, which maintained a small publishing-house headquarters at Stanberry, Missouri" *(Auto.,* p. 310). "But," says Mr. Armstrong, "of these three churches to which the search had been narrowed, only one had the right NAME for the true Church" *(Auto.,* p. 311 ).

Mr. Armstrong concluded that the Stanberry, Missouri, Church of God appeared to be God's Church. "Small and impotent though it appeared, **it had more Bible TRUTH than any church I could find!"** *(Auto.,* p. 313).

But Mr. Armstrong was still dili­gently *searching* for God's true Church. At this point he did not yet understand that the then-existing corporate body per­forming the Work of God's Church had problems: "I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.... For I have not found your works perfect before God" (Rev. 3:1-2). At the time, of course, Mr. Armstrong could not have known that God was going to commission him to raise up a new church era and revive His Work. Understanding of the situation would come into focus later, by hindsight. At the time, Mr. Armstrong just knew some­thing wasn't right with the Church.

Mr. Armstrong noted his dilem­ma, "Meanwhile, what was I to do? I was *not* at all convinced this was the one and only *true Church.* Yet, if it was not, which one was? This one came *closer* to the Bible qualifications than any I knew. Therefore I began to *fellowship* with their scattered and few members in Oregon [perhaps 50 or 60 members, p. 320], while at the same time refraining from *acknowledging membership....* **And so it was, in this detached fellowship, that Mrs. Armstrong and I continued the first three and a half years** of my ceaseless night-and-day study of the Bible" *(Auto., p.* 314).

It was a peculiar, special situation. Mr. and Mrs. Armstrong along with the rest of the Oregon Conference members, were part of the Church of God; but God was in the process of rekindling a zeal among His people to grow in grace and KNOWLEDGE, raising up a new era of expanding brotherly love from a fading, lifeless branch of the Church. A new corporate structure to accomplish this would soon be needed.

### Church Leaders Rejected Vital Truth

Mr. Armstrong's involvement in the Stanberry, Missouri, "Church of God" included writing articles which were published in *The Bible Advocate,* the church paper. He was regularly preaching sermons to the Oregonbrethren and was consequently ordained to the church's ministry in 1931. However, a parting of the ways was brewing.

Finally, he sent a 16-page exposi­tion to Stanberry, proving that the Church was wrong in one of its minor doctrines. But, even though the President of the General Conference of the church "was forced to admit, in plain words, that their teaching on this point was false and in error," nonethe­less, that church's corporate leadership said they would not correct the error for fear of losing members and their financial support *(Auto.,* pp. 315-316).

Shortly afterward, Mr. Armstrong sent "the editor and leader of this church [in Stanberry, Missouri] a lengthy man­uscript of close to 300 typed pages." His paper "proved that the so-called **`Lost Ten Tribes' of lsrael had migrated to western Europe,** the British Isles, andlater the United States—that the *British* were the descendants of *Ephraim...and* the *United States* [was] modern-day *Manasseh....* The church leader stated in his letter...that I was most certainly right.... However, he stated he did not know what use, if any, he could make of it at that time, but was sure I would hear more of it later" *(Auto.,* pp. 316-317).

Mr. Armstrong asked the question, "Did this Church accept and proclaim this vital new truth—the KEY that unlocks the doors to all prophecy?" *(Auto.,* pp. 316-317). No, they never did! And, like the "Sardis" Church of God leaders, the present leaders of our former affiliation now *reject* Mr. Armstrong's eye-opening book, *The United States and Britain in Prophecy!*

Mr. and Mrs. Armstrong had come to realize that even though, spiritually, they were members of the Church of God (the "BODY OF CHRIST"), they still did *not* feel they should stay with a *corporate body* of the "Church of God" which refused to correct a doctrine they acknowledged to be in error and reject­ed a teaching that was acknowledged to be "certainly right." Mr. Armstrong also became *disillusioned* at seeing the dishonesty and jealousy of the minis­ters of that Church.

The "Sardis" Church split in 1933 when Andrew Dugger withdrew from Stanberry's General Conference Church of God, taking about half of the ministry to form a new Church of God based in Salem, West Virginia. Most of the Oregon brethren including Mr. Armstrong switched to Salem's organization.

Mr. Armstrong did accept their ministerial credentials and submitted monthly ministerial reports. He dili­gently strove to "work with and coop­erate with, the ministers of that church." But the doctrinal differences on baptism, the Holy Days and the identity of the Ten Lost Tribes, com­pounded by some of the petty jeal­ousies that some of the "Sardis" minis­ters displayed toward Mr. Armstrong's ministerial fruits, drove a wedge between the "Sardis" corporate body and Mr. Armstrong.

A blow-by-blow account of the Armstrongs' painful separation from the "Sardis" Church organization can be read in Mr. Armstrong's *Autobiography.* The leaders of the Oregon Conference were adamant that Mr. Armstrong preach and teach *their* way, which he saw was clearly in error. The bottom line was: teach error or be forced out of the ministry of the "Oregon Conference of the Church of God." But Mr. Armstrong was equally determined to teach and preach the Truth, and to follow the Bible in all regards, even if it meant he would be fired! The Church of God (Seventh Day), headquartered in Salem, WA, revoked Mr. Armstrong's ministerial credentials in 1938.

Was Mr. Armstrong wrong? "A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them" (Matt. 7:18-20). Thirty-­one years after they revoked Mr. Armstrong's ministerial credentials, the Church of God (Seventh Day)'s primary publication, *The Bible Advocate,* reached a circulation of just over 2,000 subscribers in 1969. The corporate body Mr. Armstrong estab­lished to do God's Work was circulat­ing 1,000,000 *Plain Truth* magazines by 1967! This magazine taught the truths God restored to His Church about the nature of the Family of God, God's plan of salvation illustrated through the Holy Days, the Kingdom of God and the identity and responsi­bilities of the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel. At the time of Mr. Armstrong's death in January 1986, over 7,000,000 *Plain Truths* were being sent around the world each month!

### Severing Ties

Today Messrs. Roderick Meredith, Carl McNair, Larry Salyer, Jean Carion, Colin Adair, Dibar Apartian and I, along with over 80 other ministers and 7000 faithful brethren, have severed our ties with our former association. It is important to realize that we are follow­ing the example which Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong set back in the 1930s. But more importantly, we are *obeying* God's Word not to follow *blind leaders* who are now corrupting the doctrines of our former church organization! Mr. Armstrong's dispute with the "Sardis" leadership was blandly mild in compar­ison to the doctrinal horrors foisted upon God's Church today! Christ said, "Every plant which My heavenly Father has *not* planted will be uprooted. Let them alone. They are blind leaders of the blind. **And if the blind leads the blind. both will fall into the ditch"** (Matt. 15:13-14).

The message in this article is *not* directed to those who are "blind leaders of the blind" (Rev. 3: 17-18); they will not heed its message. This article is intended to give *God's people* the facts showing exactly why many thousands of God's people refuse to continue sub­mitting to those errant church leaders who, in recent years, have most assuredly rejected many of the basic truths of the Bible!

Not long ago, a top official of our former association said, **"We are not slowly turning Protestant. We're already there!"** On numerous occasions officials of our former affiliation have expressed their desire that their church organization be accepted by "mainstream Protestantism," or words to that effect. But Christ said, "Woe to you when all men speak well of you" (Luke 6:26).

In December 1992 Mr. Meredith spoke to the leadership at Pasadena andin April 1993 I also spoke to those church leaders regarding the massive doctrinal errors into which their corpo­rate body was sliding. On two separate occasions, we were assured by them that they had no intention of maintaining the long-held doctrines (as set in God's Church through Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong); this made it imperative that *a separate corporation* be formed. We had made it very plain to the Pasadena leaders that we did *not* intend to teach *false doctrines* (the Trinity, a spurious gospel, anti-law doctrines, etc.). By then we had clearly seen that the leaders of our former association were determined to continue teaching gross doctrinal errors. This left us with no other alterna­tive. God made it crystal clear that the commandment-keeping people of God would have to form a separate Work—a separate *corporate organization—*inorder to be *free* to continue teaching the same doctrines which *all of us* had believed and taught during the life and pastorship of Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong.

Remember, Mr. Armstrong was forced out of the Church of God (Seventh Day) organization and had to incorporate a separate Work in order to continue preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. Why? Simply because he insisted on teaching the Truth! In like manner, we too were forced out of our former affiliation because of false doctrines, in order to continue believing, teaching and preaching the Truth of God!

Speaking of the separation from his previous affiliation, Mr. Armstrong says, "This was a crucial turning point in the history of the Church of God. **My wife and I did not leave the Church [of God]. This was God's Church.** Of that I was *not,* then, com­pletely sure [because of the ministers' connivings and "double cross"]. They came closer to biblical truth than any other [church]...." *(Auto.,* p. 448).

Mr. Armstrong must have felt quite a sense of relief after being forced out. He said, "I was now *free....* Never was a more important decision made than that decision to *cut loose* entirely from being paid by an ORGANIZATION OF MEN [who rejected Truth], and instead, relying solely on God...." *(Auto.,* pp. 450-451).

Mr. Armstrong describes that momentous event—the founding of a new corporate entity, the "Radio Church of God": "Then, October 2lst [1933], at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Ed Smith, just across the road from the Jeans school, 4 miles west of Firbutte, **a new CHURCH OF GOD was orga­nized,** with Mr. E. E. Fisher as deacon, and myself as Pastor.... Attendance was averaging 22. A first action of the NEW CHURCH ["Radio Church of God"] was the decision of whether to go ahead with the [radio] *broadcast.* These *new members* and the lay brethren of the Oregon Conference all approved it joyfully as an effective evangelistic activity of the Church" *(Auto.,* p. 454). According to Mr. Armstrong, half of this "new Church" (the "Radio Church of God") came from the membership of the "Oregon Conference of the Church of God."

### Stark Contrast Between 1933 and Today!

But there was quite a difference between the way Mr. Armstrong was treated by the ministers and brethren of the Oregon Conference after leaving and the way many ministers and brethren now serving the Global Church of God have been treated after severing ties from our former church affiliation. Mr. Armstrong was *not* disfellowshipped (as were Mr. Meredith, myself and others) when he utterly refused to continue to serve under the authority of those back­sliding church leaders who demonstrated that they would not permit him to teach and preach the Truth. Mr. Armstrong was still permitted to fellowship with the brethren of the Oregon Conference—and they even asked him to speak in their churches. But neither Mr. Meredith nor I, were permitted to have similar contacts with our former church.

When I told the Pasadena leaders in April 1993 that I would *not* teach the new, false doctrines but, instead, would only teach the Truth of God, I was *not* even permitted to return to the two churches in South Florida, which I then pastored, in order to bid the brethren farewell. **Mr. Meredith and many others were disfellowshipped by Pasadena becanse we insisted on teaching the same truths which Mr. Armstrong had taught—**truths whichthese leaders also had been taught, and had *themselves* taught for many years!

Prior to Mr. Armstrong's forced separation from the ministry of the Oregon Conference of the Church of God, he had raised up a small church of about 20 members who composed thenucleus of the "new Work" which began to grow under his leadership.

Mr. Armstrong says, "The six weeks' meetings in the one-room Firbutte schoolhouse came to a close on Sunday night, August 20, 1933. A total of more than 20 had come with us—but apparently included the *ten**members* of the Fisher and Ellis families, members of the [Oregon Conference] Church before the meetings started" *(Auto.,* p. 451).

On December 17, 1992, God used Mr. Roderick C. Meredith and several other brethren to organize the new cor­porate organization, the "Global Church of God." Like Mr. Armstrong, Mr. Meredith and the ministers of Global fully intend to maintain the true teach­ings of the Bible and preach the true Gospel to the world as a witness before Christ's Second Coming.

Brethren, there are many parallels between what Mr. Armstrong did in 1933 (when he was asked to preach unscriptural doctrines) and what Mr. Roderick C. Meredith and over 80 other supporting ministers have done in recent times—to maintain and proclaim those same truths of the Bible to the world.

### Each Person Must Choose Which Way He Will Go!

God has greatly blessed the Global Church of God since its inception, and He will continue to do so as long as we faithfully, loyally serve Him, doing His Work. We *know* that we have but "little strength" (Rev. 3:8). Yet God *loves* those who count His Truth as a "pearl of great price"—treasuring it more than life itself! If we continue to love and serve Him with all our "heart...soul...and mind" (Matt. 22:37), then He will surely continue to use us in completing His Work (Rom. 9:28)!

Was Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong wrong when, in 1933, he left an *errant corporate organization* in order to establish a new *corporate entity,* the "Radio Church of God"-later renamed "Worldwide Church of God"?

Have thousands of God's people sinned by refusing to continue to follow a deceived church leadership? Have these commandment-keeping brethren sinned by establishing the "Global Church of God" for the purpose of pro­claiming the Truth of God? Did we really *leave* God's Church—the spiritu­al "Body of Christ"? Absolutely not!

You need to realize that Mr. Armstrong didn't *leave* God's Church—didn't leave the "Body of Christ." Neither have the brethren of the Global Church of God *left* the spir­itual "Body of Christ"—the true Church of God. We have merely fol­lowed Mr. Armstrong's example in establishing a new corporate body in order to preach the "whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27).

**Should God's people ever leave the Church of God? No!** No oneshould ever leave the spiritual "BODY OF CHRIST"! Those whorefuse to fol­low and support Pasadena's heresy—leaving that corporate body in order to join a biblically based, dynamic organi­zation—are really those who are stay­ing with the spiritual “Body of Christ " You should follow the example of God's *faithful ministers* (1Cor. 11:1) who got up and departed in order to keep the faith. A faithful minister is one who utterly refuses to accept the RANK HERESY now being injected, insidi­ously, into the minds of God's people by the deceived Pasadena leadership. This is a strong statement, but utterly true. **"For the time *has come* for judg­ment to begin at the house of God; and if *it begins* with us first, what will *be* the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?" (1 Pet. 4:17).**

You, and you alone, must decide whether or not you will obey God by clinging to the *precious* Truths of God's Word, or allow yourself to be "led away with the error of the wicked" (2 **Pet. 3:17), and be led back** into the utter *confusion* extant in *"mainstream Protestantism"!*

Today, God's people are at the crossroads! May God Almighty inspire each of His children to heed the warn­ing given by His faithful servant, Joshua, nearly 3500 years ago: **"Choose for yourselves this day WHOM you will serve..." (Josh. 24:15)—the true God of the uni­verse, or a lawless, Trinitarian god whom neither Christ nor His apos­tles knew anything about!**