

**WAS THE
WORLDWIDE CHURCH
OF GOD
THE TRUE CHURCH?**

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Was the Worldwide Church of God the True Church?

It was prophetic failure, along with doctrinal changes, which caused thousands of members to leave the Worldwide Church of God. Many of these former members no longer know what to believe. One thing which they severely question is: Was the Worldwide Church of God the true church? If not, where is the true church today? This article will answer these questions and explain what the Bible says about God's church in the last days.

Salvation hinges on Jesus' statement, "... I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18). For if Jesus did not keep His promise to build and sustain His church, we have no Savior! But Jesus said He would not only build His church—He would be with it until the consummation of the age (Matthew 28:20). If Jesus kept His word and is our Savior, it will not be difficult to see what and where that church is. For, Jesus' statement that He would be with His church "to the end of the world" is the affirmation that the true church would exist in modern times!

The Bible calls that church the body of Christ (Colossians 1:24; Ephesians 1:22–23). It is the spiritual organism—the *ekklesia* (congregation)—comprised of the "called out ones." Upon Christ's ascension into the heavens, the same Spirit which empowered Jesus Christ to do God's work entered into the collective body of believers and empowered them to continue doing God's work (John 16:7; Acts 1:8).

Christ Not Divided

The true church, which Jesus built, is not divided (1 Corinthians 1:12–13; 12:13). The true church is not the whole of Christendom, with its many denominations. The true church is one church, one organism, one body. It is God's House (1 Timothy 3:15; Ephesians 2:18–22). God's House is not a divided house. The organism which comprises the true church is made up of believers who are in agreement doctrinally (Ephesians 4:4–5). They are called out of the world. They no longer participate in its fundamental practices. They are not involved in its politics or religions. They are of the same mind, because they are the body of Christ—the church (Ephesians 5:30; Colossians 1:24; Hebrews 3:6). The same Spirit which motivated and moved Christ to do His Father's will is in the hearts and minds of true believers today (Romans 8:9–11). The body of Christ—the true believers—practice the same things Jesus Christ did when He was here on this earth, nineteen hundred years ago (1 John 2:6).

Commissioned to Preach

The church which Jesus built was commissioned to preach the true gospel to the world (Matthew 28:19–20; Mark 16:15). The twelve apostles carried that gospel to the world (Mark 16:20). While the active preaching of that gospel ceased after the middle of the second century, true believers have existed down to the time period in which we live. Traces of these true believers can be found in historical records, from the time of the apostles down to modern times.

But, the true believers have not always been engaged in evangelizing efforts. There were periods of time, during the Middle Ages, when activity did take place—but the historical evidence indicates this was not done consistently. It is only when God elects to appoint someone to carry out a responsibility that we see an activity of any type. For a complete explanation, write for our article entitled, *What Is the Work of God?*

While the text in Matthew 24:14 is a prophecy, the inference is that someone must be commissioned to carry it out (Romans 10:15). Apart from being accomplished by an active church effort, there are at least five different ways indicated in the Bible whereby this prophecy could be fulfilled. (This is made clear in the above-mentioned article.)

Physical Body Required for Activity

When Jesus commissioned the twelve apostles to preach the gospel to the world, the necessity of a physical organization became apparent. The early chapters of the book of Acts relate the tremendous membership growth which took place. While the book of Acts confined itself to the Mediterranean region, history confirms the fact that the majority of the apostles did not remain in the Middle East. Nevertheless, the book of Acts reveals the financial aspects and cooperation which took place there in order to accomplish the preaching of the gospel. It is from the book of Acts that the evidence of a literal, physical body is irrefutable.

Jesus specifically said, ". . . I will build my church. . ." (Matthew 16:18). While the true church is a spiritual organism, it is also a physical body. This is made plain in numerous texts (note, for example, 1 Corinthians 5:11–12; 6:4–5; 11:16, 18–19; 14:4–5, 12, 19, 23, 28, 33–35, and Ephesians 5:30). Those who assume it was primarily the Corinthian church which was organized need only read Acts 18:22; Colossians 4:15–16, and Hebrews 10:25. Jesus made it plain, in Matthew 18:17, that there was to be a physical body and that guidelines were necessary in order to maintain peace among the brethren.

There is no doubt that the church is an organized body. In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul tells us that the church is one body, made up of many members cooperating in a common cause. Paul uses the human body as an analogy to illustrate the functions of the differing members, and shows that it is God who is responsible for the various duties allotted.

In 1 Corinthians 12:3 Paul states, "Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed: and that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy [Spirit]." What does Paul mean by the expression "accursed" (anathema)? The term "anathema" implies separation (*Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, Arndt and Gingrich, p. 53).

Considering Paul's instruction throughout 1 Corinthians 12, it is amply evident he was dogmatically stating in verse 3 that the body is not divided. That is, as Jesus was complete physically—in His own body—so is the true Church of God. Members of that body are not individualized and scattered—in the sense of doctrinal belief. On the contrary, those speaking by God's Holy Spirit are one in harmony, love, understanding, and truth—even though, at times, they may be physically separated or scattered. Therefore, true Christians will not be found in divergent and conflicting organizations. This concept is not of God's Holy Spirit.

Within the body are ministerial obligations. These ministers are to supervise and direct the church (Ephesians 4:11–12; Hebrews 13:7, 17; 1 Thessalonians 5:12–13; 1 Timothy 3:4–5; 5:17). The ministry was given to serve and help the brethren (2 Timothy 4:5; James 5:14; Acts 20:28). It was never intended as an authoritative hierarchy which inconsiderately "lorded it over" God's heritage (1 Peter 5:3). For a full explanation of how the ministry is to function, write for our article, *Should the Church Enforce Doctrine?*

All Christians are laborers together in accomplishing God's work (1 Corinthians 3:9; 12:4–31; 1 Peter 2:5). It is the common cooperation—among all the church membership—which God uses to accomplish His purpose. The ministry cannot function without the support of the membership, and the membership needs the spiritual guidance of the ministry. The proper configuration is that of willing service and sacrifice, on the part of both ministry and laity. There should never develop the kind of resentment that results from a hierarchical ladder—where there are class distinctions, pitting minister against minister, and minister against member.

Proofs of the Church of God

There are specific signs which identify the true church. These identifying signs are clearly delineated in the Bible. Let us now examine them to see if the Worldwide Church of God possessed these identifying signs. Remember, Jesus said He would build His church and that He would be with it until the consummation of the age (Matthew 28:19–20). That church is not divided, and it is not comprised of the various denominations which made up modern Christianity. Modern Christianity is in hopeless confusion, for there is no agreement among its various denominations. Jesus said His church was *not* divided. So, the true church must of necessity be one body, and that one body must possess the identifying signs which reveal it to be the true church. Did the Worldwide Church of God possess these identifying signs?

Commandments of God

Of the major evangelizing efforts which appeared on the world scene during the past fifty years, it was the Worldwide Church of God alone that taught complete obedience to the Law of God. Without exception, all other evangelizing efforts were lax—at best—on either the fourth or the seventh commandment. There was no other major "work" which upheld God's law relative to marriage and divorce. While it is true some religions teach the sanctity of marriage within their own configuration, it was the Worldwide Church of God alone which upheld the sanctity of marriage as it applied to all men! Those organizations which upheld the Sabbath made allowances for divorce and remarriage—so it was the Worldwide Church of God, alone, which upheld God's law, including the fourth and seventh commandments.

Jesus said His true followers keep His commandments (John 14:15, 23). These commandments are the Ten Commandments, listed in the Old Testament. Jesus was the God of the Old Testament (1 Corinthians 10:4). He said, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). The Ten Commandments proceeded out of the mouth of God! It is the true church which keeps the commandments of God (Revelation 12:17). The book of Revelation tells us that the bride of Christ—the true church—is arrayed in fine linen. Linen represents the righteousness of saints (Revelation 10:7–8). The Bible says, "... all thy commandments are righteousness" (Psalm 119:172). The church Jesus built is a commandment-keeping church!

For over forty years, the Worldwide Church of God upheld and taught complete obedience to the commandments of God. It was not until the doctrinal changes of 1974 that they began to "water down" and turn from God's great spiritual law—the Ten Commandments!

Sabbath and Holy Days

The Sabbath must be specifically noted as one of the identifying signs. It is the sign between God and His people, forever (Exodus 31:17). While the text in Exodus 31 refers to the physical nation of Israel, it is "the Israel of God" to which this sign applies today (Galatians 6:16). For Jesus said, "The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath: Therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath" (Mark 2:27–28). It was Jesus Christ who created the Sabbath! (John 1:1–3; 1 Corinthians 8:6; Ephesians 3:9).

Jesus set the example for us to follow (1 Peter 2:21; Luke 4:16). He kept the Sabbath! The Apostle Paul said he followed Christ. This is apparent in his observance of the Sabbath (Acts 13:14, 42, 44; 17:2; 18:4). Paul told the Philippians to do the same things he did (Philippians 4:9). Paul kept the Sabbath. It is obvious, from the book of Acts and the epistles of Paul, that those who are true Christians today will keep the Sabbath.

The Worldwide Church of God taught obedience to the Sabbath. This is not to say other churches did not teach or uphold the Sabbath, but it is certain that the true church would be a Sabbath-keeping church.

Apart from the Jews, there was no major religious organization in the world—except the Worldwide Church of God—which at that time kept God's annual Holy Days! The Holy Days were given to keep God's people in constant remembrance, year by year, of His plan of salvation. It is only by keeping God's annual Holy Days that one can understand the purpose and plan He is working out here on this earth.

There is ample evidence that Christ and the New Testament church kept God's Holy Days (Luke 2:41–42; Matthew 26:18; John 7:10, 37; Acts 2:1; 18:21; 20:6, 16; 1 Corinthians 5:8). These texts show that the Apostle Paul—the apostle to the Gentiles—also kept the Holy Days. So it is clear, from the New Testament, that the Holy Days were not "done away" by the establishment of the New Covenant. Write for our article, *All About the Covenants*.

The true church will be receiving "meat in due season"—an obvious reference to the preaching which occurs on God's annual Holy Days (Matthew 24:45; Leviticus 23:4). And the most obvious fact about preaching "meat in due season" is that this activity is occurring at the time of the return of Jesus Christ! (Matthew 24:44).

So, the church Jesus built keeps God's annual Holy Days!

Correct Name

There are twelve texts in the New Testament which establish the correct name for the true church. It is the "Church of God." While there are a few texts which refer to the church as the "Church of Christ," those versed in Bible understanding know that Christ is God! Therefore, "Church of God" is the correct name for the church. And although some Scriptures include the specific locations of given churches, in conjunction with the name "Church of God," one should not assume the general name for the church is any more than "Church of God" (note 1 Corinthians 1:2; 2 Corinthians 1:1; Colossians 4:15).

Jesus said, ". . . keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are" (John 17:11). It is God's name that is placed on the true church. Any appellation used in conjunction with God's name is not important. What is important is that the true church be called the "Church of God"! New Testament references to the correct name include Acts 20:28; 1 Corinthians 1:2; 10:32; 11:22; 15:9; 2 Corinthians 1:1; Galatians 1:13; and 1 Timothy 3:5.

Originally, the Worldwide Church of God was called "Radio Church of God," due to the nature of its evangelizing approach. In 1968 the name was officially changed to "Worldwide Church of God," in order to denote its worldwide evangelizing aspect. But, Mr. Armstrong's first association with the truth came about as a result of Mrs. Armstrong's contact with the Church of God (Seventh Day) members. It was at that time it became clear to Mr. Armstrong that the name "Church of God" is the correct name for God's true church.

While there are churches who recognize the correct Biblical name and have appropriated it, the correct name is only *one* of the identifying signs of the true church. Those who have appropriated the correct name but do not possess the rest of the identifying signs are not God's true church, regardless of their understanding of the correct name.

True Gospel

Jesus commissioned His church to preach the gospel. "Gospel" is the Old English word meaning "good news." It was "the good news of the kingdom of God" which the church was commissioned to preach. The message the church was to preach was the same message Jesus preached during His public ministry (Mark 1:14; Matthew 28:19–20; Mark 16:15; John 17:17–18). This message was not a message about the person of Christ. Jesus did not go about preaching what He had done, but rather He preached about God's Kingdom and how mankind can qualify to enter that Kingdom.

Jesus taught repentance—the need for man to stop breaking the commandments of God—and acceptance of Him as personal Savior (Mark 1:15; John 6:29). The key to repentance is coming to understand what it means to break God's Ten Commandments, then manifesting remorse and sorrow for doing so. The repentant sinner then turns, with his whole heart and mind, to God and His true way. In effect, he turns around and goes the other way. Upon baptism, he receives God's Holy Spirit and is able to live a life of righteousness and truth. He is empowered by the Holy Spirit to live the kind of life Jesus lived when he was on this earth. Jesus set the proper example for us to follow (1 John 2:6; 1 Peter 2:21).

This was the message of the Kingdom of God. It was the message preached by the Worldwide Church of God for many years. There was no other church preaching this complete message—the message which made clear what repentance really was and what men must repent of. It was only after the early seventies that the Worldwide Church of God began to "water down" the force and impact of God's law—to the point where people could no longer come to understand the significance and extent of their sins or violations of that law.

It was the Worldwide Church of God which did preach that true message for so many years. There was no other church which fully preached that message and understood what the gospel of the kingdom was all about!

Unity of Doctrine

Jesus prayed to His Father, "... keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are" (John 17:11). It was Jesus' desire that His church be of one mind—united in thought, purpose, and belief. Paul wrote, "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (1 Corinthians 1:10).

The church Jesus built is united in truth—the true doctrine. There is one faith only (Ephesians 4:5). Modern Christianity, with its many differing denominations, cannot possibly be that church. Jesus said He would be with His church until the consummation of the age. If modern-day "churchianity" represents the church He built, then Jesus Christ has failed to keep His word. Of course, this is not true. Jesus did keep His word, for the true church is united in belief.

The Worldwide Church of God both possessed the true doctrine and was united in that doctrine for over forty years. It was not until the prophetic failure of 1972 and scandal in high places that many began to doubt doctrine and then began to err. Those who no longer know what to believe need to look back to the time when they did believe—when there was unity of purpose and belief. They should judge their spiritual experience by the time of confidence and harmony, not by the present time of emotional trauma. It is only by evaluating the past without emotion that one can truly evaluate the credibility of his calling and conversion.

Revealed Truth

For over forty years, the Worldwide Church of God believed and taught the Biblical truth that spiritual understanding comes by divine revelation (John 6:44; 14:16–17, 26; 1 Thessalonians 2:13–14). It was not until substantiation for doctrinal change was being sought that "scholars" were appealed to. What is now taught, with respect to revealed truth, is totally opposite to that which was taught for many years.

The Bible reveals that any commission given by God requires a foundation. Jesus took three years to build that foundation with His apostles. Paul was taught the truth for three years (Galatians 1:11–12, 17–18; 1 Corinthians 9:1; 15:8). His ministry to the Gentiles was begun with a solid foundation (1 Corinthians 3:10–11). Such a foundation, based on a commission from God, may not be altered or changed. Any alteration or change is heretical! (Matthew 24:35). For, God's word cannot be changed! Alterations or changes cannot be "new truth" if they contradict previous revelation (2 Corinthians 11:3–4, 13–15; Galatians 1:6–12; Ephesians 2:18–22). For a complete understanding as to how truth is revealed, write for our articles, *How Do Christians Come to a Knowledge of the Truth?* and *What Does the Bible Teach About Change?* Warning after warning is given, in the New Testament, relative to turning from and repudiating God's revealed way of life (Hebrews 2:1–3; 3:1–15; 4:1–2, 14; 1 John 2:24–25; Jude 3). There is not one example, in the entire Bible, where God raised up a work—then changed the fundamental doctrine behind that work!

Truth is revealed by the Holy Spirit (John 14:16–17, 26; 16:13). There is no other way indicated in the Bible. This was the teaching and belief of the Worldwide Church of God, until confidence in the ministry and in the church was lost because of prophetic assumption and the questionable lifestyles of some in the ministry. But let us not judge our calling and conversion on the emotional present. Let us look back to the past, when truth and God's way of life were meaningful in our lives!

Truth is God's Word. In no way does the validity of truth justify faulty administration and corrupt lifestyles, even though such knowledge surfaces at a later date.

Wild and Erratic Departure Prophesied

The last and most significant proof of God's church in the last days could not be understood until its work had been completed.

If what took place relative to doctrinal change within the Worldwide Church of God during 1973–1974 was not the fulfillment of many texts which prophesy of a wild and erratic departure from truth in the latter days, then there is yet to appear on the scene another true Church of God to which this will happen. Will the members then be any more prepared for a departure from truth than they were during 1973–1974?

Jesus, in referring to His Second Coming, said major religious deception would be a prelude to that event (Matthew 24:3–5, 11, 24). Those who reason this departure from truth is limited to the first century A.D. had better take another look! Paul knew there would be a departure during the first century (Acts 20:28–31), but he also knew there would be a departure just prior to the return of Jesus Christ! (2 Thessalonians 2:1–3).

The departure from truth in the latter days would not only involve the repudiation of doctrine—it would involve a denial of the times in which we are living! (2 Peter 3:3–4; Jude 18).

Second Thessalonians, chapter two, is not referring to a departure from an organization. It is referring to a departure from truth! The Greek word for "falling away" is *apostasia*. It means "rebellion, abandonment in religious sense, apostasy" (*A Greek-English Lexicon*, Arndt and Gingrich, p. 97). One does not necessarily apostatize when he leaves an organization. He merely leaves. But, an organization apostatizes when it changes doctrine—*if* the doctrine it originally believed was revealed by God. If its original doctrine was not revealed, then there is no basis for either its past beliefs or its present ones. This is what many have erroneously concluded, due to loss of confidence in the organization. They now believe nothing.

It is departure from truth—not departure from an organization—which completes the sense of 2 Thessalonians 2:3. If this text is limited to those who departed from the organization, then it was not a major departure—for the majority remained within the organization! If, on the other hand, it is not limited to those who departed from the organization it must include even the organization itself, which repudiated original doctrine

and made unauthorized doctrinal changes. Therefore, it is clear this Scripture is talking about a departure from truth—not departure from an organization.

Most striking of all is the fact that this apostasy was to occur from within! Jesus said those who would deceive His people would come in the name of Christ (Matthew 24:5). They would come by His authority, but they would deviate from the truth. For a complete understanding, write for our article, *Prophecy—What You Should Know About It!* The false teachers of the last days would be among God's true people. It is because they are accepted as God's representatives that they are afforded opportunity to deceive (2 Peter 2:1–3). "They went out from us . . ." (1 John 2:19) means they departed from true doctrine after first being accepted as a part of God's church. If it means a departure from the organization and this is the only intent of the text, then all who profess Christianity today should return to the Catholic faith!

It was false teachers within who introduced private heresies (2 Peter 2:1). After these heresies became popular and the people clamored for change, they became official church doctrine (Isaiah 30:9–11; Ezekiel 33:30–33; 2 Timothy 4:3–4; Jeremiah 5:30–31).

It was the Worldwide Church of God only which possessed the proofs of the true church—the church Jesus Christ built—the church Jesus said He would be with until the consummation of the age!

Unless the Worldwide Church of God was, in fact, the true church—then one of the three following conclusions must be deduced:

1. There is no true church extant, today, as a physical body. And the profound truths of God's Word, which were prophesied to be preached to the world in the latter days (Matthew 24:14), were not preached.

But the truth is: The Worldwide Church of God, alone, faithfully preached those truths for over forty years! If there is no true church extant today as a physical body, then Jesus did not keep His promise to preserve His church (Matthew 16:18). And if Jesus did not preserve His church, we have no Savior! Furthermore, if no physical body exists today, then the prophecies which foretold a work in the latter days and a subsequent "falling away" are not valid. If these prophecies are not valid then neither is any other portion of God's Word, and the Bible is fraudulent!

2. The true church which will perform a major evangelizing effort is *yet* to appear on the scene. And it will fail for the exact same reasons the Worldwide Church of God failed—to remain faithful to the revealed truth given it!

3. There has never—since the apostolic age—been a specific body which could be called the church. In this event, truth is made known to each individual by his own study effort.

And none of the prophecies, referring to the church in the latter days, apply. There is no specific work intended at or near the time of the end, and each person who has gained true Bible understanding is a church in his own right!

Yet, as stated at the beginning of this article, salvation hinges on Jesus' statement, ". . . I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18). As shown in Revelation 12:17 and Matthew 24:46, the church which Jesus built would be a commandment-keeping church. At the time of His second coming, there would still be a remnant remaining faithful to the truth revealed.

If Jesus said He would be with His church, why the "watering down" process and doctrinal changes which now reflect a time of spiritual deterioration and lethargy?

This is the question which needs to be answered.

Avenues and Causes of Departure

It was the prophetic binge of the past which enamored so many. People are attracted to the esoteric and the unknown. Prophecy was used as a catalyst to incite fear and to hold the membership in subjection. In conjunction with the misuse of prophecy was a form of church government which demanded unquestioning obedience. But it was not until the prophetic failure of 1972 that the general membership of the Worldwide Church of God began to doubt doctrine.

Jesus said, however, that a main factor which would cause many to disregard the truth would be the increase of iniquity. He said, ". . . because iniquity shall abound, the love of many [most] shall wax cold" (Matthew 24:12). Iniquity has always abounded in the world but has had little overall effect on God's true people. So, there are two factors involved here which should be noted. The first is that the word for "iniquity" means *lawlessness*, and the second is that this particular lawlessness would profoundly affect God's people. This lawlessness, then, would have to be apparent at a level of influence which would literally "turn off" God's people from His way of life. Obedience to His Law and way of life would almost cease because of this lawlessness.

When scandal in high places came to light in 1972, thousands of members of God's church turned from the truth. "After all," they reasoned, "if the leadership made no attempt to live up to it, obviously they did not really believe it. And if the leadership did not believe it, there is no validity to any part of it." Therefore, "love"—which the Bible defines as obedience to God's law (1 John 5:3)—waxed cold.

Those in high places, who exercised authority over the ministry and over the church, then began to attempt to substantiate their own lifestyles. This was done by an appeal to "scholars and science" for Biblical substantiation. Dozens of texts in the New Testament reveal the methods and avenues men have used to substantiate departure from truth. The warning given in 2 Timothy 4:2–4 indicates the natural proclivity for human beings to desire their own way. They do not wish to remain faithful to God's way of life. Therefore, they "heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables [Christmas parties, etc.]" (2 Timothy 4:3–4). In the quest for Biblical substantiation of questionable lifestyles, the leadership would turn to the "scholars" for help (1 Timothy 6:20; 2 Timothy 3:7).

In the appeal to "scholars" for Biblical substantiation, the "new orientation" would be doctrines predicated on *words*. Entire doctrines would be changed on the basis of the meaning of a single Greek or Hebrew word! This concept is nothing new. Paul warned about this when he wrote Timothy, ". . . put them in remembrance, charging them before the Lord that they strive not about words to no profit, but to the subverting of the hearers" (2 Timothy 2:14).

This appeal to "scholars"—and altering doctrine on the basis of the meaning of words—led to massive doctrinal changes, under official guise. There is no way these changes could or would have been accepted had not they come from the top leadership under official sanction. The "falling away," spoken of in 2 Thessalonians (chapter 2), came about as a result of "official" doctrinal changes. The vast majority of the Church of God membership did not really love the truth. In part, this was a direct result of the faulty administration which, for many years, was enforced upon the entire membership. But more so, men were admired, respected, and loved above God, so that obedience to men took precedence over obedience to God (2 Thessalonians 2:10–12). This is exactly what took place, toward the end of the first century A.D., when Diotrephes demanded respect and obedience to himself rather than to God and His faithful ministers (3 John 9–10).

The ministry was given to strengthen God's people spiritually and bring them to doctrinal unity. It was given to help them develop character (Ephesians 4:11–16). Yet, Israel's pastors were the very ones who led them astray (Jeremiah 2:8)—and Jeremiah's prophecy was an indication of what would happen in the latter days.

This "new approach" to Biblical substantiation left many unanswered questions. The result was the creation of a credibility gap between the ministry and the laity. Those who were oriented toward the organization simply went along with every change, without much thought. But thousands could not accept this "new revelation" when it was completely contradictory to what had been called "revelation" in the past. The consequence of this credibility gap has been at least one hundred splinter groups from the Worldwide Church of God and as many doctrines as there are people in those splinter groups.

So vast has been this credibility gap, that today every minister (present or former) of the Worldwide Church of God has been repudiated. But Paul said there were those who were faithful and true, in spite of the discredit brought upon the ministry by credibility gaps (2 Corinthians 4:1–4). Jesus said His faithful servants, who would not compromise truth, would be on the earth at the time of His second coming (Matthew 24:45–46).

Now that the faith of thousands was shattered, there were doubts generated about everything ever taught by the Worldwide Church of God. Members—and former members, in particular—began to question the time period in which they were living. They failed to recognize this very act as a manifestation or proof of "the last days." For, 2 Peter 3:3–4 shows thousands beginning to deny the last days—failing to realize the Bible foretold their fulfilling that prophecy! In the process of renouncing the time period in which they were living, they would reject the gospel message, obedience to God's law, and any attempt to live a godly life (Jude 18–19). They would no longer believe in the imminent return of Jesus Christ, or they would relegate it to some distant time in the future. (One former member published the time for Christ's return to be 250 years from now!)

Because of the failure regarding prophetic dates which did not materialize, the "Work" took a "new twist." Revelation 10:11 was taken out of context in order to justify expensive junkets overseas. The gospel would now be "preached to kings." "Testimonials" to kings would emphasize the "give and get" principle, and the name of Jesus Christ would never be mentioned. In fact, the statement would be made, ". . . My Lord delayeth his coming. . ." (Matthew 24:48–49). (This has actually been said.) The membership would be told that the church is just now coming out of a spiritual wilderness and that "a new age is about to dawn." As a result, the membership could now look forward to many years of further "sacrifice" as the gospel continued going to "the kings of the earth."

This "new thrust" would, of necessity, demand a real effort to relax the force of God's law. After all, if the name of Jesus Christ could not be mentioned to the kings of the earth and if the Ambassador International Cultural Foundation had to take the place of the church (due to embarrassment caused by the word "church"), it should seem a small thing to "water down" God's law. Jesus warned of this when He said, "Many will say to me in that day,

Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (Matthew 7:22–23). Their failure to fearlessly preach God's truth is viewed as a serious offense in the eyes of God! (Matthew 5:19).

In addition, the members were told they had been treated too harshly in the past (which was true) and that the doctrine was responsible. This was a blatant failure, on the part of those who were accountable before God, to recognize the difference between doctrine and administration. Further, it was a refusal to accept responsibility for hypocrisy, abuses, and other wrongs done to the members. Doctrine became the scapegoat. However, it was not the doctrine which was wrong. It was the administration. For a complete explanation, write for our article, *Should the Church Enforce Doctrine?*

"Freedom" was now proclaimed. The was to be a "new concept" in truth. Members were now free to do as they liked.

Freedom of choice should have existed from the beginning. However, it is one thing to allow members choice and space for growth while the ministry "waters down" the truth and quite another to allow free moral agency while the truth is fearlessly and consistently proclaimed. The "new liberty" concept allows the relaxation of God's laws, under the umbrella of free moral agency.

The idea that this kind of "liberty" is good for God's people is addressed by the Apostle Peter, who said, "While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage" (2 Peter 2:19).

Ezekiel 13, which is a prophecy for "the day of the Lord" (v. 5), says the prophets are guilty of strengthening "the hands of the wicked, that he should not return from his wicked way, by promising him life" (Ezekiel 13:22). Today, the "new life" promised to God's people is liberty—freedom to do as they like. But there is no longer the kind of preaching which could make them aware of the strict standards of righteousness to which they must attain.

The natural consequence of this "new thrust" is "works" that are less than ideal. Many of God's people, while wanting to be called Christian, are no longer willing to be Christian. Jesus said the Christian cannot serve God and mammon (Matthew 6:24). A repetition of what happened to Christians toward the end of the first century is taking place today. Read it in 1 John 2:15–16: "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the

world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world." The works of many who profess to know God have become abominable, disobedient, and reprobate (Titus 1:16). Do not assume Titus 1:16 is limited to those who are deceived and who have never known God. The context of the entire chapter indicates Paul is referring to those who once knew!

The first to receive the benefits of this new "liberty" were friends, relatives, and favorites of those in the leadership who were in a position to grant favors. Particularly benefitted were the wealthy and successful employees or members. Much credence was placed in the worldly success they achieved prior to contact with the church. Physical amenities, favors, and benefits—then later "spiritual favors" of one type or another—were accrued by many of these people. Nepotism was rampant. There is no doubt as to the partiality which was shown.

All this is a repetition of what occurred during the first century (James 2:1–9). The New Testament texts are not recorded as historical references only. All the factors leading to spiritual deterioration, in the first-century church, are to be repeated in the last days. Contrary to the modern, liberal concept that all of mankind's changes have been for the better, human nature has not changed. The same stimuli which led men in the wrong direction, two thousand years ago, are still here today. This is why 1 John 2:15–17 must be heeded!

The major emphasis of this new-found liberty was that of pleasure. One justification given—relative to the doctrinal change of marriage and divorce—was that since God allowed polygamy during the Old Testament period, there is nothing really wrong with multiple wives today, as long as these marriages are successive. A number of Worldwide Church of God ministers had been involved in adultery, on a limited basis. There was at least one, in a place of high influence, who had been involved in numerous indiscretions over a twenty-year period. It was the secret lifestyle of some of these ministers which was to be a silent, yet potent, force behind the doctrinal changes. Peter warned of this secret way of life and its inevitable results (2 Peter 2:13–14). What a tragedy, when those who were supposed to represent God and uphold His truth refused to recognize the fallacy of their ways! But, even more tragic is how thousands of God's people blindly followed this "new liberty," without realizing the motivation behind the changes.

As many private heresies began to catch on—and more and more of the members began to practice them—factions began to form. It was liberals against conservatives. Or it was moderates against both liberals and conservatives. Lists were compiled at Headquarters, and ministers were assigned to one group or another. Contempt and disrespect began to be commonplace. First, this contempt was manifested within the ranks

of the ministry; then it began to filter out into the local churches. Soon, it was member pitted against member, as individuals chose sides. Little heed was paid to Jesus' prophecy that hatred, offenses, and betrayals would be common among God's people at the time of the end (Matthew 24:10). The "perilous times" to which Paul referred (2 Timothy 3:1–5) include manifestations of hatred toward those who are good. Some of the most vehement vituperation—heaped upon those members who refused to go along with the doctrinal changes—has been from people who once (in some cases, for years) believed the very same thing.

The kind of pressure placed on the ministry became unbearable for some. They sought escape through alcohol. It became common knowledge that some ministers were overindulging in alcohol, on a regular basis. Their convictions were being eroded, and many of them knew it. The natural consequence was their inability to recognize, any longer, the importance of God's truth. What had once been meaningful and extremely significant lost its import—and, as more and more doctrinal changes occurred, former teachings became meaningless (Isaiah 28:7–8). The ministry of Jesus Christ was rapidly losing its sense of direction!

Many others in the ministry were completely disgusted with what was occurring. Endless hours of discussions, with sympathetic friends, did not solve anything. Some would have liked to leave the ministry but, for two reasons, did not. They felt an obligation to their congregations, even though they themselves disagreed with the changes which were being effected. And they had no livelihood other than the ministry. So they remained in the organization merely for the pay. They failed to heed the New Testament warnings that the true ministers of Jesus Christ must not be mercenary (1 Timothy 6:5; Titus 1:11; Philippians 3:17–19; 2 Peter 2:3, 15; Jude 16). They utterly lacked the faith to trust God for their needs.

So, many ministers began to prepare themselves for an uncertain future. *Moonlighting* became common. Various professions and occupations were entered into on a part-time basis. Schools were attended. All this was done with the view in mind that, if necessary (if the church collapsed economically), ministers would be able to take care of their own financial needs. As a result, many in the ministry turned to money ventures (1 Timothy 6:1–10). A repetition of what happened during the first century was occurring in the twentieth!

Corruption of the Holy Days

The first doctrinal change of major import was the Pentecost change. Two things are significant, here. One is that the Day of Pentecost, per se, was not done away—but it was

corrupted by observance of the wrong day. For a full explanation, write for our articles, *Why a Monday Pentecost*, *The Plain Truth about Pentecost*, and *The Doctrine of Pentecost—How and Why It Was Changed!* There is a reason why the prophets recorded that God could no longer stand these corrupted days (Isaiah 1:12–15; Ezekiel 5:6–7; Hosea 2:11; Amos 5:21–22; 2 Peter 2:13; Jude 12). Jesus implied only a remnant would remain faithful to God's Holy Days in their uncorrupted form (Matthew 24:45–46).

The other reason is that the change in Pentecost was the "chink" in the impregnable armor of church doctrine. It was the beginning of many changes to follow, because it was a rejection of the inspiration of God's Holy Spirit to guide and lead Christians to truth. Unless Mr. Armstrong was led by the Holy Spirit in the selection of Monday as the correct day to observe Pentecost, there can be no confidence that he was correct in anything! What was really significant, in the Pentecost change, was that the Holy Spirit was rejected as a source of inspiration to lead God's people into a knowledge of the truth. The church membership was now told that truth did not come by revelation—it came by rationalization.

Marriage and Divorce

Right on the heels of the Pentecost change was the alteration of the Bible teaching concerning marriage and divorce. Jesus said this change would occur. Read it in Matthew 24:37–39. The context of Matthew 24 clearly indicates Jesus was talking to the church. This very thing is what would affect God's people!

Since there is nothing wrong with "marrying and giving in marriage," this prophecy concerns itself with some type of evil regarding marriage. This evil is found in the book of Genesis where we read, of the antediluvian world, ". . . they took them wives of all which they chose" (Genesis 6:2). Divorce and remarriage, polygamy, and miscegenation were rampant in the days before the Flood. Divorce and remarriage were two of the causes of the Flood. Jesus said there would be a repetition of these conditions in the latter days. Had the Worldwide Church of God not changed the Bible teaching on marriage and divorce, we could correctly assume it would yet occur at some future date.

Many doctrine and policy variations have occurred since the Pentecost and marriage-and-divorce changes. In an interview with a writer for *Christianity Today*, Dr. Robert Kuhn (administrative assistant to Garner Ted Armstrong) admitted to twenty-nine doctrinal and administrative changes (*Christianity Today*, April 15, 1977). Most of the membership of the Worldwide Church of God are unaware of these changes.

Emphasis on Youth

In conjunction with these administrative and doctrinal changes is the profuse emphasis on youth in the church. Many parents are aware that the influence of the church far outweighs their own influence. Parents who were upset over events which took place in the church often found their counsel of no avail, as far as their offspring were concerned. The church had superseded parents as a source of counsel and advice.

Many young people totally disregard their parents if what their parents say is contrary to the church. In effect, many parents have lost control of their children. Isaiah said this would happen in the latter days. Read it in Isaiah 3:4, 12. Do not assume this text ~~excludes~~ children of members of the Church of God!

The House for God

In the spiritual sense, the church is the House of God (1 Timothy 3:15). What happened during the Old Testament period, with respect to the temple, is a type of what is happening to the church today (Jeremiah 7:3–11). Those who think God's church cannot make a mistake had better take another look. The Jews who trusted in the temple forgot that the blessings they received were contingent upon obedience to God's law (Jeremiah 7:14–15). It is fallacious reasoning to assume there is safety from evil in God's church, simply because it is God's church. Those who trusted in the temple because it was God's temple, found out this trust was insufficient. God requires faithfulness and obedience to His law (vv. 9–10).

Abominable things were done in God's temple. Is there a modern counterpart? For years, members of the Worldwide Church of God contributed for the construction of the "House for God." Its use was designated for college assemblies and church services. It has now become an entertainment center for the Ambassador International Cultural Foundation. Some of the productions which have been presented must surely be displeasing to God! Is it possible the "House for God" is the outward manifestation of what has occurred inwardly to God's church? To trust in "the temple of the Lord" is not wrong ~~if~~ the temple of the Lord is used for a wholesome and right purpose. But, what if it is not? During the Old Testament period, the Jews found out too late that it was insufficient to trust in the temple merely because it was God's temple. When abomination is committed in the temple of God the end result will be shame and embarrassment!

The Sheep Scattered

Today, no less than one hundred splinter groups exist as a result of the 1973–1974 exodus from the Worldwide Church of God. Some left because they wanted change and change did not come fast enough. Others left because they could not tolerate those in high office who lived hypocritical lives. Still others left because there were too many radical changes.

The sheep of God have been scattered.

God holds the ministers responsible (Jeremiah 23:1–3; Ezekiel 34:1–6). There were those in high places who were attempting to justify questionable lifestyles. They did not really care about the sheep of God's pasture. While some made much ado about protecting the "little sheep" from harm by gossip and scandalous rumors, it was the very conduct and secret sins of these ministers which led to the rumors in the first place!

Far too many ministers were too concerned about their own personal security to really care about the flock. They were willing to compromise for the sake of a salary. What is the condition of God's flock today?

Church in Last Days

The significance of Jesus' statement in Luke 18:8 can now be fully understood, in the light of what has taken place within the Worldwide Church of God.

Jesus said, ". . . Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find [the] faith on the earth?"

The definite article precedes "faith" in the original. Faith, in the context of Luke 18:8, means the embodiment of beliefs not confidence in God's power and promises. The clear inference, from this text, is that *few* would be faithful to revealed truth at the time of Christ's return!

The church's departure from truth, in the last days, can be noted by specific warnings found in the New Testament: "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the *latter times* some [certain] shall *depart from the faith*, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils" (1 Timothy 4:1).

Paul said, "This know also, that in *the last days* perilous times shall come" (2 Timothy 3:1). One of the reasons given for these perilous times is that men would have "a form of godliness" but would deny "the power thereof" (v. 5). Men would appear to be religious—but would, in reality, reject the power of God's Spirit as a source of inspiration to lead them into a knowledge of the truth and to help them overcome.)

These texts refer to men who at one time were led to a knowledge of the truth—men who once had the power of God's Holy Spirit. But they rejected it. And because God's way of truth was evil spoken of, "many" (the vast majority) followed their pernicious, destructive ways (2 Peter 2:2).

The persecution against the church in the latter days is against "the remnant of her seed," who keep the commandments of God (Revelation 12:17). Only a minority remain faithful to God's truth!

Jesus said there would be those faithful servants who would be proclaiming the truth to His people at the time of His return (Matthew 24:45–46). Jesus' promise to be with His church until the consummation of the age was not made in relation to the size of the church. In fact, the entirety of the Bible shows that in every case of apostasy, it is only a small remnant who remains faithful to the truth. Jesus said His flock would be small (Luke 12:32). The size of the true church is not important. What is important is that Jesus keeps His word. At the time of His return, there will be found a faithful remnant of believers who adhere to the truth initially given and who will not compromise their faith and conviction. Jesus promised to be with that remnant!

Who are those referred to in Jude 22–23? They are engaged in pulling out of the fire some who are about to perish. Note the time element in verse 18. It is "the last time" or the time of the end. At this time, some will be faithful to Christ and will help others regain their footing. They will pull them out of the fire of hell itself!

Malachi, the third chapter, speaks of those who fear God. Those who fear God speak often to one another (v. 16). The ones who fear God are the ones who obey Him (Psalm 111:10). The text in Malachi refers to those who have not compromised the truth. It refers to those who have remained faithful to the commandments of God—who have not "watered down" God's truth and destroyed their own convictions. Obviously, these faithful believers exist within some type of configuration, for they are in constant contact with one another and reinforce each other's convictions.

"Work of God" in Last Days

The condition of the church and God's work in "the last days" leaves much to be desired. The oft-quoted text in Matthew 24:14 is a prophecy. This prophecy, if intended as a commission to the Worldwide Church of God, has already been fulfilled. For, the Worldwide Church of God is not preaching the gospel of the kingdom as a witness to all nations today! The truth of God has been so "watered down" that real conversion is not possible. The present momentum of the church is a carryover from the past. Like a ship that has run out of fuel, it will be only a matter of time before all true spirituality ceases.

If Matthew 24:14 has not been fulfilled, the Bible reveals there are at least five different ways the gospel can be preached to the world as a witness. Write for our article, *What Is the Work of God?* for a complete explanation.

The Bible makes it plain that only a remnant will remain faithful to God in the last days (Revelation 12:17). They will be doing what they can to help those who have been nearly destroyed spiritually (Jude 21–23). There is no evidence that another great work will be raised up at this time in order to fulfill Matthew 24:14. The evidence shows this has already been done—and that those who are God's true people, today, are merely holding onto the truth in the face of unparalleled apostasy and lustful abandonment of principles.

The Worldwide Church of God was God's church. It did fearlessly preach the truth for over forty years. If not commissioned to fulfill Matthew 24:14, then it most certainly did fulfill Matthew 28:19–20! But like the Church of God during the first century, it, too, has gone off into error.

Jesus' promise to be with His church until the consummation of the age will be fulfilled in a small remnant. Where will you stand when Jesus says, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant"?