



Church of God-21st Century

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Where Is God's True Church Today?

Why are there now over 300 "Churches of God," all of which sprang from the WCG? Is there only ONE TRUE CHURCH?

by Raymond F. McNair

Is God's Church today one single, *unified* Church of God, or are God's people *scattered* among many Churches of God? Why do we see so many commandment-keeping "Churches of God" in the world today? Didn't Christ say He would establish "one Church"—"one Body"? How is it then, there are now many independently organized Churches of God—most of whom claim to "keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus" (Rev. 14:12)?

Some Brethren Have Become "Confused"!

Recently, brethren from the Los Angeles area came to San Diego to pay me a visit, and to discuss a number of doctrinal questions. One of them asked me, "Why are there so many 'Churches of God' in America today?" He simply couldn't understand how there could be so many "splinter groups," all professing to obey God. Jesus spoke of His Church as "My Church"—not "My Churches" (Matt. 16:18). The Apostle Paul repeatedly says God's Church is "**ONE BODY**" (1 Cor. 12 & Eph. 4)!

This personal friend realized that members of Christ's spiritual "Body" are *scattered* through many "Churches of God." Nonetheless, he repeatedly asked why Christ's Church is "so divided." After I explained the answer, he understood. I told him it *is* impossible for the true "Church of God" to be *divided!* God's Church" is not, and never has been, a "corporate organization," as in the U.S. and other parts of the world.

I told my friend he could only understand the answer to his question—if he accepts the biblical truth that God's "true Church" *is* a "SPIRITUAL ORGANISM"—*not* a humanly organized "church," incorporated under the laws of man. In early N.T. times, the ministry didn't incorporate, as we do today. The true "Church of God" is a **spiritual organism**, which God calls "the Body of Christ" (1 Cor. 12:27). That "Body" is not, and never can be, *divided*, because it is the "Body of Christ," and His "Body" cannot be severed into many parts, any more than a *human body* can be cut into separate parts, and still survive. Jesus said God's "Church" cannot *die*, or be *destroyed*. He said "the gates of Hades"

can never prevail against God's Church (Matt. 16:18). After I explained these points to this Church member, he finally understood that God's true Church is a *spiritual organism*, not a humanly devised "corporation," and no man *can* "divide" or "destroy" that Church. Can anyone *divide* or *destroy* that which God Himself has established?

We must keep these facts in mind as we witness an ever-proliferating number of corporate "Churches of God" springing up in the U.S., Canada, and other parts of the world! Does this mean it is *wrong* for mortal men to *incorporate* a church under the laws of a particular state or country in which they live? Not at all! It is *wiser* to use this human crutch (a "corporation"), in order to avoid problems, which arise when men establish an "un-incorporated" church, and later realize there are certain legal problems which they encounter by not being properly incorporated under man's laws, thereby submitting to Caesar (Rom. 13:1-7)!

What Constitutes the True "Church of God"?

Many have been *confused* regarding what constitutes the "Church of God." Why such confusion? Is it because they have never diligently studied the Word of God to see what the Bible says? What, according to God's Word, *comprises* God's true Church? Is His Church made up of any "group of men" who may *associate* themselves together and incorporate under the laws of men—even though they may not believe or obey God's Word? Let us examine the Word of God to see what really comprises the Church which Christ founded. Jesus said, "**I will build MY CHURCH, and the gates of hell [Gk. *Hades*] shall not prevail against it**" (Matt. 16:18). Do we believe Christ's words? Or do we believe His Church can be *swallowed up* in the grave and pass into *oblivion*?

Jesus did *not* tell His apostles what the name of His Church would be, although just before His death, He asked the Father to, "Keep through thine own name those whom thou has given Me, that they may be *one*, as we are" (John 17:11). Christ's disciples were later called "Christians" (Acts 11:26). Both Father and Son are called "God." Did God keep Christ's disciples, the Christians, in the Father's name, the name of "God"? He certainly did, by calling His Church "the Church of God."

The "Church of God" Mentioned 12 Times

After the N.T. Church was established on the Day of Pentecost in 31 A.D., it was called the "**CHURCH OF GOD.**" The name "Church of God" is mentioned in the following *nine* N.T. scriptures: Paul told the Ephesian elders to "feed the CHURCH OF GOD" (Acts 20:28). Later, he twice mentioned "the CHURCH OF GOD which was at *Corinth*" (1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:1). Furthermore, Paul told the Saints at Corinth to "Give none offence...to the CHURCH OF GOD" (1 Cor. 10:32), and then admonished them not to "Despise...the CHURCH OF GOD" (11:22). Later in this epistle, he explained that he had "persecuted the CHURCH OF GOD" (15:9). He also told the Saints in Galatia that he "persecuted the CHURCH OF GOD" (Gal. 1:13). Paul felt it necessary to instruct Timothy on how the brethren should "behave...in the HOUSE OF GOD, which is the CHURCH OF THE LIVING GOD" (1 Tim. 3:15).

The “**CHURCHES OF GOD**” are mentioned in *three* verses in the N.T. After mentioning abuses in partaking of the “bread and wine” at the Passover service, Paul said, “...We have no such custom, neither the CHURCHES OF GOD” (1 Cor.11:16). He told the brethren in Thessalonica, “For ye, brethren, became followers of the CHURCHES OF GOD...in Judaea” (1 Thess. 2:14). He told them, “We ourselves glory in you in the CHURCHES OF GOD” (2 Thess. 1:4). Altogether, the “Church[es] of God” are mentioned *12 times!*

In Romans 16:16, Paul refers to God’s Churches in these words: “The **CHURCHES OF CHRIST** salute you.” Since Jesus Christ is the “Head” of the CHURCHES OF GOD, those churches can also be called “Churches of Christ.”

Although the proper name for God’s Church is “**CHURCH OF GOD,**” this does not mean that all churches, which *appropriate* this name, are necessarily *true* Churches of God! In order to *qualify*, its members must believe in God the *Father* and *His son* (as our Savior). They must believe in and live by every Word of God, and obey His laws, including the Ten Commandments. This also entails keeping the *fourth commandment*, which mandates observing the seventh day as the Sabbath (Matt. 19:16-22). The N.T. makes it clear that every true Christian must also obey Christ’s command to be *baptized* (Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:38-39). Further, every true believer should annually commemorate the death of his Savior, by observing, on the 14th of Abib, the Passover symbols of bread and wine, as a *memorial* of Christ’s sacrifice for the sins of all mankind (John 6:53-58; Luke 22:13-20).

How Does One Become a Member of the Church of God?

Since God’s Word reveals that the Church is a SPIRITUAL ORGANISM, not a *social club*, or a “worldly corporation”—and since no one can decide to “join” himself to His Church, in an attempt to make himself a true member of the “Church of God—how then can one become a bona fide member of the “Church of God,” which, spiritually speaking, is the *Body* of Christ? In this world, humans *can* decide to join most any “church” of their choice, and by conforming to certain standards, or beliefs, they can then become full-fledged members of that church. **But it is impossible for any person to join himself spiritually to the true “Church of God”!**

Now let’s examine the Scriptures to see how one becomes a member of the “Church of God.” The Apostle Peter put it this way: “Repent, and *be baptized* every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the *gift* of the *Holy Spirit*” (Acts. 2:38-39). In the N.T., water baptism is always by *total immersion*, and should never be by *sprinkling* or *pouring*.

Two important scriptures clearly explain how one becomes a member of the “Church of God”: Paul says, “For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all members of that one body, being many, are one body; so also is Christ. **For by one Spirit are we all baptized into ONE BODY**, whether...Jews or Gentiles...and have been *all* made to drink into one spirit” (1 Co. 12:13). He

also states, “**Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His**” (Rom. 8:9-11). Further, this same apostle says, “For as many as are *led* by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God” (v. 14). One can only be put into the Church of God, through *repentance, baptism, and laying on of hands*, to receive God’s Holy Spirit. When one receives God’s Spirit, subsequent to baptism, he is thereby put into the spiritual Body of Christ, the true” Church of God.”

Scattering of God’s Sheep Foretold

Many former WCG members have been appalled at the “scattering” of God’s people, in the wake of the death of Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong in January 1986. But many have failed to understand that this “scattering” was prophesied long ago. The Prophet Daniel spoke of a “time of trouble,” at the “*time of the end* when many shall run to and fro [when] God shall have accomplished to SCATTER THE POWER of the HOLY PEOPLE” (Dan. 12:1-7).

But who are the “HOLY PEOPLE”? This end-time prophecy has a dual application: **1)** The “holy people” can refer to the “**people of Israel,**” the *physical descendants* of the ancient patriarch Israel. **2)** It can also apply to **God’s Church,** “the Israel of God” (Gal. 6:16). The *national scattering* of physical Israel will occur during the Great Tribulation. However, much of the prophesied scattering of God’s Church has already occurred, in large measure, following the death of Mr. Armstrong. It is similar to what occurred at the time of Christ’s death when the scripture was fulfilled which said, “I will *smite the shepherd,* and the sheep shall be scattered abroad” (Mark 14:27; cf. Zech. 12:7). Jesus Christ is called “Good Shepherd” (John 10:11), and “Chief Shepherd” (1 Pet. 5:3).

While alive, Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong, a faithful end-time *shepherd,* held most of “God’s flock” together, but when he was “smitten” by death in January 1986, this opened the way for God’s end-time “flock” to become *scattered.* Jeremiah predicted this *scattering* (Jer. 23:1-4), as did the Prophet Ezekiel. (Ezek. 34:1-12). A careful reading warns us that the ministers would do the *scattering.* Paul showed that certain ministers would also be guilty of later scattering God’s people (Acts 20:17-20, 27-35). Sadly, the ministers, who should feed and protect the “sheep of God,” are often guilty of *scattering* those same sheep! Some have been guilty of ruling over God’s people “with *force and cruelty*” (Ezek. 34:4, 22)!

Ways in Which *Some* Ministers Have Been Abusive

I would strongly encourage God’s people to appreciate and *assist* those **FAITHFUL MINISTERS** who have steadfastly maintained the *true doctrines,* and have ruled over the “flock” with *genuine concern, patience, and Christ-like love!* During the past ten or twenty years, I have received many reports from faithful brethren giving accounts of a lack of ministerial concern for, and abuse of, some of “*God’s sheep*” by abusive “shepherds.”. Jesus Christ spoke of such “evil servants” who would abuse their “fellow servants” (Matt. 24:48-51)! God’s Word says, “Woe to the **worthless shepherd,** who leaves the

flock...” (Zech. 11:17). Many of God’s ministers, including some top leaders, have abandoned their ministry, taking their hand off the “*ministerial plow*” and going back into the world to pursue carnal interests (Matt. 9:36-38)!

Here are some of the problems these “worthless shepherds” have shown by *not* caring for the “flocks” under their supervision: some ministers have *deceived* and *betrayed* their congregation by abandoning the Truth for **false doctrines**. Others have been *partial* and have shown **favoritism** toward certain members, while neglecting others in their congregation, such as the *needy, distraught, lonely, the widows and fatherless* etc. Still others have been **arrogant** and **high-handed** in ruling, while some went further by ruling **harshly**. Some resorted to **politicking**, and “working the angles.” Finally, some forsook the biblical pattern of **hierarchical church government**, in favor of a “**democracy of the ministry**”! I hasten to add that, Jesus Christ did *not* establish any ecclesiastical “offices” in the “Church of God” which would make any *church official* into a “Moses” figure, or a “Pope” figure. Christ ordained that there should be no **autocratic, dictatorial form of church government in the N. T.** “**Churches of God**” (cf. Matt. 20:20-28; Acts 2:42; 8:14).

We Ministers Must “Pull up Our Socks”!

Where is God’s true Church today? It has been *splintered* and *scattered*, resulting in hundreds of small “Churches of God.” The Church which Jesus said He would build is *not* to be found today in one single “church.” Instead, true *members* of the Body of Christ are now found in many “Church of God” fellowships, *scattered* across the entire globe. Let us tear down some of the barriers between brother and brother, and between the various “Churches of God”! Instead of **putting up barriers**, let us **build bridges**. Instead of **criticism** and **condemnation**, let us seek *peace* and *reconciliation* among all the scattered members of the “Body of Christ,” now found in various “splinter groups”!

It is not too late for uncaring “shepherds” to repent, and make amends, by re-dedicating their lives to genuine service of the brethren, rather than looking out primarily for their own selfish interests! “**Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.** Let *this mind* be in you, which was also in *Christ...*” (Phil. 2:4-5)!

Jesus Christ revealed that His Church would *never* become a big, powerful, politically-connected Church, which would try to influence this world’s leaders. God’s ministers were never intended to dabble in politics, or tell “Caesar” how to run his government! Rather, God’s Church would always remain a “little flock” (Luke. 12:32). God’s ministry should devote themselves, *single-mindedly*, toward looking after, comforting, caring for and encouraging “God’s sheep.” We are to be primarily concerned with the spiritual and physical welfare of our congregations, rather than becoming needlessly entangled in this world’s enticing temptations, and its political machinations!

I urge all of us ministers to look into the **mirror of God’s Word**, to see where we may have failed (Jas. 1:23-25)! No one is perfect, but we ministers

have been given an **awesome calling** and responsibility, which God intends that we not neglect. Some of the examples of ministerial neglect and abuse of God's people are *inexcusable!* There must be a dramatic change. May our Merciful Father, and His Son Jesus Christ, forgive us and inspire each of us ministers to **re-dedicate our lives, as living sacrifices**. Let us be vigilant in *caring for, protecting, defending* and *encouraging* God's people in every way possible!

If we truly love, and diligently serve *God's sheep*, they will be **content, secure, spiritually productive** and much **happier**—and our *reward* in God's Kingdom will be much greater, when we stand before our Creator at His return. Christ promises us, “Behold, I come quickly; and **My reward** is with Me, to give every man according as his work shall be” (Rev. 22:12).

At that time, the *overcomers* will assist Jesus Christ in shouldering the heavy responsibility of restoring good *government* to all the nations. Unto the overcomers Christ promises, “And he that overcometh and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations. And he shall rule them with a rod of iron” (Rev. 2:26-27). At that time, good government will be established over all nations: **“For unto a child is born, unto us a SON is given: and the government shall be upon His shoulder.... [This] Prince of Peace” will rule the entire earth....** Of the increase of *His government* and *peace* there shall be no end...” (Isa. 9:6-7)!

A PERSONAL NOTE. Here is a brief note regarding my varied experiences in the Work of God during the past 55 years. Most of you will have become familiar with my articles in various Church publications (the *Good News*, *Plain Truth*, *Tomorrow's World*, etc), and more recently in articles which were published in other “Church of God” publications. I have served for nearly 50 years as a *writer* and *editor*.

My appointment to serve on the WCG Doctrinal Teams. Mr. H.W. Armstrong appointed me to serve *under him* over the Headquarters Doctrinal Team in 1974, knowing that I would not introduce “liberal” doctrines into God's Church. After Mr. Armstrong's decease, the Pastor General who succeeded Mr. him appointed me to be over the Doctrinal Team in Pasadena; but shortly afterward, my wife and I were sent to the South Pacific to head the Work of God in New Zealand, Fiji, Tonga, etc. Since I would not endorse the *strange doctrines* then being seriously considered at our Pasadena Headquarters, my continued presence would have been a big obstacle in the eyes of those who planned to make sweeping doctrinal changes in the WCG.

My ordination as an Evangelist in the WCG. Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong ordained me as an Evangelist—over 51 years ago. During those 51 eventful years I served as the pastor of 14 churches in the U.S., Britain and New Zealand, and in 1954-1955, I founded the Chicago Church of God, the first WCG Church east of the Mississippi River. I also served as Director of the Work of God in Britain (1958-1973).

Appointed Deputy Chancellor of Ambassador Colleges in England, and Pasadena, CA. In 1960, Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong appointed me Deputy Chancellor of Ambassador College, near London. Later, in 1978, Mr. Armstrong asked me to serve as Deputy Chancellor of Ambassador College in Pasadena,

California—in order to help him put Ambassador College *back on track*. I continued serving God's Work in that position for nearly ten years—until 2 years after Mr. Armstrong's death in 1986. I was gratified to hear him say, before his decease, that **he was very pleased to see Ambassador College *back on track***. I always counted it a great honor and a fantastic privilege to work with God's end-time Apostle for over 36 years, from the time I entered Ambassador College in 1948, until his death in 1986—approximately 36 years.

I was privileged to conduct many baptismal tours while serving in the Worldwide Church of God. In the summer of 1949, Mr. Armstrong sent Raymond Cole and me on the first student-led, nation-wide baptismal tour, during which time we baptized about 125 brethren. In the following years, I conducted *seven* more baptismal tours in the U.S. and Canada before being sent to London, England in 1958 to take charge of God's Work in Britain, where I continued to serve the Work of Jesus Christ during the next 15 years. After arriving in London, England, I conducted several baptismal tours in the British Isles, and was later sent to Southern Africa with another minister to baptize a number of people in Northern and Southern Rhodesia, and in South Africa.

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