

# Good News

(Sermon Notes)

By Warren Zehrung

9/2/2016

Sixty years ago the Church of God was growing rapidly. That Church is a **spiritual entity** – not a secular corporate organization. God does not care much for corporate organizations—but He cares a great deal about the spiritual entity that consists of His sons and daughters—the Children of God.

In 1957, Herbert W. Armstrong wrote an open letter to the recently baptized Church brethren and published it in the **Good News** magazine. I thought it would be good to go over it again as a refresher – in that everything in this letter still applies very much to us today.

God caused the Gospel of Jesus Christ to be preached in all the world – for a witness to the nations of the world. And God called a few to be a part of His spiritual organism.

Acts 2:47 God [adds] to the Church daily such as [are] being saved.

That spiritual entity – the Church of God – is still alive—and you are a part of it. For most of 19 centuries after being established by Jesus Christ, God’s Church was comparatively small – and lay mostly dormant and hidden. But then, God revitalized the Church of God during the 20th century – the same Church that Jesus originally founded and said that it would never die. Jesus said:

Matthew 16:18 ... the gates of the grave shall not prevail against it.

That open letter to the recently baptized Church brethren contains sound advice for us – just as it was good counsel 60 years ago. Seventy percent of the people did not heed this good counsel to the newly baptized – and were led away with the error of the wicked in the apostasy that swept through the Church.

2Timothy 4:3 [They did] not endure sound doctrine;

2Peter 2:20-22 If after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning.

Today, as surviving Christians, it is profitable for us to revisit the context of those instructions given to the newly baptized members of the nineteen-fifties. As we go through the letter – that was sent out in its entirety in today’s Countdown – I will pause to flesh out the scriptures and concepts that are mentioned. The letter is titled:

## **AN OPEN LETTER to our newly begotten brethren recently baptized**

It is by Herbert W. Armstrong, Good News, October 1957, Volume VI, Number 10

GREETINGS! newly baptized Brethren in Christ Jesus:

This year again there is joy and rejoicing among the angels over your repentance and having been begotten to a lively hope as *children of God* thru Jesus Christ our Lord!

1Peter 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to His abundant mercy has **begotten** us again unto a **lively hope** by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

This is saying that we – the Children of God – by way of Jesus Christ’s resurrection – are assured of:

1Peter 1:4 ... an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fades not away, reserved in heaven for you.

And there is new joy in the hearts of ALL our true brethren and co-workers in Christ over your recent conversion from the desires and will of the flesh and the ways and customs of the world, to the **government** of God in your life now, that you may have reward in His Kingdom at the coming of Christ, in the World Tomorrow!

I want to explain for a moment that phrase, “the **government** of God in your life,” because it has been changed from 1939, and misapplied in 1981 (after the receivership) and up until today. Brethren, please understand that your relationship with God does not depend on any minister, or go through any man. Yes, we are under the government of God.

Ephesians 5:23 ...Christ is the **head of the church**: and he is the savior of the body.

Do not read a corporate organization into that verse – because it is not there. You, brethren, are the called out and selected church brethren.

Colossians 1:18 And [Jesus] is the **head** of the body, the **church**:

1Corinthians 11:3 But I would have you know, that **the head of every man is Christ**;

That means that you personally are accountable directly to Jesus Christ in everything you do. Brethren, you were not called and placed way down in some hierarchy. When we remain directly under God’s authority – defined by His Law and His Commands – we can be sure that we are acting on God’s behalf.

However, anytime we infringe upon any of God’s laws, statutes, judgments or perfect way, we have stepped out from beneath His protection, approval and godly government – and are **not** acting on His behalf, no matter how important and highly esteemed we might think we are.

When any man deviates one iota from God’s will – his actions are “not of God.” No man ever has license from God to bend the rules in any way at all.

Because of certain men who have crept in unawares over the years, there has been a great deal of confusion over the difference between the Government of God and Church Government (Jude :4).

The difficulty arises primarily because of a misuse of the word, "church." The Church of God is not a physical organization – but a spiritual entity, the called out body of true believers – the Body of Christ.

Corporate organizations are governed by men, whereas each member of the Church of God answers directly to Jesus Christ - the head of the Church.

In the second half of the last century, the Gospel, as a witness and a warning, went to the world with great power. Many people were converted and learned the true doctrines of Jesus Christ.

But, at the same time, many brethren suffered to one degree or another from the heavy hand of wrong government. When the apostasy came after the death of Herbert W. Armstrong, many brethren had great difficulty deciding what to do.

As a result, many made the terrible mistake of being loyal to a man or an organization by accepting its heresies, and discarding their devotion to God’s truth. They did not know how to remain under God’s authority.

Some corporate church organizations have fallen back into the same idolatrous trap of putting loyalty to men and organizations ahead of loyalty to God. The answer is not to love an organization, but to **love God** and one another.

1John 3:14, 16 We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loves not his brother abides in death... Hereby perceive we the love of God.

Brethren, please understand this: No minister is ever above God’s law. Whenever a minister sins, he no longer represents God’s authority.

God’s Government, which begins with God the Father and flows through Jesus Christ, extends to every member of the entire body of the Church of God – but not through any minister. Not even if that minister claims to have received the baton, or the mantle of authority, and subsequently thinks that he rules over the brethren of the Church – in God’s stead.

Many brethren have been led to believe that organizational “Church Government” is merely an extension of “God’s Government,” exercised and administered by the ministry. That is not the case.

We have got to get back to the Truth of God. There is no man between a Church member and Jesus Christ. Our loyalty is to Jesus Christ and His Father – anything less constitutes idolatry. Jesus is our advocate...

“We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.” (1John 2:1)

Jesus is our mediator...

“There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.” (1Timothy 2:5)

The Government of God and His authority is the rule of God in our lives as His Spirit leads us - nothing, or no one can supersede that relationship.

Romans 8:14 For as many as are **led by the Spirit of God**, they are the sons of God.

God’s Spirit always leads us according to the law of God and the will of God.

The apostle Paul said that the work of a **minister** in the Church is to serve the brethren according to Godly love and to feed, nourish, protect, and care for the flock of God.

The very last time that Paul saw the elders of Ephesus, he admonished them concerning their responsibility to faithfully serve God and the brethren.

Acts 20:28 Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Spirit hath made you overseers [guardians], to feed the Church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood.

Some might ask, “If he’s not going to run my life, what is a minister for?”

There is a **need** for ministers of Jesus Christ who **preach** and **teach** the **Truth**... to give **counsel** according to the word of God... to **marry**... to **bury**... to **visit** the sick and to **anoint** with oil... to encourage the elderly... to facilitate the ministry of **reconciliation**... to seek after and **return** those who have gone astray... to **lay on of hands**, and **baptizing** those whom God calls... and there are Feasts to **administer**, babies to **bless**, and the Gospel to warn and witness to the world, and to safeguard, protect, defend, and hold fast the doctrine of Jesus Christ.

But, the minister is not the **Government of God**. We, the people of God, live by, and are bound by the rules of the Kingdom of God – even now.

### **You will Meet Trials**

You have entered upon a new life—a life of great happiness and joy—a life to continue FOREVER—yet, in this present evil world it will not be an easy life.

As a matter of fact you have left behind the "easy way"—the popular, broad road that leads to destruction.

You have passed the cross-roads and turned off onto the narrow, rutty, bumpy, rocky and HARD and DIFFICULT road which very few people in this world ever are willing to enter—but which leads to SUCCESS, to USEFULNESS, to HAPPINESS, JOY and ETERNAL LIFE.

It leads to rewards—not of idleness and ease, but to usefulness and service and accomplishment and success—so great that I know your mind can’t possibly **grasp it**, now.

1Corinthians 2:9 But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, **neither have** entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.

## BUT YOU'LL HAVE TO PAY THE PRICE!

It won't come easy! All your temptations, trials, persecutions and hardships will come from *other people*—or from the devil—or from the consequences of sin, which means violations of God's laws and ways.

You must remember you still have to live **IN** a world organized and living in disregard of God's laws—a world governed by the sway of Satan, and according to the impulses of pride and vanity, the lusts of the flesh, and the greed and tempers of human nature.

If you were still **OF** this world, the world would love its own. But because you have renounced this world and its ways, and are no longer **OF** it, the world will hate you, **persecute** you, turn against you, even as it hated and persecuted your Savior before you.

Brethren, we should not be surprised that being a Christian is really tough, hard, **often lonely**, and discouraging.

As our British brethren would say, "Christianity is **no** cup of tea!"

Jesus Christ said that as we near the very end-time, religious **persecution**, family betrayal, spiritual deception, tribulation and falling away from the love of God would be the **norm**, rather than the exception.

Years ago, when we were first called, did any of us expect that we would get to the year 2016 before Christ returned? Why has this age gone on for so much longer than we expected? Why have we had to see the Church dwindle to a small flock?

There must be a reason. What has God been accomplishing during these **thirty years** since the apostasy began? It seems that it was not so difficult to live our faith when we were first called and first believed.

True, most of us had to deal with work issues, relatives and friends who thought we were **foolish** for joining a church that met on Saturday and rejected their holidays.

But after that, we were surrounded by like-minded brethren and we could see the tangible results of The Work. We did not know it back then, but God knew there were many among us who had **not** put Him and His Way first.

Many people who attended with us were coasting or were never really with the program. Jesus told His disciples that there would be an end-time sorting out.

Matthew 13:30 Let both the wheat and the tares grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.

That time of testing is now. Jesus Christ needs to test each of us, individually, to see where we stand. We still have more spiritual battles to fight. God does **not** send trials and afflictions on **His people** because they are evil. Let's understand that our chastening is an act of God's love.

Our God is a loving God. He is a loving Father, and as such He withholds no good thing from His children (Psalm 84:11). And, as a loving Father, He is raising us up in the way we should go.

Isaiah 48:10 Behold, I have refined thee, but not with silver; I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction. Paul quotes Proverbs 3 when he says in:

Hebrews 12:5-6 You have forgotten the exhortation which speaks unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the **chastening** of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him: For whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives.

Like many early Christians who died for their faith, are you, brethren, willing in these last days to face poverty, persecution, prison and even martyrdom for the sake of His Word? (John 16:2-3)

Are we willing to suffer affliction, or **do we always have to have it good?**

When we were baptized – we were asked if we had **counted the cost** (Luke 14:28).

We were told that we would HAVE TO PAY THE PRICE for being a Christian at this time – bound for the better resurrection (Hebrews 11:35).

Paul spoke of those faithful Christians – including Moses, who chose to **suffer affliction** with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.” (Hebrews 11:25)

...We glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation works patience.” (Romans 5:3)

As we study through the epistles, we see this theme of trials and afflictions played out over and over in the lives of the early Church brethren.

Let's admit that our pains and sufferings of today pale into insignificance when we compare them to the afflictions that the early Church endured – we have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin as they did (Hebrews 12:4).

Look at these references that Paul makes to the Thessalonians:

1Thessalonians 1:6 You became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in **much affliction**, with joy of the Holy Spirit.

1Thessalonians 2:2 But even after that we had suffered before, and were shamefully entreated, as ye know, at Philippi, we were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God with much contention.

1Thessalonians 2:14-15 For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God in Judaea, which are in Christ Jesus: for ye also have **suffered** like things of your own countrymen, even as they [the brethren in Judaea] have of the Jews: Who both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and have **persecuted** us; and they please not God, and are contrary to all men.

Brethren, do not think that it is out of place when we suffer afflictions – especially, when they come about as a result of putting our faith into practice.

1Peter 4:12-13 Beloved, think it not strange concerning the **fiery trial** which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when His glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.

Oh, what a glorious day that will be! Let's understand that Christians are not called into a life of ease - we are appointed unto afflictions: Paul says that we should have seen it coming:

1Thessalonians 3:3-4 That no man should be moved by these afflictions: for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto. For truly, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation; even as it came to pass, and ye know.

Those who stand for God and His Truth, the righteous, will be hated, persecuted and sometimes killed.

### **Why You Must Suffer**

"My PEACE I give unto you ... that my JOY might remain in you, *and that your joy may be full,*" said Jesus (John 14, 15).

John 16:33 These things have I spoken unto you that *in me* ye might have PEACE. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.

You will meet many afflictions—trials, tests, troubles—even more than before. But, if you trust in Him, the Eternal will deliver you out of them ALL. (Psalm 34:19) Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the LORD delivers him out of them all. (2 Timothy 3:12). ALL who will live Godly in Jesus Christ shall suffer persecution .

But WHY? Because God has called you to surrender your life to HIM—to GIVE your life into HIS HANDS—that He may transform you into a perfect, holy, righteous CHARACTER.

God is CREATOR!

And now, with your consent, according to your own free will, you have placed yourself in His Hands to CHANGE you—to CREATE **out of you** the Supreme Masterpiece of all His Creation!

### What Is Character?

And CHARACTER means SELF-DIRECTION, WITH GOD'S HELP, INTO GOD'S WAY OF LIFE. You'll find it is a new and different way of life from the way you have lived up to now. It means SELF-DENIAL! It means SELF-DISCIPLINE! It means resisting all that is evil or wrong in your nature.

It means *breaking up wrong habits*—rooting them out of your life—and instilling into your life NEW habits—AND MAKING THESE NEWER RIGHT WAYS FIXED HABIT.

This is not easy. It takes WILL POWER. It requires DETERMINATION.

**Character** is who and what we are in God's estimation, since He alone truly knows our frame – what we are made of.

**Reputation** is another thing. Our reputation is what others think of us—in other words, their estimation of our character and personality.

Moses desired to see God's glory – he wished to see God's divine nature, to know firsthand **the glorious character of God**.

God revealed Himself to Moses by describing His names and attributes.

God's names are clarifications of His Godly Character.

God's names are inseparable from His holy, righteous character.

They describe His divine nature.

Exodus 34:6 And the LORD passed by before [Moses], and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, **merciful** and **gracious, longsuffering**, and abundant in **goodness** and **truth**,

Exodus 34:7 Keeping mercy for thousands, **forgiving** iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation.

Exodus 34:8 And Moses made haste, and bowed his head toward the earth, and worshipped.

In the same way, Jesus made known God's Character to His apostles:

John 17:6 I have manifested Your name [Father] to the men whom You have given Me out of the world.

Jesus let the apostles “see the Father's holy righteous **character**” mostly by way of His day-to-day example in how He lived His life.

The disciples saw, heard, and touched the true nature and character of God (1John 1:1-3).

The apostles and Gospel writers took that incredible experience with Christ and passed it on to us in Scripture, which informs us how we are to live each and every day.

God, in His love, is creating us in His image. We are not yet completely like God. We have a long way to go. God's goal and purpose in creating mankind is to **reproduce Himself**. This cannot be achieved until we develop His **holy righteous character**.

God cannot instantaneously create His holy and righteous character in us by edict. That is not how character is formed. Godly character must be developed in us through a process. God requires us to be willing participants in the character development process.

"What is perfect character?"

It is the ability, in a separate entity with free moral agency, to come to the KNOWLEDGE of the right from the wrong - the true from the false - and to CHOOSE the right, and possess the WILL to enforce self-discipline to DO the right and resist the wrong." (The Incredible Human Potential, page 138)

Put another way:

"Perfect, holy and righteous character is the ability in each of us to come to discern the **true** and right way from the false, to make voluntarily a full and unconditional surrender to God and His perfect way - to yield, and be conquered by God - to determine even against temptation or self-desire, to live and to do the right thing.

And even then, such holy character is the gift of God." (Mystery of the Ages, page 69-70)

God makes it possible for us to put on His character. Our conversion is a matter of going from a lack of character to attaining perfect, holy and righteous character by the power of God's Holy Spirit working in us.

The apostle Paul describes the process of conversion this way:

Romans 8:6-9 For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind 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 cannot please God. But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his."

Jesus always spoke with the **utmost** respect and reverence to His Father in heaven, so how much more should the sons and daughters of this age do so in prayer to the living God?

This approach will aid greatly in developing our own character.

Jesus says in Matthew 5:48, "Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect."

1Peter 1:14 As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance:

1Peter 1:15 But as He who has called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation [and conduct];

1Peter 1:16 Because it is written, **Be ye holy; for I am holy.**

There – God is our role model for Godly character. This has everything to do with God establishing His image in us, implanting within each of His children the riches of His holy character. Of all that needs to be done in our preparation toward the Kingdom of God, aligning ourselves with God's character is most important.

Besides all this, God will permit trials and tests to come upon you—severe problems. He will permit CIRCUMSTANCES to drive you to HIM for HELP—for deliverance! You may soon think no one in the world is troubled like you are. You will begin to wonder why you have greater trouble to face than anyone else on earth—not realizing that **all other real** Christians are going thru the same tests! Perhaps closest relatives will turn against you, probably because of the Word of God—the TRUTH you have embraced and started to live.

But, if you learn the lesson of FAITH—and if you have PATIENCE—you may KNOW that you will be delivered out of every trouble that comes up. God has PROMISED to **deliver** you from every trial—IF you obey and trust Him.

1Corinthians 10:13 There has no temptation [or trial] taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.

You see, you are now His very own child—actually begotten of Him just as much as you were begotten of your human father. When God gave you the precious gift of His Holy Spirit—placed His Spirit within you to renew your mind, give you a sounder, more understanding mind, fill you with His love, faith, patience, power, goodness—His own character. In short, you became an actual begotten SON—or daughter—of God. Not merely a creature or being He created—but His very own child, actually begotten of Him by HIS seed, so to speak—His SPIRIT, entering within you. He is now YOUR FATHER! NOT figuratively, but actually—REALLY!

God is now Our Father. These words express the understanding that God is literally our personal Father.

Every one of us has had an earthly father, who imparted temporary **physical life** to us when we were conceived. Our physical dad even gave us his last name. In the same way, God gave us our **spiritual** beginning of Life. And God gave us His Name as well – making us a **Child of God**.

One becomes a begotten child of the Father when he is baptized, converted and given a portion of His Life – that is, His Spirit dwelling in us. It is man's ultimate potential to become born-again spirit and divine members in the Father's family for the rest of eternity.

Now you can go to Him just as any child can go to his father, for counsel and advice, for wisdom, for correction, for HELP in any time of need. Would a good human father deny his own child any good thing the child might really need?

Jesus said:

Luke 11:11 If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he for a fish give him a snake?

Luke 11:12 Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion?

Luke 11:13 If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your **heavenly Father** give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?

Neither will your heavenly Father deny you anything that is really for your good. If a human father heard the screams of his child, ran and found his child imprisoned in a burning building, would he break inside and rescue his child from danger? Your heavenly Father has given you His **written PROMISE** to deliver you from every danger, trouble, or trial—*If you call on Him, obey Him and RELY on Him!*

Since you are now a real begotten child of God—now one of the FAMILY of God, which is His true Church—you are one of His heirs. Angels are not sons, but servants. And a servant is not an heir like a son. You are now a co-heir with Christ, to inherit, with Him, ALL THINGS—eternal life, this earth as an everlasting possession, eternal happiness and joy!

Let me give you the Scriptural reference:

Romans 8:17 And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.

Think of what that means!

But we are now only heirs—only *begotten* sons. And just as it was necessary for us to grow physically from the time we were begotten in our mothers' wombs until we developed ready to be born, finally separated from the dependence on the mother for nourishment and sustenance and coming into individual and separate existence, so the begotten spiritual infant must grow and develop spiritually, being fed the spiritual food, the Word of God, [by the Mother of us all], the true Church, until, at the coming of Christ we shall be CHANGED, finally BORN of God, to have eternal life inherent in ourselves, and to be actual INHERITORS and POSSESSORS of the wonderful Kingdom of God!

The Church has come to a better understanding of the term, "the Mother of us all."

It is a good rule to let the Bible interpret the Bible. "Come hither, I will show you the Bride, the Lamb's Wife...and he showed me that great city, the Holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God." (Revelation 21:9-10)

Those who are the Bride of Christ, and those who comprise Holy Jerusalem, are one and the same – the resurrected Church brethren!

The collective body of the Church – which has become the Wife of Christ, will be mother of all spiritually speaking.

Galatians 4:26 Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all.

In order to GROW in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord (2Peter 3:18); in order to develop spiritually and overcome, and have perfected in you the CHARACTER of God ready to be fully BORN Of God, *you must do two things daily without fail!*

You must not only **read**, but eagerly, earnestly STUDY the Word of God to learn how to live—you must live according to God's teachings in His Bible—you must make it your guide for everything you do. In this way, God talks to *you!*

But you must also talk to Him! You must go to a private place, alone with God, and have long talks with Him—yes, EVERY DAY! Unburden your heart to Him. Take all your problems, your interests, your plans, your troubles to Him. Talk over *everything* with Him, continually. Then, even when going about your work—when walking down the street—when driving your car, or wherever you are or whatever you do, talk with God as you work, or as you drive or walk along. Go to a private place, and kneel in prayer (**on both knees**) as often as you can, and at least once every day.

We saw where Moses made haste, and bowed his head toward the earth, and worshipped. (Exodus 34:8)

For those of you who have grown old and infirmed – and you can get on your knees – but you **can't get up** afterwards – God **understands** - you can bow before God in your mind's eye – and that too is fully accepted by God.

But talk with God often in between. PRAY WITHOUT CEASING! (1Thesalonians 5:17)

Keep close to Him. You can't afford to be without the SECURITY of His constant guidance and protection.

By Herbert W. Armstrong, Good News, October 1957, Volume VI, Number 10

That ends the letter.

Brethren these are some of the things we should be doing in order to make our calling and election sure (2Peter 1:4-10)

For if ye do these things, ye shall never fail.

That's the Good News!

End: Good News