

Was the Gospel to *Cease* at the Death of Herbert Armstrong?

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Throughout the entire ministry of Herbert W. Armstrong, his burning passion was “to DO the Work”—to carry forth the Gospel message to the world. Yet, there are groups today who contend that it was God’s will that, at the death of Mr. Armstrong, the Gospel message should *cease* going forth to the world—that God *changed* “the work” of the Church at Mr. Armstrong’s death. Does that contention have validity? Should the Church no longer be concerned with striving to reach out to the world with the Gospel message?

One individual who has that belief, stated the following: “God gave *a work* to many people in the past—Abraham and David and Ezekiel and John the Baptist, as well as to Noah and Moses. It was all God’s *work*, but each person had a different **type** of work to do.”

So, the implication is that since none of the above individuals had the responsibility of carrying forth the Gospel, then it supposedly follows that *we* in this present Church era don’t necessarily have that God-appointed responsibility either.

However, notice that (except for John the Baptist) *every* person mentioned above lived in Old Testament times. Is the focus of the Old Testament different from that of the New Testament? Yes! Prior to New Testament times, only a handful of individuals (the prophets and patriarchs) had *access* to the Holy Spirit. For the past 2,000 years, however, God’s Spirit has been available to many, many *more* individuals than during the previous 4,000 years.

Consequently, when we look at the *New* Testament, it is largely a record of (1) Christ *training* His disciples to carry forth the Gospel message to the world, and (2) their accomplishment of that mission.

After Christ’s death, the disciples’ MAIN FOCUS was to preach the Gospel to the world!

As for John the Baptist, he was somewhat of a “bridge” between the Old and New Testaments. John was sent to preach *immediately* prior to Christ’s ministry—and to prepare the way for Christ (Mark 1:1-8). By virtue of the fact that Christ’s ministry began so *soon* after John’s ministry began, it is plainly evident that God did not *intend* for John to spread his message to the world. Rather, he was merely to prepare the way for Christ.

Scriptural Guidance

Let’s now consider some of the scriptures which show that the carrying forth of the Gospel to the world is to be a *major focus* of the Church—not only in Apostolic times, but for ALL eras of the Church.

In Mark chapter 16, we find Christ’s FINAL instructions to His disciples: “And He said to them, ‘Go into **all** the world and preach the Gospel to **every** creature’” (verse 15). Now, does

that directive apply *only* to those who were standing there listening to Christ? No! In Matthew's account of that passage, Christ *ended* those instructions by saying, "and, lo, I am with you always, even unto **the end of the world**" (Matt. 28:20, *KJV*). So, Christ's instruction is for **all** disciples, *from that time forward*, even until the **end** of the world—i.e., until a new world, **a new age**, is ushered in.

Earlier in Christ's ministry, in the Olivet Prophecy, the disciples asked Christ, "what *will be* the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" In His reply, Christ said, "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all nations, and **then** the end will come" (Matt. 24: 3,14). Yes, His Church would be carrying forth the Gospel message to the world ***all the way until Christ's return!***

Notice verses 44 to 46: "Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not expect Him. Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master made ruler over his household, **to give them food in due season**? Blessed *is* that servant whom his master, **when he comes, will find him so doing**"!

Now, did Jesus Christ consider the Gospel message to be very *important*? That question is *unequivocally answered* in the 8th chapter of Mark, where Christ said, "For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake **and the gospel's** will save it" (verse 35).

Yes, our Savior considers the Gospel to be of *extreme* importance! And He is clearly requiring of us that there be something bigger in our lives than ourselves! "Losing our life for the Gospel's sake" does not necessarily mean literally "dying"; but it **does** mean that we must earnestly **sacrifice** our efforts—and our lives—in helping to **carry forth** that message!

Notice, now, *another* occasion, where Christ was instructing His disciples about *carrying forth* the Gospel. It was in that context that Christ exclaimed, "...Freely you have received, freely give" (Matt. 10: 5-8).

And what about Matthew 4:19? There, we see Christ telling His disciples that He would make them "fishers of men." Yes, Jesus calls us to be "fishers of men," *not* members of a study group or social club! Fishermen have a job to do—to catch fish! They don't just sit around socializing or waiting for the fish to jump in the boat.

Just for Certain Eras?

No one denies that the Church during the Philadelphian Era rightfully strove to carry forth the Gospel to the world. Likewise, by simply reading the New Testament, no one could deny that the Ephesian Era—the Church during the time that the New Testament was written—*likewise* rightfully strove to carry forth the Gospel. Yet, can we find anywhere in the Bible where the Church was instructed with the following mission: "Go forth into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature, but do so **only until** the time of Polycarp. Then, for the next *eighteen hundred years* don't be *concerned* about carrying forth the Gospel. Just wait until the 1930's when a man named Herbert W. Armstrong will be raised up. Under *him*, carry forth the Gospel

again—but do so **only** until he dies! Once he dies, then just be concerned about your *own* spiritual condition!”

As ridiculous as that sounds, that is *in effect* what certain groups today believe!

The truth is that God did *not* intend that **only** the Ephesian and Philadelphian eras carry forth the Gospel to the world. In other eras, we have historical record of the Gospel going forth powerfully, under such men as Peter de Bruys, Constantine of Mananali, and Peter Waldo. Under their evangelistic efforts, many new converts were gained.

Not Just to Convert

Consider also that the carrying forth of the Gospel to the world is *not solely* for the purpose of *converting* people! Christ said that once the Gospel is “preached in all the world **as a witness**,” *then* the end would come (Matt. 24: 14). A “witness” is meant to *warn* and inform people, *not* necessarily to convert them. And that fact goes along with the **responsibility** that God gives to His very end-time Church—to preach the Ezekiel *warning* message. As Mr. Armstrong showed, the book of Ezekiel was a message *for* those in the end-time. “So you, son of man: I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore you shall hear a word from My mouth and **warn** them for Me. When I say to the wicked, ‘O wicked *man*, you shall surely die!’ and you do not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked *man* shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at **your** hand. Nevertheless, if you warn the wicked to turn from his way, and he does not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered your soul” (Ezek. 33: 7-9).

Responsibility Shirked

In the building of the second Temple, the people shirked their responsibility to **do** God’s work. Instead, they were concerned only for themselves! In the book of Haggai, God says the following: “...These people say, ‘The time has not yet come to rebuild the LORD’s house.’ [They didn’t feel they *needed* to do God’s work.] Then the word of the LORD came through the prophet Haggai: ‘Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house remains a ruin?’” (Hag. 1: 2-4, *NIV*). Then, in verse 9, God chastises them, by saying this: “...my house, which remains a ruin, while each of you is busy with your **own** house.”

Plainly, God—at all times—wants His people to **DO His** work... and not just be concerned with themselves!

Arguments

We have looked at sound, Biblical reasons why God’s Church—*not just* the Philadelphian Era, but *all* eras of the Church—should be acutely concerned with carrying forth the Gospel to the world. Yet, some groups contend that this should *no longer* be done. They say that since the

death of Mr. Armstrong, members of God’s Church are *only* to be concerned with their OWN spiritual condition! Upon examination of why they believe that, it can be seen that such belief is based upon **three** supposed supports: “the door is closed,” “prepare the bride,” and supposed teachings by Mr. Armstrong. Let’s now examine each of those three arguments to see if they have validity.

“The Door is Closed”

Where in the Bible do we find the statement that “the door is closed”? We don’t! It’s not *in* the Bible! Rather, we find in the third chapter of Revelation where Christ tells the *Philadelphian* church, “...I have set before you an **open** door, and no one can shut it...” (verse 8). So, some groups look at that statement that the Philadelphia Era had an *open* door, and they then just **assume** that the era which follows (the Laodicean Era) must have a **closed** door. Yet, the Bible doesn’t *say* that!

Now notice verse 20, speaking to Laodicea. There *is* a “door” spoken of here. Christ says, “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.” Yet, that verse is obviously speaking of something *entirely different* than the door spoken of to the Philadelphians. They are two different *types* of doors—representing two entirely different things!

Speaking to the Philadelphians, God says that “I have set before you an open door, and no one [**no man**] can shut it” (Rev. 3:8). God *Himself* can open and shut this door (verse 7), but *no man* can. However, the door spoken of to the Laodiceans **can** be opened by man! “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and **opens** the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me” (verse 20). This is a different type of door. This door represents “the opportunity to have a truly deep and authentic relationship with Jesus Christ! Christ says that if a Laodicean will repent and let Him in, He will *dine* with him, indicating fellowship and communion together...Those who open the door will enjoy *fellowship* with Christ—a fellowship that Laodiceans endanger when lukewarm attitudes place distance between them and their Savior (Revelation 3:15-16).”¹

What, then, does the door spoken of to the Philadelphians represent? The open “door” for the Philadelphians refers to a **means** for proclaiming the Gospel. That can be seen by examining certain other scriptures, such as Col. 4:3—which says, “...that God would open to us a **door** for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ...”

More specifically, what **is** the “open door” given to the Philadelphian Era? Let’s let Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong answer: “The great door that God has opened to this work is the facility to go into all the world and preach the gospel; the *DOOR* of radio, the *DOOR* of the printing press, plus other such doors” (*Good News*, Aug. 1959). “Never before in the history of the Church has it been possible to reap so great a harvest. It has only been made possible through modern technology, beginning with the printing press, radio, television, and rapid mass transit and mass communication...God is opening new *DOORS* in television and in the *Plain Truth*

distribution” (Herbert W. Armstrong, co-worker letter, 1/10/1986).

So, God *did* open to Mr. Armstrong—and to the Philadelphian Era—the *doors* of modern electronic and print media, making it possible for the Gospel to go forth more powerfully than *ever* before. Yet, have any of these doors *closed*? NO! To the contrary, new *additional* doors have opened! Doors such as the internet have now opened.

How could it be true that “the door is shut” when *millions* are being witnessed to through *The Tomorrow’s World Telecast* and through the Church’s magazine, booklets and Bible Study Course?! And, what about the *many hundreds* of new people (who have NO previous history of Church of God involvement) who have been baptized by Living Church of God ministers?! Some might reply, “Oh well, ‘many hundreds’ is not that many.” Yet, “many hundreds” is not so small compared to 144,000! Also, what if YOU were one of those “many hundreds”?

After all, how did *you and I* come into God’s Church? Was it not the result of tithes, offerings, and prayers of dedicated brethren backing up the carrying forth of the Gospel to the world? Why, then, do some Church members today *neglect* their fellowman? Is it because of *selfishness*?! Or, maybe they lack *faith* that God can do a great work through a small group. Perhaps it’s because they haven’t meditated on the *importance* of fulfilling the commission that Christ gave His Church. Each one needs to examine himself in this, because there is a very important reason why God called us *ahead* of most of humanity. He has a **job** for us to do—and He expects us to accomplish His will!

Could it be that the PRIMARY REASON why God considers our present Church era to be “lukewarm” is because He knew that many in our era would *shirk* their responsibility to fervently back up the preaching of the Gospel to the world?! If it weren’t for that negligence, we would see the Gospel going forth with considerably *more* power!

People can debate all they wish concerning the meaning of certain statements in the seven letters to the Churches. Yet, the question remains: Do we **love** our fellowman enough to help make *available to him* the knowledge of God’s Truths, God’s WAY of life, and God’s end-time warning message?

We are God’s **vehicles** to spread His Word. God Himself decides to what degree He will bless our efforts, but He expects us to do all we can! It is not up to us to decide that the Message should stop going forth, thereby bringing about a *self-imposed* “famine of the word.” In the future there *will be* a “famine of the word”—but that will come as a result of world events making it *impossible* to carry forth the Gospel—*not* because we just *decide* that it should no longer go forth! (Amos 8:11)

Some seem to think that few, if any, will be *called* by God during the Laodicean Era. Yet, where does the Bible say that? It doesn’t! Although it’s true that the majority of God’s people during the Laodicean Era have grave *shortcomings*, nowhere does the Bible say that few, if any, will be *called* during that era.

Some see no reason to place high priority on carrying forth the Gospel. They say, “Well, we have a website, and that should be fully sufficient. After all, if God did choose to call someone, He could draw that person to our website.”

However, there are two serious *weaknesses* to this line of reasoning: (1) Even though a website, properly employed, *can* be a powerful tool for spreading the Gospel, websites sponsored by groups who *don't* place high priority in spreading the Gospel, *rarely* proclaim the Gospel to the world in any meaningful way! Instead, they tend to almost exclusively attract people who are *already* members of the Church of God! (2) If it's true that a website *alone* is fully sufficient, then why not apply that same reasoning to evangelistic efforts during the Philadelphian Era? Why should Mr. Armstrong have gone to all the trouble and expense of using television *and* radio *and* mass-circulation print? Shouldn't a magazine *alone* have been sufficient? After all, God could have drawn *to* that magazine anyone whom He wanted to call. In fact, wouldn't it have been fully sufficient to have had *just* local congregations? God could have led anyone to one of those congregations.

No, it's not true that "the door is closed." Many are still coming into God's Church. Also, *millions* are being witnessed to and warned—as *God instructs us to do!*

“Prepare the Bride!”

“Preparing the Bride” is the *second* justification for **not** striving to carry forth the Gospel message. Rev.19:7 is cited, which says, “...The marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready.” Then, based on that scripture, some say, “See, *instead* of helping to carry forth the Gospel to the world, we in this end-time (Laodicean) era are to be ‘preparing the bride’—i.e., making ourselves spiritually ready for our marriage to Christ, at His return!”

In *response* to that concept, let's first ask, WHO IS “the bride of Christ”? Is it **only** those true Christians who will still be alive at Christ's return... **or**, does “the bride of Christ” *also* include all true Christians who have lived in times past and who have died in the faith? Obviously, “the bride” includes *all* true Christians from **all** seven eras of the Church—*plus* the prophets and patriarchs of Old Testament times. It should therefore be apparent that the *majority* of those who will *comprise* “the bride” have already died! So, they are either **already** prepared for the marriage to the Lamb, or else they won't be **in** God's Kingdom at all!

Now, *if it were true* that “preaching the Gospel to the world” somehow *prevents* us from **also** “getting the bride ready,” then what would we have to conclude about all those true Christians down through the ages who *strove* to carry forth the Gospel message? We would have to conclude that they are NOT ready to marry Christ! That includes Paul, the twelve disciples, and all true Christians who supported their evangelistic efforts! It also includes Herbert Armstrong and all the now-deceased brethren who faithfully backed him up.

Is it *true* that the Philadelphians who have died, including Mr. Armstrong, are **not** ready for the marriage to the Lamb? No! Scripture says they ARE ready—that they will even be “pillars” in the temple of God! (Rev. 3:12).

How can people think that the carrying forth of the Gospel *prevents* the “feeding of the sheep”? Weren't the sheep well-fed during their many years under Mr. Armstrong? Of course, they were. And they were well fed even though Mr. Armstrong's burning *passion* was to preach the Gospel to the world!

“Preparing the bride” and “carrying forth the Gospel” are *not* “either/or” issues. One mission does not conflict with (or replace) the other! In fact, lovingly backing up the preaching of the Gospel, **helps** us to get ready for the marriage to the Lamb! How? Because doing so is a supreme expression of *love* toward others—helping to *make available to them* God’s truths, His way of life, and His warning message. It’s an expression of love, and we are to become *like* God, who IS love!

Notice, in the following quote, how Mr. Armstrong saw a direct and positive *relationship between* one’s spiritual state and one’s support of furthering the spread of the Gospel message: “I have always noticed that those whose hearts—and their pocketbooks as well—are really IN the work of God are the ones who remain spiritual, close to God, and who are growing spiritually. And, WITHOUT EXCEPTION, every single member of God’s Church who has ever lost interest in this WORK OF GOD—this work of carrying the Gospel to the world...begins to fall backward spiritually” (*Good News*, March 1960).

Mr. Armstrong’s Teachings

Some erroneously believe that Mr. Armstrong *taught* that after he died, the Church’s **only** work would be to “get the bride ready.”

Yet, we just read one revealing quote by Mr. Armstrong... and now let’s read a couple more. This next quote is from the very *last* letter he sent to the brethren. It was written 1/10/86, less than one week before his death: “This is my first letter to you in 1986, and could very well be my LAST... this is not the work of Herbert W. Armstrong... It is the Work of the Living Creator, God. You are supporting this Work of God... Continue to sacrifice through 1986 to finish the commission God has given his Church. The greatest work lies yet AHEAD... God’s Work must push ahead this coming year as never before. God is opening new doors in television and in the *Plain Truth* distribution. Help us walk THROUGH them.” [See “Note” at the end of this article.]

So, Mr. Armstrong began that letter by saying that it could be his FINAL letter. Yet, *despite* that, he urged the brethren to continue sacrificing in support of that *same* work throughout the next 12 months! He also spoke of “new doors” that God was opening in television and in *Plain Truth* distribution. He did NOT say, “This could be my final letter to you, so prepare to *stop* carrying forth the Gospel, and instead prepare to do a *different* work—that of just getting yourself ready for the marriage to Christ”! He did *not* say that!

Consider now, a co-worker letter written by Mr. Armstrong about *3 weeks earlier*, on December 23, 1985: “I thank God that he has organized *this present work* of his so thoroughly that **regardless of the outcome of my present illness, the work will CONTINUE right on to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.**”

Could it be any plainer what Mr. Armstrong believed in that regard?!

Furthermore, as for his statements about “getting the bride ready,” Mr. Armstrong exhorted us to do *that* many times **throughout** his ministry. Yet, that never *lessened* his efforts to carry forth the Gospel to the world!

Conclusion

If you have been shirking your God-given responsibility of fervently backing up the preaching of the Gospel to the world, then please meditate on the issues raised in this article. Consider your underlying motives. Deeply think about the *importance* of fulfilling the commission which Christ gave to His Church. Let each and every one of us be **wholeheartedly** “about our Father’s business”!

Note: Regarding Mr. Armstrong’s *final* co-worker letter, dated 1/10/86: Some years after the writing of this letter, Mr. Aaron Dean, Mr. Armstrong’s long-time personal aid, said that *he* actually wrote that letter. He said this: “He [Mr. Armstrong] was too weak to even dictate. I did read it to him however, and told him **it wouldn’t go out unless I knew he understood it.** He squeezed my hand, and **added a couple words, so I knew he got it.**”

Therefore, even if Mr. Armstrong didn’t personally write the letter, it was **ensured** that prior to the mailing of the letter, the words of that letter were understood by, and approved by, Mr. Armstrong! There was *nothing* in that letter which Mr. Armstrong disapproved of—including the following statements: “The greatest work lies yet AHEAD...God’s Work must push ahead this coming year as never before. God is opening new doors in television and in the *Plain Truth* distribution. Help us walk THROUGH them.”

Furthermore, consider again the co-worker letter written/dictated **by Mr. Armstrong** about *3 weeks earlier* (on 12/23/85), where he said the following: “I thank God that he has organized *this present work* of his so thoroughly that **regardless of the outcome of my present illness, the work will CONTINUE right on to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.**”

References:

1. “Is the Door Closed?” by Wallace G. Smith, *Living Church News*, Sept-Oct 2010
2. “Preparing the Bride,” by Gerald E. Weston, *Living Church News*, July-August 2006