

What's Going On With All the Churches of God?

Why can't they all get along? Why are there so many splinter groups? What has been happening to all those groups which came from the Worldwide Church of God?

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(Please note this article was originally written many years ago soon after the death of Herbert W. Armstrong. Even so this is a very helpful and useful historical account of the well known problems in the Worldwide Church of God and its offshoots. Updated March 2018).

I have been asked, "What Do You Think about the Various Churches of God?" "Will we all come together before Christ returns, to do a great work?"

My answer is – "not hardly." Or, simply, 'no.'" There is too much rivalry, selfishness, lust for power, intransigence and refusal to work together – in a word, too much HUMAN NATURE – for all the disparate churches of God to get together. There is simply too much posing, self exaltation, self inflation, self aggrandizement – TOO MUCH "SELF" and NOT ENOUGH "Holy Spirit."

Satan has attacked the church, influenced and tempted leaders, and all seek their own advantage, it seems – as happened also in the days of the apostle Paul and during the first century. He wrote, "For Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica—Crescens for Galatia, Titus for Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me" (II Tim.4:10-11).

The Scripture says, "Smite [or "strike"] the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered" (Zechariah 13:7). That seems to be a principle which can happen time and time again. Since the death of Herbert Armstrong, many have been scattered into many different "splinter" churches which have risen up to "replace" him, one way or another.

Are we just another "splinter" church or off shoot of what has been called "Armstrongism"? All the other churches seem to boast of their connections to and relations to Herbert Armstrong – being ordained by him, calling him "Elijah," and practically worshipping him and putting him on a pedestal of some kind, to be honored, revered and worshipped. They fall all over themselves like Keystone Cops trying to out emulate each other in genuflecting before him or his image. Shame on them!

We, on the other hand, are different. We don't fawn over him, nor do we attack him. But we study carefully for ourselves, and where we see he was in error, we correct the error. We don't just "assume" he must be right. Often, we have found him to have been in serious error – such as on the day or manner in which he observed the Passover and Pentecost, for example. Our article "Statement of Our Beliefs" shows where we found him to be in error and teaching contrary to the Scriptures. This does not mean he was not a

man of God – all men make mistakes. But it does mean that we strive to judge fairly, without favor, one way or the other, and simply go with the “truth,” as we discover and prove it to be the truth.

The main churches that have split off from the old Worldwide Church of God, which plunged into apostasy after the death of its founder, are the United Church of God (UCG), the Living Church of God (LCG), the Philadelphia Church of God (PCG), and now the Church of God, a Worldwide Association. These four are the major splinter churches, besides the “Restored Church of God” and other smaller divisions.

Jesus Christ said, “You shall know them by their fruits” (Matt.7:20). What are the “fruits” of these different churches and ministers? We need to be careful and get it right, because our salvation could be at stake if we follow the wrong group and wrong teaching. Truth does matter. It is most important that we “prove all things” and take no church fellowship for granted, or just go “where our friends are.”

The Fruits Revealed

As for COGWA, in my own personal opinion "cogwa" has a "cog" missing, so it is dysfunctional and an unhappy group of campers. They were born in rebellion and we will see what becomes of them. They split off recently from the “United Church of God” whom they accuse of being too “liberal.” Yet, I believe that those who split off from United are really not much different from them – it is merely a matter of “who sits at the top,” who is in control and makes the decisions – and who is more dictatorial and dogmatic when it comes to various “doctrines.” One must be very careful about associations. Solomon wrote, “He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will be destroyed” (Prov.13:20). I have found by experience that the leadership of COGWA is very dogmatic and stuck in their opinions, and truth cannot penetrate their thick hides. They are stuck in church traditions and are cavalier in their approach to the Word of God. Beware of men who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but are inwardly untrustworthy – maybe even “ravens wolves” (Matt.7:15).

The United Church of God (UCG), on the other hand, is really largely “Dis-united.” They have been accused of being too liberal, and more open-minded as to fellowship and doctrine, but they, too, are like impermeable rocks when it comes to accepting new provable truth or changing policies. Governmentally, they are also too authoritarian, as well as still stuck in a doctrinal rut, and are burdened by onerous by-laws, which makes it almost impossible to “change.” Such an approach may indeed foster stability but also causes dissent. They who comply, remain; those who are dissatisfied, seek change, and leave. The United Church of God seems to be so wrapped up in procedures and rules for voting that any doctrinal changes are blocked, stultified, and errors remain impossible to correct. This is what happens when you have “democracy” in Church government. Change proceeds at a snail’s pace. Any false teachings are practically impossible to change without divine intervention, as the bylaws make changes almost impossible.

Churches seem to go to extremes – they are either too changeable or not changeable enough – not willing to change and admit error at all!

The Living Church of God (LCG) under Roderick Meredith is another variation on the same theme. It claims to be closer to the original church begun by Herbert W. Armstrong, as its leading minister was one of the original evangelists ordained by Mr. Armstrong back in the early 1950s – Roderick C. Meredith. He also wrote for the church magazines for a while, before others were selected for that purpose.

The so-called “living” church is probably more “dead” than “alive” because it resembles the Sardis church of the book of Revelation. Maybe they ought to be called the “Dead Church of God” (DCG) because of their doctrinal approach. They are very authoritarian, and absolutely refuse to change or grow spiritually. This church was originally called the ‘Global Church of God,’ but its board of directors had a major dispute with Roderick Meredith, so he took his marbles and began a new church, and the Global Church imploded, went bankrupt, and ceased to exist. It, indeed, became “dead.”

Jesus said of the Sardis church, “You have a name that you are alive [“living’], but you are dead” (Rev.3:1). Christ says of them, “Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God” (see Rev.3:1-6). The so-called Living Church of God was presented with the proven truth of the Biblical Passover, Pentecost, and the Biblical calendar, but refused to budge or repent of their errors, and remain mired in the mud of confusion, sin, false teaching, and self-righteousness. In reality, they are just another off-shoot of Herbert W. Armstrong’s “Worldwide Church of God,” which no longer exists. The former “Worldwide Church of God” has changed its name and gone back into mainstream pagan “Christianity” wholesale! It is now called “Grace Communion International” (GCI). What gives with that? They have totally abandoned Herbert W. Armstrong and anything to do with him and have become thoroughly homogenized “mainstream” Protestant in teaching and doctrine.

The Most Unlikely Church

The church which grovels up to and worships the very image of Herbert W. Armstrong is called the “Philadelphia Church of God” (PCG). It is led by Gerald Flurry, a minor minister of the old Worldwide Church of God, who revolted after the church was taken over by Joseph W. Tkach in 1986, when Herbert Armstrong died. As Tkach began to radically change doctrines right and left, and disposed of all Herbert Armstrong’s books and written material, Flurry began his own church after publishing a booklet called “Malachi’s Message.” It was primarily an attack on Joseph Tkach, and many people rallied behind Flurry, failing to see where he was headed himself. His church became an iron-fisted, tyrannical Nazi-style church with very strict rules and leadership, disfellowshipping members who did not perfectly “toe the line,” and creating chaos in families and distress and misery in its wake. “Philadelphia” means “brotherly love” in Scripture, but no church was more inaptly named. They claim to be the “Philadelphia Church” of Revelation, chapter 3, but are totally misnamed. They ought to be named “The Hate-filled Paranoid Church of God.” True love is the most obvious missing ingredient in their spiritual composition. They demand complete isolation from other church off-shoots of the Worldwide Church of God and claims the others are all “Laodicean” (except Flurry’s church, of course!).

Flurry himself claims to be “That Prophet” spoken of by Moses. He has written a

booklet on the subject. God told Moses, “The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear” (Deut.18:15). Was this a reference to Gerald Flurry? Actually, Peter tells us in the book of Acts, who “that Prophet” really was! Peter declared, speaking of Jesus Christ Himself, “who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive until the time of restoration of all things . . . For Moses truly said to the fathers, ‘The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brethren. Him you shall hear in all things, whatever He says to you. And it shall be that every soul who will not hear that Prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people’” (Acts 3:20-23).

He was obviously speaking of Jesus Christ, who came as God’s spokesman, one greater than even Moses. But Flurry claims this refers to *himself!* Write for our articles, “The Flurry Enigma,” “A New Look at the Philadelphia Church of God,” and “Malachi’s Madness.” Flurry’s church ought to be called the “Panic Church of God,” or the “Fearful Church of God,” as it is built on a foundation of FEAR, and fear seems to be their greatest motivator. It might also be called the “Gestapo Church of God” or the “Nazi Church of God” because the ministers act like the secret police, as they scrutinize the congregation and test the loyalty of all members. The ministers rule the flock with harsh bondage – if you enjoy being whipped, this is the church for you.

Restored or Wrecked?

Then there is the “Restored Church of God” under David Pack, another former Worldwide Church of God minister, who formerly belonged to the Global Church of God, but split off from them to form his own tyrannical organization, called of all things “The Restored Church of God.” He claims to be the “original,” following in the footsteps of Herbert Armstrong. But what have they really “restored”? His church appears to be a carbon copy of the old Worldwide Church under Herbert Armstrong, with all its errors and egotism, and Pack claims to be his true heir and the inheritor of his mantle. His favorite pastime seems to be flailing at the other splinter churches, especially Flurry’s Philadelphia Church of God. Pack is strong on authoritarianism and claims to be an “apostle” after the order of Herbert Armstrong. Like Herbert, he rules over the people with a vengeance, and demands multiple tithes and offerings, even telling members to take out mortgages on their homes to support his church.

David Pack might be compared to Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, who laid great financial burdens on the people of Israel – heavy taxes. Rehoboam didn’t listen to the older counselors who made up his government. He listened to the young men and said to the children of Israel, “My father made your yoke heavy, but I will add to it; my father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions” (II Chron.10:14).

Scorpions were whips with points or barbs in them, also known as scourges, which ripped and tore the flesh.

The “Restored” church of God should be named the “Destroyed” church of God, as it is just another of Satan’s attempts to destroy and sabotage the people of God and the end-time church of God, and mislead them into great error. Pack restores nothing but blather, bluster, and egotism – carving out a new empire for himself. God warned of wolf-like ministers who come in sheep’s clothing. The apostle Paul in his day warned about those who brought people into bondage and servitude to themselves. Paul told the Corinthian church about such men, saying, “For you put up with it if one brings you into bondage, if one devours you, if one takes from you, if one exalts himself, if one strikes you on the face” (II Cor.11:20).

The end-time Church of God today is obviously in dire spiritual condition. It is all divided up, and the wolves have in many cases, savaged the flock.

Like wolves encircling and snarling at each other over a fallen elk or deer carcass, many “ministers” are devouring the end-time flock of God. Paul warned the church at Ephesus that it would happen. Paul declared, “For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God. Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He has purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departure *savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves*” (Acts 20:27-30).

The apostle Paul gave us, today, another similar warning. He declared, “Now the Spirit clearly says that *in later times* some will ABANDON the faith and follow *deceiving spirits and things taught by demons*. Such teachings come through HYPOCRITICAL LIARS, whose consciences have been *seared as with a hot iron*” (I Tim. 4:1-2).

The Greek word for liars or lies, as used in this verse, is *pseudologos* – and this is the only place it is used in the New Testament. The usual word for “lies” is *pseudos*. But this is talking about “lying words,” or speech in the context of hypocrisy – something which conveys the subtlety of very cunning lies and deceptions, something beyond just normal run-of-the-mill “lies.”

These “lies” are carefully thought out and arranged and orchestrated clever DECEPTIONS, which seem close to the truth, and may even appear true, at first glance, or to the superficial observer. But these “lies” are Satan’s subtle misinformation, his clever alterations, and cunning hiding of the truth under a covering that SEEMS right on the surface. It may even SOUND like the truth – but is not! Something is not quite correct – something is very cleverly altered, to deceive and delude people! To trust in such lies leads to DEATH!

Foretold Long Ago

The likelihood of all these churches repenting of their disunity, and humbling themselves, and reuniting and coming together as one body, before Christ returns, is almost nonexistent. The Scriptures picture the flock of God in the last days as being “scattered.”

Jeremiah prophesied of the flagrant End-Time rebellion that would occur within the very Church of God at the close of the age, before the coming of the Messiah. He was inspired to write: " A horrible and shocking thing has happened in the land: The prophets prophesy lies, the priests rule by their own authority [pretending it is "God's Authority!"], and my people LOVE IT THIS WAY. But what will you do in the end?" (Jer.5:30-31).

Thousands today put their trust in "Church authority." They believe smugly that their church is "the ONLY Church of God." They confidently trust their ministry never to mislead them. They think to themselves, "If there is wrong in the Church, God will correct it in due time. I don't have to worry about it God would never let the ministry go astray, or lead us astray. Why, after all, this is God's own Church! "

Jeremiah prophesied that people would make that very boast, during the End Time! He wrote: "This is what the LORD Almighty , the God of Israel, says: Reform your ways and your actions, and I will let you live in this place. Do not trust in deceptive words and say, 'This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord! ' If you REALL Y change your ways and your actions and deal with each other justly, if you do not oppress the alien, the fatherless or the widow and do not shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not follow other gods, to your own harm, then I will let you live in this place, in the land I gave your forefathers for ever and ever. But look, you are TRUSTING IN DECEPTIVE WORDS that are worthless" (Jer.7:3-8).

The prophet Jeremiah wrote, “My heart within me is broken, because of the prophets; all my bones shake, I am like a drunken man, and like a man whom wine has overcome” (Jer.23:9).

Jeremiah says, “Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of My pasture! Says the LORD. Therefore thus says the LORD God of Israel against the shepherds who feed My people: ‘You have scattered My flock, driven them away, and not attended to them. Behold, I will attend to you for the evil of your doings,’ says the LORD” (Jer.23:1-2).

God declares, “For both prophet and priest are profane; yes, in My house I have found their wickedness, says the LORD. Therefore their way shall be to them like slippery ways; in the darkness they shall be driven on and fall in them; for I will bring disaster on them, the year of their punishment, says the LORD” (vs.11-12).

God thunders: “Also I have seen a horrible thing in the prophets . . . They commit adultery and walk in lies; they also strengthen the hands of evildoers, so that no one turns back from his wickedness. All of them are like Sodom to Me, and her inhabitants like Gomorrah” Jer.23:14).

Adultery, homosexuality, right in the churches of God – condoned, excused, justified, accepted – participated in, by both ministers, “prophets,” and church members! God is not pleased.

Ezekiel’s Warning

Ezekiel also prophesies against the pastors and shepherds of Israel, saying, “And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy and say to them, Thus says the LORD God to the shepherds: ‘Woe to the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flocks? You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool; you slaughter the fatlings, but you do not feed the flock. The weak you have not strengthened, nor have you healed those that were sick, nor bound up the broken, nor brought back what was driven away, nor sought what was lost; but *with force and cruelty you have ruled them*. So they were scattered’” (Ezek.34:1-5).

Does this not sound like the churches of God, today?

The answer is, *YES!* There needs to be a whole lot of heart-rending and soul-searching going on!

The PROOF of God’s True Church

Years ago Herbert W. Armstrong said the PROOF that a Church or individual is truly following God is their willingness to admit error when they are shown to be wrong. False churches, he stated, are unwilling to change doctrinal errors which have been believed and accepted for years. He himself several times during his ministry spanning fifty years, had to “eat crow,” and admit it when he was proven wrong. He did so, even when others opposed him. I am not his judge, but there were times when he sincerely repented of error in teaching, and changed.

Today we live in a “NEW ERA” – the post-Armstrong era of the end-time Church of God. Both Herbert and Garner Ted Armstrong, with their problems and contretemps, are gone. Now hundreds of scattered churches have sprung up like dandelions in their place. Most of them choose to follow in Herbert Armstrong’s steps, right or wrong. They refuse to admit he could be wrong, or left any errors behind. They have stopped “proving all things.”

Yet Mr. Armstrong himself never claimed to have been infallible – when he was alive, he confessed errors and changed when he saw he had been wrong. Only the Pope claims to be “infallible”!

With the passing of the Armstrongs, it behooves God’s people as never before to “Ponder the paths of your feet” (Prov.4:26) and “prove all things” (I Thess.5:21) – lest they be led astray by end-time false prophets, phony ministers, “hirelings,” and men who claim to follow Herbert Armstrong, but all fight and wrangle and devour each other. Some invoke the “Armstrong mystique” and image. Herbert Armstrong did blaze new trails in theology, and was a true “pioneer” in many respects. But he didn’t have everything right—yet he was willing to admit he could be wrong, and to SEARCH OUT things which he previously assumed to be true, and to REPENT and CHANGE when he saw he had been wrong!

What about you, personally? Are you willing to investigate further, to search the Scriptures, like the Bereans (Acts 17:11), or do you just accept whatever you are told by your local church or minister, or because Herbert Armstrong taught it years ago?

I challenge **YOU** – yes, *you personally* – to take stock of your faith and beliefs – and re-examine things you “thought” you proved and accepted years or decades ago – and CHECK UP and PROVE when and how Passover should really be observed! Check up and PROVE how we should count Pentecost and when we should observe it! If you are presently right, then what do you have to lose? But if you are wrong, don’t you want to KNOW about it? Why not take the time to MAKE SURE of your faith, your beliefs, and DOUBLE-CHECK and even TRIPLE CHECK the teachings you accepted years ago? God Himself declares, “Be *diligent* to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, *rightly dividing the word of truth*” (II Tim.2:15). Salvation and truth are too important to “merely assume” you are right, and take it for granted! So here’s what I want you to do:

► Write for the FREE article, “Finally – the Honest Answer on the Passover!” What have you got to lose? What if you have unwittingly been taught error? Did the Jews really unwittingly lose track of time, change Passover?

► Write for our FREE articles on Pentecost – the Final Answer!” and “How Should We Count Pentecost?”

► Write for our FREE booklet “A New Look at God’s TRUE Calendar.” Study and see what the original calendar was according to the Word of God. Has the calendar been changed? Who changed it, and by what authority, and why?

Isn’t it time we get back to and “contend earnestly for the faith which was ONCE FOR ALL delivered to the saints” (Jude 3)?

Fifty five years ago, I responded to Herbert Armstrong’s challenge to “blow the dust off your Bible, and PROVE whether what I am saying to you is true!” What about you? Will you “blow the dust” off your Bible, and humbly, meekly, earnestly seek God’s truth and prove it, asking God in humble prayer to show you if you have been wrong, mistaken, or misled? I DARE YOU TO TAKE THE CHALLENGE!