

THE Plain Truth

FEBRUARY 1996

When a friend
your
needs help

ALSO:

**GANG-PROOF
YOUR KIDS**

**A CHURCH
REBORN**

**THE SCANDAL
OF GRACE**

Last

PERSONAL

The 10 Commandments of God the Father and Jesus Christ are the same (Matt. 19:16-19), if you try to drive for they are one - if you try to drive a wedge between them, you are dead like the one you have just buried.

Consider Hebrews 10:26-29

A Church Reborn

You have defellowshipped yourselves from God and from me. You have fallen into your own pit.

This month's "Personal" originally appeared in the Winter 1996 issue of Christian Research Journal. We share it here to help inform and update our readers on what the Holy Spirit is doing within the Worldwide Church of God.

DURING THE past 10 years, the Holy Spirit has blessed the Worldwide Church of God with unprecedented growth in doctrinal understanding and in sensitivity to the world around us, especially other Christians. Yet the scope and speed of changes since the death of our founder, Herbert W. Armstrong, has confounded both supporters and detractors.

It's worth pausing to take a look at what we have lost and what we have gained.

Our beliefs and practices have undergone a continuous process of revision under the direction of our pastor general, Joseph W. Tkach Sr. (my father), who succeeded Mr. Armstrong. Before he died this past September, my dad appointed me to succeed him.

I am grateful for the collaborative leadership style that my father introduced. I am also grateful for the unity among those who assisted him and who continue to assist me as we yield to the authority of Scripture and the work of the Holy Spirit.

Gone are our obsession with a legalistic interpretation of the Old Testament, our belief in British Israelism, and our insistence on our fellowship's exclusive relationship with God. Gone are our condemnations of medical science, the use of cosmetics and traditional Christian celebrations such as Easter and Christmas. Gone is our long-held view of God as a "family" of multiple "spirit beings" into which humans may be born, replaced by a biblically accurate view of one God who exists eternally in three Persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

We have embraced and now champion the New Testament's central theme: the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus' saving work on behalf of humanity is now the focus of our flagship magazine, *The Plain Truth*, rather than end-time prophetic speculation. We proclaim the sufficiency of our Lord's substitutionary sacrifice to save us from the death penalty for sin. We teach salvation by grace, based on faith alone, without resort to works of any kind. We understand that our Christian works constitute our

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Now that you have finally & clearly rejoined the world, I am no longer permitted to judge you for not being submissive and obedient to the word of God (1 Cor 5:12, 13) but cancel my presence before you.

inspired, grateful response to God's work on our behalf—"We love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19)—and that by these works we do not "qualify" ourselves for anything, nor do we compel God to act on our behalf. As William Barclay put it, "We are saved for good works, not by good works."

My father articulated to the church the scriptural teaching that Christians are under the New Covenant,



not the Old. This teaching resulted in our abandoning past requirements that Christians observe the seventh-day Sabbath as "holy time," that Christians are obligated to observe the annual festivals commanded to Israel in Leviticus and Deuteronomy, that Christians are required to triple tithe, and that Christians must not eat foods that were

"unclean" under the Old Covenant.

All these changes in the space of 10 years? Many are now advising us that profound course corrections of this magnitude are without historical precedent, at least since the days of the New Testament church.

The leadership and faithful members of the Worldwide Church of God are deeply grateful for God's mercy in leading us into the light. Yet our progress has not been without costs. Income has plummeted, costing us millions of dollars and requiring us to lay off hundreds of long-time employees. Membership has declined. Several splinter churches have broken off from us to return to one or the other of our previous doctrinal and cultural positions. As a result, families have separated and friendships have been abandoned, sometimes with angry, hurt feelings and accusations. We are deeply saddened by this and pray that God will bring healing and reconciliation.

No personal confession of faith in our new beliefs

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the heretics (Rev. 17:1-6) self made. On your journey to me together. No longer want to be in the word of God, but cancel my presence before you. 1 Cor 5:12, 13

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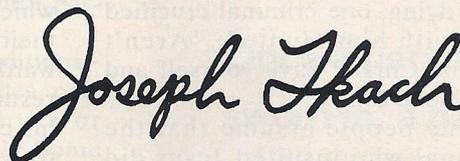
has been required of members, nor have members been expected to automatically embrace new beliefs. We have stressed the need for personal faith in Jesus Christ, and we have instructed our pastors to be patient with members and understand their struggles to understand and embrace doctrinal and administrative changes.

Despite the material losses, we have gained much. As Paul wrote, whatever was to our profit in what we embraced before, we now consider worthless for the sake of Christ. We take courage and comfort in knowing "Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead" (Philippians 3:7-11).

We are grateful for those fellow Christians—Hank Hanegraaff, Ruth Tucker, David Neff, William G. Brafford, and friends at Azusa Pacific University, Fuller Theological Seminary, Regent College and elsewhere—who have extended the hand of fellowship to us as we sincerely seek to follow Jesus Christ in faith. We welcome

the blessing of being part of, not just a small, exclusive, physical corporation, but the body of Christ, the community that is the church of God, and to do all we can to help share the gospel of Jesus Christ with all the world.

My father, Joseph W. Tkach, subjected himself to the truth of Holy Scripture. In the face of opposition, he insisted that Jesus Christ is Lord. He was a humble and faithful minister of Jesus Christ who allowed God to lead him and the Worldwide Church of God into the riches of God's grace. Relying on God in faith and in fervent prayer, we fully intend to stay the course on which Jesus Christ has set us.



Joseph Tkach
President

LETTERS

Continued from page 3

As an adult, I finally accepted the truth Jesus gave me. He is the truth and I belong to Him, and I have the Holy Spirit guiding my life to prove it!

I feel free to be God's unique and special child, and I don't have to jump through any hoops to be blessed by His grace.

Mary Jordan
Albuquerque, New Mexico

My wife and I were never so taken with one of your articles as we were by the one titled "'Boundary Marker' Christians" by Paul Kroll.

The article says what we have believed for years, and brought out facts we felt were so basic that we left a "fundamentalist" church because it denied them. Love of God and love of fellow mankind is all Christ asked of us.

George Myers
Clayton, Georgia

We're on the Internet

Thank you so much for your monthly magazine, *The Plain Truth*. I have been receiving it for many years and continue to look forward to each new issue.

Both my wife and I have noticed positive change in the magazine's

emphasis.

Does the Worldwide Church of God have an Internet home page yet? I trust you will publish your home page address when the time comes, and you are actually on the Internet. I look forward to it. You have so many wonderful things to offer the Internet world.

Richard E. Leffler
La Mesa, California

● Yes, we are happy to report that the *Worldwide Church of God* does now have a home page on the Internet. Our address is <http://www.wcg.org>. Be sure to check it for an advance look at Plain Truth articles each month.

Ministerial Welcome

Enclosed is a \$25 contribution which I hope helps to defray the cost of *The Plain Truth*. I am a Presbyterian minister who has found no basic theological error in your magazine, and who now rejoices—as did an article in *Christianity Today*—that you are joining the mainline evangelical folks.

Welcome—and thanks. I began to read *The Plain Truth* because my mother, a staunch Southern Baptist, received it from

a cousin who is a member of the Worldwide Church of God.

Alvada Durham
Union Point, Georgia

● Thank you for your comments and for your contribution to our ministry of providing the Plain Truth magazine subscription free to all who request it. Christianity Today's editorial by David Neff, the magazine's executive editor, is reprinted by permission on page 27.

Bathroom Evangelism

I love *The Plain Truth*—I keep it in the bathroom. All my guests read it and enjoy it—'cause they stay in the bathroom longer. Another way to witness.

These magazines are passed on and on. My friends and family look forward to them, too.

Sheri Illingworth
Portland, Oregon

The Plain Truth welcomes your comments. Letters for this column should be addressed to "Letters to the Editor." The editor reserves the right to use or not use comments so addressed, in whole or in part, as deemed in the public interest, and to include your name and edit the letter for clarity or space.

The Road to Orthodoxy

This editorial by David Neff, executive editor of Christianity Today, is reprinted by permission from the Oct. 2, 1995, issue of that magazine.

EVANGELICALS know *this*: A high commitment to following God's will is essential to Christian discipleship; so also is a strong commitment to all the truth we glean from Scripture.

But we also know *this*: Without an informed theology and experience of grace, these discipleship essentials can lead to legalism, spiritual pride, and isolationism.

That is exactly what happened in the Worldwide Church of God (WCG). Their founder, Herbert W. Armstrong, discerned certain "truths" in Scripture (including the need to keep all of God's law in order to be saved), and he placed a high demand for commitment on his followers (including, for example, a "triple tithe," comparable to what God's Old Covenant people paid). The result was not only a flawed theology, but, in many cases, legalism, spiritual pride, and isolation.

After Armstrong died, the church's new leadership emulated his commitment—and in their search for truth, left behind many of the individual "truths" he had taught.

One of the first doctrines to be questioned after Armstrong's death was his teaching that believers were not born again until the resurrection. Re-examining that teaching in the light of Scripture led the WCG leaders (who seem to function as a team) to reject their church's teaching that human beings were themselves destined to become gods,

which, in turn, led them to revise their doctrine of the nature of God, which, in turn, led them to teach the biblical doctrine of the Holy Trinity. "It was a domino effect," they recently told CT.

In a recently published doctrinal statement, the WCG teaches in the clearest possible terms not only the Trinity, but also salvation by grace through faith. Most evangelicals should have no quarrel with this new statement, although differences in church practice and eschatology will still distinguish the WCG. Its traditional disciplines of tithing and attendance at festivals, which many believed were essential for salvation, the WCG now considers to be helpful, but optional practices.

CT met with a representative leadership group several years ago and was convinced of their commitment, both to Christ and to authentic biblical truth. That commitment, we have learned, has exacted a high price. Many members have felt betrayed by the changes and have left to join splinter groups. The change in teaching about the tithe has resulted in drastically reduced income, necessitating layoffs and downsizing of operations. Just as painful as the layoffs has been the grieving for alienated family members.

WCG leadership believes the departures have now slowed significantly. When WCG members gather this month for their annual Feast of Tabernacles worship service, there will be 30,000 fewer in attendance. (Past events have typically drawn about 85,000.) Of those who will stay away, perhaps a third are not worshipping anywhere.

Despite the losses, WCG leaders remain confident. "We believe the

Holy Spirit is leading us to these things," they told CT. "We now know much more of what it means to take up our cross and follow Jesus," they said.

Ironically, the question around which much of the change has revolved is this: Are there Christians in other churches? (Armstrong taught that Mother Rome and her Protestant daughters together constituted Babylon the Great.) The WCG had benefited much from the Scripture scholarship of non-WCG scholars, but it had not considered them Christians because they were not sabbatarians. Suddenly, its leaders faced the dilemma squarely: either these scholars are not Christians, or the Sabbath is not the criterion of Christian identity. Armstrong's view was then decisively abandoned.

CT readers will be glad to know that they are no longer considered among the harlot daughters of the Great Whore. But how will we respond? Sadly, Christians outside the WCG have been suspicious and slow to extend the right hand of fellowship. (A few leaders have been helpful, WCG leaders say: Hank Hanegraaff of the Christian Research Institute and Ruth Tucker of Trinity International University, for example; and faculty from Regent College, Fuller Seminary, and Azusa Pacific University have also helped inform the transition. But by and large, Christians have made the WCG journey of faith and doctrine more difficult.) CT commends the WCG leadership for its courage in pursuit of truth. Can we now welcome their people into this transdenominational fellowship we call evangelicalism?

—David Neff