

It is a documented fact that, with the exception of various prophecy issues, virtually every change to Herbert W. Armstrong's apostolic doctrine (including government) embraced by the splinter organizations today was originally advocated by some or all of the 1970's liberals. Yet Mr. Armstrong literally rose off his deathbed to miraculously defeat these unfaithful ministers and drive them from the Church, precisely at the time when they believed, with good reason, their takeover of the Church was unstoppable and imminent.

In his battle to purge God's Church of the persuasive, pervasive influence of these apostate ministers, Mr. Armstrong gave the Church what may have been the most important sermon of his life. It was a life and death warning, rebuke, and exhortation to save God's people from superficially attractive apostate doctrines. Mr. Armstrong concluded his grave warning with a bold, unqualified *prophecy*: like Elijah on Mount Carmel, he announced that God would give a very specific *demonstration of His Almighty power* to prove unmistakably whose doctrine was His—Mr. Armstrong's, or the liberals'.

God fulfilled Herbert W. Armstrong's prophecy wondrously before the entire Church, and indeed much of the world. In doing so, God not only made the message Mr. Armstrong gave that Sabbath in 1978 His Word of salvation for the vast majority of the Church of *that time*, but He also made the message His prophetic warning and miraculous answer to save the scattered Church *today* in the *very same* life and death test. That test requires us to know *who speaks for God in this time*: is it Mr. Armstrong *still*; or is it the splinter leaders who overruled his doctrine in favor of the same doctrine God wondrously repudiated more than thirty years ago, "answering by fire"?

The historical context of Mr. Armstrong's sermon is important to review in order to receive the full meaning of his vital prophetic warning and direction for us today.

Year by year throughout the seventies—hidden cleverly from Mr. Armstrong, whom the Work required to be away from Pasadena most of the time—liberal doctrinal ideas steadily spread among the ministry, grew in subtle influence among the membership, and took increasing control over Headquarters operations. Each year of the seventies, aside from Mr. Armstrong's personal accomplishment in proclaiming the Gospel overseas, the Work's effectiveness and the Church's growth and vitality stagnated or even declined by every important measure. To obscure these telling facts liberal ministers, professing "all due respect for Mr. Armstrong," told members that the Church's spiritual condition was better than ever: such ministers claimed their teaching and doctrinal scholarship had contributed to the Church improved doctrinal "accuracy, balance, and sophistication."

In 1978, just a few months after God raised him up from total heart failure, Mr. Armstrong began to more clearly perceive and systematically uncover this widespread liberal conspiracy, which he called a deadly "cancer" in the body of Christ. The "Laodicean condition," he revealed, interprets God's law, government, and other deep aspects of Truth from a more "intellectual," "worldly," "permissive" mindset, with

touches of Protestantism on some issues. Mr. Armstrong warned that the condition, if allowed to grow to its final stage, inevitably generates fraudulent “new understanding” of where various doctrines and spiritual judgments established in the Church through God’s apostle are at least partially erroneous, unreliably incomplete, or “unbalanced.”

The spiritual adulteration was so shrewdly implanted in the Church that, when he gave the referenced sermon in 1978, Mr. Armstrong had not yet uncovered some significant aspects of the apostasy. He later said it took about four years to uncover all the primary aspects of it. To the end of his life, however, as you will hear in several of his ’84-’85 sermons, he was not sure if he had uncovered all the more subtle practices of the apostasy on the “operating level” of the Church/Work, where he could not personally monitor. Nor was he sure he had completely rooted its subtlest influences, often unrecognized by the individual, out of many ministers and members. In his sermon Mr. Armstrong specifically identified only a few of the liberal apostate doctrines he had by then uncovered; he more fully described the extensive apostate doctrine in other sermons and letters to the Church at that same general time and later.¹

Also of vital historical context regarding the sermon, Mr. Armstrong gave it knowing he had no choice but to disfellowship Garner Ted, and some other very popular ministers; in Ted’s case this was performed just after the sermon. Ted’s last communication with him, a few days before the sermon, threatened to utterly ruin Mr. Armstrong in the public and before the membership, through a media blitz capitalizing on Ted’s powerful media recognition and insider contacts. Ted also asserted that, by his years of de facto rulership in Pasadena, his extensive networking throughout the ministry, and how overawed many members were by him, “the die was already cast” that much of the ministry and the great majority of the membership would follow him.

Mr. Armstrong knew such advantages in Ted’s hand, coupled with persuasively fabricated scandal and alluringly “easy” doctrine, gave him good reason to believe he could wreak the devastation he threatened; further, uncompromising condemnation of liberal teaching would certainly offend ministers and members even beyond the many whom Ted might take. Indeed, Mr. Armstrong strongly suspected it was true that a considerable number of ministers and members found Ted and other particularly glib liberal ministers more impressive/persuasive overall than him.

¹ Some who listen to the referenced sermon may wonder why Mr. Armstrong, in the midst of condemning the liberal conspiracy, heatedly rebuked certain personal attacks made upon Stan Rader. Many of the liberals loathed Rader for his staunch defense of Mr. Armstrong’s *sole ultimate human authority to govern the Church*, and because Mr. Armstrong valued Rader’s counsel above the evangelists’ on a number of key matters. Garner Ted and other influential liberals had hoped (and *preferred*) to systematically, subtly take over the Church from the *inside*, to gain control of all its highly prized facilities and assets; they knew Rader, as Church attorney, helped Mr. Armstrong uncover and frustrate, just in time, their conspiracy of making major decisions without consulting him. Mr. Armstrong perceived the liberals’ duplicity in bringing charges against Rader. Even after later separating him for other reasons, Mr. Armstrong felt Rader had significantly benefited the Church regarding the liberal conspiracy, the Attorney General’s suit, and other important matters. The liberals committed a *far greater crime* in Mr. Armstrong’s judgment: conspiring to subvert God’s Truth and government.

Top advisors, as well as other generally loyal executives and ministers who knew something of Ted's erupting rebellion, thought a profound loss of membership, ministry and resources almost inevitable. In addition to fearing all the above-described power in the liberals' hands, they feared the power of, and a number tended to believe, the widespread fallacy that Ted had largely *built* the Church through his personal appeal and speaking ability; almost all believed that even the disappointing results of the telecast in the seventies would *far exceed* anything possible with Mr. Armstrong trying to do it himself. Mr. Armstrong actually agreed that all these dire conclusions seemed inescapable if judged solely by "sight" (II Cor. 5:7), without discerning and relying upon God's Spirit. See Zech. 4:6.

Thus, Mr. Armstrong gave the sermon *knowing* that an *enormous loss* of membership, ministry and resources loomed over the Church. He even expressed in the sermon that a number of influential ministers hearing him would strongly disagree with his spiritual correction, and that many members were likely to be greatly offended by it.

After a decade of stagnation, and with all physically discernible circumstances pointing to a *huge decline* even from those anemic levels in members, resources and the Work's effectiveness, Herbert Armstrong issued a stunningly confident, unqualified challenge and promise in God's name. He said God would publicly judge whose doctrine was Truth—his or the liberals'—utilizing a sign neither side could possibly hide the fulfillment or failure of. With every physical reason to believe it impossible, he prophesied that no matter how many members and ministers left as he purged liberal doctrine, judgment and practice from the Church, if the people who stayed with him would try to purge apostate influence from their minds, God would soon bless the Church and its Work to grow *greatly larger and more powerful by every measure than ever before*. The sermon was sent to the entire Church and printed for the ministry.

It is very telling that the sign of God's judgment Mr. Armstrong prophesied pleased the liberal apostate ministers. Garner Ted and some others publicly stated that the sign was a perfect one from their vantage point as it would certainly fail, and its failure could not be hidden; objective measures would unmistakably prove it, such as total membership, yearly income, number of literature requests, telecast viewership, *Plain Truth* circulation, etc.

Indeed, just a few months after the sermon, the apostate ministers thought God had definitively answered against Mr. Armstrong's doctrine, even sooner than they anticipated, when the Attorney General attacked the Church. Some apostates suggested to the Attorney General that the Church's membership overwhelmingly yearned for freedom from "dictatorship government," so they could embrace the more "enlightened" doctrine recently forbidden by Mr. Armstrong. The kind of government the membership wanted, alleged the apostates, was either something essentially identical to that of United and "COGWA" today, or, for the more "moderate," something quite similar to Meredith's and Hulme's today. Again very tellingly, the Attorney General found such apostate forms of government perfectly acceptable, while he outrageously, slanderously attacked God's government: Mr. Armstrong's sole ultimate apostolic rule under Christ.

What happened in the remaining seven-plus years of Mr. Armstrong's life after he issued his prophetic challenge is extensively documented. The "objective measures" the liberals thought would vindicate them tell the whole story regarding the life and death question of whose *doctrine* pleased God. In those seven years Church membership *doubled*; co-workers more than *tripled*. Income *tripled*. *Plain Truth* circulation increased by nearly *seven million*. Telephone response rose from around 2000 calls per weekend to often reach *20,000* per weekend. The number of publications sent out per year increased by over *fifty million*. Television audience increased by *millions*, and the worldwide availability of the Gospel witness increased by *hundreds of millions*.

The Church's overall societal and governmental recognition nationally and internationally increased dramatically. In addition, before the whole state of California, and in the close notice of high government and religious offices throughout this nation and a number of others, God vindicated His apostle by inflicting utterly humiliating defeat on two California Attorneys General, in a case that is still regarded as the nation's quintessential example of a constitutionally-forbidden state takeover of a church.

What happened in those same seven years to the liberal ministers, who first advocated virtually every change to Mr. Armstrong's apostolic doctrine and spiritual judgments which the various splinter organizations today embrace? They took *enormously* fewer members and resources from the Church in leaving than they or almost anyone else anticipated, and in a relatively short time they all lost most of the little they did take. Even Ted's telecast, which for a time enjoyed greater public recognition than the telecast or "internet proclamation" of *any* of today's splinter organizations, was *colossally dwarfed* by the cascading success of Mr. Armstrong's telecast. What is the *only conclusion* a Christian of "sound mind" (II Tim. 1:7) can draw?

Mr. Armstrong's prophecy in this sermon that the Philadelphia Church would be gloriously restored from spiritual division, malaise and disease was given *for God's people today*, just as surely as it was given for the Church's restoration more than thirty years ago. The wondrous *fulfillment of this prophecy* before "all nations" is the unmistakable *sign of God* for us now—*divine proof* that Mr. Armstrong was *speaking for God* that day in 1978, and thereafter, when he anathematized the identical false doctrine at issue today. (Much of that false doctrine is identified in the Addendum to our foundational letter.)

The great spiritual test *was not over* when God's people overwhelmingly chose the right way in 1978-81. God purposed to test our "love for the Truth" (II Thes. 2:10) in an even more searching way, just as Mr. Armstrong repeatedly warned us in his last years to expect, despite our initial success in the '78-'81 trial. The more searching test was that, *without Mr. Armstrong there to refute and disfellowship them*, God allowed a new, initially very small group of ministers to turn unfaithful—men who had remained with Mr. Armstrong in the earlier phase of the great test—and advocate to God's people the *very same liberal apostasy again*. Recall that God tested the early Church in the same dual phases, as apostate doctrine powerfully refuted within the Church by Paul, Peter and John in their later years, came back after their deaths to more widely deceive Christians.

Another critical reason why Mr. Armstrong's prophetic warning and God's great answer are for the Church today is that we must publish, using Mr. Armstrong's words rather than our own, God's final Gospel witness/warning to the nations just before "the end comes." Mr. Armstrong taught literally till the day he died that, however many years the Gospel had been proclaimed beforehand, God's purpose *required* that it be proclaimed as a witness in great power *immediately preceding* the Tribulation. Even after the Gospel had been proclaimed in every nation, Mr. Armstrong enjoined, God expected the Church to continue proclaiming it to reach more and more of the population individually, especially in Israelite nations.

He further charged that doing this Work was vital to the end time Church's spiritual development individually—for "the bride to make herself ready." The degree of coverage within all nations that God purposed, and the number of years of work necessary to complete the bride's preparation, God alone knew. Yet Mr. Armstrong believed God had revealed that the necessary degree of coverage and preparation would be achieved, by miraculous orchestration, only a matter of months before onset of the Tribulation proper, not multiple years. Then God would end this great final Work, possibly through persecution.

Thus, even though Mr. Armstrong knew he had proclaimed the Gospel in *all the world*, he literally used his last strength to urgently command and make extensive provisions for the Gospel to be proclaimed *even more widely after his death* (it was for a short time). See his January 10, 1986, and December 23, 1985, member and co-worker letters. In the January letter, when he was fully aware that he was near death, he prophesied, "***The greatest work lies yet ahead.***"

The splinter groups' efforts to proclaim the Gospel, while likely not completely without value in some cases, are nevertheless *doctrinally compromised* and unlawfully divided, just as was true of Garner Ted after he left. See Phil. 1:15-18; I Cor. 1:10-13. Their labors are blighted, by every objective measure as compared to *Mr. Armstrong's standard*, due to God's displeasure with their doctrinal unfaithfulness and division.

God chose not to reveal to Mr. Armstrong that, due to Church-wide sin in the great test, such a long gap would occur in proclaiming the Gospel with the power of God's blessing; this fact had no bearing on God's command through His end time apostle to proclaim it with all priority in whatever years remained before the Tribulation. Also the long, shameful gap was not pre-ordained by God nor His will: it could have been greatly lessened if the Church overall, and particularly the ministry, had done better in the test. Remember, Mr. Armstrong revealed and frequently mentioned that God's purpose allows for the Tribulation to be delayed according to the pace of spiritual development and achievement of the end time Church. See II Pet. 3:10-12; Rev. 19:7.

Despite these many years of slumber and negligence, we still have opportunity to fully redeem our shortcomings, just as Mr. Armstrong promised the Church in 1978 that if they shunned liberal teaching and returned to his doctrine, God would forgive their sin and wonderfully restore the loss of the whole previous blighted decade.

In this sermon and others widely available, Mr. Armstrong warned that Philadelphians are “accounted worthy to escape” *only* because they faithfully complete the great Work of the last days, and they hold fast to *all* the Truth *restored* in the end time—despite persecution and lies by those who falsely claim authority to *overrule apostolic doctrine*. See Rev. 2:2; 3:8-11. Also in this sermon and others, Mr. Armstrong pronounced that *no one* would be accounted worthy who condoned the identical apostate doctrines and governmental perversions many brethren condone today.

Please do not rationalize with yourself on this life and death question to avoid confronting the fact that you have been in error, as we all have to one degree or another in this difficult test, nor allow your leaders to deceive you any longer to glorify themselves and maintain their personal following. See John 7:18. *Every splinter organization today, the main ones and the less well known, embraces some (or most) of these apostate doctrines and governmental perversions*. Mr. Armstrong pronounced on many occasions that just *one* such apostate belief/practice is enough to Biblically mandate disfellowshipping and shunning. If you attend services with a group that accepts or condones *any* such apostate doctrine, even if you privately disagree with that doctrine, you are in grave danger of being accounted by God as one who condones apostasy.²

God expects all His people of the Philadelphia understanding to unite now, as Biblically commanded, to accomplish important *work*. Uniting is a very difficult spiritual achievement because, as part of God’s great test and lesson for us, we have become widely dispersed, in many cases unknown to each other: many brethren effectively “disappeared” in isolation as they righteously shunned the various groups, and many others seek to remain unidentified within groups they know are apostate. Yet God declares, in a prophecy for this very time of testing: “I will gather those who *sorrow over the appointed assembly*, who are among you, to whom its reproach is a burden” (Zeph. 3:18); the word translated “sorrow” here literally means “grieve.”

In truth, all have “slumbered” to some degree in these years of ruin; in his sermon, Mr. Armstrong revealed that the parable of the slumbering virgins applies in a particular sense to *Philadelphia*, in addition to Laodicea. Those who, by God’s grace and leading, first awaken and find each other are specially *obligated* to join as one to accomplish the work of seeking the others; we must help all our slumbering or straying brethren return to the *full* Truth. See Ezek. 33:8; 34:4-6. Then the restored, purified, united Church must, according to Mr. Armstrong’s most urgent final directives, proclaim the *precise, untarnished* Gospel of Christ as a witness again shortly before the Great Tribulation.

² Mr. Armstrong admonished in the sermon that God expected him to “*assemble with one or two*” faithful Christians alone rather than assemble with “thousands” of liberal-leaning Christians—even if they backed the proclaiming of the Gospel (many did), and even if they rebelled against only a *single* Truth established in the Church through his apostleship. Some liberal ministers Mr. Armstrong drove out actually were measurably *less* liberal than Meredith, Hulme, and leading ministers of United and COGWA have become.

Hear Mr. Armstrong's sermon for yourself and meditate upon it with a prayerfully-open mind. Please listen to it more than once. The sermon was given June 24, 1978 (95 min.). Various websites offer it under varying titles, but those recordings generally are either significantly incomplete or of poor quality. For convenient reference as you consider our discussion of the sermon, we make it available here.

We implore you to heed the warning, counsel and prophecy of your human spiritual father in Christ—proven authoritative by *God's great demonstration*. See I Cor. 4:15-20. His message was given for *you personally*, to *save* you from the Great Tribulation, which the stage is quite visibly being set for in recent world events.

Your brethren in Christ