

## Ronald Weinland's 'Church of God': Repackaging elements of Herbert W Armstrong

From a 'Christian truth' perspective it would have been helpful if the false teachings of **Herbert W Armstrong** who founded '**The Worldwide Church of God**' had been completely buried along with him when he died in January 1986. The grouping that then came under the leadership of Armstrong's successor, Joseph W. Tkach Snr, established a Doctrinal Discussion Group in 1989 and slowly but surely as a result of the findings of this group some of the distinctive and false teachings propagated by Armstrong were disavowed and rejected. Joseph Tkach Jnr who succeeded as leader when his father died in September 1995 carried on this 'reformation'.

However, as these changes were implemented there was 'a price to pay' – according to the church's website they currently have 42,000 members worldwide whereas back in 1993 they, according to the brief history on their website, had a weekly attendance of 133,000 people. So, where have all the 'dissidents' gone? It would appear that a whole plethora of 'Churches of God' splinter groupings sprang up such as Church of God International, Church of God of Southern California, Intercontinental Church of God, Philadelphia Church of God, United Church of God [see a previous 'Take Heed' article on this grouping located on <http://www.takeheed.info/united-church-of-god/>] and the Living Church of God.

I will later be making favourable reference in this article to some factual observations made about Ronald Weinland's teachings/pronouncements by a member of the **Living Church of God** – however by using these quotes I am certainly not endorsing the doctrinal position of the **Living Church of God**, a grouping that for instance rejects the Biblical Trinity [Their 'Godhead' is limited to The Father and The Son and according to their website '*The Holy Spirit is the very essence, the mind, life and power of God. It is not a Being*'] and teaches that baptism is necessary for salvation [According to their website '*After God calls us and brings us to repentance, and we accept Christ as our personal Lord and Savior, the next vital step to salvation is water baptism... When we repent, accept Jesus and are baptized, God forgives us our sins*']. These and other false teachings clearly place the **Living Church of God** in the cult-category.

Just at this point I should also state that all of these 'Church of God' groups that have their 'genesis' in the false teachings of Herbert W Armstrong have NO connection with the local [Northern Ireland based] Church of God denomination. Unfortunately, despite having no connection to 'Armstrongism', the local Church of God grouping does share doctrinal errors with what would be known as 'Oneness Pentecostalism' and so they likewise would fall into the cult-category. Should anyone require more information about this local grouping a booklet called '**Evangelical or Heretical? An examination of the Churches of God in Ulster**' can be obtained from me – price, including postage - £2.50.

Returning now to the title of this article, in early July 2008 I was contacted by a concerned Christian lady who had been given a copy of a book called '**The Prophesied End-Time and 2008 – God's Final Witness**'. This extra copy of the book had been passed to her by a young Christian couple who had started to read it but who had (rightly) become uneasy about some of the content. I informed the inquirer that I was not familiar with either the book or its author **Ronald Weinland** but I promised to do some 'research' and get back to her. In a short time I phoned her back and recommended that both she and the young couple either bin or burn their copies of the

book. My reasons for such a recommendation are based on the following information that I uncovered during my 'research'.

**Mr Weinland's** website introduces visitors to **'The Church of God - PKG'**- the **'PKG'** stands for **'Preparing for the Kingdom of God'**.

**On the homepage we read the following –**

**'Ronald Weinland, who is the pastor of God's Church on earth, has also been appointed by the God of Abraham to be His end-time prophet and one of the two end-time witnesses (and spokesman of both), preceding the return of Jesus Christ'.**

**In another section 'About Ronald Weinland' we read the following –**

**'Although the Church of God has not been accustomed to having a prophet for nearly 1900 years, God made him a prophet in 1997. His first book, *The Prophesied End-Time* (published in mid-2004), is the product of what God has given him concerning prophetic end-time events that have already begun to be fulfilled, events that are occurring exactly as he has written in the book. His latest book, *2008—God's Final Witness*, pinpoints the timing of these end-time events and adds additional information beyond what the first book covered'.**

**In the 'faq' section of the website we read –**

**'The best way for you to equip yourself is to read and reread both books that Ronald Weinland has written. In doing so you will reinforce the truth of your conviction and build upon what you missed in any earlier reading. In addition, all should download and read the two booklets *Time Is Running Out and Time Has Run Out*, which were originally written to help those who were scattered from the apostasy of the Worldwide Church of God. While Herbert W. Armstrong was alive (he died in January of 1986), he remained a faithful apostle to God's Church, which was known as the organization of the Worldwide Church of God. In 1994, that organization fully abandoned the truths of God and returned to teachings that originated in the Catholic Church'.**

From these brief extracts we can see that Mr Weinland claims to be a 'prophet' of God, indeed one of two end-time witnesses mentioned in Revelation 11:3 – Mr Weinland in April 2008 also declared that his wife Laura is apparently the second of these 2 witnesses – His words are quoted as being **'now is the time to publicly reveal the name of the second end-time witness. It is my wife Laura. We are a family through whom God will be working to bring an end to this age'**.

The other important point to note from these extracts is Mr Weinland's assessment of the late Herbert W Armstrong – he views him as having been **'a faithful apostle to God's Church'** and later on the **'faq'** section of his website where it deals with **'baptism'** we read the following **'Everyone seeking baptism should read the article of Herbert W. Armstrong, God's last apostle in the Church. The Church of God is a spiritual body that is made up of those who are baptized and have had the laying on of hands, which is the time of receiving the impregnation of God's spirit into one's life. This is the time one is begotten of God's spirit. Mr. Herbert Armstrong gave an excellent analogy to help people understand this process. He explained that once we are begotten of God's spirit, we are like an embryo in the Family of God, and we will be born into that Family once we are resurrected, changed from**

**mortal to immortal—finally born again with spirit life... the result of baptism and laying on of hands to receive the impregnation of God's spirit will place a person in the Body of Christ—the Church of God’.**

**I want to deal now with these 2 aspects namely**

1. Mr Weinland’s claim to be both a ‘prophet’ and an ‘end-time witness’
2. Mr Weinland’s endorsement of Herbert W Armstrong’s teachings on ‘Baptism.

The reality is that the office of ‘**prophet**’ is neither needed nor occupied by anyone on earth today. The Apostle Paul wrote ‘**Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit’.** [Ephesians 2:19-22]

Here we see the church compared to a building. Jesus Christ Himself is the chief cornerstone. The apostles and the prophets make up the rest of the foundation. This analogy helps us to see the foundational role of the apostles and prophets. When building a building, the first thing that is laid is the foundation. Everything else is then built upon that one foundation. Do we then go back after building a couple of stories and lay the foundation again? No. It is only done once. The foundation is laid once in the beginning and then never again.

As regards Mr Weinland’s claims that he and his wife are the ‘two end-time witnesses’ mentioned in Revelation 11:3 we shall shortly read that, if he were, then he would be a most unreliable ‘witness’ [and also be a false ‘prophet’] for God but before coming to that can we possibly come to some understanding of this reference in Revelation 11:3 to “**my two witnesses**”?

The understanding of this portion of scripture embracing Revelation 11:1-14 will be very much related to and coloured by a believer’s understanding of ‘end-times’. With that in mind I personally found instruction from an article that is located on [http://lazarusunbound.com/bunk\\_twowitnesses.shtml](http://lazarusunbound.com/bunk_twowitnesses.shtml) and written by Michael Bunker. Herewith are just a few helpful extracts from it -

‘Our investigation into the identity of the Two Witnesses of Revelation will start in the Old Testament, where God had two particular faithful spiritual witnesses. We read about them in Zechariah the 4<sup>th</sup> Chapter. In this chapter of the prophet Zechariah, we find a Candlestick made all of gold, and on each side of this Candlestick is an Olive Tree (Zech 4:2-3). The angel explains the mystery about these two witnesses starting with a clear and plain statement: “*Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts.*” (Zech 4:6)... Revelation the 11<sup>th</sup> Chapter specifically refers back to this message in Zechariah...The question is asked in Zechariah the 4<sup>th</sup> chapter, “*What be these two olive branches which through the two golden pipes empty the golden oil out of themselves?*” (Zech. 4:12b) Remember that the overall theme or topic under consideration is the power and might of the Holy Spirit. In prophetic language, the “oil” is a type or shadow of the Holy Spirit, and in this section of Zechariah, we are watching the

“distribution” of the Holy Spirit from the branches of the Olive Trees into the golden Candlestick. Our minds must be stayed on the Lord in this regard, as the scripture reminds us that it is not might, nor will, nor power outside of the Lord’s precious Spirit that accomplishes these tasks. The two Olive Trees empty the oil “out of themselves”, by giving the Spirit liberally unto the Candlestick which itself shows forth light. The Candlestick, in and of itself, can do nothing. It is a vessel of honor, crafted by a craftsman to provide light to the world. The Candlestick is not that light, but is a vessel used to show forth that light...The mystery of the identity of the Candlesticks is shown to us in the book of the Revelation: “...the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches” (Rev. 1:20b). So a “Candlestick” in prophetic literature is a CHURCH. The two anointed servants, the Olive Trees in the book of Zechariah, are pouring out the SPIRIT of GOD unto the CHURCH. In the Bible, both Jesus Christ AND the Comforter are shown to be pouring out the fullness of God’s anointing oil into the remnant church...So we find that God continuously uses “representative” language, to show beyond a doubt from scripture what it is He is referring to...The two witnesses we seek are BOTH the two Olive Trees, AND the two Candlesticks. They are simultaneously representative of a full and complete WITNESS CHURCH...The true Church testifies in sackcloth meaning that they are sorrowful and repentant. They are not rich in a worldly sense. They do not dress in finery. They see the wickedness that is Antichrist, and they hate it. They are in mourning for righteousness, and they are at warfare with all that rises up against Christ...God’s Holy Remnant Church, who today are His true Witnesses, and His Candlesticks, they preach the message of the Two Olive Trees, that is, the Doctrines of Grace and God’s Sovereignty...There is also a remnant which will come to Him through the testimony of His two witnesses, those who see the pains and death and tribulations of those who stand boldly for Jesus Christ and come to Him through their witness. God’s true Church is never done evangelising, and God will continue to call His remnant to Himself...There are two beautiful and perfect witnesses for Jesus Christ. They are His body and they are His bride. They are his anointed preachers and His faithful servants...They sound the testimony before a wicked and perverse generation’

A second source of instruction for me personally on this question of “**my two witnesses**” was in the book ‘**More Than Conquerors**’ written by the well-known and well respected Bible commentator, **William Hendriksen**. He shares his thoughts on ‘**The Two Witnesses**’ on pages 129 –132 and herewith are some helpful extracts –

‘The true Church is now represented under the symbolism of two witnesses. These witnesses symbolise the Church militant bearing testimony through its ministers and missionaries throughout the present dispensation...the Church as an organisation, functioning through its ministers and

missionaries will carry on this work...almost until the judgment day...the period of affliction; the present gospel age...Every day they bear witness throughout the entire dispensation. They preach repentance and for this reason they are clothed in sackcloth...This gospel age is however going to come to an end (*cf* Matthew 24:14). The Church, as a mighty missionary organisation shall finish its testimony...when we read that the corpse of the Church is lying on the broad avenues of the great city [*Footnote: The term 'great city' always refers to Babylon and never to the New and Holy Jerusalem*] this simply means that in the midst of the world the Church is dead, it no longer exists as an influential and powerful missionary institution [Cecil: What the world perceives today as 'the Church' is of course dominated by Rome and characterised more and more by immoral/apostate groups like Anglicanism etc]...The world has a grand picnic: it celebrates...Foolish world! Its joy is premature...The corpse suddenly begins to stir...In connection with Christ's second coming the Church is restored to life, to honour, to power, to influence. For the world the hour of opportunity is gone and gone forever. On the Day of Judgment when the world shall see the Church restored to honour and glory, the world will become frozen with fear. The Church - still under the symbolism of the two witnesses - now hears a voice, "Come up hither". Thereupon the Church ascends to heaven in a cloud of glory "And their enemies beheld them".

Now I readily concede that good brothers and sisters in the Lord will have a 'different take' on the identity of **"my two witnesses"** but I personally 'have time' for the views expressed by both Michael Bunker and William Hendriksen on this topic. One thing I would hope is that irrespective of our differing views on 'end times' we would be united in rejecting the claims of Ronald Weinland that he and his wife are **"my two witnesses"**.

Earlier I wrote concerning Mr Weinland and these claims – ***'if he were, then he would be a most unreliable 'witness' [and also be a false 'prophet'] for God'***. This now brings me to the **'favourable reference... to some factual observations made about Ronald Weinland's teachings/pronouncements by a member of the Living Church of God'** that I made mention of in the early part of this article. Thanks to the research of this person we are informed of how Ronald Weinland in a radio interview with James Whale told listeners that catastrophic events including a nuclear detonation in the United States would start occurring on and after 17<sup>th</sup> April 2008. Nothing like that happened of course and so on 26<sup>th</sup> April Mr Weinland preached to the effect that God had 'made a few things clear or clearer'.

Rather than quote copiously from this research perhaps I could direct you to this link <http://www.cogwriter.com/cgpfk.htm> where **[with great caution – please remember the author of the article on the link, whilst he is accurately as far as I am aware reporting events surrounding the false prophecies etc of Mr Weinland, he is however doctrinally astray on other issues and he gives links in his article to supposedly the correct interpretation of certain matters – but he is wrong and I would not advise you to follow his links]** you can read of just how 'false a prophet' Mr Weinland truly is. To hopefully assist you in this I would recommend scrolling down the article and reading the first portion of the interview listed under **'James Whale Interview April 10th, 2008'** and then scrolling back up and reading **'Ronald Weinland's April 26,**

**2008 Sermon Claims No Destruction by June 8th, 2008'**. I believe the contents of these two portions appear to be sufficient proof that Mr Weinland truly is a 'false prophet'.

Another helpful exposure of Mr Weinland as a 'false prophet' can also be found on <http://shadowsofwcg.blogspot.com/search?updated-max=2008-04-29T12%3A51%3A00-04%3A00&max-results=7>

Once more I would urge '**doctrinal caution**' when reading the particular post listed on this link-page under the heading of '**Open Letter to Ronald Weinland and the COG-PKG: Do that Right Thing**'

Moving on I want now to consider Mr Weinland's endorsement of Herbert W Armstrong's views/teachings on Baptism. On the '**faq**' section of his website Mr Weinland wrote the following – '**If you follow the steps outlined below, you will have all that is needed, at this time, to properly equip yourself for the coming of Jesus Christ**'. So, according to Mr Weinland being ready for '**the coming of Jesus Christ**' is a step-by-step programme. Let's look at some of these 'steps'.

Mr Weinland writes – '**The most important thing you must do is to repent of your false beliefs and practices, your wrong ways of living, and to fully turn to God in obedience to His ways of life. The first step is to keep the Sabbath day holy... read about proper Sabbath Observance. This will direct you to what you need to do if you are going to obey God's Sabbath day, observed from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset... Finally, all must come to understand that there is only one true baptism in life whereby one can be forgiven of all sins. There is one true baptism into God's one true Church...Those who want to be baptized and desire to be begotten of God's spirit must read and follow the instruction given in the Baptism 'faq' section of the website...Everyone seeking baptism should read the article of Herbert W. Armstrong, God's last apostle in the Church...**'

I looked at the article by Herbert W Armstrong and 'gleaned' the following extracts from it –

The popular denominations have taught, "Just BELIEVE -- that's all there is to it; believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you are that instant saved!" That teaching is false! And because of deception -- because the TRUE GOSPEL of Jesus Christ has been all but blotted out...Man is mortal. Man has no immortality inherent within himself. Christ Jesus, only, of all men who have lived, has immortality...Only GOD has eternal life inherent in Himself -- only GOD has eternal life to give...through Christ, God gives it to us...The BLOOD of Christ does not finally save any man...wipes the slate clean of past sins -- it saves us merely from the DEATH PENALTY...But we are SAVED -- that is, given immortal life -- by Christ's LIFE, not by His death...To be saved, we must be born of God, who is a Spirit....To be born of God, we must, first, now in this life, receive the impregnating LIFE -- the Holy Spirit -- from God...So, being, as we say, converted -- receiving the Holy Spirit of God -- is merely the beginning!.. "What shall we do?" they cried out to Peter and the disciples. "HOW SHALL WE BE SAVED?" The answer came straight and direct! "REPENT"! shouted the inspired Peter in great power, "AND BE BAPTIZED, EVERY ONE OF YOU IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST FOR THE REMISSION OF SINS, AND YE SHALL RECEIVE THE GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT"! (Acts 2:38.)

There are many statements in this piece that could be biblically challenged but I will confine my comments to the clear inference by Mr Armstrong that **WATER BAPTISM IS A REQUIRED 'STEP' ON THE WAY TO SALVATION!**

Another little booklet issued by the Worldwide Church of God during Mr Armstrong's time as 'God's Apostle' is called 'Why You Should Be Baptized' and in it we read –

**'baptism is a vital part of the process of salvation (p5)...Through receiving the Holy Spirit after baptism and the laying on of hands, we are put into, become part of the Church of God (p7)...Baptism is the beginning of the Christian life (p9)...If you believe and are baptised you will receive the Holy Spirit and become a member of the body of Christ'.**

Mr Armstrong is teaching and obviously Mr Weinalnd agrees that people who 'believe' but are still 'unregenerate' ["in the flesh" as the bible describes it – see **John 3:6**] can by being baptised do something that will **"please God"** and that God as a result will regenerate that unregenerate person and make them a member of the body of Christ, the Church of God. The Bible teaches quite a different reality in **Romans 8: 5-8** **"For they that are after the flesh [unregenerate] do mind the things of the flesh...For to be carnally minded [unregenerate] is death...Because the carnal mind [unregenerate] is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then, they that are in the flesh [unregenerate] CANNOT please God"**.

The Lord Jesus Christ identified baptism as being a work of **"righteousness"** as we read in **Matthew 3:15**. Can unregenerate people contribute to what was referred to in 'Why You Should Be Baptized' as a 'process of salvation' – not according to **Titus 3:5** where we read **"Not by works of righteousness which we have done but according to his mercy he saved us"**.

In the quote from Mr Armstrong's article we read of how he debunked **'belief'** as being the sole conduit through which we receive God's gracious salvation. Yet the Lord Jesus Christ Himself said to the repentant thief who obviously had belief in Christ's ability to save him from God's judgement **"Today shalt thou be with me in paradise"** – no need or indeed no opportunity for him to be baptised and yet his salvation was assured.

This incident resonates very well with what the Lord had earlier said in **John 5:24** **"Verily, verily, I say unto you. He that heareth my word and BELIEVETH on him that sent me HATH everlasting life and shall not come into condemnation but IS PASSED from death unto life"**.

The Philippian jailer, having asked the question **"What must I do to be saved?"** was told by Paul **"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved"** [**Acts 16:30-31**] and that wasn't a 'one-off' arrangement for the jailer, it also applied to any in his household who would likewise believe.

The Bible makes it very clear that baptism is for those who have already believed, and so have passed from death unto life [i.e. are 'saved'] – it is not part of a process that leads to 'salvation'.

A number of Bible verses are often quoted to make a case for baptism being necessary for salvation and rather than me now writing about these perhaps I could direct readers to the article on this link <http://www.carm.org/questions/baptneec.htm> I should make clear that I do not necessarily agree with every point advanced in this article but overall I do think it is helpful in the context of what we are examining.

Currently my friend Rob Zins of 'A Christian Witness to Roman Catholicism' is compiling a booklet that will respond to various arguments advanced by apologists for the Roman Catholic faith and one of the issues he examines relates to Rome's teachings on baptism. Herewith are a few extracts of what Rob has written that should prove helpful in this context –

**'Baptism is not necessary for salvation. Baptism is the response brought about by conversion to Jesus Christ. It is the effect of salvation but not the cause of salvation... Baptism has its place as a beautiful picture of identifying with the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ but is never given the purpose of bringing about salvation in the Bible... We find that water baptism occurs after the event of faith in each and every recorded salvation experience in the Bible. The question is this. "Is Baptism necessary for salvation?" We argue that it is not. Baptism does not bring about salvation. Nor is it one of several conditions without which there can be no salvation. Nor is it the final step to effect salvation. Salvation is by grace through faith alone... compelling is the testimony of Acts 10 wherein the Holy Spirit falls upon all those who heard the message of Peter. What was Peter's message? "All the prophets testify about Him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through His name" (Acts 10: 43, NASB). While Peter is still speaking, the Holy Spirit falls upon those listening and they begin giving evidence by speaking in tongues. Upon seeing this, Peter asks, "Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water?" "They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have" (Acts 10:47 NASB)... We find Lydia's heart opened by the Lord and then baptized in Acts 16. We find the Ethiopian eunuch baptized after having heard the good news explained to him by Philip. We find the apostle Paul baptized after coming to faith in the Lord. In no case does Baptism bring about salvation and in no case is baptism necessary for salvation.... Baptism is not necessary for anyone's salvation. It is the response of those who have already been saved. It is not a condition of eternal life. A refusal to be baptized exposes an unbelieving heart but baptism adds nothing to the true heart of faith. The apostle Paul refused to confuse the preaching of the gospel with baptism while at Corinth. "For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power" (I Corinthians 1:17, RSV)'**

Clearly Ronald Weinland is just one more name on the ever-growing list of 'false apostles' that the Lord Jesus Christ gave advance warning of in **Matthew 24:11**.

**Cecil Andrews – 'Take Heed' Ministries – 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2008**