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## Is God's Church Divided?

Many people believe there are true Christians scattered in various churches. What does the Bible say?

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Following the death of Herbert W. Armstrong in the 1980s, the new leadership of the Worldwide Church of God (wgc) fired my father for faithfully following in Mr. Armstrong's steps. After God established the Philadelphia Church of God through my father in 1989, a number of other churches broke away from the wgc in the early to mid-1990s.

Since that time, many of God's people have come to believe that there are true Christians in many different "branches" of God's Church. *We're all God's Church*, they reason. But that is *not* what they believed when they were in the wgc *before* Mr. Armstrong's death.

What does your Bible teach?

Does it say there are many different religious organizations with different leaders and different beliefs, yet all of them are right with God?

The Apostle Paul wrote, "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye *all speak the same thing*, and that there be *no divisions* among you; but that ye be *perfectly joined together* in the same mind and in the same judgment" (1 Corinthians 1:10).

About this passage, Mr. Armstrong wrote, "Some of them wanted to follow Peter, some wanted to follow Apollos, some Paul. But PAUL was their apostle, and Christ taught them by PAUL. The separated individual believer will follow *his own* idea of God's truth. THAT IS NOT GOD'S WAY. God in His almighty wisdom has raised up the CHURCH as HIS MEANS of teaching all the SAME TRUTH—all speaking the SAME THING! Not each individual *his own thing!*" (*The Incredible Human Potential*).

There is *one Church*. That Church must speak that same thing or it will become divided. That's what happened after Mr. Armstrong's death: The Church split apart and everyone started speaking different things. *God's Church is not divided!*

## Why Division

Many people who were part of God's one true Church and are now in various groups take comfort in the idea that God's Church is divided into "branches": different organizations, different leaders and yes, different doctrines. They believe that all the Catholic and Protestant Christians are divided and wrong, but the divided churches that still hold most or some or a few of the biblical doctrines Mr. Armstrong taught are right; they are divided yet united.

As Mr. Armstrong wrote in Chapter 6 of *Mystery of the Ages*, the Church of God is a spiritual organism. It is the body through which Jesus Christ is doing His work. He is its spiritual Head, and He actively leads it! Those who have the Holy Spirit are His people. That is what constitutes His Church; that is what constitutes true Christians. Through His Church, Christ feeds, guides and governs God's begotten children.

But by neglect or by choice, people can stop believing and obeying. They compromise; they think and act contrary to the Holy Spirit. They leave the spiritual body that is being actively led by Christ. They can and do ultimately lose the Holy Spirit and eternal life!

How does God nurture His begotten people so they grow enough spiritually to be born into His Family? Not through separate and opposing governments, but *one government* (Ephesians 4:11-13). Not through separate and opposing bodies of doctrine but pure, true doctrine.

Those true Christians who were taught the truth in the wcg splintered into dozens of different groups after Mr. Armstrong died. The reason *different* groups exist is that they have *different* beliefs—disagreements, divisions!

Where is Jesus Christ in this? He commanded that His people be the opposite, *unified* in the faith. The night before He was crucified, His thoughts were on His people, His Church, “[t]hat they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me” (John 17:21).

Did Christ become more like worldly Christianity, or did worldly Christianity seep into His Church? Is Jesus Christ the reason for the division among these churches, or it is us? Is the existence of divergent “branches” because of righteousness or because of sin? Is Christ the cause for difference, disagreement and division—or are *we*?

Jesus Christ is not distant. Nor is He actively working through hundreds of different presidents, boards, ministries and voters to do His work.

Christ still leads His Church! Christ still feeds His Church! Christ still governs His Church! Your duty and only hope is to *find Him*! You must grow more believing, more obedient, more close, more at one with Him.

Many in the scattered Church of God groups do still have God’s Holy Spirit. But unless they are part of the body where He is, they are growing increasingly separated and divided from Christ!

The books of Malachi, Hosea, James and Revelation *prophesy* that many in God’s Church would turn away from God and Jesus Christ.

The thousands who truly did receive God’s Holy Spirit as a result of Mr. Armstrong’s teaching were indeed begotten by the Father into His Family. But if they are no longer in the Church He is leading, then *they are losing what truth and what Holy Spirit they have!* But they still have a chance to repent and turn to Him.

*Read Chapter 6 of Mystery of the Ages. Read these scriptures: John 6:44; Hosea 4:6; 6:1; Revelation 3:14-22; Ephesians 4:11-16; 1 Corinthians 1:10; 12:18.*

Is the current state of the scattered Church of God groups what Jesus described, saying those the Father draws through apostles and prophets become a “body fitly joined,” “all speak[ing] the same thing”?

Perhaps many think that the days of a Church of God like that ended with Mr. Armstrong’s death. Not true! The one true Church of God that Jesus Christ directly leads is *alive*. The Church described in those scriptures is here today!

## A Tragic Example

One prominent leader to break away from the Worldwide Church of God in the early 1990s was the late Rod Meredith. When he left the wcg to start a new church in 1992, he wrote a booklet called *Church Government and Church Unity*. In it he rejected the way Mr. Armstrong had governed the wcg; he said the Church had seriously misunderstood church government. He wrote that God’s Church had *rarely* ever been governed by one administration, with one man in charge—and Mr. Armstrong knew it.

The fruits show this is totally false. Especially in the later years of his ministry, Mr. Armstrong understood and wrote <sup>clearly</sup> about this subject and its crucial importance. He wrote in April 1981 that God *always* works through one man at a time, under Jesus Christ: “He worked through Abraham. He worked through Moses, through Joshua, through one ‘judge’ at a time, through Samuel, through David, through Solomon. He worked through Peter and when Peter had left the Middle East, through Paul. These men had, in greater or lesser number, staff assistants under them, but *God’s work was through the one man at a time!*” (*Good News*; emphasis added throughout).

In his Dec. 17, 1983, sermon, Mr. Armstrong listed the government of God as one of the major restored doctrines of the Church. In a subsequent list of these truths that was published, “the government of God” was number one! Everyone in the wcg at the time knew Mr. Armstrong taught clearly and emphatically about the biblical doctrine of God’s government.

But after Mr. Armstrong was gone, Mr. Meredith tried to spin a confusing and deceitful web. He said Mr. Armstrong supposedly knew God *did not* work through one man. In his booklet, Mr. Meredith said he and fellow minister Herman Hoeh were largely responsible for the top-down government Mr. Armstrong adopted. “*Even after several years of guiding the college [which began in 1947], Mr. Armstrong still did not understand much about Church government,*” Meredith wrote.

“Consequently, in the early to mid-1950s, Herman Hoeh and I each were inspired to write articles along this line.”

According to this story, *Mr. Meredith and Mr. Hoeh were the ones responsible for helping Mr. Armstrong set up the government structure*. Mr. Meredith noted that “all of us *leading ministers*” understood that for the WCG to do God’s work, it needed to be unified. He wrote that as long as there was a dedicated man like Mr. Armstrong at the top, a hierarchical government would best preserve unity. Meredith’s description was that the leading ministers devised this pyramid structure and wrote about it in articles; then, “Mr. Armstrong accepted these articles and *immediately* published them in the *Good News*.”

Meredith said that, over time, this form of government led to all sorts of hardships and abuses. According to his booklet, everything started going haywire when WCG ministers began to compare Mr. Armstrong *to Moses*.

“Frankly there was never—in the New Testament Church—any example of a *Moses figure*,” Meredith wrote. “God guided many apostles and elders to work in a brotherly, nonthreatening, collegial atmosphere, and no single one of the apostles towered over the others.”

According to Meredith, this collegial “New Testament” approach is what the Church failed to grasp during the days of Mr. Armstrong. “I’ve learned the right approach in *servant* leadership,” Meredith said at a ministerial conference in July 1993. Later he added, “Let’s try to do it right *this time*, as shepherds with a *loving* approach.”

## The ‘Loving Approach’

The inescapable implication is that Church government under Mr. Armstrong was not loving, not shepherding, not servant leadership, not brotherly, but dominated by one man towering over the others in a threatening atmosphere.

It is well worth noting that this is the same deplorable tactic Mr. Armstrong’s immediate successor, Joseph Tkach, and especially his son, Joe Jr., used to destroy Mr. Armstrong’s legacy. *We’ve made so many mistakes in our past, they repeatedly said. And unfortunately, Mr. Armstrong didn’t live long enough to correct these many errors. But now God has led us to make the necessary changes!*

Mr. Meredith implied, *If only Mr. Armstrong would have lived long enough to learn the right approach to servant leadership! If only he would have been able to administer government the right way, with a loving approach.* That message was clear in Mr. Meredith’s *Church Government and Church Unity* booklet. From beginning to end, that booklet blatantly attacked the form of government Mr. Armstrong administered—which was God’s government! It revealed so much about the problem Mr. Meredith had with that government.

Men like Mr. Meredith had been called into God’s Church decades after God had used Mr. Armstrong to build it. They had been taught, trained, baptized and ordained by Herbert W. Armstrong. But then they *thought they knew more than he did*—and on the subject of Church government, of all things!

The notion that the New Testament had no Moses-like figure in the Church is provably wrong. “Peter was the *first* and chief apostle,” Mr. Armstrong wrote in *Mystery of the Ages*. The surname that *Jesus Christ Himself* gave him was a *title* designating a religious leader!

Mr. Meredith rejected this truth, then added that it was incorrect to even think that Jesus Christ *directly* guides His Church! Instead, Meredith wrote, Christ uses many “different branches”—all coexisting—to do His work.

That might sound reasonable. But is it biblical?

In his landmark June 24, 1985, *Worldwide News* article, “Recent History of the Philadelphia Era of the Worldwide Church of God,” Mr. Armstrong actually wrote that the “different branches” idea was one of the “fruits” *of a 1970s-era rebellion in the Church*. He wrote: “Little groups, splintering off, centered in Washington, D.C.; Eugene, Oregon; Tyler, Texas; Monterey, California; and other places with groups too small to mention. They are not bearing fruit for the Kingdom. They are not pleasing God or being blessed by Him. Jesus said, ‘By their fruits you shall know them.’ *They usually claim to be ‘branches’ of the Church of God.* But Jesus said, ‘I will build my church’ (Matthew 16:18). He did not say denominations, sects, cults, branches or a church divided against itself. Rather He said a house divided against itself cannot stand. There is one true Church and one only. The Apostle Paul pictured humanly *self-appointed ‘branches’* when he said to the elders of the local church at Ephesus that some of their own selves would depart to draw a following after themselves.”

Mr. Armstrong then referred to 1 Corinthians 12:25, saying there should be no divisions in the body—“no branches or branch organizations.” Paraphrasing Ephesians 4, he added, “[T]he Church is organized and fitly framed *together*, not organized with competing and differing branches.”

## History Repeating Itself

Now, please *consider this carefully*. The reason this history is so important is that there are many *thousands* of people who once devoted their lives to upholding the teachings of Herbert Armstrong who now are laboring under the notion that *there are many different branches of God's Church doing God's work today*.

That thinking is a deadly delusion. As Mr. Armstrong wrote in the article quoted above, it started during the liberal rebellion against God's government in the 1970s. And six months before he died, he felt compelled to remind the brethren about this history.

"I want you, brethren, to think about and understand what happened to God's Church in the 1970s *lest history repeat itself!*" I want you to see the 'fruits' of rebelling against God's way and God's government," Mr. Armstrong wrote.

Seven years after Mr. Armstrong delivered that sobering warning, Rod Meredith left the Worldwide Church of God to, as he claimed, *faithfully* preach "the truths proclaimed by Herbert W. Armstrong." And yet, in his very first booklet—the battle cry for his church and the establishment of its government—Mr. Meredith said Jesus Christ almost always uses many different coexisting branches to do His work. And *Mr. Armstrong*, he added, believed this too!

None of it was true. But many people believed it. And today, many still do.

Mr. Meredith's collegial government kicked him out of his own church in 1998. He then established a new church, this time resorting to a form of government in which he retained more power, prior to his death in 2017. It was a more hierarchical style, yes, with one man holding more power at the top. But when you are trying to find God's true Church, the question isn't just whether one man is leading it, but—far more importantly: *Is Jesus Christ leading that man?*

It falls to you to prove for yourself the one true Church (not branch) that Jesus Christ is *directly leading*. That means Jesus Christ is directly *governing* it. The fruits of Mr. Armstrong's ministry and the biblical doctrines God used him to restore prove that it was not just the work of a man. Today, many churches that splintered from the Worldwide Church of God—or splintered from those splinters—claim to continue parts of that legacy. But there is only one that has the doctrines of the Bible, the government of the Bible and the leadership of the Bible—not just the leadership of one man, but of *Jesus Christ*.

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