

CHURCH OF GOD (INTERNATIONAL)

This group which is based in Tyler, Texas, USA has in recent years been seeking to extend its influence in the UK and Europe through the efforts of a Mr James McBride who is based in Lincoln, England. This group was founded by Garner Ted Armstrong, son of Herbert W. Armstrong who founded The Worldwide Church of God which produces the glossy magazine 'The Plain Truth' and puts out a satellite TV broadcast each Sunday called 'The World Tomorrow'.

In fact, my first introduction to Garner Ted Armstrong was during my teenage years when I used to listen to the pop music station - Radio Luxembourg and Garner Ted used to present a 15-minute programme on behalf of his father's church and the programme was called 'The World Tomorrow'.

Garner Ted was disciplined by his father's church because of problems in the area of morality and then later reinstated but eventually he was disfellowshipped by a personal letter from his father dated 26th June 1978. As a result, Garner Ted set up his rival group the Church of God (International) with the help of a former official in his father's church Ronald Dart who is now associate editor of 'Twentieth Century Watch' the magazine produced by the new group.

The "Statement of Beliefs" of the Church of God International lists 26 different sections many of which appear to have been lifted directly from the beliefs of The Worldwide Church of God and which have been analysed over the years by Christian cult ministries and shown to be in conflict with the Word of God. Briefly I would draw attention to just a few errors of the Church of God International as they are set out in their "Statement of

Beliefs”. This is not meant to be a full-scale analysis of all the errors of this particular group.

BELIEF NO.1 - GOD

“God is one, composed of spirit and comprising a family presently consisting of God the Father and Jesus Christ the Son. God. . . wants to share His magnificent existence by reproducing Himself through man.”

This teaching that we can become God was a central plank in the teaching of Herbert W. Armstrong and is simply a restating of Satan's lie in the garden of Eden shall be as gods" (Genesis 3:5).

BELIEF NO. 4 - THE HOLY SPIRIT

“The Holy Spirit is the essence, power, mind and spiritual extension of God ... It strengthens a Christian spiritually”

Here we can see the personality of God the Holy Spirit being denied as He is referred to as “it”.

BELIEF NO. 5 - MANKIND

“Humans are physical beings with no inherent immortality”

This teaching is similar to what Jehovah's Witnesses and Seventh Day Adventists believe namely that when a person dies physically there is no ongoing conscious existence until resurrection.

BELIEF NO. 7 - SALVATION

“This process includes one's calling, repentance, baptism, justification, receiving of the Holy Spirit, life of faith and obedience, and final birth into God's Kingdom as a spirit being”

The parts underlined show a 'gospel' of salvation by works. In an earlier part of this section the process outlined above is described as "the means by which God through Christ saves man from the penalty of sin and gives him eternal life. " In effect they are saying that the death of the Lord did not save anyone, but we can save ourselves by going through the process outlined. This is a false 'gospel' similar to that condemned in Paul's letter to the Galatians. Also, we are not destined to become a “spirit being” for Paul tells us that the Lord “shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body” (Phil 3:21) and in (Luke 24:39) the Lord speaks concerning His glorious body “Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me and see for a spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see me have.”

BELIEF NO. 10 - BAPTISM

“The ceremony of water baptism is performed by immersion for the forgiveness of sins... After this ceremony and as a result one receives the baptism of the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands”

Here we see the false teaching that forgiveness of sins is appropriated through the ritual of water baptism. This is also one of the central errors of the Church of Christ 'denomination. The baptiser with the Holy Spirit is the Lord Jesus (see Matthew 3:11, Mark 1:8, Luke 3:16, John 1:33) and does not occur through the laying on of hands.

BELIEF NO. 13 - GOSPEL

“The gospel is the message preached by Christ and His church about God's coming Kingdom, the restoration of His government on earth and how mankind can enter that Kingdom and government.”

This message is identical to the “gospel” message proclaimed by Jehovah's Witnesses. This “gospel” is false. The true “gospel” is set out in 1 Cor 15 v 1-4 “I declare unto you the gospel... that Christ died for our sins...and...was buried and that he rose again.” THAT “gospel of Christ... is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth.” (Romans 1:16)

BELIEF NO. 14 - RESURRECTIONS

“The Bible refers to (1)...(2)...(3) the resurrection back to physical life of all who have ever died without having understood God's way, for their first opportunity for salvation”

BELIEF NO. 15 - JUDGMENT

“The time of one's judgment is the time of his opportunity for salvation”

These two beliefs extend a false hope that after physical death some people will have an opportunity to be saved. Many passages of scripture would show this to be a false teaching - see Matthew 25 especially 31-46.

BELIEF NO. 19 - SABBATH

“The seventh-day Sabbath is to be taught and kept holy in accordance with the biblical instruction. . the observance of the Sabbath is basic to a Christian 's relationship with God”

The debate over Saturday or Sunday has raged for many years and there are many works written on this issue and so I don't propose to enter into that aspect now. Rather I would quote what Paul wrote in Colossians 2:16

“Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holy day, or of the new moon or of the Sabbath.” The expression “the observance of the Sabbath (ie.Saturday) is basic to a Christian's relationship with God” has a strong legalistic ring to it and would appear to be introducing a further Galatian-type error into an already flawed gospel proclamation.

The influence of this group is spreading in Europe with meetings being held in London, Liverpool, Newcastle, Lincoln (All England) Belfast, Ballymena (Northern Ireland) Kilmarnock (Scotland) and Oslo (Norway). This group clearly falls into the category of a cult.

Cecil Andrews – ‘Take Heed’ Ministries - June 1993