

In *Mystery of the Ages* Herbert W. Armstrong proclaimed that the Church is one of the seven great mysteries of God. Mr. Armstrong revealed and explained the mystery of the Church from its inception in A.D. 31 through the years of his stewardship. What has happened in the Church since his death twenty-five years ago next month, however, is itself a great mystery—one of vital importance to God’s people, the nations of Israel, and all other peoples in this end time.

Why did the Church disintegrate (but not *die*) in just a few years after Mr. Armstrong’s death, losing almost all the miraculous power it received from January of 1934 until January of 1986 to do a great Work in the earth—proclaiming the Gospel of the Kingdom of God? The miracles of those years moved even secular commentators and religious opponents to ascribe genius to Mr. Armstrong, as a way of explaining the amazing ascent of the Church literally from nothing. They marveled at how the Church, employing only a controversial and unorthodox message, not asking the public for money or members, achieved a great wealth of resources and an international reach and influence unexplainable and unparalleled for an organization of its modest membership.

The Church was so greatly blessed, powerful and united in 1986 that no one remotely foresaw the stunningly rapid disintegration or the stunningly rapid rise of false doctrine and apostasy within. Truly the collapse of the Church was nearly as amazing as its ascent; this assessment too was shared by outside observers.

Many of God’s people today assume the new leadership who instituted false doctrine in the Church caused the stunning, shameful disintegration. That answer is true on an elementary level, but there are deeper spiritual issues it cannot explain and does not resolve.

Since many thousands of the Church’s members, ministers and headquarters officials—we believe the *majority* of members—ultimately rejected Joseph Tkach’s doctrine of lawlessness, why did God not give the faithful the Church’s resources and *cast out the apostate ones*? Why were the faithful not empowered to hold on to the Church’s worldwide recognition, respected name, good will, and high-level government access? Why were they not empowered to keep what God *used them to build*, much more than the apostate ones in His judgment, with their own diligent labor, sacrifice, contributions, prayers and love? God had done exactly that for the faithful when Garner Ted Armstrong and others attempted a similar apostate “take over” in the seventies, as well as when the state of California attacked the Church in 1979.

Instead, the vast majority of God’s people were driven out of the Worldwide Church of God like Judah was driven out of the temple and Jerusalem in Jeremiah’s day: the ones called and widely known by God’s name, with a large public audience looking on in some wonder, were shamefully unable to “hold the temple” against men who rejected all the Truth the Church was internationally known to represent. Consider this comparison further in Jeremiah 26:2-3, 12-13; 51:51 and Daniel 9:7-8, 16-17 (*Scriptural quotes herein are from the NKJV unless noted.*)

Almost all the members who separated did so at least fourteen years ago; thousands of them left before that. Yet to this day God’s people are still chaotically *divided* contrary to the clear biblical *command*, “[Let] there be **no divisions** among you”: they do not “**speak the same thing**”; they are neither of “**one doctrine**” nor “**perfectly joined together**”; one is “of Apollos, another of Cephas”; they are not “**one body**” but many, divided into several *completely independent* corporations, organizations and governments (I Cor. 1:10-12; 3:4; 12:13, 25; Eph. 4:3-5, 13-16). *Christ is not divided* (I Cor. 1:13; John 17:20-21). Citing these same Scriptures, all the splinter churches of the original Worldwide Church of God still use the argument, in their sadly weak efforts to proclaim the Gospel, that by Biblical definition only *one* body of Christian doctrine and government can be right (authorized by God)—all the others have to be in spiritual error and rebellion to one degree or another.

Thus, there are only two possibilities: either all but one of the splinter churches are in rebellion and error, or *all* of them are.

Obviously the Tkaches and their ministers are *not the primary reason* why the disintegration of the Church *persists to this day*. Those false ministers, long abandoned, do not prevent God’s people from uniting as He commands under His *one* government and doctrine, nor do they prevent God from restoring to the faithful the great blessing He gave the Work in Mr. Armstrong’s time. Not one of the splinter groups has grown substantially in numbers, resources or work since its relatively early years; all the sizable groups {c. 2016} have greatly contracted from their peak. None has been blessed to do a work even *remotely* approaching what God did through the Church in Mr. Armstrong’s time. Despite present denials, every one of the groups’ leaders believed God would distinguish them from the others with special blessing, to do a powerful work of some type or otherwise demonstrate very impressive “fruit.” Yet to this day the original WCG, despite the terrible corruption and ruin publicly inflicted upon it, is still much better known in the U.S. and around the world than all these groups combined: what remains of the once great recognition and influence of the Church still *eclipses all the groups*.

If God’s people *pleased Him* in their handling of the stumbling block and test posed by the Tkaches, today they would be united under His government in *one spiritual body and doctrine*, and their work would be *blessed* as it was in Mr. Armstrong’s day: there is still an important Work to do because this country and the other nations have not heard the true Gospel proclaimed with anything approaching power for over twenty years. Mr. Armstrong solemnly commissioned the Church’s leadership to *carry on* after his death proclaiming the Gospel with *all priority until the end*.

The *only conclusion* is that God’s ministers and people are compromising with sin in a serious way (Isaiah 59:1-2), despite their faithfulness in ultimately rejecting Joe Tkach for his rejection of Commandment keeping. This compromise with sin must have existed when God decided His people, rather than the apostate ones, would be shamefully driven out of the inheritance God gave them. The truth is that the Tkaches and their ministers encouraged, “stirred up” and preyed upon a *pre-existing* sinful inclination in *all of us*, to one degree or another, minister/official or member; they did not *originate* that inclination (II Tim. 4:3, prophesying of the Church in the “last days” (3:1)).

The sinful inclination is to move some degree *back into the world* rather than “*come out*” completely, and to make God’s law and expectations more “*lenient*” and *publicly acceptable*. Many will recall that this is what Mr. Armstrong called a “Laodicean condition” (not the *era*), and repeatedly warned the Church about in his last years. He said the hallmark of this condition is that, despite good “*head knowledge*” of right spiritual principles, the *physical* aspects of Christian life are more “*real*” than the spiritual; there is a tendency to *exercise and apply* spiritual principles too much according to *physical* considerations, desires, and appearance, especially on harder spiritual questions the Bible only answers *in principle*, rather than *literally and specifically*.

The ones primarily responsible for the state of God’s Church fourteen or more years after separation from the Tkaches are *the leaders the people chose in leaving the WCG*. Every one of these leaders, with the support of many ministers and other men of executive Levitical office at former Church headquarters, has led his own smaller-scale rebellion against God’s government and parts of His Truth. To their shame, most of God’s people have followed along, though many have done so with serious reservations and/or partially unwittingly.

THE PIVOTAL QUESTION

A pivotal question lies at the heart of the mystery of what happened in the Church after Mr. Armstrong’s death: which of the doctrines and spiritual judgments Mr. Armstrong authoritatively set in the Church are erroneous?

All God’s people and those who lead them today believe most of the doctrines and judgments are revealed Truth. In fact, none of the leaders of the various groups seriously disputes any of the following crucial facts: 1) Mr. Armstrong taught the original Gospel of Jesus Christ for over fifty years, when no other church in the world was doing so, and even God’s true Church had not done so for many years; 2) Mr. Armstrong learned the true Gospel from Christ Himself, through His written word, in that there was *no other teacher or surviving written source* for Mr. Armstrong to learn the true Gospel from, even in God’s Church; 3) starting literally from nothing, Mr. Armstrong proclaimed the Gospel to the world more universally and with greater power than had been done by anyone *since the original apostles*; 4) a number of other points of original Truth taught by Christ and the apostles, which also had been lost even by the Church over the centuries, were revealed to Mr. Armstrong and restored to the Church’s understanding through him; 5) key components of Biblical end-time prophecy “*shut up and sealed until the time of the end*” (Dan. 12:4) were first revealed to Mr. Armstrong.

Among numerous examples of this last point are the true identity of America and Britain, and the restoration of the Holy Roman Empire in a united Germany allied with European Soviet bloc nations. It is worth remembering here that even as late as 1985 no serious commentator believed he would live to see Eastern Europe escape the Soviet Union. Some reporters at the time of German reunification actually commented on Mr. Armstrong’s remarkable “prediction.”

Despite the obvious import of these facts to the question of whose spiritual understanding is more reliable *by God's demonstration*, all the leaders of the various splinter organizations believe some of the doctrines and spiritual judgments Mr. Armstrong left in the Church are erroneous. They also disregard the fact that Mr. Armstrong *emphatically reconfirmed* in his final years all the doctrines and judgments in question (including makeup), and he charged the Church and the leadership that he had been commissioned to “*restore all things*” and put the Church completely “*back on track*” before his work ended in death or Christ's return.

A significant number of God's people accept the opinion of their chosen leaders in this regard. Many are not sure if they accept their leaders' opinion but go along because they feel they must “attend services” somewhere; others disagree with their leaders but stay in their congregations for the same reason. Some actually have blinded themselves to the fact that their leaders teach contrary to Mr. Armstrong. The various leaders disagree with each other about where the errors are, and their critiques of their rivals' spiritual accuracy and honesty are generally valid. Among the various doctrines and spiritual judgments they will not follow, *all* have rebelled against principles of *God's government* restored in the Church through Mr. Armstrong.

The great question of Mr. Armstrong's spiritual accuracy is actually a question of the *proper understanding of God's government*. This question did not originate with the Tkaches after Mr. Armstrong's death, but was raised first by a number of other men in the seventies. The names are familiar to most of God's people, and should be instructive: Garner Ted Armstrong, David Antion, Wayne Cole, Ron Dart, Charles Hunting, Ernest Martin, Ken Westby, the Systematic Theology Project, etc. All these argued (at least in the earlier stages of their rebellion) that though Mr. Armstrong's teaching was correct on certain very important subjects, and therefore he had been given understanding unique for his time, they understood certain other doctrinal subjects better than he did, and so they were authorized by God to correct Mr. Armstrong's supposed errors.

Their “authority” was the same facile reasoning often invoked today to justify “correction” of Mr. Armstrong's truly authoritative teaching—the slogan that “no man is infallible.” Eventually the vast majority of God's people at that time perceived the fatal flaw in using such a theoretically undeniable principle as authority to overrule Mr. Armstrong: the ones who proposed to “correct” Mr. Armstrong were fallible too—even more so. Mr. Armstrong had the undeniable “fruits” of a true apostle: God's revelation to him *unique* in his day, and God's miraculous blessing of the Work under him, in which God “sent him forth” with the Gospel in *unprecedented* power. The ones proposing to correct had no such fruits, just arguments Mr. Armstrong heard and considered in detail, then rejected.

God's people succeeded in the test false teachers posed in the seventies because they ultimately decided to faithfully follow a key principle of God's government: that Christ would eventually guide His *proven leader* to recognize any valid points raised by advisors or even average Church members, as had happened at times over the years. Also it was appreciated that a far greater number of *invalid* points had been zealously advocated by others and rightly rejected by Mr. Armstrong over the years, thus *saving the*

Church from straying into persuasive error. Proponents of such invalid points were not all obvious rebels, but also included loyal and spiritually knowledgeable evangelists such as Dr. Meredith and Dr. Hoeh. Thus, the apostle in God’s government was like a faithful father who welcomes candid advice on important spiritual decisions from wife and children, but must ultimately exercise the greater spiritual discernment *God makes available to his office.* Sometimes he finds his family’s advice significantly flawed, often it generally concurs with his own judgment; sometimes he finds eventually that it contributes key information/ideas he was unaware of or had not yet considered.

Amazingly, little more than a year after Mr. Armstrong’s death the vast majority of God’s people, including the ministry and headquarters executives, were ready to accept *apostate doctrine* regarding healing and makeup they had *rejected* during Mr. Armstrong’s 1978-81 Church restoration. All it took for them to forget the spiritual principles that *led them right* in that earlier test were Mr. Armstrong’s *death* and an appointed successor who quickly turned from the Truth—even though if Mr. Armstrong was right in the seventies it was not he but *Christ*, who had not died or changed.

This of course proves many of God’s people were partially guilty of “following a man” in the faith they had in Mr. Armstrong *before he died*, such that his death seriously shook their faith—though most did not seem to recognize it in themselves. In the seventies/early eighties much more persuasive men than the Tkach cadre could not make the vast majority reject *any* of Mr. Armstrong’s doctrine, even though the Laodicean condition was prevalent through the seventies; after his death the vast majority *immediately* began to do so, blindly following new leaders. When confronted with contradictory teaching by the Tkaches they essentially reasoned, “Since God let Mr. Armstrong die and replaced him in the Church’s government, maybe he wasn’t the *uniquely* taught and authorized end time apostle we thought he was.” It is sadly ironic that many such people today follow a whole different set of new leaders, and they disparage as “following a man” the belief that no new leader has the *authority or spiritual competence* to “correct” Mr. Armstrong’s doctrine and spiritual judgments.

Another key fact proven by the vast majority’s unhesitating willingness to embrace what they had very recently rejected is that the Laodicean condition was still dormant just under the surface throughout the Church when Mr. Armstrong died—as he feared and warned—such that its regeneration only required a short period without his powerful advocacy of the Truth.

Virtually all the many doctrinal changes that followed the first two just discussed, through about 1992, were also originally advocated by one or more of the “liberals” listed above. Yet still almost no ministers or officials opposed them in any way discernible by the membership; the great majority *supported* them to the people, and relatively little opposition surfaced among the membership. When the Tkaches eventually introduced the “trinity” blasphemy and struck at the most fundamental aspects of the Truth held through all eras by the Church of God (the Sabbath and Commandment keeping), then many ministers, officials and members finally left. Yet even this was done with very little attempt by the vast majority of the fleeing ministry or officials to advocate *within the Church* against the heresy, for the whole membership’s sake.

Incredibly, having seen the end result of Joe Tkach’s doctrinal evolution, knowing its earlier phases originated with *disfellowshipped* men of a similar spirit in the seventies, rightly judging the end result *anti-Christ*, and even hearing Joe Tkach Jr. confess eventually that “doing away” with the Law naturally followed in doctrinal reasoning from the preceding changes, many of God’s ministers and people today *still agree* with some or all of the pre-1993 doctrinal changes. Yet Christ commanded *for this very spiritual test*, in His day but primarily for future ages of the Church: “A tree is known by its fruit;” “a **good** tree cannot bear **bad fruit**, nor can a **bad** tree bear **good fruit**;” “do men gather **grapes from thornbushes** or figs from thistles?” (Matt. 7:15-20; 12:33-34; Luke 6:43-44).

All the ministers and officials who left the WCG for the sake of Truth are a living testimonial that Mr. Armstrong was a “good tree”: he trained and appointed them all (directly or through surrogates), and the vast majority of what they still recognize as Truth was revealed to him uniquely before any of them knew it. Indisputably the Tkaches and Garner Ted etc. were “bad trees.” What is the inevitable conclusion under Christ’s clear command?

THE SPLINTER ORGANIZATIONS

United, Dr. Meredith, David Hulme

The largest single body of God’s people is “United” (chaos by any other name...). It generally accepts or condones virtually all the pre-1993 doctrinal changes, and adds to that false doctrine regarding God’s government, including outright ministerial voting and elections—government Mr. Armstrong called *demonic* and even Garner Ted considered too “liberal.” United’s doctrine also accepts or condones in principle virtually everything from the seventies Mr. Armstrong called “*liberalism*” and “*watering down truth*”—*virtually everything Mr. Armstrong fought to put the Church “back on track” from in the eighties*. The organization started out with about twenty thousand people fifteen years ago but it is smaller today. Despite potentially greater resources, it has done far less work in proclaiming the Gospel than the anemic accomplishment of some of its much smaller rivals. United’s primary “work” has been to provide a paycheck to the many ministers and other Levitical workers who collaborated to form it.

A significant number of God’s people in United disagree with much of the false doctrine, yet still attend. About a quarter of the organization’s ministers even refused to vote in United’s formational years. Yet, as discussed more fully later, even these who see the error also forget or reject Mr. Armstrong’s doctrine in a vital regard: he often taught that all in the Church *must speak the same thing*, and it *must* be what *Christ speaks*. If parts of the Truth Christ set in the Church are *rejected* by a group’s highest authority, God’s people not only aren’t required to attend for the sake of “assembling,” but *they sin if they continue to do so knowingly*: they would then be assembling under leadership Mr. Armstrong would have *disfellowshipped for division and false doctrine* (Rom. 16:17).

On more than one occasion Mr. Armstrong stated that if he were the only one left who held fast to all God's revealed Truth, he would worship by himself. Many of God's people today condemn their brethren (of significant number) who still attend Tkach's "Sabbath congregations" despite absolutely rejecting the doctrine of lawlessness; yet those at United and other groups who so condemn make the same error *by continuing to attend where they do*.

David Hulme and Dr. Meredith also reject important aspects of God's government in the Church. Government is the truth Mr. Armstrong said was in a sense the *most important* one he had been sent to restore to the Church, because all the other restored truths would be gravely jeopardized if this one were compromised. Both groups reject Mr. Armstrong's spiritual judgments regarding makeup and tithing (gross), as well as other doctrine.

David Hulme's "correction" of Mr. Armstrong's healing doctrine, including its relationship to the Passover, is essentially identical to that enacted by the Tkaches in 1987-88; the Tkach doctrine was substantially the same as that advocated by Garner Ted and other "liberals" in the seventies. After his wife was diagnosed with a potentially fatal illness, Mr. Hulme called for a church-wide fast to ask God for "better understanding" of the healing question than Mr. Armstrong's doctrine offered; Hulme's rebellion centered on Mr. Armstrong's general rejection of medical treatment as contrary to faith in God's promise and Christ's broken body (I Cor. 11:27-30; I Pet. 2:24). Mr. Hulme set the fast for Sabbath, January 16. His wife died shortly after the fast/Sabbath began. Reportedly her doctor's prognosis did not anticipate her to be on the verge of death at the time. Mr. Hulme subsequently enacted his "correction" of Mr. Armstrong's doctrine.

Dr. Meredith's healing doctrine, while marginally different in words, is essentially identical to Hulme's in substance: seeking full-scale medical treatment (surgery, chemotherapy, medicines, etc.) is actually called wise, rather than contrary to faith in God as our Healer. United's healing doctrine is the same as Mr. Hulme's.

Mr. Hulme was appointed a telecast presenter by the Tkaches, contrary to Mr. Armstrong's direction. They then ordained Mr. Hulme an evangelist, and for several years of the apostasy the Tkaches considered him to be in agreement with them.

Mr. Armstrong removed Dr. Meredith from high Church administrative office some years before his death and never reinstated him to any such office, though he remained a professor and a member of the Advisory Council of Elders. Not necessarily related, certain actions Dr. Meredith took as head of the ministry embroiled the Church in a very lengthy, extremely expensive lawsuit that became an additional burden for Mr. Armstrong in his last years. In his final months, Mr. Armstrong specifically rejected Dr. Meredith as a telecast presenter even though the Church television department chose him.

Many may recall that Dr. Meredith's church suffered a nationally publicized tragedy a few years ago. Mass murder occurred at Sabbath services and the pastor was one of the victims. It is said the church lost a number of members after this tragedy.

Mr. Hulme and Dr. Meredith, just like United's "government by committee," claim more accurate overall understanding of God's Truth than Mr. Armstrong, even though they received almost all of what they still believe is true directly from Mr. Armstrong. Very instructively, both Hulme and Meredith disdained Mr. Armstrong's teaching that *any* form of democratic rule is anathema in God's Church government, both issued pompous explanations to their people of how Mr. Armstrong was wrong in this regard, then both (in the same year) were humiliatingly *voted out of office* in the organizations they originally *founded/headed* after leaving the WCG. Both were shocked to find that key subordinate ministers and officials they trusted turned on them in a very short time. Both lost thousands of sheep in the schism, and since then neither one's membership or "work" have ever recovered to any meaningful degree, much less demonstrated anything like "blessing." *Mr. Armstrong prophesied that exactly such "fruit" would be reaped if Church government were compromised.*

Gerald Flurry and David Pack

The two other splinter organizations of any size/recognition are substantially different and potentially more correct overall than the three just discussed, as assessed by the "plumb line" of Mr. Armstrong's teaching (Zech. 4:10). They both formally reject all the doctrinal changes of the Tkach era, in stated recognition of Mr. Armstrong's office and successfully completed commission of "restoring all things" in God's Church. Mr. Armstrong revealed that this means *all the Truth originally given to the Church in the Ephesus era*, much of which was lost over the centuries. This vital understanding is truly *the key to the mystery* of the disintegration of God's Church since Mr. Armstrong died, and the key to the Church's restoration. As discussed in more detail later, God promises to restore the Church so greatly if we repent that the years of humiliating ruin and punishment will only have caused us to grow in grace, knowledge and blessing.

Unfortunately, neither leader of these two organizations fully lives up to the understanding described above; both fail to follow Mr. Armstrong's teaching in certain areas, most importantly God's government. Gerald Flurry appointed himself to the office of "that prophet" several years ago, and claims a great volume of end time prophetic understanding not revealed to Mr. Armstrong, significant parts of which conflict with Mr. Armstrong's prophetic doctrine. Apparently just very recently Mr. Flurry announced he is an apostle as well. David Pack also appointed himself an apostle a few years after founding his small church, and he claims authority superior to the two witnesses (he believes he will train them).

Despite his organization's correct core premise, Gerald Flurry transgresses a principle of Church government often discussed and written about by Mr. Armstrong: persons who are literal prophets have no role in governing God's people or establishing doctrine in the Church age (except for the *prophesying* aspect of the work of the end time Elijah and the two witnesses). Mr. Flurry even removed passages to this effect from *Mystery of the Ages*. Also dismissed is Mr. Armstrong's long-standing teaching that the New Testament phrase "that prophet" does not refer to an end time human servant of God.

Both Mr. Flurry and Mr. Pack transgress Mr. Armstrong's teaching regarding the office of apostle, which Mr. Armstrong would not even confer (on Christ's behalf) on the man he anointed to lead the Church at the *height of its power to proclaim the Gospel*. Needless to say, both these men also lack the Biblical fruits of a true apostle's office/accomplishment—the demonstration only God can perform of having been “sent forth” in unmistakable power—as opposed to the concurrence of a few thousand lost sheep sincerely but vulnerably seeking a good shepherd. Mr. Armstrong, by contrast, would not acknowledge his office for years after God had demonstrated powerfully the fruits of an apostle in his work.

In a stunning attempt to reconcile his small work with his correct belief that the Gospel still must be preached in all the world as a witness, Mr. Pack appears to claim that the national and international availability of his website constitutes preaching in every nation. This is similar, but even more spiritually unenlightened, to an argument certain “liberals” used to make against spending money to purchase additional and higher quality air-time: as long as the Gospel was available on some type of medium—whatever the time, frequency or audience—an area was “reached.”

Among all the various organizations only Gerald Flurry's considered Mr. Armstrong's writings vital enough to God's Church and Work to strenuously seek the right to publish them. The organization deserves credit for this. The Church in this age was *built upon*, preached the Gospel with, and grew mightily by studying and disseminating Mr. Armstrong's inspired writings. All true Christians today received the great majority of their understanding from Mr. Armstrong's writings—by God's Spirit and in conjunction with the Bible—both directly and through surrogates trained by his writings.

Likely Mr. Flurry believed winning the right by judicial decree to publish Mr. Armstrong's works would be a great sign to the rest of God's people, and the goal was such a right one that God probably would have given that type of victory if not for the spiritual error described above. Nevertheless, it was a fitting symbolic testimony that a group of God's people, after the shame of our being driven out empty-handed, went back to the desecrated Temple to rescue some of its most important treasures. If they did not achieve this by glorious victory in battle, they still testified by their willingness to fight and to publicly put a fittingly dear price on those treasures.

In addition to these five main organizations and the beleaguered remnant of God's people who still attend Sabbath-meeting congregations at the former WCG, there are a number of even smaller organizations. These mirror the larger ones: they believe most of what Mr. Armstrong taught but reject some of it. All are headed by a leader who claims he possesses “more accurate understanding” than Mr. Armstrong in end time prophecy and/or on certain other doctrinal subjects.

GOD'S PEOPLE "AT HOME"

Thousands more of God's people are "at home" (Col. 4:15), whether individually, in families, or in very small spiritually organized congregations (i.e. no legal organization). Their precise numbers can only be estimated.

Most of these thousands are at home not because they prefer it or "neglect assembling together," but because they understand that God's command to *shun* apostate doctrine/teachers takes *precedence*, as Mr. Armstrong taught and the Bible makes clear, over the exhortation to assemble: that exhortation rightly applies only where there is *unified acceptance*, upheld by the *leader*, of the doctrine God authoritatively delivered to the Church. "Now I urge you, brethren, note those who **cause divisions** and offenses, **contrary to the doctrine which you learned**, and **avoid** them" (Rom. 16:17). "I [God] **cannot endure iniquity** and the **sacred meeting**" (Isaiah 1:13). "If anyone does not **obey our word in this epistle**, note that person and **do not keep company** with him, that he may be ashamed" (II Thes. 3:14-15). "**Reject a divisive man** after the first and second admonition" (Tit. 3:9-10). The following verses contain important additional instruction on this *crucial* point: Rev. 2:14-16, 20 (Christ gravely warns the Church about continuing to *congregate with apostate teachers*); II John 6, 9-11; II Tim. 2:16-17; Jer. 9:2; 15:17; Ezek. 13:9.

Under normal circumstances the principle of assembling together coincides with that of shunning apostate doctrine/teachers, but part of the searching test God has brought on the Church is that these principles *diverge today*. The test also brought the principle of shunning apostate doctrine/teachers into conflict with otherwise right principles of Church government, including waiting for God to correct the appointed leader rather than leaving the place of worship God clearly founded; this conflict caused many of us spiritual anguish in considering whether and when to leave the WCG. The same divergence of these principles likely happened when God tested other Church eras with "better understanding" proclaimed by false apostles/teachers (Rev. 2:2, 14-15 and 20-25).

Mr. Armstrong taught that the Church is a spiritual body, the body of Christ, not an organization or association of people. Obviously, however, Church worship has partially physical aspects subsidiary to its greatest meaning—direct communion with God in the Holy Convocation, in which we are specially called into *His presence* in the Spirit. Chief among these partially physical aspects is that the Church's Sabbath observance normally includes interaction with other worshippers. Additional physical aspects are a customary meeting facility/location, and customary service arrangements and procedures.

These partially physical aspects all *potentially* carry significant spiritual value, but if *separated* from the *essential spiritual aspects* of the Church, they are worthless. Consider, for example, that unless things have changed in recent years, the church Garner Ted Armstrong founded conducts services just like a congregation of the true Church: a minister officiates in the customary way, with all customary arrangements/procedures, and the members "fellowship." Indeed, the same could be said even to this day of the former WCG's Sabbath-meeting congregations.

If a faithful Christian today lived in a place where the only Sabbath service he could possibly reach is one held by the remnant of Garner Ted Armstrong's church, or one held by the former WCG, does the principle of "assembling" (and fellowship) require him to attend there? Obviously the greater spiritual meaning of the Church's Sabbath observance—appearing in *God's* presence where *all* His Truth is accepted and His *government* obeyed—*commands* such a person *not* to attend there. Mr. Armstrong and presumably all the leaders of the splinter organizations would tell such a person that, with no other *right* place to assemble available to him, he must keep the Holy Convocation by assembling with his family alone.

People who actually apply this command today and keep the Sabbath in their families are of "one doctrine," all "speak the same thing," and the doctrine is God's because they follow *all* the Truth restored to the Church through God's proven apostle. Thus they are still fully under God's government, which in Christ's apostleship (Heb. 3:1) *did not die* when the human apostle died. This is not "every man doing what is right in his own eyes" because these people claim no authority to *change* what was authoritatively "once for all delivered" to them through Christ's apostleship (Jude 3); "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever" (Heb. 13:8). In keeping the Sabbath these brethren function as a very isolated family did in Mr. Armstrong's time.

Head of a family is a recognized teaching and ruling office in the government of God. Under normal circumstances spiritually elder men supplement the authority and teaching of the human apostle/leader to the heads of all the various Church families (or individuals). Historically, however, in certain periods and regions *faithful* supplemental teaching was not available to all God's people—due to apostasy, persecution, scattering, or a shortage of "laborers."

Some of God's people at home today have such faithful intermediate guidance available to them, the vast majority are unaware of any. If there is no *proven* spiritually elder man yet known to a family or individual, *after diligent search*, then Christ's authority runs directly through the teaching of the faithful apostle to the *individual head*. Though physically separate—often knowing few others who worship as they do—all such faithful families, tiny groups and individuals are in *spiritual communion* with all other faithful Christians through the essential spiritual meaning of the Holy Convocation: fellowship *with God* in the Truth.

Many of God's people today, represented in all the splinter organizations, harbor serious doubt as to whether the organization they attend is fully faithful. Many expressly justify their chosen organization as just the best choice in a situation where *all* the options are compromised. Such Christians believe they *must* "go to services" in an organization and "assemble" with familiar people, in traditional circumstances and arrangements; in effect they reason that purity of doctrine, though definitely desirable, is not *essential* if no organization offers it.

People at United who concede to one degree or another its doctrinal and governmental chaos actually justify it primarily on the ground that it has the most members and ministers from the old days. Commonly these brethren came to United in a sudden “wave of exodus” along with a substantial part of their old WCG congregation and their old minister; they came without even *knowing the particulars of United’s doctrine and government* (a number of ministers came without such knowledge as well).

Many people in each of the organizations kept not a single Sabbath’s interval between the Tkaches’ service and their new organization’s. Before becoming acquainted with their new organization most argued the right response to the apostasy was to *continue “assembling” in the services of the WCG despite the evil*, and they typically professed that those who had left (to home or an organization) were sinning. As soon as they found their new organization, most professed that any Christian still attending the WCG was sinning greatly in God’s sight. Even those sinning Christians, however, likely to be cut off from God for their continued attendance in gross apostasy, were considered to be doing better in *congregating with the lawless ministry* than those who shunned the apostasy by keeping the Sabbath “at home.”

Thus, a substantial segment of God’s people today, whether literally or just effectively, seem to believe the Holy Convocation is a commanded appearance before *other people* in a certain customary *association, setting and arrangement*, rather than a commanded appearance before *God’s throne*. Speaking frankly, it is a subtle form of idolatry to consider it more important to “assemble” in an organization, even for the purpose of doing a work, than it is that the organization’s leadership rejects Truth restored to the Church by Christ through His proven apostle (consider the principle of Jeremiah 7:4-14). Remember that Garner Ted Armstrong continued to proclaim aspects of the true Gospel of the Kingdom for some years after his father disfellowshipped him, with greater recognition than any of today’s splinter leaders.

The apostle Paul warned that when a serious spiritual problem infects a significant part of a congregation, even if the problem has not yet reached the point of outright apostasy and disfellowshipping it can still mean that the Church members “come together [assemble] not for the better, but for **the worse**” (I Cor. 11:17). In other words, assembling is actually worse spiritually than not assembling under the circumstances. The spiritual problems Paul rebuked in Corinth were *growing division* and *negligent regard for apostolic direction*.

As Mr. Armstrong said frequently, even in the true Church it is possible to “go to services” faithfully, consider yourself in agreement with all the Church’s teaching, enthusiastically participate in all aspects of the service, spend much time talking with brethren, join in many Church activities, and yet completely fail to attain the greater spiritual meaning of the Holy Convocation and the Church. Mr. Armstrong warned this is a common problem of the Laodicean condition, because of its tendency to find the more physical aspects of God’s Church, worship and the Christian life more important and appealing, indeed more real, than the greater spiritual aspects.

HOLD FAST TO THE PROVEN APOSTLE'S DOCTRINE

As part of the command to “*hold fast*” (Rev. 2:25; 3:3, 11), God expects us to choose Truth above all until He restores right government and *unity* of the Truth in the whole Church. It is an obvious fact, which the unfaithful leaders of the various organizations could not seriously deny, that if they began to teach exactly what they do now while Mr. Armstrong was alive, he would have disfellowshipped them. The fact that they still agree with *most* of Mr. Armstrong’s doctrine would have *availed nothing*: under clear Biblical command, knowingly teaching against even *one* authoritative doctrinal point is enough to remove a man from office and for God’s people to *shun him* until he repents. If Christ would have disfellowshipped such a teacher then, what is *spiritually* different now? In fact the *division* these leaders have caused today is *far greater* than they could have done when Mr. Armstrong was alive. Has Christ changed?

Mr. Armstrong often repeated a life and death warning during several difficult doctrinal controversies in which God’s people had to choose whom and what they believed—including the rebellions in 1974, in 1978-81, and the makeup controversy of 1981 forward: “Do you really want to bet your eternal life that God’s apostle, with proven fruits of revealed knowledge and unprecedented power in proclaiming the Gospel, does not understand God’s word and law as well as you or subordinate ministers?”

As discussed earlier, Christ gave us the standard to distinguish true apostles from false apostles/teachers: “you shall know them by their fruits.” Whether they *claim* the office of apostle or not, the leaders of the splinter organizations (including the several governing ministers of United) effectively usurp the authority of an apostle when they overrule doctrine Christ set in the Church through a *proven founding leader*. None of the splinter leaders disputes that Mr. Armstrong was the *God-appointed human governor of the Church for over fifty years*. The Bible shows exercising the authority of an apostle to overrule Church doctrine *when Christ has not conferred it* is not simply an “error” in spiritual judgment an otherwise faithful minister may make: all who usurp such authority are called *false apostles* unless they repent quickly (Rev. 2:2; II Cor. 11:13).

Thus, Mr. Armstrong himself either died a true apostle or a false apostle—there is no “in-between” for one who claims the office. If he died a true apostle of Christ, *no one today has the authority to overrule the doctrine he established in the Church*. None of the groups believes Mr. Armstrong a *false apostle*. Even a number of Tkach followers don’t believe that. The fruits of Mr. Armstrong’s work prove *overwhelmingly* he was “one sent forth”: God’s faithful messenger of restored Truth and “voice crying out” the end time warning in the earth in God’s name. God *could not* have used him in such power if he were *falsely calling himself an apostle*. It is a documented fact that in the approximately thirty years of his life *after* he acknowledged the office of apostle, the already astonishing growth of the Church and Work *multiplied by huge percentages* in every category: *World Tomorrow* audience, availability and prominence; nations and regions reached; Gospel materials readership; national and international recognition; co-workers, financial support and other resources; facilities; and membership. “Truly the signs of an apostle were accomplished among you” (consider II Cor 12:11-12).

God even raised Mr. Armstrong up from total heart failure to complete the greatest part of all this wondrous work (1979-86)—exactly at the pivotal moment to defeat the seventies “liberal” movement, then literally only months away from largely taking over the Church—the same apostate doctrine that infects the Church today.

Conversely, we have all now seen approximately twenty-four years of the “fruit” of various “successors” to Mr. Armstrong (starting with the Tkaches), who claim “new understanding,” “doctrinal correction,” and in most cases claim “less onerous, more loving, more balanced spiritual judgment.” As noted earlier, most of these “successors” also have fed God’s people doctrinal “fruit” that came from indisputably “*bad trees*.” Consider in this regard the prophecy of end time apostate teachers in II Pet. 2:19, “While they promise them [Christians] **liberty**, they themselves are [servants] of **corruption**.”

The “work” of all the splinter organizations combined only constitutes “a drop in the bucket” compared to what God did through Mr. Armstrong. As the individual leaders all teach (at least by obvious implication) that their rivals are spiritually illegitimate or misguided, God’s people whom Mr. Armstrong left *unified*, are *divided* into a variety of organizations and an untold number of “home” congregations. Consider the prophecy of end time apostasy in Jude 19, “These are sensual persons [false teachers] **who cause divisions** [among God’s people].” Ironically, each splinter organization’s specific grounds for criticizing the record of its rivals are generally *valid Biblically and factually*.

It is a very telling “fruit” of the various “successors” that *not one* of them is considered *legitimate* by anything like a majority of God’s people today; even the present leaders of the largest organization are considered illegitimate/wrong by a significant “voting bloc” of their own church, plus everybody else. Yet if any organization were approved by God, it would by now have received great power from God and fruits many of God’s people could recognize. The vast majority of the sheep would “hear their shepherd’s voice” and unite under Christ’s human shepherd (John 10:3-5, 14); Christ’s servants who *by grace* have found the right way in this chaos have a *duty* to “seek the straying sheep” (Ezek. 34) instead of just saving themselves. Mr. Armstrong faced several serious rebellions and challenges to his office, but the vast majority of the people always *recognized* Christ’s leadership in him, even when the Church sank rather deeply into the “Laodicean condition” in the seventies.

Having given us the sure test for distinguishing true apostles from false through the Church ages, Christ gave us in Biblical prophecy a *clear answer* to the pivotal question posed earlier herein: the question of whether the end time apostle’s doctrines and spiritual judgments can be unfailingly relied upon to “pass” the great test prophesied to come upon the end time Church. The books of II Thessalonians, II Timothy, II Peter, I and II John, and Jude prophesy extensively of this great test upon the end time Church; these apostles apparently did not know the end time test (like Christ’s return) was very far off, but in fact the Ephesus era suffered a type of the same test, which climaxed *after the apostles died*. Recall that *Mr. Armstrong revealed the Bible was written primarily for the Philadelphia era of God’s Church*, such that much of the Bible’s prophecy about the Church is *for our time*.

All these books repeatedly and gravely emphasize a single piece of spiritual counsel for success in this great test: *hold fast* to the Truth “once for all delivered”—the Truth God gave you through a proven apostle *before* the great test of apostate teaching began. The King James translation of this passage from Jude 3 is clear enough, but the literal Greek yields an even more precise translation: “the absolutely reliable and complete truth you were authoritatively taught before.” In II Timothy 3:13-14 *God’s people today are prophetically commanded*, “**Imposters** will grow worse and worse, **deceiving and being deceived**. But as for you, **continue** in the things which you **have learned** and been assured of, **knowing from whom you have learned them** [the genuine apostle] ...” In II Pet. 2:10 (repeated in Jude 8) Christ prophesies of the *same end time imposters*, revealing their hallmark is that they “**despise authority**” and “are not afraid to **speak evil of dignitaries**”—i.e. they take to themselves authority to criticize and disdain the genuine apostle’s office, work and doctrine.

In II John 6 Christ *commands*, “This is the commandment, that as you have **heard from the beginning**, you should walk in it.” Verse 10 warns, “If anyone comes to you and **does not bring this doctrine** [what you “heard from the beginning”], **do not receive him into your house nor greet him...**” I John 2:24 promises us we will pass the great test if we keep this commandment, “If what you **heard from the beginning** abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and the Father.”

Christ’s very message to the Philadelphia Church in Revelation 3 tells us the test requires us to, “**Hold fast** what you have [possess], that no one may take your crown” (verse 11). By definition, both of the Greek and the English, you can only “hold fast” what is already in your possession; the word does not apply if part of what is in your possession must be *cast away and replaced*. Consider the following additional passages which underscore the same command: II Thessalonians 2:15 (“traditions” here is better translated “precepts” or “ordinances,” and the same Greek word is so translated elsewhere in the N.T.); II Timothy 1:13-14; 2:2; 4:3-4; II Peter 1:12-15; 2:1, 10 and 21; 3:1-2. Old Testament prophecies in Isaiah 51:1 and Jeremiah 6:16 also speak to God’s people today and give them the same counsel for success.

God is the perfect teacher. No good teacher would give the class a final examination until he had taught them *all the correct information to be tested*, answered questions fully, given *preliminary tests* on the information as the students progressed to help cement their understanding, *reviewed* all the correct information before the final, and clarified any *earlier misunderstandings*. No teacher would announce at the final exam: 1) that a significant part of the information taught during the class, and even counted *as right* on preliminary tests, was in fact *erroneous*; 2) that he would not tell them what specifically or even how much was erroneous; and 3) that the students were on their own to figure out themselves what was wrong, what was right, and what the correct answer is regarding any false information they were given. This is precisely the type of teacher a Christian effectively accuses God of being who says the test today is not to “hold fast,” but to “change, discard and replace”: every man judge “whatever is right in his own eyes” and even find a significant part of the new “accurate” material within the otherwise heretical teaching of the Tkach ministry.

Mr. Armstrong warned repeatedly in his last few years of a great test coming upon the Church—a test of whether we had grown in grace, understanding and character enough that we *loved the Truth* (consider II Thessalonians 2:10-12); *knowing* the Truth was *not enough*. He said only by such growth could we hold fast when tested by Church crisis and/or persuasive teachers preaching contrary to the Truth; he also warned that the “Laodicean condition” hinders or even stunts such vital growth in those affected by it.

For the sake of the test, God did not reveal to Mr. Armstrong who would come in the power of Satan spearheading the temptation. He thought it might be Garner Ted from the outside, but he also had concerns about how all the evangelists would do once he wasn't around any longer to supervise them. He knew that even if the temptation came from the outside it would certainly be empowered and given credibility by ministers and officials on the inside allying with the false teacher, just as originally loyal ministers and officials had betrayed the Truth in earlier apostasies and rebellions. Also Mr. Armstrong was very concerned about what would happen to the man he chose to succeed him because he knew that man would then become Satan's target with an intensity he had never been required to withstand before.

Mr. Armstrong agonized over the question of his successor because of individual concerns he had about *each of the evangelists*. He believed God would give His people a *faithful leader* to complete the Work and help them become “accounted worthy to escape”—which is why he said to follow that leader as if our spiritual life depended upon it in his last sermon, fervently praying the one he appointed would succeed. However, *he also knew it was possible the one he appointed would disqualify himself* in the great test, and *someone else* would have to be appointed later by God. Mr. Armstrong alluded to this possibility in his prayer at the January 7, 1986, meeting in which he formalized Mr. Tkach's appointment, referring enigmatically to the Laodicean condition's possible rapid advance following his death (it appears no one really understood what Mr. Armstrong meant at the time). Assumed as a given by Mr. Armstrong in his statement about following the leader was his oft-repeated teaching that the leader should be followed only “as he follows Christ,” and that no one following Christ would reject God's law or the Truth God had restored through Mr. Armstrong's commission.

Mr. Armstrong specifically refused to ordain Mr. Tkach to the office of apostle, saying that could only be done by Christ Himself—with demonstrations of the fruits and power of the office only Christ could give. Mr. Armstrong also believed withholding this office was vitally important to his concerns just described regarding the unique temptation his successor would face, and to the fact that his successor's role was to help the Church *hold fast what God had already restored*, not to replace/correct that doctrine.

Yet after about a year in office Mr. Tkach took to himself the title of apostle. This was open rebellion on a key point of God's government (he had already rebelled on a couple of less fundamental governmental issues). Before the whole Church he defied Mr. Armstrong's authority as a proven apostle: again, since the authority of an apostle is Christ's in a unique way (Heb. 3:1), it does not die when the man dies. Mr. Armstrong commanded Mr. Tkach and other evangelists/officials to this effect in his last months,

telling them the doctrine he had learned from Christ step by step, trial by trial, with progressive addition and correction over the years, was the authoritative doctrine God commanded His Church to hold fast to after his death—the *completion* of his commission to restore all things. It is no coincidence that shortly after he rebelled on the question of his office, Mr. Tkach also approved the first doctrinal changes; before that time he had actually refused (apparently sincerely) at least two proposed “liberalizations” of important spiritual judgments made by Mr. Armstrong.

When Mr. Tkach started going wrong Mr. Armstrong’s concerns about the rest of the evangelists were borne out, as none of them strenuously *fought* the developing apostasy from their offices inside the Church, even though a few executives tried to do so and sought strong backing from the evangelists, which was the only hope. Most of the evangelists generally *agreed* with the apostasy until about 1992-93. Only a very few were known to have even *privately* voiced major concern before that time; none opposed the apostasy *openly for the benefit of the whole Church* before they left to form or join new organizations.

ZERUBBABEL REBUILDS THE TEMPLE

The book of Haggai speaks prophetically of the restoration of the spiritual Temple in the end time, using certain aspects of Zerubbabel’s restoration of the physical temple as a prophetic type. Many will remember Mr. Armstrong believed his work was that of the prophetic Zerubbabel: the first Zerubbabel was sent to restore the original temple from ruins; the prophetic Zerubbabel, Mr. Armstrong said, had been sent to restore the original apostolic Church and Truth, just at a time (1927) when the Church had decayed, through loss of much understanding over the centuries, to the point where it was virtually dead (Rev. 3:2). *Haggai’s prophetic message is for us today.* The time of its fulfillment is at hand.

Haggai typically and prophetically describes God’s people as *neglecting their commission to restore His House*. During the reign of Cyrus, a number of years before the dates mentioned in Haggai 1, Zerubbabel had led the people back from captivity to rebuild God’s house, and he had *laid a right foundation* for it (Ezra 3:10-11). Subsequently enemies of God’s work, wielding *unrighteous governmental authority*, forcibly *stopped the work* and damaged some of what had been accomplished. Thus, God’s people were tested in their dedication to rebuild the temple by subversive enemies *who at first claimed they also worshiped God and wanted to do the work too* (Ezra 4:2-3).

After this persecution subsided, however, leaders among the people preferred to build their own “houses”—prophetically *churches*—leaving God’s house lying in ruins (Haggai 1:2-4). Those leaders and the people following them *expected great blessing* in the work they chose, but God gave them only frustrating, shameful *fruitlessness* in their labors (1:5-11).

After *judging* them in this manner for a period of about *fourteen years*, God speaks to His people again through Haggai and Zechariah, restores His government over them in Zerubbabel, and they set Zerubbabel's foundation back in order from the enemy's damage and the decay caused by their own neglect. God then reminds the people that until the day this was accomplished He had cursed their work; He promises to *bless their work greatly* from that day forward (2:15-19). The same prophetic message from God to the people is given with further detail in Zechariah's parallel prophecy (8:9-17).

Returning to Haggai, God foretells (in prophetic type) that His people will rebuild the spiritual Temple to an even greater glory than the original (2:3, 9); this is the fruit of the lessons learned by the people in their great test and accompanying punishment.

The time setting of Haggai's prophecy is clearly indicated to be shortly before the Tribulation and the Day of the Lord (2:6-7, 21-22). At that time God uses the prophetic Zerubbabel as a "signet ring": a stamp that *identifies unmistakably the authentic edicts and law of the King*, and exposes any *contrary* directives not stamped by the signet as *unauthorized counterfeits* of the King's word (2:23).

The parallel prophecy of Zechariah reveals, "The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this temple, his hands shall also finish it" (4:9). The Hebrew word translated "hands" twice in this verse can mean literally that, or a man's personal work and effort. However, it can also mean the *judgments/ordinances/instructions of one in authority* when he is *not physically present*, or even more specifically when he is *no longer alive*. The word is so translated regarding David's "ordinance" (literally "hands") still governing the proper worship of God in the physical temple centuries after David's death; not coincidentally, this reference is found in Ezra's parallel passage describing *Zerubbabel's worship ceremony* after he laid the foundation for the restored temple (3:10). The same word can also denote the representatives/agents of the one in authority who faithfully implement and execute his judgments/ordinances/instructions (I Kings 10:29; II Chron. 1:17).

Though he believed he fulfilled the role of the prophetic Zerubbabel, Mr. Armstrong did not believe that necessarily meant he would live to see the spiritual Temple completed: the time when the Church would have "made herself ready" and become "accounted worthy to escape" to the place of safety by holding fast to *all* the restored Truth and completing God's work of proclaiming the Gospel as a witness. Many will recall Mr. Armstrong spoke of his possible death a number of times. He often noted that prophetic Zerubbabel restores and proclaims not by human "might nor power," but by the Spirit of God (Zech. 4:6).

To God's glory, the mortal man Herbert W. Armstrong did die, but his true might and power of the Spirit in his teaching and judgments did not die, and will complete the Temple according to God's Word. His writings will be the heart and core of the work of proclaiming the Gospel that still must be accomplished.

Mr. Armstrong's *continuing* work for the Church's completion is also shown by the previously cited New Testament prophecies regarding the end time Church. As explained, the end time Church is warned prophetically—as the first century Church was warned contemporaneously by those apostolic letters—that their test will be to hold fast *to the end* the Truth “once for all delivered” to them by apostles of proven fruits. Thus, all of us today *vitaly* need Mr. Armstrong to *review the Truth with us* by his writings and other materials—to *restore, increase and continuously reinforce* that Truth in us so we can prove faithful *to the end*.

Due to apostate influence and the Laodicean condition Mr. Armstrong's writings and other materials have been neglected for years and partially forgotten by many of God's people. We need to study his teaching anew to restore to ourselves aspects of the “Truth once delivered” we lost full understanding of over the years through such neglect. Also the test has proven that our understanding and *love* of deeper aspects of the Truth was somewhat *deficient* in God's sight even *before* the apostasy; Mr. Armstrong often said he feared many mistook their *extensive familiarity* with his instruction for *deep understanding* of it. As with the Bible, his writings can be read over and over with refreshed and *new* understanding/appreciation imparted each time. We all must zealously seek Mr. Armstrong's teaching anew in conjunction with the Bible in order to *grow in grace and knowledge* until the end. “He obtained witness that he was righteous, **God testifying of his gifts**; and through it **he being dead still speaks** [teaches]” (Heb. 11:4).

It should also be noted in this regard that the Hebrew words in Haggai 2:18 translated “from the day that the foundation of the LORD's temple was laid,” can also be translated, “from the day that the LORD's temple was made ready by instruction to proceed.” The operative word translated “foundation ...was laid” is translated in II Chron. 3:3(KJV), “These are the things wherein Solomon was **instructed** for the building of the house of God.” Thus, the work of completing the Temple cannot go forward again until God's people *fully recognize God's instruction* to them through Mr. Armstrong.

It is revealing that God refers only indirectly to the human leader who carries on in Zerubbabel's judgments/ordinances/instructions—God's government always requires a *single* ultimate leader—merely referencing him as Zerubbabel's representative/agent (“hands”). God gives him in prophecy no name in his own right. Contrast this with the self-appointed apostles, prophets, and various other titles *who all center their message to God's people today primarily on who they are in their own right, and significantly on what they know that Mr. Armstrong did not*. The message you read now is entirely about who Mr. Armstrong was and *is* in Christ.

God's Word reveals He will judge His people in great mercy and grace, to bring them back under His government and authentic edicts, as stamped by His signet ring. In addition to the prophecy of Haggai and Zechariah to this effect, Isaiah 51 and 54 both prophesy of the great restoration of the Church in the end time (these prophecies are dual, first for the Church and later Israel in the Kingdom).

God will break the control and influence of the unfaithful shepherds who have misled the sheep in seeking their own glory, let the sheep become “scattered,” and have not “strengthened the weak” nor “healed the sick” nor “brought back those driven away” (Ezek. 34:3-10). Consider also Zech. 11:8, 15-17. After God so judges, His people will rebuild His spiritual Temple now lying in ruins—rebuild it on the *right foundation* laid by Zerubbabel, faithfully following his judgments, ordinances and instructions.

The Church cannot “hasten the coming of the day of God” (II Pet. 3:12)—our end time service to all mankind—until the rebuilding resumes. We cannot be “accounted worthy to escape” (Luke 21:36) unless we complete the Temple faithfully. Anyone who now turns back to the authority and doctrine of God’s faithful apostle, even after all these years, and fervently prays for the restoration of God’s Church, will be accounted by God among the first of the laborers to return to our commissioned work prophesied by Haggai: God promises He will forgive any spiritual error you have followed, or even taught, when you “pray toward His Temple” in true repentance (Dan. 9:3-5, 16-19; II Chron. 6:19-21, 26-31).

Please give serious consideration to this message even if, as will be the case for many, it is significantly contrary to what you presently believe. Rather than dismissing it out of hand, please pray God will show you if it is true. You lose nothing by so praying. If you pray this and sincerely want to know God’s will even if it is different than your present understanding, He promises to reveal it to you (John 7:16-17).

Your brethren in Christ

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We urge you to hear several [critically important messages by Mr. Armstrong](#) which we provide here; these messages address major themes of this letter, the Addendum, and the other letters on our website.

A d d e n d u m

The pivotal question posed in our main letter (p. 3), is the essential key (Rev. 3:7) to understanding the mystery of the Church's divided, compromised state today, and to understanding what God wants us all to observe and achieve in these last days, in order to be "accounted worthy to escape." In this addendum, we offer an amplified discussion of the principal evidence regarding the pivotal question.

Through the apostles in the Ephesus era, Christ established in the Church the *complete Truth, without any error in doctrine*. The Church's test thereafter was to *hold fast to all the Truth* "once for all [time] delivered to the saints" (Jude 3). The doctrine of the apostles was not to be changed in *any respect*; they commanded God's people, especially the ministry, to hold fast to the doctrine exactly as delivered. Six books of the New Testament make this command their primary theme, applying it to the succeeding eras of the Church (see main letter, pp. 14-15).

Yet even during the lifetime of the apostles, other ministers began to advocate that some of the apostles' doctrine was erroneous and needed correction. This eventually resulted in the formation of counterfeit Christianity (the Catholic Church and later her Protestant daughters). It also affected God's Church, however, which began to drift somewhat from, and eventually lost, certain aspects of original Truth. This process of sporadic drifting from Truth slowly continued over the centuries until the end of the Sardis era. By that time, as Herbert W. Armstrong often explained, the true Church had lost so much of the original Truth that it was nearly dead (Rev. 3:1-2).

Christ declared that in the last days He would send a man in the spirit and power of Elijah to "restore all things" (Mal. 4:5-6; Matt. 17:11). Recall how often Mr. Armstrong explained that "restore all things" meant *all the Truth* "once for all [time] delivered" through the original apostles. Though this Truth is in the Bible in principle, if one receives great enough understanding to piece it all together ("here a little, there a little"), no one was given *full* understanding of it again over the centuries until the one sent in the spirit and power of Elijah.

Herbert W. Armstrong taught that he was the one Christ sent. The fruits prove it: no one can deny that through Mr. Armstrong Christ performed the greatest work of proclaiming the Gospel ever done in the earth. Equally important, no one can deny that many key points of original Truth, lost over the centuries, were *first revealed again to Herbert W. Armstrong uniquely*—as were key elements of prophecy "shut up and sealed until the time of the end" (see main letter, pp. 3, 13-14). Mr. Armstrong then taught all this understanding to the rest of us. All the Truth the splinter organization leaders still teach they learned directly from Mr. Armstrong. Mr. Armstrong, on the other hand, like the original apostles, was not taught the Truth by any *man*, but by direct revelation from Christ (through His Word). When he first began to fellowship with the Sardis Church as a *lay congregant*, he already knew *far more Truth* than any of its ministry.

As Herbert W. Armstrong was the one uniquely sent to "restore all things"—all the unchangeable original Truth—his doctrine cannot be changed by *any succeeding leader*. No one in the splinter organizations today doubts that the doctrine of the original apostles, as reflected in

the Bible, was *infallible*. The apostles were fallible men, who sinned and made mistakes, but by Christ's power, to fulfill God's great purpose, the doctrine and spiritual judgments they established in the Church are completely reliable and authoritative for all ages. Christ Himself said that in the last days He would send another man with *the same miraculous understanding as the original apostles*, so he could accurately *restore all* the Truth they originally established in the Church. Mr. Armstrong was a fallible man, but Christ fulfilled His Word and purpose through Mr. Armstrong perfectly by the end of his life.

Mr. Armstrong often explained that the complete original Truth was not revealed to him all at once and he continued to receive it into his last year, culminating in *Mystery of the Ages*. Therefore he had to correct or augment Church doctrine every time new understanding was revealed to him over the years. The first twelve apostles themselves, as shown in Acts and elsewhere, did not *fully* understand *all* the Truth in the Church's earlier years. Christ continued to teach them through the Spirit, and as they learned more perfectly, so did the Church (John 16:12-13). Even though the apostles had to learn over time, *no one else's spiritual judgment was being inspired as theirs was*. Therefore it was *grievous spiritual error* to follow *anyone else's* opinions about where the apostles were wrong or incomplete in their understanding.

False ministers, during the apostles' lives and especially shortly after, led many people astray by claiming that, because the apostles were fallible and had made mistakes they later had to correct, other aspects of their doctrine could be wrong that they had never recognized. Yet the truth was that Christ *completed* His purpose in them: however long it took them to perfectly understand every point, the apostles eventually did establish infallible doctrine in the Church and *left it in place at their deaths*.

Similarly, and by definition, the man *specially commissioned by God* to "restore all things" must have *accomplished it* before he died; God's purpose cannot fail. The commissioned one, even though he made mistakes along the way, must have eventually restored *all* the *infallible doctrine* of the Ephesus era. Because this was spiritually *certain*, Mr. Armstrong *gravely and repeatedly warned* Church leaders in his last years, even his last weeks, not to change Church doctrine or government if he should die; his grave warnings expressly encompassed the judgments of *spiritual sin* he had established in the Church. Preparatory to his death, Mr. Armstrong *emphatically reconfirmed each* of the doctrines and judgments God's people now debate whether to obey.

Such doctrines and judgments included, among others: cornerstone precepts of God's Church government rejected by all the main splinter organizations today; the prohibition of makeup as *spiritual sin*; the *promise* of healing in Christ's body broken for us, and the understanding that the promise is effectively *rejected* by use of most types of *medical treatment*; *disfellowshipping* members for marrying outside the Church or interracial; the stringent divorce and remarriage doctrine; rejection of "liberal" views on the priority of the First Commission, on Sabbath observance, on the importance of U.S. & B.C., on college accreditation, on birthdays, etc. Mr. Armstrong also confirmed that tithing net of taxes in the U.S. is *theft* from God (the U.S. system has not changed substantially since 1986 and does not even approach his very narrow exceptions).

Most of God's people accept that Mr. Armstrong, sent by Christ, was the human founder and governor of the Philadelphia era. The message to the leader of Philadelphia in Revelation 3 contains *no criticism* (unlike other eras). In fact, Philadelphia is only exhorted to "hold fast what you have, that no man may take your crown": the obvious understanding is that they received the complete Truth, and their great test is not to "correct"/change the doctrine they received, but rather whether they will let *men* talk them into *exchanging aspects of it for false doctrine*, as happened in the other eras.

When you hear *students* of the founding human teacher of Philadelphia telling you they understand Truth better than he did, such that the doctrine he left in place in Philadelphia at his death was erroneous in important aspects, alarm bells should go off in you spiritually. "A servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent [trained and ordained] him" (John 13:16). Remember that these new leaders conveniently taught all Mr. Armstrong's doctrine without deviation while he was alive, *as he would have disfellowshipped them for teaching then what they do now*; and he did disfellowship other ministers, especially the infamous seventies liberals, for teaching *essentially the same* doctrinal revisions these new leaders teach.

Did the human founder, governor, and greatest teacher of Philadelphia disfellowship hundreds of people for believing Truth? Did God allow him to *purposely block* important aspects of Truth from being received in the Church in the Philadelphia era? Was he wrong and *Joseph Tkach right* about the end-time Elijah, cornerstone precepts of Church government, Christ's *precise* Gospel message, healing/medical treatment, makeup, accreditation, and other doctrines where the teaching of Meredith, Hulme, and both branches of United is closer to Tkach's (pre-1993) than to Mr. Armstrong's? If the doctrine of these present leaders is right, then *Garner Ted's 1970's liberal doctrine was much more spiritually accurate than his father's doctrine that "put the Church back on track."* Do you believe such things? If not, the only possible explanation is that the Laodicean *condition* has flourished since Mr. Armstrong died, and infected all the main organizations.

Even Flurry and Pack are closer to Tkach's teaching than Mr. Armstrong's on the cornerstone restored Truth of Church government: each man appointed himself an apostle in gross violation of Mr. Armstrong's doctrine.

Some ask what authority we hold to say everyone else is wrong and we are right. Our authority is not our own but that which God invested in Herbert W. Armstrong as the *restorer of all the original Truth*. The authority of so great a commission and apostleship does not die when the human instrument dies, any more than the authority of the original apostles ended at their deaths. Such authority continues until Christ's return (and beyond). Anyone who teaches God's people contrary to doctrines of the restored Truth is in *rebellion* against undying *Godly authority*. Mr. Armstrong said repeatedly that, if apostasy should ever arise in the Church, any of God's ministry or people who see their brethren rejecting/changing doctrines of the restored Truth not only have authority to point it out, but they have a *duty* to their brethren to try to show them their error.

In a dispute among God's people over specific doctrines of Truth, by definition only *one* of the disagreeing viewpoints can be *God's*; Christ is not divided (see main letter, p. 2). Thus, it will always be the case in such disputes that the people of one viewpoint *justly* say they are right and all the others wrong, and it will often be the case that they are at least temporarily condemned by the others for their "self-righteousness." Typically those who so condemn *themselves* believe they are right and the others wrong, as is true of the leaders of every splinter organization today. These leaders have the gall to summarily condemn anyone who questions their righteousness in rejecting doctrine which *they themselves once taught is Truth restored by the end time apostle*.

We turn now to some important misunderstandings common among God's people regarding Mr. Armstrong's makeup prohibition and healing doctrine. It is no accident that these were the first doctrines Joseph Tkach rejected after appointing himself an apostle: the two doctrines were signature issues of the apostasy of the 1970's liberals.

After restoring the makeup prohibition in 1981, Mr. Armstrong taught until his death that makeup use is *spiritual* sin: he insisted its prohibition was not just a physical Church grooming regulation, and that it made no difference if makeup attained the height of respectability throughout society. Rather, he declared that makeup use is *inherently* sinful, as a practice of *vanity*—not wrong merely because it could cause division in the Church or would be rebellious against Church government. Mr. Armstrong repeatedly threatened publicly to disfellowship any minister who denied makeup use is spiritual sin. Meredith, Hulme, and United's leaders (both branches) are all guilty of this disqualifying apostasy.

Mr. Armstrong explained his makeup doctrine in several articles and sermons/Bible studies which are still publicly available, including some of his last. One prominent example was an extensive article in the July 1, 1983, *Pastor General's Report*, in which he gravely pronounced that makeup use "will certainly lead to DEATH in the LAKE OF FIRE!" (Emphasis his). Many ministers have falsely characterized Mr. Armstrong's makeup doctrine in order to justify their refusal to hold fast to it—relying that many of God's people have forgotten, and will not review, what Mr. Armstrong actually enjoined regarding makeup use. Will you *bet your eternal life* he was wrong?

Similar false information has been spread, for similar reasons, regarding Mr. Armstrong's healing doctrine. Many former Headquarters personnel know Mr. Armstrong's use of doctors was for very limited purposes, mainly nutritional, to naturally strengthen the body's own recuperative powers, vitality, and immune system function. Even Tkach knew Mr. Armstrong intended no change on healing by his very limited use of doctors. As noted earlier, Mr. Armstrong warned that his healing doctrine, reflected in both his original 1950's booklet and his 1979 updated/expanded version, was part of the restored Ephesus era Truth God commanded the Church to hold fast after his death. In those booklets, and periodically in sermons in his last years, Mr. Armstrong solemnly warned that seeking most forms of medical treatment is inconsistent with real faith in the promise of healing by Christ's stripes—the promise that, "He has borne our sicknesses and carried our pains" (often caused by physical sin) (Isaiah 53:4—literal translation).

Today many ask how one can know who is right in the confusion of all the competing and conflicting messages God's people hear. The simple answer is to know *Herbert W. Armstrong was right*, by Christ's authority; the doctrine Mr. Armstrong left behind is the original Truth *restored for the end time*. Utilizing that straightforward standard will, upon careful scrutiny, exclude every erroneous message, and expose every messenger who falsely claims God's authority to lead His people. Shun the false messengers, and return to *all* the Truth once delivered. Our being accounted worthy to escape depends upon it.

We pray God will guide you.

Your brethren

NOTE: Following publication of our main letter, United suffered a schism resulting in a profound loss of membership and ministry. All the ministers who left quickly formed a new organization—again, without *first* securing, as *Biblically-commanded*, stable *unity* on controverted issues of doctrine and government. Once more, full ministerial *employment* was the great priority, not righteousness. It seems a significant number of people who left United have not joined the new organization or any other organization yet. The new organization's leadership appears a little less liberal in doctrine than United's, and it is somewhat displeased with the democratic "babylon" of United's government. Yet, about half its ministry *disagree* with significant aspects (and *leaders*) of the organization's newly adopted government. Overall, the new organization is *far* closer to United's doctrine and government than Mr. Armstrong's—to the disappointment of a substantial minority of its members, and others who either stayed at United or "went home" following the schism.