

# **Herbert W. Armstrong and The Worldwide Church of God (A Modern False Prophet and His Cult)**

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[Chicago Conference Pastoral Conference, Immanuel Evangelical Lutheran Church,  
Waukegan, Illinois, May 7-8, 1984]

## **I. Introduction**

Harvey recently retired. He usually kept himself pretty busy, except when he went to the nursing home to visit his wife, Daisy. Everyday he would be there and usually they would spend the time watching TV since Daisy was by and large an invalid. It was on the tube that Harvey and Daisy came to know Herbert W. Armstrong. At first, there was no apparent evidence that he was having an effect on their lives. But as the years passed, and as Harvey began to send for and read his free literature, pastoral visits began to show that Harvey and Daisy were becoming confused. They looked forward to their resurrection in the spirit. They looked forward to the day when they would be born again instead of being just begotten as they were now. They were sure they would be rulers somewhere in God's kingdom on earth because they believed in Christ, in Biblical prophecy, and were obedient to God's commands and laws. Besides, they were Americans - part of the lost tribes of Israel. What finally made their break permanent was when he quit coming to Christmas, Easter, and Sunday services. When you questioned Harvey, he responded, "It's wrong!" When you tried reasoning with him, he retorted, "That's okay. I appreciate your concern. But some day you will be saved, too!"

Although fictional, this type of scenario takes place to a greater or lesser degree among many who are caught up in the cults. It happens in our WELS and ELS churches, too, although I pray that it is a rarity at best. But because it happens, and because the cults have so much exposure in our free America, it is helpful to look at the cult problem by way of a more in depth look at one cult in particular -- Herbert W. Armstrong and the Worldwide Church of God. And as an end result, I pray we will be better able to help those who might be caught up in a cult.

## **II. The Appeal**

Every cult has its own appeal. There is something about every cult which, some people find attractive. It is through the appeal that persons are drawn to the cult where other forces are exerted which later lead people to be spiritually corrupted and destroyed by the cult. Some cults, such as the Moonies and Hare Krishna, appeal to many because of the warmth, concern, and interest that members or missionaries seem to express. Such love often seems to be lacking in many mainline denominations. They often give the appearance of being very active in contrast to the 'dead orthodoxy' of the major churches.

What is Herbert W. Armstrong's appeal? Why are many attracted to him and his theology? As is the case with most cults, most of Armstrong's followers come from mainline denominations. Armstrong appeals to them because he uses the Bible and leads people into the Bible to discover truth and its own meaning.

Study the Bible to find TRUTH. Be careful to “prove all things” (I Thes. 5:21). Then believe God -- believe His Word as you would accept any other book in which you had confidence.

And above all -- do not try to interpret the Bible by trying to read your own meaning in to it. Remember that the Bible basically interprets itself!

...So study your Bible without prejudice -- but be careful -- prove all things as the Bereans did -- search the Scriptures whether those things be so! Read and study your Bible daily -- check up for yourself and see what it really teaches. Don't just assume that what you have always heard and believed is the truth.<sup>1</sup>

Armstrong uses the terminology that they are familiar with. Salvation, faith, good works, heaven, sin, the kingdom of God, born again, are all words that Herbert W. Armstrong uses frequently, to name just a few. He upholds all the miracles of the Bible as factual happenings, as he does with creation, condemning evolution.

The very first verse of the first chapter in the Bible states positively that God exists -- that God created the heaven and the earth. The first chapter also states positively that man is not descended from lower animal species, and that man is not an animal.<sup>2</sup>

He says that “The Bible is simply God’s divine revelation of BASIC NEEDED KNOWLEDGE which man is not capable of finding out for himself by any other means.”<sup>3</sup> Armstrong upholds the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture. He says that such things as abortion and homosexuality are indeed sinful. He is fiercely patriotic. All of this makes him especially appealing to those in conservative circles. Because there is some truth in what he says, some will be drawn to him.

Another aspect of Armstrongism and the Worldwide Church of God that is so inviting is the multitude of fine quality, glossy printed literature that one can receive absolutely free. All of his pamphlets, books, magazines, and correspondence course materials are sent free of charge and only when you request them. No representative comes knocking on your door. No request for donations comes through the mail. In this era of religious hucksters, this ultra low-key approach is enticing.

On top of that, his weekly radio and TV programs can be heard in almost any city and give him very wide exposure, and a sense of legitimacy. And again, unlike so many others, there is no request for funds or financial appeals of any kind. In addition, he appeals to the hysteria of the times. He purports to have all the answers to all of the problems plaguing today’s world. He knows why there is so much crime, war, and nuclear tension, and he tells you how you can most certainly escape the impending doom. That’s why some of his pamphlets bear such intriguing titles as “Your Awesome Future” and “Never Before Understood – Why Humanity Cannot Solve Its Evils.” Finally, what also is alluring to some is his cocksure attitude that he is the first one in 18<sup>1/2</sup> centuries -- the first one since the time of the Apostles to preach the true Gospel.

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<sup>1</sup> Herbert W. Armstrong, ed., *Ambassador College Correspondence Course*, Lesson 1 (Pasadena, CA: Worldwide Church of God, 1977) p. 10.

<sup>2</sup> Herbert W. Armstrong, *Why Were You Born* (Pasadena, CA: Ambassador College, 1972) p. 5.

<sup>3</sup> Herbert W. Armstrong, ed., *Ambassador College Correspondence Course*, Lesson 1 (Pasadena, CA: Worldwide Church of God) p. 3-4.

And that all-important revelation from the living God was not again proclaimed publicly to the world until our present generation. Even today, most of humanity has never heard the glorious true gospel. And those millions who do hear it have been so drugged and stupefied by false religions and counterfeit “gospels” that they only become confused.

...Satan connived to set up a powerful Gentile religious leader with a counterfeit religion -- the ancient Babylonian mystery religion. He hatched a counterfeit “gospel.” He even appropriated the name of Christ, calling that religion “Christianity.” That, I know, is a breathtaking revelation, difficult today, 1900 years later, to believe. But nonetheless, it is true!

...Nevertheless, now just before the END of this age, Almighty God has decreed that “this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations, and then shall the end come” (Matt. 24:14). This is the message the Eternal God is delivering now by His end-time apostle, to the heads of governments in world capitals all over the world.

...But since the first century the world has known NOTHING of the Kingdom of God because that message was not proclaimed publicly to the world after the first century.<sup>4</sup>

Of course, Armstrong claims to be that “end-time apostle.” It is he who has been the first one to proclaim the ‘truth’ -- his brand of truth -- since the first century. It is typical for someone in cults to make these kinds of extravagant claims. Christian Science has it’s Mary Baker Eddy. The Mormons have Joseph Smith. Jehovah’s Witness have Pastor Russel. The Worldwide Church of God has Herbert W. Armstrong.

At this point, it’s good to be reminded that “not all that glitters is gold,” or as Jesus put it from a religious perspective, “Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves” (Matt. 7:15). Many will find something that will draw them into closer contact with the teachings of Herbert W. Armstrong. But despite all the “glitter” and the “sheep’s clothing,” we must “not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world” (I John 4:1). These false prophets have an uncanny knack for mixing Biblical truth with human error. They are good at mixing what is pure and wholesome with unscriptural garbage and rot. This is what makes not only the cults, but all heterodox religions so deceptive. The problem then is sitting down with people and helping them sort out the truth from the error; what, is good from the glittering garbage. And the best way to do this is to follow the example of the Bereans who “examined the Scriptures daily to see if what Paul said was true” Acts 17:11. In this instance, we need to study the Scriptures to see if what Herbert W. Armstrong says is true. Only then will we effectively burst the bubble of his appeal which draws others to him.

### **III. Bursting the Bubble of Appeal with the Pointed Word of God**

Herbert W. Armstrong (born 1892) grew up among the Quakers in Des Moines, Iowa. After marriage, he joined a Methodist church. Upon a move to Oregon in the 20’s, his wife

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<sup>4</sup> Herbert W. Armstrong, *Your Awesome Future -- How Religion Deceives You* (Pasadena, CA: Worldwide Church of God, 1978), pgs. 2, 4, 9-10, 11.

joined an off-shoot of Seventh Day Adventists. In an effort to prove his wife's new found views were wrong, Herbert began to read the Bible in earnest. After study of the Scripture he agreed his wife's view about worship on the Sabbath was correct. More study and inner struggle ensued. There seems to have been associations with the Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses.<sup>5</sup> The result was that in 1931 he became an ordained minister of the Church of God, from which he was expelled only two years later because of his peculiar views. In 1934 he began to preach over a 100 watt radio station and, to print the first issues of *Plain Truth* on a borrowed mimeograph. From those humble beginnings, he now has hundreds of churches; thousands of followers, and branches in most major foreign countries.

Even though Herbert W. Armstrong studied the Scriptures, it becomes very apparent that he didn't study with an open mind letting the Scripture interpret Scripture, as we shall soon see. He read the Bible in light of learned errors from his varied religious background, and then added a few peculiar twists of his own. One can pick up almost any issue of *Plain Truth* or read any of his pamphlets and easily find examples where Armstrong twists Scripture to fit his own odd theology or where he makes statements that simply have no Scriptural support whatsoever, even though a Scriptural reference is tossed in to make it look legitimate. Meanwhile, he totally ignores those passages which clearly conflict with his erratic beliefs.

What makes Armstrongism distinctive from most other major sects or denominations is British-Israelism, or Anglo-Israelism as it is sometimes termed. This is the belief that the British and the other English speaking peoples are really the lost tribes of Israel. In Biblical prophecy, as interpreted by Armstrong, Britain is specifically Ephraim and America is Manasseh. Although not a new teaching (it was first advanced during the rise of British colonialism by Richard Brothers, 1757-1824)<sup>6</sup> Armstrong has given this dying error much new life. His book, *The United States and Britain in Prophecy*, was written to prove his views. A thorough refutation of it can be found in Walter Martin's *Kingdom of the Cults*, and Roger R. Chambers, *The Plain Truth About Armstrongism*.

It is in his book *The United States and Britain in Prophecy* and in his efforts to prove British-Israelism that we can begin to see how Armstrong misuses, distorts, and adds to Scripture.

A most interesting fact is the Hebrew meaning of the names of the British people. The house of Israel is the covenant people. The Hebrew word for "covenant" is beriyth, or berith...

The Hebrew for "man" is iysh, or ish.... In the original Hebrew language vowels were never given in spelling. So, omitting the vowel "e" from berith, but retaining the "i" in its anglicized form to preserve the "y" sound, we have the anglicized Hebrew word for covenant, brith.

The Hebrews, however, never pronounced their "h's.".... So the Hebrew word for "Covenant" would be pronounced, in its anglicized form, as Brit.

And the word for "covenant man," or "covenant people," would therefore be simply "BRIT-ISH." And so, is it mere coincidence that the true covenant people today are called the "BRITISH"? And they reside in the "BRITISH ISLES"!

<sup>5</sup> Walter R Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults* (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, Inc., 1965) p. 296-297.

<sup>6</sup> Walter R. Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany Fellowship, Inc., 1965) p. 317.

...the Israelites are called “the house of Isaac” in Amos 7:16. They were descended from Isaac, and therefore are Isaac’s sons. Drop-the “I” from “Isaac” (vowels are not used in Hebrew spelling); and we have the modern name “SAAC’S SONS,” or, as we spell it in shorter manner; “SAXONS”!<sup>7</sup>

It is sufficient to point out that the Hebrew Words ‘berith’ and ‘ish’ literally mean ‘covenant’ and ‘man’ and not ‘covenant men’ as Armstrong maintains. Notice how he also drops the Hebrew letter yod (י) from יִשָּׂא, Isaac, but retains the yod in בְּרִית, covenant. Such inconsistency, along with the fact that there is no etymological connection between ‘British’ and its supposed Hebrew derivatives shows that Herbert W. Armstrong either lacks a knowledge of Hebrew, or simply forces his ideas and thoughts upon the words. In all likelihood, both are probably true. Although Armstrong often refers to Hebrew and Greek words in his books, Pamphlets, and magazines, there is no evidence or support that he has ever truly studied Hebrew and Greek, or can even read them.

Another example with the Greek of this type of faulty exegesis and forcing his own ideas upon the original Greek can be seen from his writings about the word γεννάω. Armstrong maintains that since this word can be translated as “beget” or “conceived” as well as “born,” Bible translators must have erred in translating it born. His explanation: “the Greek had only one word for the two vitally different phases of the process... since the original Greek in which the New Testament was written had only one word for both meanings (gennaō).”<sup>8</sup> In reality the Greek Bible contains three other words, συλλαμβάνω, τίκτω, ἀποκύεω, all of which can be translated as ‘conceive,’ ‘bring forth,’ ‘born,’ ‘delivered,’ etc. Once again, Armstrong has proved his lack of knowledge about the original languages, of the Scripture, and his insistence of forcing his ideas into words to support his theology. In this case it is his teaching that in this life believers are only conceived (our entire life is a gestation period) until we are born again at our resurrection into God’s family.

Notice that although we are now the ‘sons’ and ‘children of God,’ we are only heirs - ones who shall, in the future, inherit all that God has promised? Why? Because we are now only begotten children. It is only when we are born of God that we become inheritors of God’s kingdom - divine members of the Family of God.

...God the Father must first beget each of us by placing His Holy Spirit within our minds. We are then impregnated, so to speak, by the “seed” or germ of eternal life. It is the begetting of the spiritual life of God within our minds.

...If by the return of Jesus Christ we have grown and matured in spiritual character, we will become born “children of God,” being “children of the resurrection” as Christ was at his resurrection.

...Because God is spirit, when one is “born” of his heavenly Father he will BE SPIRIT - he will be composed of the same substance of which God is composed. He will be given a spirit body just like Christ’s ...

<sup>7</sup> Herbert Armstrong, *The United States and Britain in Prophecy* (Pasadena, CA: Worldwide Church of God, 1980) pgs. 95-96.

<sup>8</sup> Herbert W. Armstrong, *Just What do You Mean Born Again*: quoted in *The Kingdom of the Cults* by Walter Martin (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany Fellowship, Inc., 1965) p. 317.

...And all who are thus “born of God” will be able to see God because they will be in the Kingdom - the divine Family - of God!<sup>9</sup>

His belief that we will be part of the divine family - gods - of God, just like Jesus is in part, based on more erroneous exegesis.

Moses wrote in the Hebrew language. The English word “God” is translated from the Hebrew Elohim - a uni-plural noun, like such words as “family,” “church,” “team,” “group,”

...And then verse 26: “and God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness ...” This plainly says ...God made MAN after the God kind!

And notice, please, Elohim did not say “Let me make man after my kind” but “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.” It is the GOD FAMILY speaking.<sup>10</sup>

Here we see Herbert coining the term “uni-plural” and making Elohim mean “family,” for which there is no support in any lexicon, dictionary, or grammar. But with such exegesis he is able to start building a false theology that will actually make us divine spirit beings upon our resurrection, - divine spirits in the very family of God. Unfortunately, nowhere does the Bible itself say this. Instead it says that “yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see Him with my own eyes” (Job 19:26-27). We will be flesh and blood human beings, not gods, only we will be without the effects of sin. “For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality” I Cor. 15:53.

As far as Herbert W. Armstrong’s attempts at exegesis, as far as his use of the Greek and Hebrew in his writings, Walter Martin said it best. “It is simply a perversion tailored to impress those who can be impressed with the ludicrous.”<sup>11</sup>

However, without even delving into the Greek and Hebrew, an individual can pick almost any material written by Herbert W. Armstrong and find examples where Scripture is misused or where statements are added for which there is no Scriptural support. Even beginning students of Bible study would find such an assignment not all that difficult.

But if the Bible is silent about telling us to observe Christmas... it does have something to say about Christmas trees! This will come as a real surprise to many. But here it is:

Jeremiah 10:2-6: “Thus saith the Lord, Learn not the way of the heathen... For the customs of the people are vain: for one cutteth a tree out of the forest, the work of the hands of the workman, with the axe. They deck it with silver and with gold; they fasten it with nails and with hammers, that it move not.”

There is a perfect description of the Christmas tree, termed by the Eternal as the way of the heathen - the customs of the people.”<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Herbert W. Armstrong, ed., *Ambassador College Correspondence Course*, Lesson 8; (Pasadena, CA: Worldwide Church of God, 1977) pgs. 11-12.

<sup>10</sup> Herbert W. Armstrong, *Why Were You Born* (Pasadena, CA: Ambassador College, 1972) pgs. 5-6.

<sup>11</sup> Walter R. Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults* Minneapolis, MN: Bethany Fellowship, Inc.: 1965 p. 315.

<sup>12</sup> Herbert W. Armstrong, *The Plain Truth About Christmas* (Pasadena, CA: Worldwide Church of God: 1974) p. 18.

If one would read the entire passage in context, it becomes very clear that God is speaking out against the heathen custom of idolatry, not Christmas trees.

But how “the god of this world” (II Cor. 4:4) would blind your eyes to that. He tries to deceive you into thinking, all there is to it is just “accepting Christ” - with “no works” and presto-chango, you’re pronounced “saved.” But the Bible reveals that; “He that shall endure unto the end, the same shall he saved” (Matt. 24:13.)<sup>13</sup>

In the Matthew passage quoted above, Jesus is speaking about the end times. He is speaking about those believers who endure the tribulation and trials of those perilous times. They will be saved. It’s not a passage that speaks about all the believers of past, present, and future. Yet, taking it out of context, that is how Herbert W. Armstrong uses it.

Let’s take a look at another example.

Originally Satan was a created great archangel, the cherub Lucifer. He was perfect in all his ways from the day he was created (Ezekiel 28:15). He was placed on the throne of the earth as earth-ruler (Isaiah 14:12-14). He ruled over angels who then inhabited the earth. He led his angels into rebellion against the government of God (II Peter 2:4).<sup>14</sup>

Each of the passages to which Armstrong refers in the above quotation is misused. The passage from Ezekiel 28 is from a prophecy against the King of Tyre and is addressed to him, and in no way refers to Satan or Lucifer. Ezekiel 28:12 “Son of man, take up a lament concerning the king of Tyre and say to him...” “Much the same is true of the Isaiah passage to which Armstrong refers, except that this time the prophecy is not against Tyre, but against Babylon. Isaiah 14:3-4: “On the day the Lord gives you relief from suffering and turmoil and cruel bondage, you will take up this taunt against the King of Babylon...” Verses 12-14 of Isaiah 14 is merely a part of that taunt and in no way speaks of Lucifer as being placed on a throne as ruler of this earth. Nor does the II Peter passage to which he refers speak of Satan leading his evil angels in a rebellion against the government of God. Instead, II Peter 2:4 reads: “For if God did not snare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them into gloomy dungeons to be held for judgment.” It can only be concluded that Herbert W. Armstrong misuses, twists, and introduces inept Scripture references to force upon his readers his own ideas which simply are not to be found elsewhere in the Bible. He often uses Scripture as a smokescreen to cover views which are in actuality contrary to God’s Word.

However, what is even worse is the way in which he makes statements, says they are true, and for which he doesn’t even offer any Scriptural support whatsoever. And as usual, his literature is littered with these deceptions. Suddenly appearing on the pages of *Why Were You Born* is this supposed truth:

<sup>13</sup> Herbert W. Armstrong, *Why Were You Born* (Pasadena, CA: Ambassador College, 1972) p. 21.

<sup>14</sup> Herbert W. Armstrong, *Never Before Understood - Why humanity Cannot Solve Its Evils* (Pasadena, CA: Worldwide Church of God, 1981) p. 15.

For this grand and glorious purpose, God has marked out a duration of SEVEN THOUSAND YEARS! Each 24-hour day of the Genesis 1 creation was a type of the seven millennial days of the spiritual creation.<sup>15</sup>

In the same booklet this gem is found without any reference to Scripture whatsoever.

That tree symbolically represented the Holy Spirit of God. Taking it would have impregnated within them GOD-life -- SPIRIT-life. Then Adam's creation could have been completed within his lifetime. He would have been channel from mortal to immortal - from physical material composition to being composed of spirit, even as God is!<sup>16</sup>

The obvious reason there are no Scripture references given is that no where in Scripture is there even a hint that the 7 days of creation were a type of, or prefigured any kind of spiritual, millennial creation. Likewise, nowhere does Scripture give even the slightest hint that if Adam and Eve ate of the tree of life they would receive the Holy Spirit or become immortal, spirit creatures like God, Himself. These are nothing more than pure fantasies that were conjured up in the mind of Armstrong; or which he gleaned from the writings of other errorists.

Let us site still one more example in which he adduces a fictional truth, couples it with Scripture, to prove that all other religions are false, except his.

At that time, A.D. 33, this Simon the Sorcerer tags himself baptized along with multitudes of others. He then tried to buy an apostleship in God's church from the Apostles Peter and John - but of course was refused and rebuked. Thereupon this Simon appropriated the NAME of Christ, calling his Babylonian mystery religion "Christianity." Satan moved this man and use him as his instrument against the true Church of God. Before the end of the first century - probably by A.D. 70 - he managed to suppress the message Christ had brought front God... A hundred years later, history reveals a "Christianity" utterly unlike the Church Christ founded. And for at least eighteen and one-half centuries the true gospel was not proclaimed publicly to the world.<sup>17</sup>

Let us note at this point, before we continue with Herbert's words, that there is nothing in Scripture or in history to support what Armstrong here says. It was true that Simon tried to buy the ability of giving the Holy Spirit to others through the laying on of hands (Acts 8:18ff.). But after Peter had very strongly rebuked and admonished Simon, the last we hear of him is this: "Then Simon answered, 'Pray to the Lord for me so that nothing you have said may happen to me.'" (Acts 8:24). If anything, this would seem to indicate that Simon had truly seen the error of his ways and repented, although Scripture doesn't say for sure. But it in no way says that he appropriated the name of Christ and corrupted the Gospel with a Babylonian mystery religion. In

<sup>15</sup> Herbert W. Armstrong, *Why Were You Born* (Pasadena, CA: Ambassador College, 1972) p. 20.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>17</sup> Herbert W. Armstrong, *Your Awesome Future - How Religion Deceives You* (Pasadena, CA: Worldwide Church of God, 1978) p. 5.

short, there is simply no support Scripturally, nor even historically, for what Armstrong here says. And yet to convince his hearers how totally corrupt historic Christianity is, he continues:

To the Thessalonians Paul wrote, “For the mystery of iniquity doth already work...” (II Thess. 2:7). It was the Babylonian mystery religion, started by Simon the Sorcerer (Acts 8), a religion of iniquity - lawlessness - a religion rejecting the law of God.

...During the time of Paul’s ministry, these Simon Magus ministers were troubling the Corinthians. Paul wrote to the Corinthians: “...I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he (a minister of Simon Magus) that cometh preacheth another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or if ye receive another spirit (of rebellion and disobedience) which ye have not received or another gospel...” (II Cor. 11:2-4).

Notice, they were proclaiming another Jesus - as well as another gospel - and they followed another spirit - of rebellion and disobedience. That deception has continued through the centuries and is the state today.

They took the name of Christ. They called their Babylonian religion “Christianity.” They not only presented a counterfeit gospel but a counterfeit spirit of self-centeredness and a counterfeit Jesus, completely different to the Jesus of the Bible.<sup>18</sup>

Let us note that the II Thess. 2:7 passage does not refer to Simon Magus, but to the Anti-Christ as the context clearly reveals. The II Cor. 11:2-4 passage does not refer to Simon Magus either, but to false Prophets who were troubling the church of Corinth. Simon Magus is not even mentioned in the books of II Corinthians and II Thessalonians. Yet Armstrong forces his peculiar interpretation into these passages, couples it with a statement that cannot be proven in the least Scripturally and historically, and presents to the world a teaching that in reality goes contrary to the Scriptures he purports to uphold.

It is important to remember at this point that these examples of adding to Scripture, utter abuse and misinterpretation of Scripture, and faulty exegesis of Scripture are not isolated instances. They are the norm for his literature. It is not hard to understand, then, how the religion of Herbert W. Armstrong and the Worldwide Church of God bears little resemblance to historic Christianity and orthodox Lutheranism.

Concerning the Trinity, he writes: “But the theologians and ‘Higher Critics’ have blindly accepted the heretical and false doctrine introduced by pagan false prophets who crept in, that the Holy Spirit is a third person - the heresy of the ‘trinity.’ This limits God to ‘Three Persons.’”<sup>19</sup> He also adds in his comments on I John 5:7: “Those who believe in a ‘trinity’ grasp at this verse to support their belief because they have NO Bible proof for their conviction! Rather, history reveals the trinity concept is a pagan invention and belief found in many countries.”<sup>20</sup>

Since the doctrine of the Trinity, as well as the other doctrines of historic Christianity and orthodox Lutheranism which we shall refer to in the upcoming pages, are all very Biblically

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>19</sup> Walter R. Martin, *op. cit.*, p. 308.

<sup>20</sup> Herbert W. Armstrong, ed., *Ambassador College Correspondence Course*, Lesson 8 (Pasadena, CA: Worldwide Church of God, 1977) p. 8.

supported despite what Armstrong says, I shall simply refer you to a Catechism for abundant Biblical, proof passages rather than take up space here to refute his heresies. All I shall do is mention a few more of his errors.

Besides rejecting the doctrine of the Trinity, notice how he also rejects, the person of the Holy Spirit.

In Greek, as in English, the word 'spirit' is neuter. It naturally requires a neuter pronoun which is rightly translated into English as "it," and is usually so translated. However, in some cases the translators have used a masculine pronoun where the original Greek uses 'it.'...The pronouns "he -him" should have been rendered "it." No doubt the translators erred because they themselves assumed the Holy Spirit to be a person.<sup>21</sup>

Concerning the resurrection of Christ, after ignoring all that the Evangelist Luke has to say in Luke 24, Armstrong boldly asserts:

Nowhere does Scripture say He was alive and active, or that God had Him get back into the human body, that had died and was now resurrected... And the resurrected body was no longer human - it was the Christ resurrected, immortal, once again changed!<sup>22</sup>

Concerning the nature of Christ, Armstrong also adds in an issue of Plain Truth: "Yes, Jesus had sinful flesh - human nature."<sup>23</sup>

In speaking on Genesis chapter 2, Armstrong further asserts:

And the second chapter depicts God himself saying positively that man is not an immortal soul - contrary to the very foundational belief of many, or most religions!<sup>24</sup>

The Bible, which is God's message and instruction to mankind, nowhere teaches any such thing as the pagan doctrine of an "immortal soul" going to heaven at death. It teaches that the soul is mortal and shall die.<sup>25</sup>

This false relief is due to a misunderstanding of the Hebrew word נַפְשׁוֹ and the many different ways it is used in the Old Testament. It certainly is unfortunate that he speaks with such authority on something about which he knows so little.

On page 8, we already referred to Armstrong's one-sided views of the terms "beget" and "born again." He does this so that it will fit into his faulty views of conversion and the resulting distortions of the doctrine of justification by faith alone. In Armstrongism, conversion becomes a process towards justification by one's works, even though Armstrong asserts that we are saved by grace and by faith. Note how he uses traditional Christian terms, but gives them a different meaning - another typical practice of the cults

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> *The Plain Truth*, quoted in Walter Martin, *op. cit.*, p. 310.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 309.

<sup>24</sup> Herbert W. Armstrong, *Why Were You Born*, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

<sup>25</sup> Herbert W. Armstrong, *What Do You Mean Born Again?*, quoted in Walter R. Martin, *op. cit.*, p. 314.

There is a sense in which true conversion does take place at a definite time - all at once. But it is also true that in another sense conversion is worked out gradually - a process of development and growth.

**NOW NOTICE CAREFULLY!**

When does one really become a Christian? It is when he receives God's Holy Spirit... At the very moment he receives the Holy Spirit, he is, in this first sense converted.

But does that mean his salvation is complete? Is he now fully and finally "saved"? Is that all there is to it? **NO! FAR FROM IT!**

These are the two conditions to receiving God's GIFT of the Holy Spirit: Repentance and Faith. The two above-mentioned conditions to becoming a Christian - Repentance and Faith - we ourselves must perform.

But these do not make us Christians - do not convert us. It is what GOD does - giving his Holy Spirit by his grace as His free gift - that converts us... He merely requires repentance and faith as conditions.

...Yet he, himself, must make the decision. If he does repent, surrender to God, and in faith accept Jesus Christ as Personal Saviour, then, upon performance of these TWO conditions, God promises to put within him the GIFT of the Holy Spirit. This is the very life of God - SPIRIT life. It imparts to him the very divine nature.

...This new convert has not received the full measure of God's Spirit which Christ had; he is only a spiritual babe in Christ. He must now GROW spiritually, just as a newly conceived embryo in its mother's womb must grow physically large enough to be BORN as a human.

It's vital to UNDERSTAND how true Christianity REALLY WORKS! The newly begotten Christian must grow up, spiritually.

...The Christian must develop the righteous CHARACTER to choose the right way, and resist the wrong ...God, above all things, is PERFECT, RIGHTEOUS CHARACTER! God is able to create character within us; but it must be done as a result of our independent free choice. We, as individual separate entities, have our part in the process.

This development is a PROCESS. It is a matter of GROWTH - DEVELOPMENT. It requires, to become perfect, full and right KNOWLEDGE of the very Word of God; because Jesus taught that we must live by EVERY WORD OF GOD (Matt 4:4; Luke 4:4).<sup>26</sup>

Armstrong summed up his thoughts much more simply in his pamphlet *All About Water Baptism*:

We are saved by grace, and through faith - make no mistake about that; but there are conditions!

It is only those who, during this Christian, Spirit-begotten life, have grown in knowledge and grace, have overcome, have developed spiritually, done the works of Christ, and endured unto the end, who shall finally be given immortality

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<sup>26</sup> Herbert W. Armstrong, *Just What Do You Mean ...Conversion?* (Pasadena, CA: Worldwide Church of God, 1972) pgs. 8, 12, 13, 14, 17-18.

- finally changed from mortal to immortal at the time of the Second Coming of Christ. (I Cor. 15:53-54)<sup>27</sup>

If it hasn't become clear, Armstrong is saying that immortality comes only to those who willingly meet the conditions of receiving the Holy Spirit, and to those who then do and obey God's Word and works. This is work righteousness. There is no gospel motivation whatsoever for living the Christian life. Instead the stage is set for Armstrong's legalism. Those who truly and really keep God's Word will worship on the Sabbath; they will not celebrate Christmas they will not celebrate Easter on Sunday; they will tithe (which means at regular intervals they will give a double and a triple tithe); etc., etc., etc. Why?

And if we grow spiritually (II Peter 3:18) and keep growing until the end of this physical existence, we shall be born of God by a resurrection.

UNDERSTAND THIS! God refused human access to the Holy Spirit – UNTIL CHRIST, THE SECOND ADAM, should come and pay the death penalty for humans in our stead.

UNDERSTAND THIS! The Holy Spirit and gift of eternal life was not available to Adam's children. It was not available even to God's called and chosen people ancient Israel, except their prophets...

Others CANNOT come to Christ now (John 6:44). Jesus in no manner came on a "soul-saving crusade." At no time did he plead with any one to "give him one's heart." He pleaded with none to accept him and be saved...

But a comparative FEW were predestined to be called to judgment and salvation during the church age (Eph. 1:11-12)... But why? Why call a few, a thousand to three thousand years before the judgment of the MANY? To prepare and spiritually train a people for the Kingdom of God - the divine FAMILY of God, to rule with Christ during the Millennium and after, in redeeming the vast billions of people since Adam during the time of their judgment and salvation... to be prepared and trained to become God beings in and after the millennium, to rule with Christ as we bring to eternal LIFE all others beginning with Adam, who then shall be willing!<sup>28</sup>

...the whole universe is to be ruled by us, who, with God the Father and Christ, become the Kingdom of God... These Scriptures indicate we shall impart life to billions of dead planets, as life has been imparted to this earth. We shall create, as God directs and instructs. We shall rule through all eternity... because we shall have learned to choose God's way of good.<sup>29</sup>

According to Herbert W. Armstrong, those who meet the conditions, and keep God's Word (as interpreted by Armstrong, himself) shall become immortal spirit members of God's divine family who will eventually rule over all those others who didn't quite make it in the first judgment. They will teach them the truth so that by the second judgment, those who survived the first judgment will rule those who survived the second judgment in various places and on various

<sup>27</sup> Herbert W. Armstrong, *All About Water Baptism*; quoted by Walter Martin, op. cit., p. 312.

<sup>28</sup> Herbert W. Armstrong, *Why Humanity Cannot Solve Its Evils* (Pasadena, CA: Worldwide Church of God, 1981) p. 14, 16, 21, 20, 24-24.

<sup>29</sup> Herbert W. Armstrong, *Your Awesome Future – How Religion Deceives You* (Pasadena, CA: Worldwide Church of God, 1978) p. 27.

planets throughout the universe. All those who didn't make either of those two judgments will simply be annihilated, instead of suffering eternal punishment as the Bible describes.

They shall be as though they had never been (Obadiah 16). Does this show harshness with God? Is God unfair? NEVER! God is LOVE! This is the kindest and most merciful end for those who have been freely offered LIFE and in self-centered rebellion rejected it.<sup>30</sup>

To sum it all up, one can burst the bubble of Armstrong's appeal. It may take some effort and time to wade through his ocean of confusion and his sea of error. Put if we use Scripture, as he suggests, and let Scripture interpret Scripture, as he also suggests, it will become clear that Armstrong is a wolf in sheeps clothing rather than the first one to preach the truth in the last 18<sup>1/2</sup> centuries. And it will be just as clear that the Worldwide Church of God so confuses and distorts the truth that its followers will most likely be left standing spiritually naked at the entrance to the hell which they don't believe exists.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

For those like Harvey and Daisy there is hope. In their spare time, we must urge them to continue to read their own Bibles faithfully. We can suggest that they listen to the Bible on tape; read the Northwestern Lutheran, Meditations; and come to church and Bible classes faithfully rather than turning to TV and radio preachers. In this way they will be strengthened in the true faith, and they will be better able to distinguish truth from error.

And if, after being caught up in a cult, sect, or heterodox religion, they are led to realize it's errors, then remind them of Romans 16:17. Urge them to avoid and stay away from their broadcasts and literature, and any kind of worship and support.

And finally, let's keep reminding our Harvey's and Daisy's that "Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness" (II Cor. 11:14-15). Or as Jesus Himself put it:

Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?" Then I will tell them plainly, "I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!" (Matthew 7:21-23).

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<sup>30</sup> Herbert W. Armstrong, *Why Humanity Cannot Solve Its Evils*, op. cit., p. 24.

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