

God's Peculiar Treasure Part III

December 2010

Dear Brethren:

In the October issue of the *Monthly Letter*, we continued our analysis of God's Church—His peculiar treasure—and confirmed the prophesied collapse and scattering of that legitimate body of believers, not only in ancient times but more importantly to occur in the very last days. Wherever that true church may be found, it is one prophesied first *to possess the revealed Truth of God*, but then *to forsake* those priceless teachings, just as did the ancient Israelites *and* the New Testament Church of the first century. We ended by asking once again, is it possible that the work of Herbert Armstrong indeed may have been the fulfillment of some of those very last-day prophecies? It could only be so if he was called by God and given divine inspiration to proclaim the true tenets of God's plan and purpose for man's salvation. Were Herbert Armstrong's teachings absolutely consistent with those Biblical principles which distinguish the true Church of God from every other counterfeit religious movement extant in this world? Let us examine that doctrinal history and then decide. The five *test points* we have already highlighted are certainly not an exclusive list, but they indeed do help narrow the field remarkably in evaluating all of those religious works which claim to adhere to the Bible as God's revealed Word.

The Times of Salvation

What did Mr. Armstrong teach concerning the opportunity to know and accept Jesus Christ? Did he profess the common ideas espoused by most churches, that salvation is open and obligatory for all men right now? From a 1952 issue of *The Good News*, here is a confirmation of his fundamental teaching:

It would APPEAR from the common teachings that salvation is open to EVERYONE *today* and that all one has to do now is to join a church and be "saved." IS EVERYONE FREE TO ACCEPT SALVATION AND BE SAVED ANY TIME ONE WISHES TO BE? Or are some *blinded* to salvation in this day? . . . Paul, speaking to the Romans concerning their Gentile forefathers, said: "As they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a REPROBATE MIND . . . being filled

with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness . . . full of envy" (Romans 1:28–29). Again, "For God hath concluded them (*all* mankind) all in unbelief that he may have mercy on all," Romans 11:32. The GENTILES were blinded then and THEY ARE BLINDED TODAY! ALL NATIONS are blinded today! ("Is This the Only Day of Salvation?," *The Good News*, July 1952)

Was that principle intended to glorify an "elite few" at the expense of the many? In Herbert Armstrong's view, did any human being, Jew or Gentile, have any "natural advantage" in the salvation process? What did he clarify further, in the same 1952 *The Good News* article, concerning natural-born Israelites?

A FEW had received the chance of salvation—but notice verse 7 [Romans 11]: ". . . the REST (the VAST MAJORITY) were BLINDED." The same is true today: the few, whosoever *will*, may come to God, but the vast majority *won't* because they are blinded to God's truth by thinking their ways are better. Jesus *never once* said that everyone is in this age called to salvation. Paul said: "Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called." (I Cor. 1:26). Only those drawn by the Spirit of God and who come through Jesus can approach God, John 6:44.

Did Herbert Armstrong thereby perceive a cardinal principle of the Bible which mainstream Christianity despises and rejects? Yes, indeed. Most professing Christians love to quote John 3:16 as proof that anyone who wishes can accept Jesus Christ at any given time: "that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." But it is amazing how they refuse to acknowledge the very *clear and simple* statements of Christ concerning what it means to *really believe* in Him. Herbert Armstrong challenged mainstream dogma by pointing out that Jesus *nowhere* said that all people automatically have salvation opened to them *at every time in every age*. He further proved it by emphasizing texts like John 6:44; "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him." If all men have an *automatic right* to "accept Jesus" whenever *they* choose, why this kind of emphatic pronouncement? In fact, John 6:44 became an "identifying text" expounded throughout Herbert Armstrong's ministry. While other churches avoided it like the plague (as well as 1 Corinthians 1:26, etc.), he fearlessly emphasized *all of the texts* which—assembled together with simple clarity—demonstrate the true revelation of Jesus Christ on this topic of a necessary calling—the choice and timing of God, not man.

What did he teach concerning those who have lived and died in this world, never having been given the opportunity of a true calling by Jesus Christ to date? Are they doomed to eternal oblivion? Continuing from the same 1952 *The Good News* article:

Now, if God is Just and it is He who has blinded most of the people that ever lived, from understanding his laws and the grace which they must accept to be saved, then He will have to remove the blindness to give them a chance—their

first chance—will he not? YES!—and he has PROMISED TO DO IT! "And he will DESTROY in this mountain the face of the COVERING CAST OVER ALL PEOPLE, and the VAIL THAT IS SPREAD OVER ALL NATIONS," Isaiah 25:7. It is no stigma or disgrace to your loved ones or others that they are among those that are blinded *now*. God's PLAN called for the removal of blindness from only a *few* NOW. It is HIS responsibility! . . . AFTER *blinded* man has had a lifetime of sad *experience* living by *his own* way of life, then is resurrected back to this earth and has *his blindness removed* so that he can SEE and PRACTICE GOD'S WAY OF LIFE—the only way that leads to happiness, and can SEE HOW MUCH BETTER GOD'S WAY IS THAN HIS OWN—*then*, AND ONLY THEN, it is that God REALLY starts to save the *vast majority* of mankind and give eternal life to those who are willing to come under his loving rule and aid HIM in administering wisely the great power HE will give to them!

So we see that a key identifier of the true Church of God—documented in the Bible concerning multiple and distinct times of salvation for human beings—was certainly taught by Herbert Armstrong. What about our second key identifying mark of the true Church?

The Israel of God

Did Herbert Armstrong understand the significance of the type/antitype role of Israel in God's master plan for the salvation of all mankind? Here is what he wrote in the 1967 edition of his book, *The United States and British Commonwealth In Prophecy*:

We must realize, if we would understand, a peculiar fact. The Holy Bible is the particular Book of a definite nationality—the children of ISRAEL. It is undeniable! Its history, from Genesis to Revelation, is primarily the history of one nation or people—the Israelites. Other nations are mentioned only insofar as they come into contact with Israel. All its prophecy, too, pertains primarily to this people of ISRAEL, and to other nations only insofar as they come into contact with Israel. The Bible tells of these Israelites and their God. It was inspired by the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, committed to writing through Israelites exclusively, and was preserved until after the New Testament was written by these Israelites. In its sacred passages we read that all the promises and the covenants of God, all the sonship and the glory, belong solely to ISRAEL (Romans 9:4). . . . In Old Testament times, His PEOPLE were the people of ISRAEL. In New Testament times, HIS PEOPLE are those of God's own CHURCH—the truly converted, Spirit-begotten CHRISTIANS! (Chapters III, p. 14; XI, p. 159).

Herbert Armstrong certainly understood therefore the significance which God had placed upon His peculiar treasure—Israel—as an instrument for offering salvation to all

mankind. Wherever the true Church of God exists, it will possess this knowledge as a key in applying the physical and spiritual lessons found within God's salvation plan. Any church which ignores the special role of Israel—both physically *and spiritually*—is offering proof that it is not the true Church of God at all.

As mentioned before, the problem with professing belief in the unique role of Israel as God's chosen people is the charge by many of exclusivism, divisiveness, and even racism. To hold to a belief that no one can have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ without being specially called, that few at this time are receiving such a call, and that we are required to become part of Israel to be saved, is guaranteed to attract charges of hatemongering. Especially in this twenty-first century, the *politically correct* position is to accept *all peoples, all ideas*, and even while pursuing your own chosen religious beliefs freely, be sure to allow that *other beliefs* are equally as "right" as are yours, and that yours is not "the only way" to salvation. In general, any manner of bizarre beliefs will be tolerated in our modern societies as long as we leave room for the practices of *every other group* as being "right also," no matter how perverted. In this day and age, about the most criminal label you can receive is that of being *intolerant* or *exclusive*. And the true teachings of the Bible about the singular path to human salvation—through Jesus Christ and His chosen people—is a recipe for controversy, ridicule, and loathing.

There is a reason Jesus Christ was hated and martyred. It was not that many of His individual doctrines were so intolerable, but that He taught them as the *exclusive* requirement for salvation:

Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. . . . When Jesus knew in himself that his disciples murmured at it, he said unto them, Doth this offend you? . . . And he said, Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father. From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him (John 6:53, 61, 65–66).

In the same way that Christ's *exclusive* message became the catalyst for His own persecution and eventual martyrdom, rest assured this same dynamic *has been* and *yet will be* a factor for any who will walk *legitimately* in His footsteps:

Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake (Matthew 24:9).

They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service. And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me (John 16:2–3).

So persecution is assured for those who embrace the real truth, wherever that may be found. But truth is still truth. How did Herbert Armstrong succinctly describe the makeup of spiritual Israel—the Church—in relationship to that physical nation of old?

YOU HAVE TO BECOME AN ISRAELITE TO BE SAVED! You have heard a lot of *false* and *anti-Scriptural* teaching leading you to suppose salvation is for Gentiles. IT IS NOT! All the PROMISES were given to ISRAEL. Why? Listen! Read carefully, and UNDERSTAND! All nations had gone into anti-God, false, pagan religions. In such a God-rejecting world, God raised up, from the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the days of Moses, a special nation to be HIS nation—to be a *light* to the non-believing Gentiles. Incidentally, the very name *Gentile* MEANS unbeliever. God gave this special called-out nation HIS right ways of life—and *to them* were given the PROMISES which include salvation. (Romans 9:4.) But, when a Gentile-born person repents, accepts Christ and receives God's Holy Spirit, then he becomes, spiritually, an Israelite, a child of Abraham, and an heir of the promises (Gal. 2:28–29) [sic; Galatians 4:28–29]. Salvation is of the Jews (John 4:24) [sic; John 4:22]. Salvation, however, is for EVERYONE that believes (in *living* faith, not dead faith)—to the Jew first, and, through Christ, also to the Gentile (Romans 1:16). YOU can have no salvation *unless* you become, spiritually, a JEW! (Romans 2:28–29.) Of course, through disobedience, all natural-born Israelites have been *cut off* from the Promises and God's Salvation—but they may receive it, like all others, *through Christ!* (Romans 11:17–18, 23–26.) ("Which Day Is the Christian Sabbath?," *The PLAIN TRUTH*, October 1962)

This leads us to the next important test to identify the true Church of God.

The True Church Is Not Arrogant or Racist!

The next key identifier to distinguish the true Church of God is that it does not take credit for its own special place in God's plan, and certainly does not view any other human being as inferior or beyond hope. As mentioned previously, among many who have attached themselves to the idea of being "the Israel of God," you will find many groups which twist this concept to justify persecution or disdain toward those they consider "inferior" (i.e: the Christian Identity movement). This too is a ploy used by Satan to besmirch the truth about God's master plan and to make it seem evil. With so many who have justified violence, wars, and even genocide while promoting the cause of "an elect few," it is no wonder there is such a backlash today against *any* who profess belief that *some people* were called out to be "special" to God. But what was Herbert Armstrong's teaching in this regard? Did he consider that a "chosen few" today were better than everyone else? Was his doctrine used to justify hatefulness and intolerance toward the rest of humanity? In the December 1952 issue of *The Good News*, we find this citation as an example of his consistent position on this critical point:

GOD CALLED Israel out of Egyptian slavery to perform the most important mission any nation has been given in all the history of mankind. Israel is not God's "favorite" people, or "pet" nation. They were not chosen for any goodness of their own (Deut. 7:6–9). God called them so He could reveal *Himself* as Creator and Ruler of the universe—so that through them He could reveal his *plan*, his laws, and his blessings to all nations (Deut. 4:5–9).

This describes accurately and succinctly what members of the Radio Church of God were taught consistently over many years. They were taught that ancient Israel's failings were a warning to spiritual Israel of today—the New Testament Church—and that we can just as easily become failures if we take our calling for granted or assume any "right" to salvation:

Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it (Hebrews 4:1–2).

Members of the Radio Church of God were taught not to become smug by virtue of being "called." That calling brought serious accountability for acquiring the loving and merciful nature of Jesus Christ, and rejecting the arrogance of those natural-born Jews whom Christ criticized strongly as hypocrites for using their physical pedigree (as children of Abraham) as excuse to manifest hatred and indifference toward others (John 8:39–41). Herbert Armstrong taught that *the called* were being judged *now*, based upon their works to either please or displease God, while the uncalled world was *not* being held accountable as yet. Therefore, the wise individual would take heed to focus upon overcoming his own carnal nature, learning to show mercy to those who yet had not been offered that priceless opportunity to know Jesus Christ. It was a doctrinal approach which was anything but racist.

What About the Ten Commandments?

So Herbert Armstrong understood the Bible truth concerning the need for a special calling from God, the fact that there are differential times offered for those callings in His dealing with mankind, and that Israel is the instrument through which that salvation plan is being sponsored. But what did he believe and teach concerning the law of God? Did he believe—like so many others—that Christ "did away" with the Ten Commandments? Here are some quotations which will confirm the original doctrine of the Radio Church of God concerning sin and law:

NEARLY everyone has been taught that the old covenant was the ten commandment law—that the new covenant contains only grace and promises, but no law. Hence, it is argued that since the old covenant has been abolished

God's law has also been abolished. This teaching would lead you to believe that the law of God was harsh, cruel, and enslaving—that the FAULT of the old covenant was with the law, and since *God* gave the law, the FAULT must have been His! . . . If the fault were with the law, then the law would *not* have been perfect; but David said, "The law of the Lord *is perfect*, converting the soul" (Psalm 19:7). . . . There is a great deal of needless misunderstanding about that which constituted the first covenant with Israel. In Exodus, the 19th chapter, God made arrangements to declare the conditions of His covenant to the people. Then in the 20th chapter God spoke every word of the ten commandments. The ten commandments are a perfect and complete law in themselves. When the Eternal God finished speaking them "HE ADDED NO MORE. AND HE WROTE THEM IN TWO TABLES OF STONE" (Deut. 5:22). The ten commandments were *a distinct part* of the terms of the old covenant to which Israel agreed. . . . When God spoke the old covenant to Israel at the time they were brought out of Egypt, He did not command them "concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices: But this thing commanded I them saying, Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people" (Jeremiah 7:22,23). The ceremonial and ritualistic laws were *added later because of transgressions and as a reminder of sin*—after the old covenant was sealed. . . . Remember that the spiritual and civil laws were not instituted by the old covenant. They were already in existence and had to be included in the covenant. (See Genesis 26:5 and Exodus 16:28 and 18:16). ("The NEW Covenant—Does it Abolish God's Law?," *The PLAIN TRUTH*, April 1956)

We see then that Herbert Armstrong understood and taught that the Ten Commandments had been instituted *for man's benefit* from Creation, and were not done away by being incorporated *much later* into a special *temporary covenant* with ancient Israel. A body of law can never be annulled by revocation of a *later covenant agreement* having its own *separate and distinct* origin and purpose. That covenant did not bring the law into existence, so neither can its annulment extinguish the law. What we find is that Herbert Armstrong taught exactly what Jesus Christ Himself—as well as the apostles, including Paul—taught concerning the spiritual law of God, that those rules of "right and wrong" for man's own good have *never been abolished*. Any group claiming so is proving thereby it is *not* a legitimate spokesman for the true Christ at all.

The Sabbaths as a Sign

The final point we identified to help distinguish—initially—the majority of false churches from those few *which might possibly* represent the true Church of God is their treatment of the commanded Sabbaths of the Bible. What did Herbert Armstrong teach about the fourth commandment specifically? Again, from the October 1962 issue of *The PLAIN TRUTH*:

Later, after both the Ten Commandments and the Old Covenant had been made *complete*, ratified, put in force and effect God made ANOTHER TOTALLY SEPARATE and eternally-binding covenant with HIS PEOPLE. . . . God, through "The Word" (John 1:1–3) who became Jesus Christ, *made* the Sabbath. He made it *for* man. But WHY? What PURPOSE does it serve? . . . That is why this special, separate SABBATH COVENANT is important. For it reveals THE REASON—the basic *purpose*. . . . In Exodus 20:8 we saw that He commanded to "keep it HOLY"—God *made* it HOLY TIME, and commanded us to *keep* it holy—NOT TO PROFANE WHAT IS HOLY TO GOD. Now study this special covenant a little further: ". . . for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations; that ye may know that I am the LORD that doth sanctify you." . . . NOTE THOSE WORDS CAREFULLY! It is the *sign* that IDENTIFIES to them *who is their God!* It is the sign *by which we may KNOW that He is the Lord!!* It IDENTIFIES GOD! . . . Jesus Christ says "The Sabbath was made for MAN"—for all mankind! Remember? It was made WHEN man was made—at the time of Adam! There were no Jews then! God Almighty does not have one standard for Jews and another for Gentiles. No Gentile can become a Christian *until* he becomes an ISRAELITE—read Ephesians 2:11–22. God says, through the apostle Paul to GENTILES: "There is neither Jew nor Greek . . . for ye are all ONE in Christ Jesus. And if ye (Gentiles) be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed (children), and heirs according to the promise." (Galatians 3:28–29.)

This is only a single condensed citation among hundreds which could have been quoted confirming one of the bedrock doctrines of the Radio Church of God from its inception. Belief in the seventh-day Sabbath as a key identifier of the true Church was one of Herbert Armstrong's most foundational teachings. Remember, it was his wife, Loma—whose rejection of Sunday worship and change to Sabbath-keeping—who originally spurred Herbert Armstrong into his first religious studies. So there is no question that his work was grounded upon respect for this distinctive sign of the true Church of God. Furthermore, his profession of the requirement to keep God's *annual Sabbaths*—the Holy Days listed in Leviticus 23—certainly set his work apart even from those few groups in the early twentieth century which were honoring the weekly Sabbath. More on that later.

The Only Identifiers?

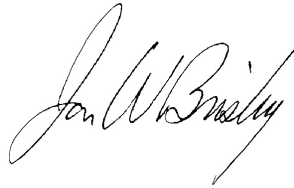
Thus far we have analyzed only one broad category of Biblical understanding—and Herbert Armstrong's doctrinal positions on those particular points—to help narrow our search for the true Church of God. That broad category has included five basic points concerning Israel as a firstfruits harvest in God's plan, the Ten Commandments and the Sabbath as a sign marking the true people of God, their orientation to that special calling, and their role within a *much greater plan* which God is orchestrating to bring salvation to the whole world. But are these the only distinguishing marks of the true Church? Not at all.

Historically, Mr. Armstrong listed *the name* of the church as another defining signature of God's true people. He stated that the Bible shows the name should always be the *Church of God*, and that any church not using that name was illegitimate. While it is certainly true that this criteria was useful in the early twentieth century in narrowing the field of religious works, today there are so many groups calling themselves "Church of God" in some form—especially among the many groups which have sprung from the Worldwide Church of God—that *the name itself* has ceased to provide the distinguishing mark that it once did. But are there other indicators which still make God's true church stand out from the others? Certainly.

In the next segment, we want to analyze other major doctrines which distinguished the Radio Church of God from all other churches of its time, and investigate the original sources of those teachings. We will do so by addressing some of the assertions by Herbert Armstrong's strongest detractors—especially those who were once part of the Worldwide Church of God but have since repudiated all that they once believed. Is it true that Herbert Armstrong copied all of his teachings from other men and religious organizations? Is it true, as is claimed, that he offered nothing truly unique, but simply *repackaged* the concepts of others into a fresh, attractive wrapping? Was the meat of his work really just a clever advertising charade? That analysis will offer additional insight into the history of one of the most interesting religious phenomenons of the twentieth century.

Until then, may God keep you all in His most loving and benevolent care.

Yours with heartfelt devotion in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jon W. Brisby". The signature is written in dark ink and is centered on the page.

Jon W. Brisby