

**THE
TRUTH ABOUT
ANTI-CHURCH OF GOD
LITERATURE**

Reprinted Edition
© 1977, 1989, 1997 Church of God, The Eternal

The Truth About Anti-Church of God Literature!

Virtually every doctrine in the Church of God is now being questioned. The present proliferation of literature assailing Church beliefs was promoted by the doctrinal changes which took place in the Worldwide Church of God during 1973–74. Is there any validity to the questions raised in this anti-Church of God literature? And what are some facts we should note before considering their arguments?

No less than fifteen splinter groups presently exist as a result of the doctrinal upheaval and questionable lifestyle of the Church of God leadership. Many members had long desired change. Some left because change did not come fast enough. Others left because the changes were too many and too radical. Most, however, left because they could not tolerate the double standard of some in the ministry. They wanted a leadership which at least tried to practice what it preached.

The Church of God membership had, for years, withstood the various doctrinal arguments which came out from time to time against this or that doctrine. These arguments were generally Protestant in nature and could be easily disproven. It was not until there was a loss of confidence in the Church leadership that some of these arguments began to seem plausible. After all—some reasoned—if the leadership could not be trusted, how could the doctrine?

It was only after former ministers and employees of the Church of God began publishing literature repudiating doctrine and revealing "faults" of the leadership that the faith of many was shaken.

This article will not concern itself with the various arguments written against the Church of God before 1973. It will concern itself with that literature which arose after 1973, when doctrinal changes were made by the Church of God itself. The term "anti-Church of God literature" will be taken to mean that material repudiating Church of God doctrine which was believed prior to 1973 but published by dissident factions after 1973. Specifically, we shall examine the incongruity and "change of heart" which took place in the minds of those who now write against what they formerly believed, preached, and practiced in some cases, for over twenty years!

Did They Ever Believe?

One question we should ask concerning these former ministers and members who now formulate arguments against what they once believed is, Did they ever really believe in the first place? If they at one time believed the doctrine of the Church of God, then what they now write reflects either a change of heart or a repudiation of an organization over

nondoctrinal issues. Those who repudiate doctrine probably think they were deceived in the past. Yet, not one of these writers has admitted this. If they really believed the doctrine but now repudiate it, they are saying one of two things: (1) They practiced or taught what they never really believed, or (2) they carelessly assumed, lacking conviction. The credibility of those who spend years representing an organization, only to deny everything they preached or practiced, must be seriously questioned. Such individuals are hypocritical or indifferent. How can they be relied on in those matters which require spiritual integrity?

Incongruous Arguments Manifest Prejudice

A close examination of anti-Church of God literature often reveals incongruities. For example, one author states the Worldwide Church of God started small and grew large. Yet, at the time of his book he states the Worldwide Church of God was too small even to be noted in *Mede's Handbook of Denominations*. He later states the administrative flop of the Worldwide Church of God was due to its immense size! In each case, what the author stated fits in with the particular argument he was employing at the time. But in doing so, he contradicts himself. Such incongruity is a manifestation of prejudice. A prejudiced person is not fair, nor are his arguments objective. Such lack of objectivity reflects emotional reaction. And emotion is the archenemy of logic.

Emotional Reaction to the Past

Sound conclusions are seldom reached during emotional stress. Emotional reactions lead to illogical conclusions. Yet, it was during a time of emotional stress when many members left the Worldwide Church of God. The primary reasons were the personal sins of some in the ministry, as well as administrative abuses. Yet doctrine became the scapegoat. Tithing abuses led to a repudiation of tithing, and "Christian giving" became the substitute. Administrative abuses were equated to church government per se and "local autonomy" took its place. Faulty administration involving the doctrine of divorce and remarriage was equated to "breaking up homes," and Jesus' words about divorce were set aside.

Those who said, "I'll never be fooled by a religious organization again," were the first ones to be "fooled"—this time by emotional reaction. They did not, at the time, recognize what the real problem was. The real problem was not doctrine. The problem was administration. The objectivity and care taken to prove the Truth initially was set aside when most repudiated it. If the same care and objectivity had been taken to "disprove" the Truth, as was taken originally to "prove" it, most would have seen the answers clearly. But in the heat of emotion, correct answers do not come easily. And once an emotional decision is made, it is almost impossible to alter it (Proverbs 18:19).

Much of the anti-Church of God literature written today reflects a determination to support incorrect, emotional conclusions. Emotional conclusions are seldom right.

Rebellion and Witch-Hunting Deny Spiritual Direction

For many, rebellion against all church authority and incrimination of the ministry have become a way of life. This posture is apparent in much of the anti-Church of God literature. This is a denial of any inspiration and guidance by God's Spirit in the past! Those who examine the past objectively, can readily see God's hand in their lives, as well as in the lives of others. Thousands of brethren can recall marvelous and wonderful experiences in God's Church. But some are now saying, "Nothing was right; it was all a hoax." Those who do so are denying God ever had a part in their lives! They are, in effect, saying they were never converted, never knew the Truth, and never were a part of God's true Church!

If you believe you had any kind of relationship with God in the past, then you have no legitimate right to discard the Truth given you. Rebellion and witch-hunting accomplish nothing. They are only forms of self-justification. If you believe your prayers were answered and that God did heal you or your children, then God was a part of your life. And that part of your life was when you believed and practiced the doctrines of the Church of God. To deny that spiritual direction now, on the basis of rebellion or finger-pointing, is folly indeed. Those who really believe the Truth do not allow personal feelings to destroy their relationship with God—a relationship which came from belief of the Truth, as taught by the Church of God (2 Thessalonians 2:13).

Distortions Render Everything Questionable)

One who distorts is one who twists a false meaning out of the true facts. Once this is apparent, the entire argument is suspect. One anti-Church of God writer says Mr. Armstrong deliberately chose young men who had no knowledge of his Machiavellian methods. Yet, the author fails to point out these young men were not coerced or forced into the ministry. Furthermore, the author completely overlooks the fact that God could have been responsible for their calling, conversion, and ordination! This example of distortion illustrates how the entire intent and meaning of events can be misinterpreted. When misinterpretation is apparent, an author's entire presentation must be questioned. Any distortion of the facts clearly discredits not only the author, but also his conclusions. One man's interpretation of an event does not necessarily reflect the truth. For not one of the "young men" referred to above would agree with what the author states concerning Mr. Armstrong's reasons for ordaining younger men. Therefore, at best, the author's statements reflect his own opinion—and even that, subsequent to the time of emotional stress.

Imputing of Motives Not Feasible

Those who display true Christian love do not impute motives (1 Corinthians 13:5, see margin—the Greek for "thinketh" is "imputes"). It may be easy for writers to interpret why Mr. Armstrong did certain things forty years ago. But are these interpretations accurate? It is on rare occasions that some may be able to understand why people do the things they do. Although an act generally can be seen, the reason behind the act is another matter. Even the most accurate analysis is often "off key." Not only is it generally impossible to discern the true motives of others; most people often don't even know their own reasons for doing things. This is why Jesus said, ". . . first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye" (Matthew 7:5).

Those writers who express various "reasons" why Mr. Armstrong did what he did are interpreting—interpreting by imputing motives. Yet, this is the most inaccurate method of ascertaining truth. Those who seek truth should get the answers from the individual himself, or otherwise refrain from drawing conclusions.

Must Not Judge Past by Emotional Present

As stated earlier, decisions made under emotional stress are generally incorrect. So are conclusions about the past, if based on the emotional present. Those doctrinal decisions of 1973–74, which rejected revealed Truth originally given to the Church of God, were largely emotional decisions. Past teachings and experiences were rejected on the basis of the "emotional present." Truth and accuracy cannot be ascertained under such circumstances. It is by an honest evaluation of the past, apart from emotion, that one can accurately determine the basis for truth and conversion. Many brethren cast years of dedication aside within a few months' time. Why should the conduct of some ministers lead to such disillusionment? One can only conclude the basis for church membership, by many, was the charisma of men rather than dedication to God and belief of the Truth. Those who substantiate their present conduct by rejecting the past, on the basis of the emotional present, cannot possibly be relied upon for an accurate analysis of truth.

Why Did Dissidents Believe Initially?

One question which must be answered is: Why did those who now write against Church of God doctrine believe initially? As has been stated, if they did not believe, then they were hypocrites. One cannot preach what he doesn't believe without being a hypocrite! On the other hand, if they did believe, then they now obviously feel they were deceived. But what if they were called, were converted, were ordained of God, but now have rejected that

calling? One fact is certain—they were not converted to what they presently believe or advocate. God does not convert His children to error. God converts His children to Truth. If these dissidents were called and converted, the only basis for what they are presently doing is the past! And if they have repudiated the past, then their present authority is their own. No one was forced, initially, to accept the Truth. Those whose church association was the result of following personalities are guilty of dereliction. The Bible says to "prove all things" (1 Thessalonians 5:21). How can one preach what one never proved to be true? That kind of ministry does not have the reliability necessary to represent an unchanging God who can be trusted to be the same yesterday, today, and forever!

"Out of the Abundance of the Heart the Mouth Speaketh"

Jesus said, ". . . out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh" (Matthew 12:34). The vitriolic attacks hurled against God's Truth, by some, reflect what is in the hearts of the writers. Jesus said, "A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things" (Matthew 12:35). There is a vast difference between stating a fact and embellishing it with sarcasm, bitterness, or mockery. Those who represent Christ are expected to speak the truth, but that truth must not reflect invective or hatred. The Truth must speak for itself. It is God who will do the indicting. The ministry must not be the instrument used to destroy people. It is sufficient to generalize about the problems which existed, without revealing detail. If those who now oppose God's Truth would have concentrated upon upholding it, rather than destroying people by publicly revealing the faults and sins of the leadership, they would be under far less indictment. It is one thing to state facts for what they are, and another to pass judgment. God is the Judge. Jesus clearly said, "For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned" (Matthew 12:37). This applies to those who write, as well as to those who speak!

Refusal to Accept Personal Responsibility

It is obvious, to all who read Anti-Church of God literature, that there is an unwillingness on the part of the authors to accept personal responsibility for believing previous Church of God doctrine. Not one writer has been willing to blame himself for formerly accepting what he now believes to be error.

Those who reject past teachings obviously now believe these teachings to be in error. Where is the admission, then, that these people failed to properly exercise the spiritual responsibility to "prove all things?" Rather, their association with the Church of God is attributed to the charisma of Mr. Armstrong. If they followed a personality only, and never

proved the doctrine, then they never really believed it. Yet, some of these men preached and taught for many years what they now repudiate. Why should disillusionment with men be the excuse to reject doctrine? The obvious reason is: the entire basis for their ministry was the personality of Mr. Armstrong. They might as well be honest and admit it. At least, then everyone would know these men failed to exercise the responsibility to prove the Truth initially. Continued silence, on their part, is proof they are unwilling to accept that responsibility!

Dissident Arguments Not Objective

The New Testament illustrates the bias and prejudice of the Jewish religious sects against Christ. The leaders were not objective. Their arguments were designed to sustain their viewpoint, only. Those whose minds are already made up cannot be objective. Present anti-Church of God arguments are a rehash of Protestant arguments going back at least twenty years. If one's mind is already "made up," and if one is determined to reject Church of God doctrine, these arguments seem plausible. Men who once rejected these arguments, now support them. Why? Because they were looking for an "out." Once they lost confidence in the Church leadership, they lost confidence in the doctrine. If they had proven the doctrine initially, they would not be influenced by Protestant thought now. Their determination to deny what they once believed is a classic example of the failure to be objective.

Failure of an Organization Does Not Abrogate Truth

It was not until many lost confidence in the organization that doctrine began to be questioned. Prophetic dates which failed to materialize precipitated doubts. Most members did not understand the tripartite division of doctrine, prophecy, and administration. It was assumed that if prophecy "failed," the doctrine was in error also. Prophetic dates are not the inspired Word of God. Jesus warned against setting dates. The setting of prophetic dates was the blunder which led to an avalanche of doctrinal uncertainty. Later, when it became apparent some ministers had not lived up to even minimum Christian standards, doctrine was openly challenged. Many lost confidence in the organization, in its leadership, and in the doctrine.

But can the failure of men or of an organization abrogate Truth?

If organizational error can abrogate truth, then there is no such thing as absolute truth. And if there is no such thing as absolute truth, the Bible is invalid. God's Word, then, is alterable and changeable. What may be truth for one generation is not for the next. Neither

is there a permanent standard by which man can judge character. The standard changes, from generation to generation or from organizational error to organizational error. If this is true—it matters little, then, what we believe as long as we "accept Christ."

If we believe organizational error can change truth, we are declaring there is no eternal truth. And if we say there is no eternal truth, even that statement is untrue, because there is no truth to any statement. If there is no eternal truth, man is free to determine right and wrong. What we believe and practice is then a matter of personal preference. Therefore, those who aspire to live by the "good principles" choose their own standard.

But we know better than that. Two plus two always equals four. Absolute truth in mathematics proves there is absolute spiritual Truth. God did not place man on the earth to live in ignorance. Truth is revealed—by the Holy Spirit—to all called, sincere seekers. Organizational failure or prophetic assumptions which do not materialize cannot abrogate divine Truth.

Rejection by Former Subscribers Does Not Alter Truth

God's Church is "the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:15). Rejection by those who once subscribed does not alter that Truth. Many who followed Christ turned away (John 6:66). But that did not alter God's Truth. Gentile converts turned away from Paul (2 Timothy 1:15), but that did not alter God's Truth. If all men deny God's Truth, does that make it any less the Truth?

Absolutely not (2 Timothy 2:13)!

The first century Church apostatized. Should we assume God's Truth was invalidated then?

Of course not!

Neither does apostasy in the latter days (Deuteronomy 31:29; 2 Thessalonians 2:3) invalidate God's Truth!

God's true message—and God's true servant—were never accepted by the world. The history of Israel makes that plain. Prophets turned from truth to become false prophets. Kings turned from God's Truth to mislead entire nations, but that did not alter the Truth. To now assume that God's Church never had Truth revealed, because of recent doctrinal changes, is fallacious reasoning. Consider Solomon. Historical examples, such as his, attest to man's fickle nature and his inability to exercise the resolve necessary to remain a faithful

and loyal servant of God. Present and past members of the Church of God, who now repudiate Truth, do not invalidate it. There is no veracity to their arguments. It is only because a chain of unfavorable events transpired, that people are not willing to listen to what they formerly ridiculed!

What Happened to Israel?

The history of Israel is a corollary for modern times. The assumption today is: Since the Church of God disallowed much of its doctrine, the doctrine was false. By an examination of Israel during the Old Testament period, this idea is proven to be false. In Deuteronomy, chapters four and eight, God revealed to Israel His Way. Nothing was to be added or subtracted. Neither was there to be alteration. Israel's continued inheritance of the land was contingent upon obedience to that Way of life. Israel was given the foundational principles, and they were instructed to be faithful. Israel could not observe what they never knew. Truth was revealed to them!

The same applies today. If Christians are expected to be faithful to God's Truth (Deuteronomy 31:29), that Truth is revealed (John 14:26)! Israel was warned not to forget (Deuteronomy 8:11). Christians are warned not to forget (James 1:25). Christians cannot forget what was never revealed in the first place! Far too many of God's people have forgotten their early years of conversion. They have forgotten the marvelous spiritual experiences of the past (Hebrews 10:32). They have forgotten revealed Truth!

Israel forgot God's Way. Baal worship, as well as worshiping the host of heaven, became prevalent. Reformations were accomplished in Judah by a few kings, but Israel never returned and was finally driven into national captivity—lost from sight. God's Truth, however, was not invalidated by Israel's failure (Romans 3:3–4). Neither is that foundational Truth rendered invalid by the failure of a church organization in upholding it!

People today are denying Christ because of the failure of men. They are denying His Truth and His authority over their lives (Titus 1:16). But they will not be judged on the basis of what they think they are doing! They will be judged on the basis of what they are doing! They have become tainted by their own concepts of how they will obey God. They deny Christ because of the failure of men, and are taking their frustrations out on God! The Bible tells us whoever denies the Son denies the Father also (1 John 2:22–23). Instead, they should deny men and believe God. Those who believe God will be faithful to the Truth given them initially! Israel's history is ample proof that even though an entire nation turned from God, His Truth has not changed! And what happened to Israel is an example for us today (1 Corinthians 10:6, 11; Romans 15:4; 1 Peter 1:12).

Christianity Is Constructive, Not Destructive

The destructive element of some anti-Church of God literature is apparent by bitter attacks without any real attempt to substantiate doctrinal Truth. Irrespective of what the lifestyle of some ministers has been, the real issue is doctrine. It is true some doctrinal changes were brought about to substantiate these questionable lifestyles, but another's lifestyle is not what will judge us. What will judge us is God's Truth—whether or not we live up to it (John 12:48). Therefore, when doctrinal departure occurs, it is the responsibility of God's true servants to uphold the original Truth. It was an emotional reaction—to wrong acts by some in the ministry—which precipitated the large-scale departure from the Church of God in early 1974. Official doctrinal changes did not occur until later in 1974. Therefore, that literature which merits examination is that which confines itself essentially to doctrinal issues. And, specifically, that literature which gives Scriptural proof to its arguments. Such literature will be constructive in nature. It will avoid detailing the sins of others. It will substantiate the basis for past doctrinal beliefs, as well as proving the beliefs themselves. Any literature which imputes motives without proof destroys confidence in God by attacking the character of men and manifests contempt is not constructive. It is the constructive approach, only, which upholds doctrinal Truth and reflects the true spirit of Christianity.

Impossible to "Second-Guess" Past Decisions

It is impossible to look back to past decisions and say, "If only I had known the future." We all base our plans on future considerations, but no one really knows what the specific future will be. We comprehend general trends, but we do not completely understand the time element. Had we known the Bible foretold apostasy in modern times, we could have adopted alternatives. But, God did not reveal the apostasy until it happened. There is no need to say, "If only I had known." God does not intend that we know every detail. God desires us to have confidence in Him and in His Truth. That Truth was revealed. Living by faith means to trust God's revelation. To distrust revelation, because of the failure of men, is to distrust and impugn God. Can we manifest sufficient faith to continue in His Word, and not lose sight of God's Truth because of today's adverse conditions? These conditions did not exist at the time we initially accepted God's Truth. So, there is no legitimacy to "second-guessing" past decisions. Present trials are a test to strengthen our faith—not to destroy it (1 Corinthians 11:19; Deuteronomy 13:1–4).

Doubt and Suspicion Prevent Proper Evaluation

Today hundreds, perhaps thousands, of former members of God's Church trust no one. Doubt and suspicion are now a "way of life" to them, since events of the past few years have destroyed confidence in any man. What happened to the confidence of the past?

Christianity requires faith—faith in one's conversion and in the Truth God revealed. So, why should the failure of men be the reason to doubt one's calling and conversion?

Moreover, confidence in men has been destroyed by what some have done. But is that sufficient reason to doubt everyone? Do you doubt yourself? Are you suspicious of you? Of course not! Why, then, be doubtful and suspicious of everyone else?

The manifestation of this trait is seen in one author, who attributes everything Mr. Armstrong said in the past to ulterior motives. Yet, the same writer subscribed—for many years—to everything Mr. Armstrong did. It is doubt and suspicion which has generated this kind of "analysis" of the past. Yet, those who use this approach obviously would not wish others to be doubtful and suspicious of everything they said or did. Those who speak or write must give others the same benefit of the doubt as they themselves desire.

Is Anyone Honest Today?

In conjunction with doubt and suspicion is the conclusion that no one is honest. Certainly, you believe you are honest. If you believe you are honest, is it possible others could be also? Are those who say or believe no one is honest saying they trust themselves only? What does the Bible say about trusting the self? Read Proverbs 3:5; 28:26; Jeremiah 17:9. These texts clearly tell us not to trust ourselves. Rather, our confidence should be in God. Can we manifest the confidence necessary to trust the Truth God gave us and not allow the dishonesty of some to be an excuse for distrusting even God? Christians are to prove God's Truth (1 Thessalonians 5:21). If we proved that Truth in the past, why should we allow present human frailties to be a cause for distrust now? Those who tell us no one should be trusted today have allowed the failure of others to be an excuse to reject Truth. Those who say no one can be trusted must of necessity include themselves!

"Everyone Is a Christian"

Not one splinter group from the Worldwide Church of God has defined itself as non-Christian. Each group assumes it is Christian. Yet, the beliefs and practices of these groups are widely divergent. Not all can be correct. Obviously, someone has to be wrong. One fact is certain, God's true people will not reject divine revelation. Yet the bulk of the anti-Church of God literature, apart from publicly delving into the sins of individuals, is totally opposed to the doctrine held by God's people prior to 1973. If we believe God revealed Truth in these last days, then what was believed before the doctrinal changes of 1973–74 constitutes that Truth. Those who repudiate that doctrine are candidly admitting

they have never known Truth! For if the doctrine was in error, then they were not converted and were never Christians! So, what makes them think they are now?

What Is the Manifestation of God's Spirit?

God's children are known by the fruits of the Spirit. But for many, today's fruits are not godly fruits. God's people are manifesting unbelievable contempt and hatred for one another. Because lawlessness was permitted, the love of many has waxed cold. All have been affected to a certain degree. True Christians, however, will not lose the desire to do right, to manifest compassion and understanding and to be conciliatory. But they will not compromise with Truth. They will try to overcome evil with good. They will attempt to avoid sarcasm in what they say. They will not be perfect, but they will endeavor to practice Christianity.

They know love covers sin. They do not make specific sins of others' public. Neither do they condone them. They abhor sin, but they do not abhor the sinner. They do not fellowship with or defend those who turn from God's Truth or who fail to practice what they preach. They recognize the fact that calling oneself a Christian is much easier than being a Christian. They judge what others say and do by the fruits borne. They are learning to take the trauma of the past in stride without developing reactionary habits of false accusation, vindictiveness, bitterness, contempt, and deliberate exposure of the sins of others. What they say publicly and what they write will reflect the same general attitude. If they are forced to mention names, they try to place the individual in as good a light as is permitted. They know it is not their responsibility to expose. It is God who will bring the hidden things to light (1 Corinthians 4:5). Their primary concern will be to uphold the Truth of God as it was given and to help those who are seeking to restore God's Way in their personal lives.

True Christians will be accused of many things. They will be labeled stubborn, unwilling to change, self-righteous. But they know it is God who will judge them, not those whose guilt, because of compromise, is the motivation behind such accusations. True Christians did not create the present problems. They are incidental to them. But they know they have a personal responsibility to God which transcends allegiance to and loyalty toward any organization, church, or man.

It is God's Spirit which has given them the courage and conviction to remain faithful to the Truth. What they say and do shines forth like a beacon in the raging sea, lighting the way for any bewildered souls who are lost in the tempest of doubt and confusion.

Personal Problems Must Be Accepted for What They Are

It was only after personal problems of the Church of God leadership became known that thousands of members became upset. This was a natural reaction and is not necessarily wrong. However, had the ministry as a whole looked beyond these problems to the doctrine, rather than the personal sins of others, much bitterness could have been avoided. Personal problems should have been accepted for what they were. They are not a reason to begin doubting doctrine. The doctrinal changes which took place in 1973–74 were precipitated by those ministers who viewed these problems as an excuse to change doctrine. Once "Pandora's box" was opened, there was no stopping these changes.

Few people would discard an auto because of a bad sparkplug. Yet, because ministers as well as laymembers were unable to view personal problems for what they were, they began doubting church doctrine. Much of the anti-Church of God literature today reflects those doubts. This is not to say personal problems became the total issue. Rather, they were the catalyst which precipitated the doctrinal issue.

Once confidence in the leadership was lost, a full-scale rebellion against the Church leadership took place. So, it was a loss of confidence that brought about division among God's people. Had Church doctrine been proven by all initially, and had personal problems been recognized for what they were, much of the doctrinal chaos which took place in God's Church may never have transpired. It is the doctrine which should have been upheld—not doctrinal changes, aggravated by personal problems of the leadership.

Time of Trial Not Time to Question Validity

Once the storm begins, it's too late to question the worthiness of the ship. The ship will either float or soon sink. The verifying should have occurred before the ship left port.

Too many of God's people waited until the storm began, then proceeded to "check things out." Anti-Church of God literature illustrates a lack of prior resolution. Peter walked on the water before he began to doubt. Jesus said, ". . . O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" (Matthew 14:31.)

With the storm of doubt, many of God's people proved to be "fair-weather friends." Why didn't they trust and believe what had been given them initially? Because they had not really proven the Truth! They placed confidence in man above confidence in God. When the spiritual boat began to rock, many panicked. Much was said at the time about remaining "on the ship," where it was safe. What was not said was that the ship itself was adrift! Not

only those who "jumped ship" in 1973–74 doubted, but those who stayed on board did exactly the same thing. These doubts led to a rejection of foundational principles. The rejection of foundational principles led to doctrinal changes. (Write for our articles *Doctrinal Changes—How They Affect You!* and *What Does the Bible Teach about Change?*) Had God's people proven the foundational principles, doctrinal change would have been utterly rejected. But because many ministers—as well as members—failed to effectively "prove all things" initially, doctrinal doubts occurred and finally doctrinal changes took place. Anti-Church of God arguments, based on doubts aggravated during a time of trial, should be recognized for what they are!

Attacking Others to Justify Weakness: Not Valid

One book which attacks Church of God doctrine states its purpose is to vindicate its author. The author feels he was greatly wronged by the Church in the past. Yet after his "wrong" he remained a member for many years. It was not until personal problems of the leadership were made known that he began to impute motives to almost every past act done by Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong. Some of these imputations go back years before the author became acquainted with Mr. Armstrong! It would be difficult for any thinking person to rely on testimony based on guesses made about incidents transpiring many years earlier—incidents to which the author was not even a party. With this kind of approach, the validity of the entire book must be questioned.

Dissident Arguments Abortive

Dissident arguments include the allegation that Mr. Herbert Armstrong is a false prophet. Certain texts, as applied to the Church, label it as the false church. Yet, these very same texts substantiate—by the fact the present-day Church was to go astray—it had to possess the Truth in the first place!

Thus, the textual arguments used to repudiate Church doctrine actually substantiate it! A fallen church is one which had the Truth initially. For, one cannot depart unless he has the Truth in the first place. If one insists on applying false-prophet texts to Mr. Herbert Armstrong, he is required by the texts themselves to admit it was Mr. Armstrong who restored the Truth in these last days, prior to an apostasy (2 Thessalonians 2:3; Deuteronomy 13:1–3; 18:20–22)!

New Testament Prophecies

Up to this point we have noted various reasons why anti-Church of God literature should be questioned. We have noted both the lack of logic and the Scriptural error in their arguments. Let us now examine the Bible, in the context of these doctrinal attacks, to determine whether the Worldwide Church of God was God's Church and did preach the true doctrine.

New Testament prophecies foretold there would be a true Church in the last days. Either these are the last days, or these prophecies are yet to be fulfilled. Either the Worldwide Church of God was the true Church or another true Church of significance, which is destined to depart from revealed doctrine, is yet to appear on the scene. Either the gospel has been preached to all nations, or someone else is going to fulfill this commission. Whatever time period denotes the last days, there is to be a true Church on this earth. Jesus said He would build His Church and it would never perish (Matthew 16:18). That Church was to proclaim the gospel (Mark 16:15). And it was to apostatize (Acts 20:28–31; Jude 4, 18; 2 Timothy 3:1, 5; 4:3–4; 2 Peter 3:3–4)!

Departure From Truth Substantiates True Church

The doctrinal changes made by the Worldwide Church of God in 1973–74 substantiate it as the true Church! Rather than discredit God's Word, these changes actually attest to it. For, God's Church was to depart from Truth for the exact same reasons the Worldwide Church of God did in 1973–74. Failure to uphold true doctrines, prophetic assumption, and brutalization of members, all form a part of the problems of the Church in the latter days. If what took place in the Worldwide Church of God after 1970 is not the fulfillment of prophecy relating to God's Church in the last days, then the same events will repeat themselves in whatever constitutes God's Church of the future. And if the Church of God of the present is not God's Church, will the people—including the ministry—be any better equipped to evaluate conditions of the apostasy at some future time?

Obviously not! So, recent doctrinal changes substantiate the Truth—they do not deny it!

Furthermore, the increase of dissident factions proves there had to be truth initially. These factions have rejected either part or all of the original Truth. One cannot reject what one did not originally have. It is the rejection of Truth and the increase of dissident activity which substantiates the true Church. The major thrust of every dissident faction was to change doctrine. One must have the original doctrine before he can change it. Not one of

these groups is presently willing to admit it is non-Christian, regardless of the extent of doctrinal deviation. So, these dissident factions obviously believe the Worldwide Church of God taught the Christian faith. And if the Worldwide Church of God taught the Christian faith, then it taught the Truth. Any dissident faction which repudiates this statement is admitting its members were never Christian and that they are not now Christian!

No Justification for Doctrinal Changes

Truth is revealed. (Write for our article *How Do Christians Come to a Knowledge of the Truth?*) Jesus was given the words of His Father (John 12:49–50). He was commissioned to speak only that which the Father commanded. This same revelation was given to the apostles, who were not allowed to alter it. Paul later received the same revelation from Jesus Christ (Galatians 1:12). The doctrinal struggle, in the last half of the first century, involved false teachers who were attempting to turn true Christians from the original Truth which had been revealed to them (Acts 20:28–30).

One does not grow into "progressive truth" which contradicts previous truth. "Growing into new truth" does not destroy the old. Truth is truth. It cannot be changed. It is absolute. "Spiritual growth into acceptable new truth" will not contradict original Truth. If Truth were not given initially, then doctrinal changes are justified. But if they are justified, there was no Truth revealed in the first place. It is illogical to justify doctrinal change on the basis of altering Truth. Truth cannot be altered if it is Truth.

Prophetic and Administrative Failures

The total complement of Biblical Truth involves doctrine, prophecy, and administration. Despite past confusion, these are three separate categories as follows:

- 1) Doctrine is absolute.
- 2) Prophecy should not be regarded as doctrine, because prophecy is an unknown quantity. We can understand general prophetic themes, but we know neither the specific time nor the details prior to fulfillment.
- 3) Administration relates to how doctrine is employed.

Many brethren have been caused to doubt—even questioning the one absolute, doctrine—because of the setting of prophetic dates which failed to materialize. The abuse

of administration has, likewise, caused people to be "turned off" toward the doctrine. The Bible does not teach the kind of administrative approach exercised in the Worldwide Church of God. (For a complete understanding, write for our article *Should the Church Enforce Doctrine?*)

The prophetic failures of the Worldwide Church of God now comprise a catalog. Jesus warned about setting dates, but His warning went unheeded. Understanding prophetic dates can come only by direct revelation—it does not come by individual's conjuring up various arguments to support dates.

However, those dissident factions which have repudiated prophecy have failed to recognize the difference between prophetic dates and general prophetic events. In like manner, those dissidents who have rejected church of God doctrine have failed to recognize the difference between doctrine and administration. Prophetic and administrative failures demonstrate God's Church assumed knowledge and abilities in areas where it had no right. These served to exacerbate the various problems which eventually led to doctrinal division and the several splits.

Jeroboam assumed priestly responsibilities (1 Kings 12), yet this assumption did not negate his God-given right to be and continue being a king. Similarly, one's right to preach the gospel is not forfeited by his apparent desire to be a prophet.

Prophets are called of God. Their office is validated by the fulfillment of their prophecies. Thus, prophetic failure indicates the assumption of an office not given by God.

But doctrine is another matter. It was the inability to discriminate between doctrine, administration, and prophecy, which caused many to stumble. Had they understood the tripartite division, they would not have departed from the absolute, doctrinal Truth revealed by God!

Principle of Deuteronomy 13

Deuteronomy 13:1–2 indicates prophets can go astray. Note, this text is not talking about Gentiles who came into Israel with pagan religions. This text describes a prophet coming from within the nation of Israel. He is accepted as an Israelitish prophet, initially. The spiritual counterpart is obvious. Those who are God's ministers can deviate. Paul said false teachers would come from within the ranks of the ministry (Acts 20:29–30). The principle of Deuteronomy, chapter thirteen, shows ministers are first accepted by the people,

then, the minister presumes responsibilities not given. The idea that God's true ministers cannot pervert Truth is not substantiated scripturally.

The doctrinal changes of 1973–74 were a rejection of revealed Truth. What was believed before 1973–74 is totally different, in major doctrinal areas, from that which was believed after. Both cannot be right. Either the Church of God deviated from revealed Truth, or it was never the true Church of God in the first place! True doctrine is revealed by God. Deuteronomy, chapter thirteen, shows deviation comes after acknowledgment of original Truth and acceptance of God's servant by the people.

Principle of Time

After the loss of confidence in the Church leadership, some former ministers began to deny the concept of "the last days." But this substantiates the fact these are "the last days." Peter said scoffers would repudiate the times in which they live and would deny the imminent return of Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:3–4). The facts are: The same conditions which exist, in both the world and the Church, will exist in "the last days." There is to be a turning from Truth (2 Thessalonians 2:3) and a denying of the times in which we live (2 Peter 3:3–4).

These texts are not talking about nominal Christians. They are referring to those within the Church—those who once knew the Truth but have rejected it (2 Peter 2:20; 3:5)! These texts point out those within the ministry who have departed from Truth (2 Peter 2:1–3, 21)! Heresy was to originate within—not without! And the vast majority of God's people would be influenced to depart from God's Truth by vicious attacks against revealed doctrine—now "changed" under the guise of "scholarship" and "new insight" (2 Peter 2:2).

"What If" Questions

As long as "all went well," no one questioned the validity of God's Truth. But when prophecies failed and sins of individuals were made known, some began to ask: "What if this isn't the Truth? What if this isn't the true Church? What if Mr. Armstrong isn't God's servant?"

Why did people begin to ask "What if . . ." only after adverse facts came to light? The reason is the fickleness of human nature. It was not a "what if" question when they were baptized. So there is no objectivity to the present conclusion drawn, that the Worldwide Church of God was not God's Church. This reasoning points to the failure of the individual

to "prove all things" and the proclivity to follow men when they depart from God. It also depicts the failure to grow in faith and character, through trial and difficulty.

The "what if" question was for many the "last rung of the ladder" before they fell into the abyss of doubt, loss of faith, and rejection of their "confidence . . . unto the end" (Hebrews 3:6–14).

There is much to question concerning anti-Church of God literature. Much of what is said is illogical and unscriptural. There is ample Biblical proof that the Worldwide Church of God was God's true Church. And it did preach and practice the Truth for many years!

Those today who deny God's Truth deny Christ. The methods of rationalization displayed by anti-Church of God literature are methods of denying Christ. If we deny Christ by changing Truth, we also deny the Father. God does not change, and neither does His Truth. To accept doctrinal change is to deny one's call and conversion. Because the Worldwide Church of God demonstrated, by the doctrinal changes of 1973–74, that it did not know what it believed, those who have concluded it was not God's Church might well ask themselves what they believe!

One thing is certain: If those who departed had really believed the Truth, they would not have departed by using doctrine as an excuse. God's true people will recognize subtlety of both mind and heart—and, though momentarily distressed by the present confusion, will refuse to allow the host of anti-Church of God arguments to influence them to turn from God's revealed Truth.