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# IS THERE SAFETY IN NUMBERS?



## **Is There Safety in Numbers?**

In the latter years of Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong's life, the membership of the Worldwide Church of God numbered into the multiple thousands worldwide, up to about 1986. There were congregations in many major cities spread across the United States and throughout the world. The individual churches kept everyone busy in those years, with all of the family-style activities like picnics, hiking, campouts, combined Holy Day services, Spokesman clubs, Y.O.U. groups, and many, many other activities. We had friends and relatives clustered around us, and we felt safe and secure with a large support group. Furthermore, we had respect for our ministers (who were set on a pedestal), for they were our immediate authority figures who had a direct effect on our lives. Our local minister was the one we called in the middle of the night with all our problems. And perhaps we leaned on them (the Church and minister) more than we should.

### **THE FALLING AWAY**

For years, Mr. Armstrong warned that a falling away was coming. We all believed, or seemed to believe, that this encompassed a falling away from the CHURCH. And so it was! But it was more than falling away from the Church - It was a falling away or a defection from THE TRUTH! The APOSTASY was the cause of the falling away FROM THE TRUTH OF GOD by many thousands of members and hundreds of ministers! NO ONE expected that falling away would happen the way that it did! It took us all by surprise.

### **WHERE DID THEY ALL GO?**

Since the death of Mr. Armstrong, many Church members just walked away, while some stayed in the parent organization. Where did MANY of the scattered brethren go? It can be seen they went where their friends went; where their relatives, their pastor, and where the vast majority in numbers went. They left and went away, reasoning to themselves that all these people, and the ministry, just couldn't be wrong! Brethren, everywhere, went where the numbers were, to continue the church activities, the fellowshipping, being concerned about keeping families and relationships together. Searching for a place where there were other children for their children to play with, in short - to continue just as before the Church split and went astray, when they were safe and secure. Members were striving to keep the physical structure in tact as if nothing had happened. After all, they reasoned, how could all of these people be wrong? How many of our brethren from yesteryear were there just for the social life, and how many stayed in the Church because they really didn't care about doctrine? It's a serious question we must all take the time to ponder in our minds!

### **HOW MANY FOLLOWED THE TRUTH?**

Question: Of the corporate churches that formed after the full effect of the apostasy took place, which Church (at this point, group would be the appropriate word) continued to preach the TRUTH? By now, with all the baggage and errors many churches brought with them when they were established, the true gospel message was now distorted and polluted. The real question each person should be asking is what group continues to preach and practice the TRUTH?

For example, one corporate church expounds that they are preaching the "whole counsel of God." But anyone over time, and comparing what they do preach to what Mr. Armstrong taught and restored, will soon discover it is not quite the same gospel message. They might have a slick magazine or radio and TV stations that reach around the world, but without the full Truth of God, just what do they really amount to in God's sight?

#### SMALL AS A GRAIN OF MUSTARD SEED

The larger corporate church groups, with membership numbering into the thousands, should have hit the ground running. Those with a tithe-paying base in the thousands should have been overwhelmingly sufficient to kick start a massive rush to pick up where the Worldwide Church of God ended! They didn't have to start out as small as the grain of a mustard seed. But, that's EXACTLY how God DOES start His Work! As a side note, when the departure accrued, why did they scatter? Why did they not all stay together? That's another article.

This is something Mr. Armstrong taught, one of those core truths was the PURPOSE of the Church and the reason you and I were called. We were not called just for personal salvation, something those who are "just waiting it out" should consider, but to support through the tithing system the commission of the Church to preach the Good News message about the coming, return of Jesus Christ as KING of Kings and LORD of Lords to this sick, corrupt, dying world. Turning over God's tithe to a man or group of men who are not truly involved in the right service to God and mankind could be considered careless. In John 10:12, we read, *"But he who is a hireling and not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming, and leaves the sheep and flees: and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them."*

Mr. Armstrong also taught that one cannot grow in truth and understanding unless one is tied to THE trunk of the tree, fully immersed in that commission. Any other work or preaching that is NOT THIS GOSPEL has a blinding effect - as Christ makes known. *"And Jesus said, For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind (John 9:39)."*

What Christ is saying is that THOSE ONCE enlightened, those who were taught and lived the truth, as delivered once and for all to the saints (Jude 3) - came to be blinded - and are now off track (II Peter 2:1-3). For those who profess they are following the teaching of Mr. Armstrong should consider what he taught about having their hearts in the Work and a LOVE for the Truth as delivered ONCE and for ALL.

#### THE COMMISSION WAS COMPLETED

Many will say that the commission of preaching the gospel around the world has been completed by Mr. Armstrong. Even Mr. Armstrong himself felt that he did. Mr. Armstrong completed THE WORK GOD GAVE HIM TO DO in his life-time ministry! But in hindsight, we can see that he did not complete the work of the Church that God has planned for these times. Paul completed the work God gave him to do, as did Moses, Jeremiah and all the other cloud of witnesses recorded in Hebrews 12:1 Even Jesus Christ Himself said, as He bowed his head, exhaling His last breath, "IT IS FINISHED!" (John

19:30) What did Christ mean? Was He finished with the Work of God? NO! It is clear that He was finished with the Work God gave Him to do during His human life ministry! In like manner, Mr. Armstrong completed the work Jesus Christ sent him to do during those lifetime years, but NOT THE WORK OF THE CHURCH. If the church continues to exist, so does the Work and the commission.

#### DUALITY PRINCIPLE

During the Philadelphia Era years, Mr. Armstrong repeatedly made a comparison of the difference of what the worldly churches teach or don't teach to the true teaching expounded by Jesus Christ detailed for us in the Word of God, the Bible. Using that same principle of showing duality with all of the various 700 (last estimate) plus different groups today, we can see that all these churches **cannot be right**. Each of the corporate churches has its own little quirk for its own blinded reasoning that makes it think it is unique and right! A close examination of the corporate churches will show a subtle deception or deviation from the original gospel message and doctrines restored to the true Church of God by Mr. Armstrong.

One major ruling by an Apostle came crashing down almost immediately after his death was the doctrine (teaching! blessed and approved by Christ) regarding make-up. It is said Mr. Armstrong went back and forth on the issue. That's the lie EVERYONE believes or deceives themselves so they can continue to blend and mix in with the world. The truth is Mr. Armstrong allowed it ONCE; Christ brought him to see the error and reinstated that doctrine. The next time he was tricked. The information is available for anyone who cares about and has a love of THE TRUTH.

The standards and doctrines adopted by these churches (groups) might look alike, or have a similar message, but often leave out the way of life we all once understood, lived and accepted as taught by Christ through Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong. To know or recognize the changes wrought by various groups or corporate churches, one would either have had to have lived it to see the differences, or put in hours and hours of study and devoted examination. The Word of God calls those who understand this ... the wise! (Daniel 12:10) God warned us these times would come in II Timothy 4:3, *"For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears."*

Some will say, as in Biblical times, that this group or that group is "TOO ARMSTRONG!" That is exactly what was said in I Corinthians 1:12 (1 Cor 3:4) *"Now I say this, that each of you says, 'I am of Paul,' or 'I am of Apollos,' or 'I am of Cephas,' or 'I am of Christ.' ... For when one says, 'I am of Paul,' and another, 'I am of Apollos,' are you not carnal?"* We are instructed, *"Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ (I Corinthians 11:1)."*

#### LOVE OF THE TRUTH

Mr. Armstrong often repeated that Scripture about himself. (1Cor 11:1 above) Those who refused to follow completely (holding fast to what you have) the teaching, the way taught by Christ through Mr. Armstrong, seem to have some kind of grudge against Mr.

Armstrong. Often there is some aspect of his teaching (which was given to him from Jesus Christ) with which they disagree. This indicates a problem with submission to God's government, or perhaps,

#### A LACK OF LOVE FOR GOD'S TRUTH!

(II Thessalonians 2:10) There can only be ONE uniting truth of God, not variations, differences or opinioned viewpoints causing confusion and playing right into the hands of Satan. We are told by Christ: "... come out of HER MY people (Revelation 18:4)." HER meaning not only the world, but out of groups that are in error. We must all seriously COME OUT and GET BACK to the true doctrines as taught by the early apostles and restored by His late apostle, Mr. Armstrong. Please note the warning that follows in that verse.

#### DOCTRINES ARE TRUTHS FROM GOD

One of the hallmarks identifying signs of the true Church of God and being a true member is doctrine. The Sardis Era, according to the Word of God, remained truthful and faithful to the doctrines they understood AT THAT TIME. The truths restored by the apostle of Jesus Christ in our time are the doctrines as made known by Jude: *"Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints (Jude 3)."* That would be ALL the doctrinal teaching restored, the rulings an Apostle who had the authority to make.

There are little flocks (though scattered at this time) that are "holding fast" by clinging faithfully to the restored doctrines. These little flocks, as compared to Gideon's army, are small flocks, or armies, scattered throughout the world, waiting. Waiting for that time just ahead when God will call them out from where they are to a gathering. Ezek 20:34 *And I will bring you out from the people, (those teaching error) and will gather you out of the countries wherein ye are scattered, with a mighty hand, and with a stretched out arm, and with fury poured out.*

God has made it known that He will not need many to rout the much larger army of Satan that awaits us in battle in the future. **"The things of God, when the Eternal works through human instruments, must start the very smallest - like the grain of mustard seed. But they grow. No power, no grouping of power, whether satanic or human, can stop or prevent God's PURPOSE"** (Autobiography, volume one, page 517, Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong).

Today, the marvels of man ingenious imaginations, the knowledge explosion, the development of mass communication (worldwide web) instant, direct, delivered right into your home. To do the work of God today doesn't take numbers. Coupling what Mr. Armstrong wrote with the story of Gideon's army, we can see this as an example preserved for our learning today to see clearly how God operates. It is just one of many examples God uses to show He doesn't need large numbers to do His will!