

July 2011

Dear Brethren:

In the March *Monthly Letter*, we continued our analysis of the history of the work of Mr. Herbert Armstrong, giving attention to the claims of his detractors, particularly the man who became his ultimate successor in the Worldwide Church of God. In conscience, Mr. Joseph Tkach, Jr. helped lead that organization away from everything the church had formerly believed and practiced. As we seek to weigh evidence for and against that church having ever been the true Church of God in this age, there is much value in assessing the "proofs" offered by those who earnestly concluded that Mr. Armstrong's work was not inspired by God. Recall Mr. Tkach's thesis about the original body of church doctrine:

Allow us to lay out a challenge aimed at combatting the idea that these doctrines were specially revealed to Herbert Armstrong. We want to show that they really did not pour directly from the Godhead into his mind. Here's our challenge: You know the distinctive teachings of Herbert Armstrong; now you name the teaching and we'll tell you where it came from. We'll show you what preceded Herbert Armstrong and demonstrate that the teaching was *not* specially revealed to him and it wasn't restored from the first century (*Transformed By Truth*, p. 88).

Yet in spite of all inferences to the contrary, we found that Mr. Armstrong never claimed to have received God's inspiration in the very same way that Moses or the Apostle Paul did, but he consistently explained that revelation process *openly* to the whole church from the very beginning. He also never claimed to have been the first man to have understood many individual principles, but unashamedly discussed his study of *many* religious and secular authors in his quest for real truth. On what basis, then, should any of the church membership ever have become *shocked and disillusioned* to discover that Mr. Armstrong was not the originator of Sabbath-keeping (for example) in the twentieth century? We find no evidence that he ever claimed to be such an author.

What further evidence can we glean from the historical account provided by Mr. Tkach to prove his point? As one who felt sincerely that Mr. Armstrong was not inspired by God in what he taught, we should be able to put his rationale to the test.

Nothing New, Except ...

In the very same chapter in which he threw down the gauntlet to claim that *not one* of Herbert Armstrong's teachings was original—but rather borrowed from other religionists—Mr. Tkach then begins to list "Seven Key Doctrinal Emphases" which made the Worldwide Church of God stand out from all other churches. Here is how he prefaced that itemized list:

For those who may not be familiar with what the Worldwide Church of God formerly taught, allow me to briefly sketch out seven areas of doctrine that, taken together, set us apart from all other organizations, denominations, and churches. Our former doctrinal distinctives cannot be limited to the following, but in my opinion what follows represents the chief teachings that defined us as a group and distinguished us from all others (*Transformed By Truth*, p. 91).

Notice, he seems to concede that the *collective body* of doctrine—"taken together"—was indeed distinctive. So in spite of feeling that Mr. Armstrong was not inspired by God to come to understand any specific *unique* truths, he does after all acknowledge that *the package* of doctrinal teachings was indeed unique among this world's religions. But his admission does not stop there. Concerning his assessment of one in particular of those seven points, entitled, "What Is Salvation?" (p. 94), he summarizes Mr. Armstrong's teaching as follows:

We used to teach that no one was "born again" until the final resurrection. We said that those who believed in the death and resurrection of Jesus and who committed themselves to obeying the law were "begotten" (which we understood to mean "conceived") sons of God and would be "born again" at the time of the resurrection. Until then, a believer was only conceived, not born. Therefore, no one was "saved" in their earthly life; they had to await the return of Jesus Christ for that. At the resurrection the believer would be raised up and finally be born again.

What follows this summary, however, is quite stunning. Mr. Tkach concedes:

This was one of the few doctrines taught by Mr. Armstrong that has no known precedent; it appears to be unique to him (p. 94).

So much for the initial challenge on p. 88—"now you name the teaching and we'll tell you where it came from." By page 94, Mr. Tkach seems to have negated his own

premise. And this is not an inconsequential teaching. The belief about what salvation is all about and how it is achieved is a *defining signature* for any and every religion.

Salvation Teaching and Being "Born Again"

This particular doctrine of begotten vs. born again was not included in our earlier list of five simple identifiers of the true Church of God, but it certainly could have been. It is another example of a key part of God's plan for mankind which is not understood at all by others professing to be Christians. How is it that Herbert Armstrong seems to have been the only one who recognized such simple and prolific statements in the Bible about the salvation process? The interchange between Jesus and Nicodemus makes it very simple to discern that being "born" involves being in *the form of Spirit*, not flesh:

Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and *that which is born of the Spirit is spirit*. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be *born again*. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: *so is every one that is born of the Spirit* (John 3:5–8) [emphasis mine].

How simple is that! Jesus Christ defined very specifically that the "born again" state does not exist in a flesh body, but requires a *Spirit body* which then has the same capacity to move like the wind, invisibly but powerfully. But perhaps that interpretation twists the Scripture? Or might it actually be confirmed in other Bible passages as well?

Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God (1 John 3:9).

One who is truly "born again" does not commit sin. Not because the law has been done away—making it *impossible* to sin—but because that individual has become born into the Spirit realm—now having *inherent* life—possessing full power and perfect control to obey the law. Anyone in the flesh, no matter how spiritually mature, has no such perfect control, and therefore continues to sin. Any flesh being claiming he is not still a sinner is only proving he is not a true Christian.

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:8–9).

As we have already seen in earlier chapters, one of the hallmarks of the true Church is acknowledgment that God's spiritual law is still in force—not done away. Anyone claiming *it is done away* is unavoidably claiming he is *not committing sin*. Where there is no sin, there is no law, because sin is the transgression of the law (1 John 3:4). So the only one who is totally sinless is one who has already been perfected and given an eternal, spiritual Body.

But if we are not yet "born again," what are we at this time? Mr. Armstrong's teaching made it abundantly clear. We are *begotten* of the Spirit, even as human life begins with begetting in the womb, requiring time to mature before finally being born. And what is the responsibility of one of those priceless, begotten children of God in order to grow spiritually toward that ultimate maturity?

We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God *keepeth himself*, and that wicked one toucheth him not (1 John 5:18) [emphasis mine].

"Keepeth himself" how?

If ye love me, *keep my commandments*. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you (John 14:15–17) [emphasis mine].

A begotten child of God has received only *an earnest*—a down payment—of God's Holy Spirit.

In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were *sealed with that holy Spirit of promise*, Which is *the earnest of our inheritance* until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory (Ephesians 1:13–14) [emphasis mine].

Receiving the Holy Spirit through baptism is only a *down payment* of that Spirit, infusing in us *a begetting* of new spiritual life. But birth—being born again—is the ultimate *transformation* when the flesh body dies, being replaced by a new spiritual Body. And in the meantime, the work of a true Christian is to be *an overcomer*, learning to walk more and more over time as Christ Himself walked.

Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, *according to that he hath done*, whether it be good or bad (2 Corinthians 5:9–10) [emphasis mine].

There will indeed be a Judgment, and we will each be judged upon what we did with our calling, during that gestational period we were given to grow, following our spiritual conception. The repetition of these basic principles is prolific throughout the New Testament. Why, then, did *no other religion* pick up on that thread of simple truth? Mr. Tkach says that only Herbert Armstrong taught it.

The alternative, which most believe—including Mr. Tkach—is that one becomes a Christian by making *a verbal profession*, "I accept Jesus Christ as my Savior." Then he is automatically "born again." Having been "born," the law does not apply, and he is no longer capable of committing sin. No matter what he does for the rest of his life, his salvation is "guaranteed," being already "born," or completed. Too bad that such a notion is simply inconsistent with everything recorded in the Bible. What is the simple truth about what is truly required for salvation?

And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely. *He that overcometh* shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death (Revelation 21:6–8) [emphasis mine].

Can it be any more plain? Salvation will not be granted to anyone based upon a *profession with his mouth*. It is all about what he *does* to show honor to God's law (respect for the Ten Commandments), which is what it means to be an "overcomer." Mr. Joseph Tkach changed his mind and came to believe he is already born again, just like the majority of religious movements claiming to be Christian. It is interesting that on this particular critical issue affecting our very hope of salvation, he acknowledges that Herbert Armstrong offered a teaching found in no other church in the twentieth century. But what is the real truth about God's standard for human salvation? You must weigh the evidence and decide for yourself.

Another Unique Teaching

Closely related to this teaching about *when and how* salvation is achieved is another doctrine taught by Herbert Armstrong which has no parallel in any other religion. That is the teaching about the *ultimate hope* to be realized by those who do indeed become "born again." What will those spiritual children actually be doing for all eternity? We know they will have new spiritual—immortal—bodies, but what will their status be in that Kingdom of God? Will they become angels, disembodied spirits, or something else?

Herbert Armstrong taught that the hope of the saved was to become *full members of the God Family*, sharing all of the power and glory possessed now by God the Father and Jesus Christ; literally becoming "God, as God is." It is a teaching which makes most so-called Christians cringe: denounced as blasphemous while they sniff the air for the damnation of hell fire, like lightning, to strike down its adherents. How utterly audacious to believe that human beings will actually become God! Yet that is exactly what Herbert Armstrong taught, and that which the Worldwide Church of God promoted during all of those decades of incredible growth. Here is one example to confirm that consistent teaching still evident even soon before he died:

The divine family is God. There is one God—the one family, consisting of more than one Person . . . God then purposed to reproduce Himself, through humans, made in his image and likeness . . . with the possibility of being born into the divine family begotten by God the Father . . . and that is why God put man on the earth (*Mystery of the Ages*, 1985, p. 78).

Mr. Tkach acknowledges this history under item number two on his list of seven key doctrinal emphases of the former church:

We taught that God was literally reproducing Himself through mankind. Our destiny was not to remain merely human, but to become God—born again as members of God's family. Just as human children are fully human, so (we thought) God's children will be fully God (*Transformed By Truth*, p. 94).

He fails, however, to acknowledge that this is another teaching of Herbert Armstrong which was *absolutely unique* among today's religions. You will find no other church which taught this God-family doctrine. There was no one from whom Herbert Armstrong could copy. It simply did not exist. The very closest one can find may be among the Mormons or the Eastern Orthodox Church. In each case, these groups espouse

a form of *apotheosis*—the eventual deification of humans. But their ideas are hardly similar to that of Mr. Armstrong because their entire concept of the natures of "God" and man is very different. There is absolutely no precedent we know of for teaching that man was created in the image of God because God is re-creating Himself and expanding His own Family. It is yet another key reason that "Armstrongism" is so distinct within the religious world, in spite of claims that every teaching was merely "copied."

But is there any Biblical substance for belief in the God Family plan? If there is, why would no other religious movement have stumbled upon it, even in part? Let us see.

God did indeed create man in His very own image (Genesis 1:26). No other creatures hold that distinction. Yes, some of the angelic host do appear with certain attributes like unto men (Ezekiel 1:5–10), but usually combined with the features of animals like lions, birds, oxen, etc. Most Christian religions believe the hope of the saved is to become angels, sitting on clouds and playing harps. Yet the Bible refutes that utterly! The angels were created by God to be the servants of God, like the butlers and maids in the royal household.

Notice first that Jesus Christ did not become an angel at His resurrection. He became *the Son of God*, an honor that was never offered to any being in *the angel class* of creature:

Being made so much *better than the angels*, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee? And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son? And again, when he bringeth in the firstbegotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him. And of the angels he saith, Who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire. But unto the Son he saith, *Thy throne, O God*, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom (Hebrews 1:4–8) [emphasis mine].

This makes it very plain that Jesus Christ was high above the angels, resurrected to sit on a throne, and like His Father, *called God*! But what does that have to do with the future of resurrected human beings? Most accept that Christ is God, but reject that man will follow the same path. Yet Jesus Christ is called *the firstbegotten* (verse 6 above), not *the only* begotten. If there is a first, it is because there will be others to follow. And is not that exactly what the called of God are told to do, to follow Him? "He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked" (1 John 2:6). But where is the evidence that God is going to reward "the saved" of men with a resurrection to glory as Jesus Christ received?

The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are *the children of God*. And if children, then heirs; *heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ*; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may *be also glorified together* (Romans 8:16–17) [emphasis mine].

Human beings are consistently called the children of God. Most try to dismiss this as a doting sentiment of the Father, like the pet owner who fawns over her little dog and calls it "my baby." But that is not the way God behaves or thinks. He is never frivolous with names and titles, and when He calls someone His own *children*, it deserves serious consideration. Those children are also called heirs, and not just some token, second-rate heirs, but *joint heirs with Christ*! No angel was ever offered such a future, only human beings. What does it mean to be joint heirs with Jesus Christ? The Bible makes that very plain as well. Concerning Christ and those who will follow Him, we are told:

And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; And hast made us unto our God *kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth* (Revelation 5:9–10) [emphasis mine].

Jesus Christ, as the Son of God, is going to rule. Those who follow in His footsteps—the perfected children of God—will likewise be glorified.

That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And *the glory which thou gavest me I have given them*; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, *that they may be made perfect in one*; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me (John 17:21–23) [emphasis mine].

Made perfect in one, how? By being born into the very God Family, and sharing with the Father and with Jesus Christ all of the glory, honor, and privileges of royal children, including offices as Kings and Priests. This is a future offered to no other creature—angel or otherwise—a theme which is replete throughout the Bible.

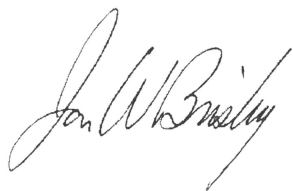
Do the words of the Holy Scripture really make that such a far-out concept? The Bible calls the saved repeatedly, children, heirs, joint heirs, kings, and priests. Why would Herbert Armstrong be the only religious leader to pick up on this theme and form a salvation doctrine around it? You can choose to dismiss it as blasphemy if you will, but to say there is no biblical substantiation for the concept would be absurd. The texts listed

above are only a very brief example. But once again, you must each choose what you believe to be true, based upon the evidence or lack thereof.

What is absolutely true, however, is that the idea that Herbert Armstrong copied all of his teachings from other religionists is very easy to disprove. It would appear that Mr. Tkach had a strong personal reason for wanting to believe there was nothing unique, perhaps to make it easier to dismiss his predecessor's credibility and to convince others of the same. But again, the very history of that church organization and its *clearly unique doctrines* in the twentieth century make that an indefensible position.

In the next segment, we finally will address what Mr. Tkach called "the central plank" of that church's doctrine—the teaching about modern Israel in prophecy.

All love and respect to the remnant of God,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Jon W. Brisby". The signature is written in dark ink and is centered on the page.

Jon W. Brisby