

May 2014

Dear Brethren:

Almost a year ago, in the June 2013 issue of this *Monthly Letter*, we began to write a *synoptic summary* of key events that defined the life of Herbert Armstrong, including the important benchmarks in the history of the Worldwide Church of God which would affect the course of that church in later years. That letter series was interrupted in recent months, but we will now resume the storyline where we left off last summer. To understand how and why certain events took place in the 1970s and '80s, it is crucial first to become familiar with the early events which formed the foundation of that very work. Mr. Armstrong's own account in the *Autobiography of Herbert Armstrong* (1967) is very revealing.

Previously, we covered the early life of Herbert Armstrong from birth, maturity, marriage, up through his initial calling by God, which was sparked by his wife's decision to keep the seventh-day Sabbath in 1926. We documented the key events which occurred to move him away from a career in advertising to becoming not only a Sabbath-keeping laymember, but even an ordained minister of the Church of God. We ended with a description of his ministerial ordination in June 1931.

I mentioned previously that the Armstrongs had two daughters, Beverly and Dorothy, born in 1918 and 1920 respectively. Their two sons, Richard David and Garner Ted, were born sixteen months apart, in mid-1928 and then in early 1930 respectively. These two sons would later become pivotal in the work of their father, as this summary will show. Having been raised during the time of their parents' progressive conversion, that way of life would have a profound effect upon all of the children, although it is Garner Ted Armstrong who will become the key figure in the church storyline from the 1960s onward.

## **The Question of Church Government**

In the process of learning more of the truth of the Bible, Herbert Armstrong was confronted with questions about proper organization of the church. Once ordained as a minister, he became immersed immediately in the reality of church government as practiced by the Oregon Conference of the Church of God. Here is how he described the question that confronted him in 1931 and would take nearly twenty years to be resolved:

. . . I was especially puzzled over the matter of church organization. Not yet having come to see and understand the plain and clear Bible teaching, I had gone along with the Oregon Conference in its idea of government by the lay members. In this Conference the governing board was composed solely of lay members. They hired and fired the ministers.

. . . But the question of church organization and government was to keep coming up in my mind for years, before it was finally to become clear. Remember, I still was driven by the persistent question: "WHERE is the one *true* Church — the same one Jesus founded?" This Church of God, with national headquarters at Stanberry, Missouri, seemed to be closer to it, according to the pattern in the Bible, than any — yet I was unable to reconcile myself that such a small, and especially such a *fruitless* church, could be that dynamic fruit-bearing spiritual organism in which, and through which CHRIST was working. Surely the instrument Christ was using would be more alive — more productive! Yet I had not found it! (*Autobiography*, p. 421)

So, for a number of years he tried his best to work within the structure which already existed among these Sabbath-keeping brethren. And it appears that he was never seeking to make himself the center of attention. He seems sincerely to have desired to achieve "results" in helping the church to grow, and was very willing to "play second fiddle" behind other ministers in order to accomplish that overarching goal.

### **Poor Results From Collaboration**

Both before and after his ordination, Herbert Armstrong worked in several instances with other ministers to organize evangelistic campaigns to spread the gospel. Here is what he said about the fruits of those projects:

My first evangelistic effort was conducted alone, at the end of 1930, in Harrisburg. There were conversions. In 1931 I was teamed with Elder Taylor, who had arrived from California. There were no results, except for the night it stormed the meeting out, and in a private Bible study in my room Mrs. Elmer Fisher had accepted the truth. I was teamed with Elder Roy Dailey. There were no results. He left Umapine. I continued alone, and *there were conversions*. Results then were small — indeed it was a small beginning, compared to the mounting worldwide harvest of today [1967] — but God was using me, and producing "fruit" (p. 426).

This was the consistent pattern over those early years. Only when Mr. Armstrong "wound up" working alone did there seem to be any serious response. This seemingly accidental occurrence would become a consistent pattern, leading Herbert Armstrong eventually to conclude that God does indeed sponsor His divine work through particular chosen servants. It is one thing to claim such a role and then seek selfishly to substantiate it. It is quite another to have that role thrust upon one, becoming apparent through repeated events and proofs manifested through undeniable results.

### **Derailed for a Time**

At the end of 1931, there was no salary available from the church to support Herbert and his family full time in the ministry. Although he regretted it later, he allowed himself to be enticed into accepting another newspaper advertising job in Astoria, Oregon. What he intended to be only a short-term position stretched into fifteen months, until the beginning of 1933. During that time he continued to study and learn, although there was no opportunity to focus on God's work. This is how he described that time:

. . . I found I was caught in a trap. We had 23 men employed. If I left then, the paper would have folded up, and these men would have been out of work. There still was no money in the Oregon Conference church treasury to bring me back into the ministry. I was stuck in Astoria. God intended for me to learn a lesson. It seems that most of the time I have had to learn these lessons the HARD WAY, through experience, and suffering. This was to be no exception. It was not until the end of February, 1933, that my prayers to be relieved of these newspaper responsibilities, and to be allowed to return to God's ministry, were answered (p. 445).

### **Son Miraculously Healed**

While Mr. Armstrong was working in Astoria, Mrs. Armstrong and the family were still living in Salem, and he was making trips back most weekends. Here is his account of a significant event in their lives which would also impact the future of the church:

Finally, by early July 1932, we decided to move the family to Astoria. This resulted from my wife calling long distance late one afternoon asking me to rush home. Little Garner Ted was stricken with pneumonia! I drove *The Messenger* coupe down to Salem, arriving late that night. The children were asleep. Mrs. Armstrong was still up, beside little Ted's sofa, on which he was

lying. Immediately, we both knelt beside our sick baby. Little Garner Ted was then two years and five months.

And I must explain here that he had been, to that time, dumb — unable to talk. While somewhere between six months and a year old, he had fallen out of his crib-bed headfirst onto the hard wood floor. We attributed his inability to talk to this fall, landing on his head. He would point to whatever he wanted to tell us about, making motions, and grunting "Ugh! Ugh!" But he was unable to speak a single word. We were becoming much concerned.

I anointed Ted and began to claim God's promises to rebuke the fever and heal him. As I was praying, Mrs. Armstrong silently prayed, asking God that, if it was His will to heal our baby of this dumbness at that time, to put it in my mind to ask for this, as well as healing from the pneumonia. . . .

I did also have this in mind — or God put it in my mind — for the very instant she had asked for this, I began asking God to restore Ted's power of speech.

His fever left quickly. The very next day he was able to say a number of single words. In about three days he was talking in whole sentences (pp. 449–450).

This account shows not only the miraculous way God was working to honor the faith and sincerity of the Armstrongs, but even more particularly, the quiet but strong role that Mrs. Loma Armstrong continued to play as events progressed. This, too, will continue to be evidenced over the next thirty-five years of their lives.

## **The Tithing Lesson**

In later decades, the issue of tithing would become very contentious, and the Worldwide Church of God would be criticized by the world for its teaching on the doctrine of tithing, among other things. But here is what Mr. Armstrong recounts about the very personal lesson he and Mrs. Armstrong learned from their own experience:

I have mentioned repeatedly how God had brought me down, reduced us to poverty and want, and how much we had suffered hunger through those years. Much of the time in Astoria, up until about the time of this emergency trip to the Helms' farm, we had not had enough to eat.

I have explained in past chapters how, after conversion, I had to come to learn and understand one doctrine at a time. The truth was not acquired all at once. I had known that the Bible had quite a little to say about tithing one's income, and probably had by this time come to understand that it was still in



force during the New Testament. Yet somehow it had never become completely clear, and we had never made tithing a regular and strict practice.

At about this time, in the little time I had from my work at the newspaper for Bible study and prayer, I had made a special and thorough study of this matter of tithing. We saw the mistake we had been making, and started a definite practice of strict tithing. We had only a very little on hand, but we sent a tenth of it, plus an offering, to the Oregon Conference treasurer.

That very day, the way opened for us to be able to stock up at home with a reasonable abundance of food. For one thing, we had a large thick steak. My wife cooked it at low heat with the utensils we had acquired when I had devoted a year to selling them. I shall never forget that steak! It was way and by far the best steak I have ever tasted!

Although we still were required to live another 14 years in the barest and most modest financial circumstances, we have never from that day had to be actually hungry, and miss meals, because of financial poverty! We have since heard scores and scores of case-histories of the experiences of others who were immediately prospered, once they began tithing. But we, ourselves, lived through this same experience. I am very grateful to have been privileged to have been instrumental in bringing countless others into this same divine *blessing*! My wife and I had to learn the HARD WAY! (pp. 454–455)

It was February 1933 when the door opened for Mr. Armstrong to return his attention to the ministry. The Oregon Conference had accumulated enough funds to pay the Armstrongs \$3 per week, and sent a member to Astoria to move them back to the Willamette Valley. Since the Astoria newspaper was already virtually defunct by then and workers already gone, Mr. Armstrong felt comfortable in leaving and resuming his primary mission in the ministry.

### **Lesson of Faith and Divine Healing**

Two months later, in April 1933, the next major lesson would begin. Mr. Armstrong's father had embraced the truth by this time and asked to be baptized. Having experienced what was thought to be a bad case of indigestion, he had asked to be anointed. It was planned to baptize him the day after this anointing. But by that evening, he fell into a coma and never recovered. It was not indigestion, but a heart attack. Mr. Armstrong had full confidence his father would be healed, yet at 9:40 A.M. the next morning he died. Here was the result as it affected his son:

I *knew* that God could not break a promise. I *knew* God has promised to HEAL — that Jesus took the penalty of physical sickness and infirmities and paid

it for us by having His perfect physical body broken by being beaten with stripes!

But WHY, then, did my father die? Through James God instructs us that if any lack wisdom, he shall ask of GOD — asking in FAITH, not wavering or doubting — and God promises wisdom shall be given. I prayed earnestly. I asked God for UNDERSTANDING.

And I searched the Scriptures for the explanation. I did not doubt — but I *did* seek an explanation. Faith must be based on UNDERSTANDING, and I knew there was something I had not yet come to understand. Naturally I soon came, in this search, to the "faith chapter" — the 11th of Hebrews. Then the answer became plain.

God gives us many examples of faith in that wonderful chapter. I noticed the example of Abraham — the *father* of the faithful. He, with Isaac and Jacob and Sarah "all died, *not having received the PROMISES.*" My father, like them, died, not having received God's promise of healing — *AS YET!* Did the death of Abraham, *before* he received what God had unconditionally PROMISED, nullify that promise? Did his death mean that God failed — that God's promise was worthless, not to be kept? NOT AT ALL!

No, it simply meant that, for God's own reason and purpose, the fulfilling of the promise is delayed UNTIL THE RESURRECTION!

In like manner, I could now understand that God has PROMISED to heal — but He has *not* promised how immediately, or by what manner, He will do it. I knew, now, that my father's healing is still absolutely SURE. He will be resurrected — HEALED! I saw, now, that our days are indeed numbered. God has not promised that we shall live in this mortal existence eternally. It is appointed to men once to DIE — and after this the resurrection. I read how the TRIAL of our faith is allowed to work PATIENCE.

God, then, does give us tests of faith. Faith is the EVIDENCE of that NOT seen, NOT felt. Once we FEEL and SEE that we are healed, we no longer need the invisible spiritual evidence of faith. Faith, then, is our evidence — our PROOF of the healing — which God gives us to be exercised and utilized BETWEEN the time we ask, and the time the physical evidence is granted.

We should not *go* to God, asking, unless we have FAITH that God *will* do what He has promised, and what we are ready to ask. Then, after we ask, we should *still* have faith — just as before — that God WILL do as He has promised.

Now I understood! (pp. 463–465)

This is a succinct summary of the original doctrine about divine healing which would be taught to thousands. It is another teaching which brought persecution upon the church in time, and was eventually altered by the Worldwide Church of God in the tumultuous decade of the 1970s. But this history confirms not only the original teaching which Herbert Armstrong

came to understand, but also the *divine means* by which he claims God chose to teach it. This would be the very same pattern that would emerge to confirm *many doctrines* of the church over time. It is also the *foundation of thinking* which would be repudiated in his old age. For that reason, I have taken the time to highlight these details.

In the next installment, we will summarize the means by which Mr. Armstrong first came to preach on the radio, and examine the first roots of that assembly which would later be named the Radio Church of God.

With sincere love for the beloved of God,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Jon W. Brisby". The signature is fluid and elegant, with a large initial "J" and a long, sweeping underline.

Jon W. Brisby