

Church of God, The Eternal

P. O. Box 775

Eugene, Oregon 97440

www.cogeternal.org

The late Raymond C. Cole
Founding Pastor
Jon W. Brisby
Pastor, Director

Offices in
United States
Philippines
Switzerland

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Dear Brethren:

Most of you who regularly receive this monthly mailing understand what makes Church of God, The Eternal different from other groups who share roots in the Worldwide Church of God. Yet many former members of our parent organization may yet be unaware of us as a remnant body. Given that there are many people—coming into the church during the 1980s and later—who were never told about the history of doctrinal changes in 1974 (something the ministry sought to sweep under the rug), it is not surprising that a remnant body holding tenaciously to pre-1974 doctrinal teachings might be rather obscure. And given we have never sought to do a grand work, our existence—let alone our body of belief—has often flown below the radar for many former members of that parent body.

Yet it appears such obscurity may be lifting in small ways, although not because of any change in our own premise. The latest indication is the fact we have been specifically targeted by one larger splinter group (formed in the late 1990s), whose leader obviously views us as a threat. While not referring to Church of God, The Eternal by name, there is no doubt that we are a particular group on his mind. Note this quote from his book about the apostasy and splinter groups that formed from the Worldwide Church of God, which specifically highlights a group keeping Monday Pentecost and rejecting divorce and remarriage:

As with so many other truths, many brethren are now blurring, or even reversing, their understanding of two crucial doctrinal advancements that Mr. Armstrong made in 1974—circumstances that correctly permit divorce and remarriage as it applies to the Church, and changing Pentecost observance from Monday to Sunday. Now, incredibly, many hundreds of brethren, who once understood the plain truth of these necessary changes, have now convinced themselves that it was Mr. Armstrong who departed from "divinely revealed truth"—generally seeking to use against him his own statements made prior to the change. This thinking attempts to insert Mr. Armstrong as the true author of the apostasy, which is then deemed to have begun in 1974, having merely accelerated in the 1990s until it engulfed the whole Church. Strangely,

these people often find a way to assert that they are "supporting" Mr. Armstrong and "standing up for the truth"—while they are doing neither.

Can there be any doubt that Church of God, The Eternal is the specific target of this article? The only other ones of whom we are aware who hold to a Monday Pentecost are some few who came out from us. And we are the only group significant enough to have the "many hundreds of brethren" spoken of as turning to this belief, which has obviously become a threat to this man and to others. Within his ten-chapter book—which is listed on his website as mandatory reading for anyone seeking membership in his group—we have been given an entire chapter to ourselves!

With a whole chapter devoted to analyzing and exposing the "error" of our interpretation of truth and church history, how well has this former Worldwide minister done in debunking our teachings? An analysis of his arguments will provide an excellent opportunity to verify the soundness of our premise and to distinguish between our beliefs and those of most other splinter groups.

Does God Make Mid-Course Corrections?

Our antagonist begins by making this statement:

. . . throughout Church history, "liberals" have sought loopholes to justify watering down long-held doctrines and traditions. They longed to be "free" from restraints. At the other extreme, some Church "conservatives," in their quest to not water down or compromise, have rejected legitimate—and necessary—refinements in doctrine, as God revealed them through His end-time apostle, Mr. Armstrong.

He goes on to compare the church to the 1960s Apollo moon landing program, with scientists who respected God's laws of physics:

. . . they had to continually make mid-course corrections or else they would not have achieved their goal. Worse, without proper mid-course corrections and refinements, the astronauts would have died. These vitally needed corrections paid off because they adhered to the laws of physics in every step of the process. *No laws were broken.* . . . Just as scientists and engineers needed to make mid-course corrections, *without breaking physical laws*, to achieve their goals, Christians must do the same [emphasis mine throughout].

The intent is to claim that the changes in church doctrine in 1974—to begin allowing divorce and remarriage, and the change in Pentecost from Monday to Sunday—was not really a change in the law, but simply a "mid-course correction." But does that make any sense?

Let us take Pentecost as a simple example. God commanded Israel to appear before Him on those annual Holy Days at the appointed places and times which He chose. No man ever decided when Pentecost fell. God is the One who appointed the one-and-only day and told Israel when and where to assemble to keep it.

And thou shalt keep the feast of weeks unto the LORD thy God with a tribute of a freewill offering of thine hand, which thou shalt give unto the LORD thy God, according as the LORD thy God hath blessed thee: . . . Three times in a year shall all thy males appear before the LORD thy God *in the place which he shall choose*; in the feast of unleavened bread, and *in the feast of weeks*, and in the feast of tabernacles: and they shall not appear before the LORD empty (Deuteronomy 16:10, 16).

It was likewise critical that the New Testament church keep the correct day for Pentecost. Had they arrived on the wrong day and in the wrong place in 31 A.D., they would have missed being part of that first great miracle when the Holy Spirit was delivered:

And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high (Luke 24:49).

And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord *in one place*. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy [Spirit], and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance (Acts 2:1–4).

With this in mind, is there more than one possible day that Pentecost can be kept correctly each year? If one does not appear on the singularly correct day—as commanded by God and at the correct place where He has placed His name—how can he keep the Feast? It is impossible! Either we comply with the command of God or we do not. There is only one way to comply, and that is being in the right place at the right time. Anything else is sin.

How then are we to apply our antagonist's principle of mid-course corrections to Pentecost observance? He claims that mid-course corrections must be applied all along the way, and that such corrections never violate the law of God. But was the 1974 change in

Pentecost from Monday to Sunday truly a change that never involved the violation of God's law—either before or after? That is what is being claimed. But Pentecost was either sanctified by God as being on a Monday or else on a Sunday (excluding the myriad other arguments extant today). One—and only one—of them has always been correct from the beginning, and the other has always been wrong.

Mr. Armstrong vehemently thundered for nearly forty years that God would *never* have started His New Testament Church on Satan's pagan day of worship—Sunday—and he claimed the authority of Jesus Christ's divine revelation for keeping Monday! Yet in 1974, he approved the change to Sunday, and the Worldwide Church of God and most of its ensuing daughter churches began keeping Sunday from that time forward.

At what point was the church keeping the one-and-only correct day of Pentecost? When were God's called people assembling in the very presence of God on the correct day? Was it on Monday, or was it on Sunday—which? It cannot be both. We were either obeying God's commanded law in one case or the other, but never in both cases. Such is impossible.

How then can changing the day for observing Pentecost be compared to an astronaut making a "mid-course correction," and never violating a law of God at any time during the journey? Such a premise is truly laughable for its incongruity. Either the church was breaking the cardinal law of God by keeping Pentecost on Monday during the first forty years of the church, or else it *began* breaking the law by changing to Sunday after 1973. It is one or the other. You cannot have it both ways. When was God's law being violated, before or after?

The same holds true concerning divorce and remarriage. Before 1974, many remarried couples coming into the church were instructed to separate to avoid committing adultery any longer, because one or the other was bound to a former living mate. After 1974, these same couples were told they were finally free to be together after all. But note this point: adultery is not only having sexual relations with someone other than one's legitimate mate, but likewise *withholding oneself* from a lawful mate and not living in the unity that both have vowed to give (1 Corinthians 7:5). Even if neither one ever remarries, the very act of separating what God joined as one is putting asunder that marriage! (Please see our article entitled, *Marriage and Separation—Facts You Should Know*.) Therefore, for these couples in question, when were they committing adultery? Before 1974, the ministry told them they had to separate, because a previous vow made their current relationship (marriage) adultery. But in 1974 that reversed completely, and the ministry said that former vow did not really count after all, and now they could be together. If that change in the law was right, then before 1974, the ministry was guilty of causing a lawfully wedded couple to separate from each other, which was in itself an act of adultery—putting asunder what God joined together.

But if the former doctrine was correct, then the ministry actually aided and abetted couples to begin committing adultery by the 1974 change. Which case was it? It is either one or the other. When was the sin of adultery being committed—the violation of God's marriage law? Were these changes in 1974 really just "mid-course corrections" in God's view? Who is kidding whom?

Yes, astronauts steer their spacecrafts and make course corrections using and working within the immutable physical laws of God. But the change in Pentecost and divorce and remarriage is better compared to a scientist who decides his colleagues are all wrong about their understanding of gravity and inertia, and now plans a new space voyage adopting a total *change in law* as his "new truth" about the motion of bodies in the universe. We all know what will happen to such a space mission predicated upon the rejection of true physical law.

Did God and/or Moses Undermine the Law?

Our antagonist next turns to the Bible to prove that not only God's servants were required to make corrections in doctrine over time, but God Himself changed!

He begins with the story of a Manassite, Zelophehad (Numbers chapters 27 and 36), who died without a male heir, but who had five daughters. Who would inherit his land within Israel? God gave each tribe an inheritance and commanded that each tract of land appointed to that tribe always remain the legal inheritance of a descendant of that tribe. Even if land transferred away from the tribe through sale or debt confiscation, it was to be restored automatically in the Jubilee year. This is how God made sure His promised gift to each tribe would remain with that tribe in perpetuity. God did not want those possessions being lost to future generations just because one custodian in the current generation became an unwise steward.

With that in mind, God inspired Moses to assign Zelophehad's land to his daughters, and enunciated a judgment concerning the order of inheritance rights among extended family members in absence of a direct male heir (Numbers 27:8–11). But the leaders of the Manasseh families petitioned Moses for clarification (Numbers 36:1–5), because if those daughters married men from any other tribe but Manasseh, their property would then fall legally into the estates of their new husbands, thereafter being controlled by other tribes, and never being restored to Manasseh at the Jubilee. God therefore inspired Moses to decree that those daughters must marry only men from the tribe of Manasseh, which would keep their property within Manasseh's legal control.

How does our antagonist use this story to prove God changes? Referring to the fact these daughters were restricted from marrying outside their tribe of birth (even though all other young Israelite women were free to marry eligible men from any of the other tribes) here is what he says:

God made a refinement here—an amendment—to His original judgment, without breaking His other spiritual laws. However, it was not a correction made because God had somehow not thought out these laws sufficiently, but was rather an amendment to a previously made judgment. God did not present judgments for every possible scenario. Instead, as new circumstances were presented, God ruled accordingly. He added judgments!

So this minister is really claiming that when God "changed" to add a special limit upon whom these Manassite daughters could marry—a limitation that never existed before this new decree—this was a necessary "mid-course correction" in the law of God. But what is not specified in the story, however very reasonable to deduce, is that these young women could still have married outside the tribe of Manasseh if they so chose, only in doing so would *forfeit* their property rights to their father's inheritance. Remember, it was the *daughters themselves* who originally petitioned Moses to grant them legal rights to their father's estate (Numbers 27:1–4), which was unheard of before. When God said yes, He simply applied a *condition* to fulfilling their unique request. If a woman was going to be allowed to carry the mantle of an heir, she would then become subject to a special rule to assure that property stayed in legal control of her paternal tribe. In all likelihood, if she chose to marry a man from another tribe, she would have been allowed to do so—just as all other women in Israel were allowed to do—but she could not then insist upon holding the legal rights as a property heir. It was her choice which was more important to her.

But if this story is intended to be a justification for the Pentecost change in 1974, it appears this minister must equate the proper day for keeping any Holy Day with a secondary judgment, and not part of God's foundational law. After all, he defines it as an *added judgment* that does not break other spiritual laws. So, to him, keeping Pentecost on either Monday or Sunday must never have been part of God's spiritual law! Is that what he is telling us? If it could be changed from Monday to Sunday without being a change in the spiritual law, what other conclusion can we draw?

If the particular day for observing a Holy Day is only a secondary judgment, is not the same true for the weekly Sabbath? Logic dictates that what is true of the annual Sabbaths is true of the weekly Sabbath as well. Yet this same minister is one who absolutely rejected the ruling—administrative judgment—of Mr. Armstrong's lawful successor in the 1990s who claimed worship on Saturday was optional—Sunday being just as acceptable. Why is the

weekly day of worship sacrosanct as part of the immutable law of God—which can never be changed—while the day determined for the annual Sabbath of Pentecost is treated merely as a secondary judgment? The argument falls flat under scrutiny.

Furthermore, the argument that God never changes His "laws," but does change or amend His "judgments," demonstrates a lack of understanding of the relationship between the two. The purpose of a judgment is to provide further clarification and course of action to assure *fulfillment* of the fundamental law. Judgments always *augment and support* the underlying law; they never contradict or nullify that law in any way.

In the case of Zelophehad cited above, the fundamental statute of God in question was the command that the tribes of Israel always preserve their God-given inheritance. God then gave a number of judgments to support that law, including the Jubilee (Leviticus 25), the Levirate law (Deuteronomy 25:5–10), the law of succession (Numbers 27), and the judgment concerning marriage for inheriting daughters (Numbers 36). In each case, the judgments—which were revealed by God *after* the initial statute—were added to insure the primary law was fulfilled. Examine each of those judgments and you will find they *support and enforce* compliance with the foundational law. They never contradict.

We understand this principle within the structure of our own human governments. In the United States of America, the fundamental law is the Constitution. Then below that are statutes (from the United States Code), which are more specific laws supporting those primary constitutional provisions. Below that are regulations and ordinances, which further clarify statutes and provide rules for real-life application of those higher laws. In each case, the lower (more specific) laws are intended to provide a consistent framework to assure those higher primary laws are fulfilled uniformly.

If God's Law Code works the same way, with laws, statutes, and judgments working together in harmony, how can anyone believing God never makes a mistake, claim that His judgments reverse or contradict other provisions? Did not God tell Moses how to rule in this case of Zelophehad's estate? Remember, Moses was not the one making up these judgments through his own human wisdom. God is the One who told Moses what to do (Numbers 27:6–8). Knowing that, do we or do we not accept that God never has to make "mid-course corrections"? "For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed" (Malachi 3:6).

Did Paul Cause a Mistake in the Bible?

The second and only other "proof" cited from the Bible to try and show that the church must make changes to doctrinal teachings sometimes, is found in the following quote:

Even Paul made refinements—mid-course corrections—in his doctrinal understanding. For example, he taught the first-century brethren that Christ's Second Coming would take place in their lifetimes (I Thes. 4:15–17). This was not a teaching invented in Paul's mind—he based it on his understanding of Scripture. This teaching actually became an established doctrine . . . God allowed this to be recorded in the Bible!

But is this assertion true? This is what Paul actually said:

For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord (1 Thessalonians 4:15–17).

Did Paul really believe—erroneously—that he and others would live to see the return of Christ, and did God really allow Paul to record this "error" in His inspired Scripture? If there is error in the Bible, how can it be Holy Scripture? And if Paul made a mistake in this point, how can we be sure he did not make many other mistakes recorded in the Bible as well? And as brilliant as Paul was, if he made mistakes, how do we know all the other men God used to record books of the Bible did not make similar mistakes in what they wrote? Again, it all depends on whether you really believe God is so weak and limited to be unable to make sure His servants hear His voice. Was it Paul—the man—who wrote the book of 1 Thessalonians, or do you believe it was God who literally inspired Paul to write down each and every word of that book? How you answer that will say a lot about your fundamental belief about God and the Bible. If you believe God is the author of the Bible—not man—and you accept He would never have allowed any mistakes to be made in His Holy Scripture, how do we explain Paul writing to the Thessalonians in the first century and speaking in the present tense about the return of Christ?

The answer is found in understanding for whom the Bible was really written. Was the "target audience" of those writings only the brethren who lived in the first century? Absolutely not! Notice this statement from Paul's inspired words about the purpose for God recording the history of ancient Israel in the Old Testament:

Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, *upon whom the ends of the world are come*. Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall (1 Corinthians 10:11–12).

This would actually have been a better text to use than 1 Thessalonians 4, if one is trying to prove Paul thought he was living in the very last days. But if you reject that God would have allowed such an error in His Holy Scripture, this text is instead proof that the Bible was written *most especially* for those who *would* be called later—in the very last days—and be alive to see the Second Coming of Jesus Christ! Paul was not simply writing to the Corinthians of his day, or to the Thessalonians of the first century. God was using Paul as an inspired instrument to record the divine message of God Himself which would be carried down through time to its true intended target—the last-day Church of God!

So we have a choice. We can either believe God allowed error in His Bible, or that God specifically inspired Paul and His other servants to write exactly—word for word—what He wanted the Church—especially the last-day Church—to receive. Which is your concept of God and His Word?

Even if it were true God allowed Paul to make a mistake in assuming he would live to see Christ's return, would that really be a precedent to support an apostle's authority to change Pentecost to Sunday, and begin allowing divorce and remarriage? How absurd. The only claim being made is that Paul erred concerning a prophetic speculation about the timing of future events. Where is there any evidence Paul ever made a mistake about teaching the Church God's Holy Commandments? Where is there any other example in the Bible of one of God's *commands for our obedience to His laws* being changed? There is none.

Our antagonist—like many former members of the church today—has also never come to discern the difference between doctrine and prophecy. (Please see our article entitled, *Prophecy—What You Should Know About It!*). Because he misunderstands this distinction, he even makes the following statement:

Because of this, some people label Mr. Armstrong a false prophet. Yet they do not say that Paul was a false prophet, even though, in his original thinking, Paul was over 100 times as wrong as Mr. Armstrong!

The truth is, Mr. Armstrong emphatically stated he was not a prophet—one given the gift of revealing specifics about the future. He even said God had not chosen to raise up any true prophets so far in this age. And that was certainly true, since many things he thought would transpire on a certain timetable failed to materialize. He never claimed to be a prophet, but only an apostle. An apostle is one sent by God to deliver true doctrine—the laws making up the Word of God—the personification of Jesus Christ. Doctrine includes the do's and don'ts we must live by in order to have God's favor. This includes keeping the Sabbath and Holy Days, avoiding adultery, stealing, murder, and every other violation of the law. It is the code of conduct for all Christians. Prophecy is something totally different.

Knowing or not knowing who, what, where, and when about future events has nothing to do with keeping God's commandments in one's own life. So again we ask, where is there any evidence in all the Bible that a faithful servant of God ever changed—made a mid-course correction—any of the *laws* of God? No evidence has been offered, because it does not exist.

Does God Reveal Error?

Our antagonist also makes the following very interesting statement:

If we refuse to obey Him, even in mid-course corrections, we deny ourselves greater understanding. Mr. Armstrong saw in stages the truth of even single doctrines. For instance, he first saw that the Church should keep Pentecost before later recognizing how to compute the correct day upon which it should be kept.

It is very true that God led Mr. Armstrong to understand truth one step at a time, and did not give him all knowledge at once. God revealed the need to keep Pentecost first, and Mr. Armstrong initially began by turning to the Jews' assignment of Sivan 6 for about three years before God revealed the next piece to him in 1936—that Pentecost could never fall on Sunday (which Sivan 6 will do). But did God reveal more and more pieces of *The Truth* to him one step at a time, or did God reveal a mixture of truth and error to him, one step at a time? God does not lie, and if the Radio Church of God was ever the true Church of God, then it was Jesus Christ who founded it, and He was its very cornerstone. Christ was the Word made flesh. There is no error in Him. There will likewise be no doctrinal error in the foundation of any body of which Christ is the Head. Mr. Armstrong said he had to slowly put aside his own false concepts over time, like altar calls and accepting the Jews' Sivan 6 Pentecost. He never claimed to have received those teachings from God by revelation. He assumed them. But he *did* claim that Monday Pentecost was a revelation. That is the difference.

When we proclaim there will be no doctrinal error in a Body inspired by Jesus Christ, that assertion is always met with great disrespect by those who seek to defend doctrinal changes in the 1970s and beyond. They claim no man could have gotten everything right on his own, and mistakes were inevitable. But such a posture is merely evidence these people do not really believe the church is a body founded miraculously by Jesus Christ, but instead they attribute it to the efforts of a man. Yes, it would have been impossible for Herbert Armstrong to figure out all these truths and get them right. But what does that have to do with anything? I think we agree we are talking about the Church of God, not the Church of Herbert Armstrong! Herbert Armstrong was only the instrument used by God to do *His*

Work. The man could have accomplished nothing of value if it had not been for God's divine inspiration—a true miracle—to establish that Body in these last days.

Where is there any example in all the Bible that a legitimate work of God began with a mixture of doctrinal truth and error—due to the fallibility of the human servant—and the error had to be purged out decades later to *finally* arrive at a "more pure" product? You will not find it. Moses received the Ten Commandments, statutes and judgments by divine revelation and was told to give them to Israel. Moses did not figure them out. God gave them to him! So that first Church in the Wilderness (Acts 7:38) got its start with true doctrine—no errors. The prophets of old were later sent by God to give divinely-inspired messages to the people. They proclaimed what God told them to say, not what came out of their own human wisdom. And I think we all accept that there was no human error allowed to creep into their writings. It was a miracle, because such would have been *impossible* if it were the man—Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, et al—doing the work. Then Jesus Christ came in His own flesh and selected twelve apostles to be His ambassadors. He taught them directly (just as He had taught Moses and the prophets of old), and I think we all agree Christ taught them only true doctrine—not a mixture of truth and error. So those first apostles thereafter raised up the churches of God on the basis of pure doctrinal teaching. Left to their own interpretations, they would have gotten many things wrong. But we do not believe that happened, do we? No, we agree that new fledgling Church was founded solidly upon the One-and-Only Christ—who is Truth personified! Later, God raised up the Apostle Paul and taught him that very same Truth in the Arabian desert for three years. And even though he was isolated without communication with the first Twelve, when he compared what Christ had revealed to him privately, it matched precisely with what Christ had taught the Twelve while in the flesh (Galatians 1:11–18; 2:6–9). Amazing! So both the work of God to the Circumcision through the Twelve, as well as the work of God to the Uncircumcision through Paul was predicated on exactly the same doctrine, so that the New Testament Church in the first century began with pure and undefiled doctrinal teachings, just like the Israelites of old had received.

Yet today—in these last days—many seem to believe that same unchanging Christ threw out His rule book and did something totally different. They believe—like our antagonist—that Christ allowed His chosen servant of the last days to make all manner of errors in doctrinal teaching that had to be purified decades later through the wisdom of human scholars. Now think about that for a moment. Is that really reflective of Jesus Christ's work? No, that premise is reflective of a *human* work, not the work of God.

To claim it was necessary to make "mid-course corrections" in doctrine is to claim Christ made mistakes in how He established the *foundation* of the House of God in this age—error which later had to be jack-hammered out and replaced. But you will find no such historical precedent in all the Bible for a legitimate work of God.

Does an Apostle Have Authority to Change Doctrine?

We are accused of laying claim to supporting Mr. Armstrong and standing up for the truth, while doing neither. This comes from the fact we refuse to accept that any apostle, even Herbert Armstrong, had the authority to change what Christ revealed to His Church. Do we have any basis for our premise? To begin with, our antagonist even goes so far as to admit the cardinal principle involved, for he says:

Over the years, various ideas, perceptions and opinions have arisen over how God reveals truth to His Church. During the ministry of Herbert W. Armstrong, we all understood that God revealed truth through His apostles. This was once not a mystery to anyone. God inspired Paul to write that His Church was "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone" (Eph. 2:20).

If only this minister really believed what he wrote—that God really *did* reveal Truth through Mr. Armstrong. That is what we believe! There is no greater honor we can give to Mr. Armstrong than to acknowledge he was the man God selected in this age to raise up that Church. But if God revealed truth to Mr. Armstrong, how can that "truth" ever be treated as "error" later on? It was Mr. Armstrong who vehemently defended Monday Pentecost for nearly forty years, and rebuffed many attacks on this teaching through the 1950s and 1960s by claiming that Jesus Christ *revealed* to him that it could never be Sunday—Satan's pagan day of worship. Now was he telling the truth when he said God revealed it, or was he not? And if he was telling the truth, how can a revelation of God ever need changing?

If Herbert Armstrong was ever a legitimate apostle (and we believe he was), then he was subject to the very same limitations of authority as was the Apostle Paul. Here is the key text that defines that limit:

I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But *though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed*. As we said before, so say I now again, If *any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received*, let him be accursed (Galatians 1:6–9).

Paul said that no man, not even he himself—as an apostle—had the authority to change *anything* God had revealed in the foundation of doctrinal teaching. No being—angel or man—was given that authority. Paul goes on to thunder the reason he had no authority to change:

For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ. But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me *is not after man*. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, *but by the revelation of Jesus Christ* (Galatians 1:10–12).

Mr. Armstrong used to quote this very passage and apply it to himself, claiming to have received his knowledge of God's truth the very same way Paul did—by divine revelation. If that is true, how can it ever change? And if it needed to change to be right, that only certifies that Jesus Christ was never the original revelator, unless we believe Christ lied. And if we do not believe He lied, then it means Herbert Armstrong only *presumed* to be an apostle, and received no such divine revelation from God. Yes, many former members of the church have since arrived at that faulty conclusion. They have rejected the entire body of that teaching. But we do not believe that at all. We believe he was a legitimate apostle, and that means we believe Jesus Christ was the one working miracles to make sure he got the right doctrine from the beginning, on Pentecost, divorce and remarriage, and all the others. And since we believe with our whole hearts those teachings came from God—not man—we are not about to give them up for anyone.

Our antagonist tries to bring up a number of examples in which he says Mr. Armstrong did not understand the whole truth about a topic early on, and had to grow into that knowledge as God revealed it later. We have no argument with that point at all. But this minister claims we believe God revealed all truth to Mr. Armstrong all at one time. This is patently false. The historical record supports exactly what Mr. Armstrong wrote many times—that God revealed doctrines to him one at a time over a protracted period. The key is that once God *revealed* a doctrine, it could be counted on to be right. God might not reveal all truth all at once, but what He does reveal is always right and can never change thereafter. He might reveal new knowledge about that doctrine which we did not understand before, but it will *never* contradict or refute that which was revealed before. Growth means to augment and add to, never to uproot and to replace. (Please refer to our articles entitled, *How Do Christians Come to a Knowledge of the Truth?*, and *What Does the Bible Teach About Change?*)

But our antagonist tries to use church government as an example, referring to Mr. Armstrong's 1939 article which he claims speaks against top-down government. But that article was really written to counter the claims of Church of God, Seventh Day at the time, which was ruling by *boards of men* and *voting* on church doctrine—not governing from the top down. Did Mr. Armstrong ever *change* the structure of the Radio Church of God from a democratic, voting board to a top-down structure? Of course not. He was *always* the physical head of that church organization from its very inception in 1933, and remained so until he died. There was no change in that regard. But God did not reveal the full and

expansive truth about church government to him until after Ambassador College began in 1947—the first time it was actually needful for him to understand how to deploy new helpers in the ministry. But that later increase in understanding never resulted in a *change* in government structure within the church.

How Was Pentecost Changed?

The same is not true of the Pentecost change in 1974. We were taught by the authority of Jesus Christ that Sunday could never be the correct day, and that Monday was revealed by God. But in 1974, all of that was reversed. Let this former Worldwide minister's own words provide the background for the about-face in teaching concerning Pentecost:

Before a faithful apostle can revise any established doctrine, he must examine all the facts from every angle. This includes the original text and meaning of the language in which the scripture was originally written. In this case, Mr. Armstrong contacted his personal friend, Dr. Binyamin Mazar, of Hebrew University in Israel. Dr. Mazar gave Mr. Armstrong access to the most able scholars from Israel specializing in the ancient Hebrew language. Mr. Armstrong conferred with these experts in a series of conversations, over a period of time, before ever reaching any definite conclusion. . . . Pentecost is clearly and unequivocally labeled "the morrow after the Sabbath"—Sunday. The same conclusion had been previously introduced to Mr. Armstrong by a headquarters minister. But not until conferring with the ancient Hebrew language experts did Mr. Armstrong consider revising the Church's former understanding.

This description of events speaks volumes. Where was God's direct and divine inspiration in any of this? Where in the Bible are we told that God's apostles go to the renowned scholars of this world to discover real truth? Quite the contrary, we find this statement by Jesus Christ:

In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast *hid these things from the wise and prudent*, and hast *revealed them unto babes*: even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight. All things are *delivered to me* of my Father: and *no man knoweth who the Son is*, but the Father; and who the Father is, but the Son, and *he to whom the Son will reveal him* (Luke 10:21–22).

Did God choose to reveal Himself to Dr. Binyamin Mazar and reveal the truth about Pentecost? Ironically, as a practicing Jew, Dr. Mazar did not even accept Jesus Christ as his own savior! And in spite of his impeccable credentials to interpret the Pentecost count in Leviticus 23:15–16, he himself did not even keep a Sunday Pentecost, let alone a Monday Pentecost!

Saul (who became Paul) was a celebrated Pharisee and was more trained in the Holy Scriptures and technicalities of languages than most people of his time. He was taught in one of the most elite schools, at the very feet of the famous scholar, Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). And yet for all this education and training, Saul never recognized his Saviour until God chose to reveal Himself to him. What profit was all that training and education before he was given a miraculous calling? It was worthless. Saul's technical knowledge actually led him to be a persecutor of God's true people—the enemy of Christ (Acts 22:4). Saul had to be humbled and taught the divine truth through *direct inspiration* of Jesus Christ. He never got it by going to the scholars.

Yet that was precisely the authority claimed for Mr. Armstrong's change of Pentecost in 1974, and later, divorce and remarriage as well. Where was God?

This minister alludes to the fact other men had tried to get Mr. Armstrong to change. How true that is. In fact, it was pressure from a doctrinal committee of high-ranking evangelists (including Mr. Armstrong's liberal son) who ultimately had their way in getting these doctrines changed. Let Mr. Armstrong's own words fill in the blanks about the way all of this came about. From a *Worldwide News* article, June 24, 1985, entitled, *Recent History of the Philadelphia Era of the Worldwide Church of God*:

A small few Ambassador graduates who had become ministers in the Church were somewhat scholarly inclined, especially one who had a specific problem. He suffered from an inferiority complex. Because some of our graduates at the time were enrolling in outside universities for higher degrees, a few came to conceive that a "scholar" was in the loftiest position of humanity. If this inferiority sufferer could feel in his own mind that he was a scholar he would feel elevated above other people and therefore delivered from feelings of inferiority. He began to question some of the established doctrines of the Church of God, such as counting the day of Pentecost, divorce and remarriage, tithing and others. Soon he was entering into what he considered a scholarly research to DISprove some of the Church's basic teachings. Gradually one or two others, then even more, joined in a self-appointed "scholarly research" to DISprove plain biblical truths. It became evident that those attending other

universities came to consider Ambassador College as inferior and substandard intellectually and academically because of our belief in God. Secularism and the anti-God approach of evolution seemed to them far superior to the revealed knowledge of God.

Where do we find any instance in all the Bible when a faithful apostle of God had to have his arm twisted by scholarly underlings to get him to finally accept a needed change in church doctrine? It does not exist. But that is exactly what happened within the Worldwide Church of God in 1974. We are said, by this minister, to believe that Mr. Armstrong was "the true author of the apostasy." Not at all. We do not believe he was the *author* of those doctrinal changes. It was not Herbert Armstrong who went to the lead ministers and told them he had received an *apostolic revelation* from God that Monday Pentecost was wrong. No, it was his liberal son and other key evangelists who sought opportunity to change *many* doctrines over time, and waited for their moment to influence Mr. Armstrong to finally give them what they wanted. If it is true "mid-course corrections" need to be made by God, is that the way one would expect Him to initiate them? Does God inspire an underling to pressure the apostle to consider the change and go to the worldly scholars for proof? Each of you must be the judge of that.

No, we do not believe Mr. Armstrong was the author of those changes. But is it unprecedented that a faithful servant ever gave in to a weakness for his son and permitted apostasy in his old age? We find exactly that example in the Bible, where a faithful high priest allowed his love for liberal sons to become his downfall. Read for yourselves the account of the High Priest Eli in 1 Samuel chapters two through four. So too, is it possible that in his old age, after his faithful wife had died and many wolves had gathered round him to merchandise the church, that Mr. Armstrong succumbed to a weakness for his son and gave him what he wanted, to try and make peace? It seems very likely. But even if we cannot know for certain what caused Mr. Armstrong to begin approving changes to long-standing doctrines he had previously defended for decades, such changes are never permitted by God. There is no authority for repudiating doctrines revealed by God to His true Church, and that applies to apostles too.

It is important to note that our evidence against the validity of the 1974 doctrinal changes is not strictly based upon divine revelation, although that is certainly the most important proof. We also have a multitude of technical evidence to confirm a Monday Pentecost and the original teaching on divorce and remarriage, which will stand the test of any scholar's attack. (Please refer to our articles entitled, *The Plain Truth About Pentecost*, *Why a Monday Pentecost?*, *Divorce and Remarriage—What Should Christians Know?*, and *The Truth About Marriage and Divorce*.) These articles demonstrate that honest and inspired

scholarship will always support and confirm the divine revelation to God's chosen servants. It will never refute or undermine it.

What Is Progressive Revelation?

The next point is our answer to the antagonist's accusation that we are defending the same form of "progressive revelation" espoused by Catholicism. Here is what he says:

Now contrast the attitude of true Christians with that of the great counterfeit. Like certain elements within the Church of God, Catholics deny that Christians can grow in the truth or recognize that former beliefs and practices are in error. They believe that their church can never err, since "Christ" is deemed to be mysteriously guiding it at *every* moment and in *every* way. This is called "progressive revelation." As a result, the Catholics consider every contradictory decree ever issued to be inherently irreversible. Therefore, they do not feel the need to repent of error. Change is not an option, they reason, since their church could not err under Christ's guidance.

First of all, it appears this former Worldwide minister is confused about the common definition of progressive revelation. The Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance provides a good summary of various religious teachings about progressive revelation, and makes the following accurate statement:

Different faith groups assign various meanings to the term "Progressive revelation." A common definition is the belief that God did not teach full theological, legal, moral, scientific, medical and other knowledge to humans in the beginning. Rather, God gradually revealed truths over a long interval, according to their needs, and at a rate slow enough that humans were capable of fully absorbing them.

Therefore, most faiths do not define progressive revelation as a belief that truth is revealed and can never change. Quite the contrary, most religions who espouse progressive revelation do the *exact opposite*, believing that what is taught at one point in time as truth can be replaced with new and better "progressive" truths in the future.

What do the Catholics specifically teach on this subject? Note this quotation from an article by Marcellino D'Ambrosio, a theologian explaining the Catholic Church's teaching in the Vatican II document "Dei Verbum" subtitled, "A Gradual and Progressive Revelation":

Another thing to note about God's communication with us over the course of salvation history is that he was wise enough not to reveal too much about Himself too fast. One can compare our relationship to God to a human love relationship. When a couple begins courting, they don't "tell all" on the first date. Rather, as they get to know each other better, they gradually reveal more and more about themselves. When their wedding day finally comes, they reveal themselves completely to each other, even physically. The total intimacy of marriage is the culmination of a progressively deepening relationship.

Do Catholics really believe doctrine can never change? Of course not. They believe doctrine *can* change, if such change comes from the Pope—the one figure they accept as carrying God's authority. When the Vatican Conclave met to select a replacement for Pope John Paul II, you can be sure it was a highly-charged political process. Whoever was selected to become the new Pope would hold ultimate authority to either confirm current doctrine or amend it. Many liberal American Catholics would love for the Pope to approve the use of contraception, marriage for priests, just to name two. To date, that has been considered a sin. But they believe the Pope has the authority of God to make such a change, if he chooses to. If he ever did so, most of that church worldwide would embrace the doctrinal reversal as a necessary "mid-course correction," and deem it the will of God, expressed through His holy human servant on earth.

Our antagonist accuses us of sharing the Catholic belief in progressive revelation. Is that true? Nothing could be farther from the truth. Is it true we believe Christ is mysteriously guiding the Church "at every moment and in every way," and never inspires a faithful apostle to teach us false doctrine? Yes, that is a very accurate statement of our beliefs. But that cannot be called "progressive revelation." In fact, progressive revelation is just the opposite, and is manifested in this world's churches through advocating that new teachings can supplant former teachings as time goes by. They label such flip-flopping as "growth" and "new enlightenment."

By comparison to what this remnant body teaches on the subject, here is a quotation from our antagonist that highlights his own teaching on the matter:

Personally growing in grace and knowledge is a long, on-going process that will take the rest of your life. Similarly, God does not reveal everything about any particular doctrine all at once even to apostles. . . . Consider this—God wants his people to learn from experience. He does not tell us everything in precise detail all at once in every circumstance. He does not address, at the outset of any undertaking, every possible complication that may arise. . . .

Since God's truth is understood step by step—slowly, throughout a lifetime of conversion and overcoming—necessary refinements and corrections in biblical understanding need to be made.

Given these citations, which one of us is the real champion of this world's concept of progressive revelation—Church of God, The Eternal, or our detractor? His own philosophy precisely matches the false premise of the Catholics! How so? As the Catholics believe in the supreme authority of the Pope to change doctrine with God's blessing, so our antagonist (and many former Worldwide ministers) believe God gave Mr. Armstrong the same authority to change doctrine. Here is what he says:

Progressive revelation ultimately led the Catholic Church to adopt the doctrine of Papal Infallibility: When the Pope speaks from the official throne—Ex Cathedra ("from the chair")—it is considered as if God is speaking. Error is deemed impossible!

Yet this is exactly the way this same minister views Herbert Armstrong! Notice this further quote:

As a result of the apostasy and falling away, hyper-conservatives at the other extreme are now more cautious and suspicious of any change that Mr. Armstrong himself made. . . . When God uses His true apostles to increase our spiritual understanding, He expects us to act and grow. Mr. Armstrong's role as Elijah more greatly emphasizes this principle.

In essence, since Mr. Armstrong was an apostle and considered to be "Elijah," he too—like the Pope—was infallible, and we must accept every change he approved as coming straight from the mouth of God, even if that change turns the previous teaching on its head. Who is really emulating the Catholics? It may be interesting to note this minister has now claimed himself to be an apostle, like Mr. Armstrong was. This must mean he considers it within his authority to make more "mid-course corrections" in church teachings as necessary in the future. He says further about our refusal to accept change:

Since no error is ever admitted, and correction and change are forbidden, composite doctrines become a maze of contradictory decrees and positions. Doctrinal simplicity and purity become impossible to maintain.

Is that really an accurate reflection of the fruits of Church of God, The Eternal? We have been a remnant body now for more than thirty years. We have a lengthy track record that can be analyzed for our consistency of teachings. In all those years, have our teachings

really been "a maze of contradictory decrees and positions"? Hardly. We continue to hold fast to the very doctrines the entire unified church once kept together during the first forty years of Mr. Armstrong's work, when God was blessing the Radio Church of God with an average annual growth rate of thirty percent. Was the church confused and contradictory back then? No, the confusion and contradiction is actually manifested by all of these late-comer splinter groups who continue to change and revise their doctrines as every year goes by. They may not be changing as rapidly as the Worldwide Church of God did over the past thirty years, but they are treading the very same road, howbeit at a slower pace. Most members in these groups are never sure when their leaders will come out with the next round of "new truth" which will force them to make another departure from past fundamental beliefs. There is no sure foundation when a ministry believes in necessary mid-course corrections. It is those very changes that destroy doctrinal simplicity and purity.

We Cannot Have It Both Ways

It is also interesting how many former members of the Worldwide Church of God defended Mr. Armstrong's authority to change long-held doctrines of the church, but then condemned the changes made by the Pastor General who succeeded Mr. Armstrong after his death in 1986. Here is what our antagonist says about those later changes:

The liberals who infiltrated the leadership of God's Church and led the great apostasy of the late 1980s and early 1990s referred to their doctrinal changes as "growth." But their radical changes were *not* growth, because growth does not dismantle, restructure and depart from virtually all of God's restored truths.

What an amazing admission. It is only too bad this man cannot acknowledge the very same thing in relation to the 1974 changes. Why does he consider a change in the weekly Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday as unacceptable, but readily accepts a change in Pentecost from Monday to Sunday? Why does he reject the change to the "born again" teaching, but wholeheartedly defends the defilement of marriage? The later changes were made by the man who held legitimate authority to lead the church, because Mr. Armstrong appointed him as successor. When that man made changes, it was treated as heresy, and they felt justified in separating from the parent body and starting their own groups. But when it was done while Mr. Armstrong was alive, it was merely a "mid-course correction." Because it was Mr. Armstrong himself who finally approved the liberal changes on divorce and remarriage, Pentecost, and others, those were just fine to them. What hypocrisy and incontinence. God's people—especially the wayward ministry—need to come to accept that no man—not even an apostle—was ever given authority by God to change doctrines He revealed and made part of the very foundation of the Church.

You cannot appeal to apostolic authority in accepting changes you like, and then cry foul when that same authority is used to make changes you do not like. What is good for the goose is good for the gander.

Again we ask, where is God in all of this? If the Radio Church of God was ever the true Church of God, then it was because Jesus Christ Himself built that body and made sure it was founded upon a Rock—the Truth. All of this other nonsense about accepting particular changes as mid-course corrections but rejecting other changes as heresy—based upon the personality in charge of the church at the time—is ridiculous. Is God's work really so confused and convoluted? Are we really left to wonder how much of those original teachings were really from God, and which ones might have been inserted by accident through Mr. Armstrong's "ignorance"? Is there any wonder so many are out there flailing about in spiritual confusion today? Without the foundation of divinely-revealed Truth, what else do we expect, except every man doing that which is right in his own eyes (Deuteronomy 12:8)?

We have seen the very fulfillment of key prophecies in these last days:

This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away. For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts, *Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.* Now as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, *so do these also resist the truth:* men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith (2 Timothy 3:1–8).

Yes, men who were called of God to proclaim the Truth and serve the sheep are the very ones who now tell us God did not really reveal truth to us at the first, and we have to turn to the scholars of this world and be willing to make "mid-course corrections"—"ever learning." But that is not what the Apostle John taught:

I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, but because *ye know it*, and that no lie is of the truth. Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son. Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: (but) he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also. *Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning.* If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall

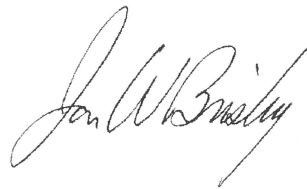
remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father (1 John 2:21–24).

John said the true people of God *know the Truth*, and anyone claiming we did not really receive the Truth is denying Jesus Christ! The difference in these contrary philosophies about truth and revelation should now be very clear.

Brethren, the point of this letter is not to make a direct rebuttal to this particular minister, who has rejected God's revelation and turned to his own conception of truth. The point is to educate the faithful children of God to be able to recognize the fallacy of these apostate teachers. The day is coming when many of you may be called upon to answer why you are holding to those "old teachings" from before 1974. ". . . be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear" (1 Peter 3:15). The day is coming when those holding to those original truths will no longer exist in obscurity. While it is a blessing to see God allowing that light to shine more and more as time goes by, such increased exposure will likewise bring more frequent and severe attacks by those who once knew and accepted these things, and have since turned away. If we are aware of some of the major arguments being used to attack our beliefs, we are also in a much better position not only to shore up our own foundations, but to answer those who might ask in future days about the basis of our faith.

May God give every one of you the conviction and faith to stand fast to the very end.

Yours with love in Christ Jesus,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Jon W. Brisby". The signature is fluid and stylized, with the first name "Jon" being particularly prominent.

Jon W. Brisby