

THE CHURCH OF GOD, INTERNATIONAL

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Dear Friends and Brethren:

Since September of 1997, the Church of God, International has been working through a very difficult situation involving Mr. Garner Ted Armstrong. It has been a particularly traumatic time, intensified because of Mr. Armstrong's profile before the world.

As many of you know, for twenty years Mr. Armstrong has been heavily involved with our publications and the weekly television program that carried his name. He has been thought by some *to be* the Church of God, International, even though Mr. Armstrong himself has repeatedly said, "This is *not* Ted's church." Our attachment to Mr. Armstrong's preeminence, as well as the reality of his contribution over the years, made all the more difficult the decision we wrote to you about in December. Now, once again, another meeting of the Ministerial Council resulted in another unanimous vote to remove Mr. Armstrong as the spokesman for the Church of God, International.

During a two-day ministerial conference, held December 20–21, 1997, Mr. Armstrong stood up among the ministry and made an announcement. He told the assembled ministry, with whom he had been interacting—talking and responding to comments—that he was going to separate from the Church of God, International and begin his own evangelistic association. One of the reasons behind his decision was the resolution made by the Ministerial Council to the Board of Directors, dated November 25, 1997. In this resolution, the Ministerial Council recommended that Mr. Armstrong proceed to retirement. Anything short of that would result in the revoking of his ministerial credential. The resolution went on to say that "it was the unanimous conclusion of the Ministerial Council that due to events associated with *his lawsuit* and *other personal matters*, Mr. Armstrong's ministry has been affected sufficiently to warrant his retirement. This retirement should continue until such time as the lawsuit is concluded and the aftermath has sufficiently subsided." At that time, members of the Ministerial Council thought Mr. Armstrong had agreed to "proceed to retirement." They would soon learn Mr. Armstrong did not share their opinion.

Three days after the Ministerial Council reached its conclusion in November, Mr. Armstrong wrote a letter to the Board of Directors and the Ministerial Council. In this letter he inferred that several members of the Ministerial Council had been "blind-sided" and alluded to some kind of "power play." This letter became public and soon led to all sorts of "conspiracy" theories. He refused to acknowledge the real reasons for the Council's decision, preferring to have all accountability directed toward anyone but himself.

During this same conference in which Mr. Armstrong made his announcement, the Ministerial Council was asked to explain its decision regarding Mr. Armstrong's removal as a credentialed minister. All eight members offered a brief explanation. Their comments centered

on “qualifications for the ministry” and the reputation of those who represent Christ.

The ministry and the Ministerial Council had been through a similar controversy in 1995 when Mr. Armstrong was caught on videotape exhibiting lewd behavior with a local Tyler masseuse. Then, the Ministerial Council (and the ministry) was assured by Mr. Armstrong that this sexual encounter was a “one-time thing.” On the basis of his repentance and confession of wrongdoing, the Council, comprised of the same men who serve on the Council now, voted for Mr. Armstrong to retain his credentials. That decision resulted in 60 percent of our ministry leaving our church. We also lost 50 percent of our membership. Supporting Mr. Armstrong was indeed a costly decision, but one the Council members were willing to stand by on the basis of Mr. Armstrong’s integrity.

Now, *why*, after “defending” Mr. Armstrong in 1995, *did the Ministerial Council recommend in 1997 that he proceed to retirement?* The answer is simple: Members of the Ministerial Council learned, through a confession of sin, that Mr. Armstrong was involved in another sexual liason at the same time he was caught on tape with the masseuse in 1995. The lady with whom he was having this affair is a longtime member of the church. She came forward in September of 1997 and confessed her five-year affair with Mr. Armstrong to her pastor. It started (in her own words) “around early spring of 1990; I believe he invited me out for a bottle of wine. He came over to where I once lived...and took me to dinner as he was en route on a fishing trip.” The affair continued through the middle of 1995 and ended (in her own words) when “he got in the videotape scandal with the massage therapist.”

As already mentioned, this woman’s confession came in the wake of the turmoil created in 1995 when Mr. Armstrong was sued by a masseuse for sexual assault. As to that allegation, Mr. Armstrong has claimed he was set up and has declared his innocence. However, the problem all along has not been whether he was set up, but what he was doing there in the first place. He has claimed that he was the victim but *has yet to tell the entire truth* about his involvement with the masseuse. We now know that he had been with her on several occasions, participating in other sexual activities. If that weren’t serious enough, the video shows that Mr. Armstrong is there for reasons other than being “taken advantage of.” Since this past summer, portions of this video have been shown on national television *three times*.

We have no way of knowing to what degree you have been informed, either by Mr. Armstrong or us. Mr. Armstrong has written of the many hundreds of letters, e-mails, and telephone calls he has received. We too have received the same, and due to an increasing number of inquiries, we want to answer the most asked questions regarding the Ministerial Council’s decision:

Why did the Ministerial Council make the decision to no longer issue ministerial credentials to Mr. Armstrong? The Ministerial Council believes Mr. Armstrong’s past and recent conduct is inappropriate and unsuitable for someone who represents himself as the spokesman for Christ. This conclusion is based upon the scriptural demands of I Timothy 3:2–7, where we note in particular, “blameless [or above reproach],” “of good behavior,” “one that rules well his own house,” and having “a good report of them which are without.” The Council recognizes the injunction given from the apostle Paul to Timothy in I Timothy 5:20–22,24–25, where guidance

is provided for handling the minister who sins.

It is recognized that, to the Council's knowledge, Mr. Armstrong has not been involved in any sexual misconduct for (as he last said) twenty-eight months. That is commendable, but not the issue. It would be much more recommending for Mr. Armstrong to say that he has been faithful to his wife for the last twenty-eight years or longer. Those scriptures pertaining to ministers rest firmly on fidelity, not on how long it has been since a minister's last affair. For one to remain *credible* as a minister, he must not be known as a womanizer.

All of us agree that every man should be faithful to his wife. Unfortunately, too often indiscretions occur: mistakes happen. We understand the weakness of the flesh. We understand a "slip up" because we know how easy it is to sin. But what's troublesome (and disqualifying) is when one sees *a pattern of sexual sin*. Mr. Armstrong has demonstrated this pattern, having had one affair, then another, then another. We now know of several other women Mr. Armstrong has been with sexually since the early 1980s.

The Ministerial Council believes the qualifications for elders (I Timothy 3 and Titus 1) applies to **ALL** ministers *without partiality*. We do not believe that the qualifications apply to all **BUT** Mr. Armstrong.

The situations we have discussed so far are sexual in nature. They, in and of themselves, are very serious. But equally serious, if not more disturbing, is Mr. Armstrong's conduct *in the last four months*. He has turned to fabrication and distortion, imputing motives and making allegations that are self-serving and totally void of the truth. He has told so many "untruths" that it is difficult to know where the truth begins. If he is truly repentant, why has he involved himself in this capricious behavior?

Following our meeting with him on the morning of November 23, we felt Mr. Armstrong would act in good faith toward the commitment he made that morning. In the weeks that followed he has demonstrated a breach of that faith. Mr. Armstrong, from his first letter to his latest, has misrepresented the Council's motives, unequivocally stating, as a matter of fact, things that are not true. Mr. Armstrong said he didn't know in advance that his "situation" was going to be discussed. That is not true. Mr. Armstrong said he did not have a chance to face his accusers. That is not true.

The Ministerial Council has not been "blind-sided" in any way, nor are we aware of any "power play" by any of our Council members. Mr. Armstrong, since meeting with us the morning of November 23, has been involved in oral defamation, trying to cast an unfavorable impression on the decision of the Council. It is unfortunate that Mr. Armstrong has chosen to violate his own statement regarding conduct as recorded in the Constitution and By-laws of the Church of God, International where it says "to conduct ourselves honorably, honestly, openly, and frankly before the people of all societies; and to be, according to the divinely-ordained impositions of Scripture, subject to the powers that be." It is shameful for him to have conducted himself so dishonestly these last few months.

Mr. Armstrong's recent letters, filled with innuendo, accusations, and misinformation, have

only led to an environment of suspicion, discord, and confusion. *His blatant disregard for the truth is beyond the limits of reasonable behavior expected of a minister, much less the one who claims to represent the church.*

Mr. Armstrong also advanced the misleading accusation that there had been some violation of the priest-penitent law. He accused others rather than himself. The truth is, on November 22, 1997, members of the Ministerial Council were informed of a "secret" affair carried on under the cloak of forgiveness from 1990 to 1995. This was not a one-time isolated dalliance out of weakness; it was premeditated, and planned. Mr. Armstrong used the Day of Atonement and the days leading up to the Feast of Tabernacles as a rendezvous, entertaining his adulterous relationship up to the time brethren began to arrive. *What the ministry did not know until 1997 is the fact that Mr. Armstrong had been confronted about his conduct with **this same woman** in 1992.* Then, as now, he said he bitterly repented and was sorry. He said he ended the relationship. To our dismay, we learned just a few months ago that the affair continued for another three years.

The Church of God, International and its members, including the Ministerial Council, were deceived and misled by Mr. Armstrong in 1995. For years he has carried on with a "double life." Now, considering *his present behavior* and conduct, he is disqualified from being a minister in the Church of God, International. This decision casts no lingering shadow on his relationship with all of us as a brother in Christ. We are all carnal and sold under sin. But such conduct is unbecoming a minister of Jesus Christ.

If these sins are over two years old, why are they now an issue? They are an issue now because we just learned of them when the woman confessed in September, 1997. This disclosure also revealed that Mr. Armstrong was not totally forthcoming when the ministry inquired about "any other sexual sins" going on in Mr. Armstrong's life in 1995. The five-year affair continued until the day Mr. Armstrong was served legal notice from the masseuse's attorney following a personal appearance in Phoenix. The following Monday, he called his mistress and asked her for her support and hoped that she was not embarrassed because of what he had done with the masseuse.

Did someone (a minister) go to this woman and dig up Mr. Armstrong's (and her) old sins? Yes. Mr. Armstrong did. The Ministerial Council learned about this five-year relationship through the woman involved. She volunteered this information to her pastor. *She did so because of a phone call made by Mr. and Mrs. Armstrong to her home about four months ago.* Because of insinuations made by the Armstrongs during this phone conversation, she felt compelled to "come clean." She told of how Mr. Armstrong broke priest-penitent confidentiality, leaking a confession to him given by an office employee, and how Mr. Armstrong inferred she might have a lawsuit against another office employee for slander. The implications from the Armstrongs incited her to begin making inquiries about their remarks. While searching for the truth she learned that she had been misled. She reasoned that there was a motive behind the telephone call from the Armstrongs. When she realized the Armstrongs were trying to use her for their purposes, she felt obligated to tell the truth. The ministry did not go to her trying to dig up old sins of Mr. Armstrong's. If Mr. and Mrs. Armstrong had not made that phone call, the situation we face today would most likely have never happened.

Since Mr. Armstrong has repented of his two-year-old sins, doesn't forgiveness make everything all right? Due to the long-standing nature of his problem, and due to the fact that clips of the infamous "massage" video (showing Mr. Armstrong engaged in lewd behavior) have been shown on television in the United States and abroad three times to date, we (members of the Council) firmly believe that allowing Mr. Armstrong to continue as the sole voice and representative (before the world) of all that we believe and stand for is contrary to the principles set forth in Matthew 18:6,7; I Timothy 3; Titus 1; Romans 2:22-24; and II Samuel 12:14.

Paul encouraged the young women of the church to be good wives, kind, self-controlled, and pure "so that no one will malign the word of God" (Titus 2:5, NIV). The apostle encouraged Titus, a minister of Jesus Christ, to teach with seriousness, integrity, and soundness of speech "so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us" (verse 8). He encouraged Christian slaves to be subject to their masters, pleasing them in every way, "so that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive" (verse 10; cf. I Timothy 6:1). Paul advises godly behavior for widows, not only because wholesome living is right in the eyes of God, but "so that no one may be open to blame," and so that they would "give the enemy no opportunity for slander" (I Timothy 5:7,14).

Notice that the scriptures cited in the above paragraph emphasize the importance of making the gospel presentable through proper example. For the same reason, an elder "must be above reproach," and "must have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap" (I Timothy 3:2,7). If we continue putting out front, as representative of all that we believe and stand for, a man whose reputation has been seriously damaged because of past immoral behavior (and especially because of the exposure of his sins through means of a videotape), then we are guilty of bringing reproach to the name of Jesus Christ, and giving the enemies of the Lord great occasion to blaspheme His holy name.

Forgiveness is not the issue! We have all forgiven Mr. Armstrong. In fact, if we discovered that he did it again, *we would forgive him again!* More importantly, if he truly repented, God would forgive him as well. It is simply a matter of holding the ministry of our church to the requirements set forth in the scriptures cited above.

Doesn't the growth that the church has experienced in the last few years testify to God's support for Mr. Armstrong's ministry? Numbers do not prove anything. A person can repent upon hearing the truth from a false prophet, or harden his heart upon hearing the truth from an apostle, or from Jesus Christ Himself!

And, about those numbers: In 1997, festival registration was 1,954; in 1996 it was 1,731; in 1995 it was 4,629; in 1994 it was 4,226; in 1993 it was 3,761; in 1992 it was 3,913. Of particular concern is the number of people who are asking about attending church. These are the viewers who call or write in to ask where a local church is located or ask for counseling with a minister. In 1996 the number of referrals was down 22.8 percent. In 1997 the number of referrals was down 24 percent. Again, we obviously want the numbers to reflect an increase every year. But, if you feel God is only blessing us in the "up" years, what is He doing in the "down" years?

We would also like to point out that Mr. Armstrong (or any man or woman) is a “tool” for God to use as He sees fit. Unfortunately, we as humans see some of those tools as “better” than others. It’s very likely that Apollos was a much better speaker than Paul. But would any of us dare say that Paul was a lesser instrument in the hands of God? Certainly not.

In I Corinthians 3 we find the apostle Paul correcting the brethren when he says, “Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom you believed, even as the Lord gave to every man. I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that plants anything, neither he that waters; but God that gives the increase” (verses 5–7). We must be careful in our adulation of those we choose to favor. If we look at the fruits of the CGI, we are grateful to those who have responded to Mr. Armstrong’s voice, even as we are grateful to the entire ministry who labor without recognition to shepherd the flock. But it is God that gives the increase, not men.

We must exercise caution toward those who claim to be God’s anointed. Such a proclamation does not make it so. Mr. Armstrong has told many stories about visitors who have claimed to be the “Elijah” or one of the “two witnesses” or “John the Baptist.” Self-promotion is not the evidence of divine selection. We should sooner turn our thanksgiving to those who labor *together* with God: We are God’s husbandry; we are God’s building. When one sets himself above others, take notice.

If we consider the example of David, we have to wonder how God would tolerate David’s disobedience to Deuteronomy 17:17—“Neither shall he multiply wives to himself”—and still respond to David’s cries for help. Perhaps the answer to this can be drawn from II Samuel 5:12, where we learn that God will stand by His promises “for His people Israel’s sake.” God will never abandon His own cause just because a leader disqualifies himself. When Moses gave up the privilege to enter Canaan, someone else rose up to lead Israel. We can rest assured that God’s sovereignty will never be challenged by the indiscretions of those who lead. We, after all, are to follow Christ, and Him only.

In Mr. Armstrong’s absence, who is running the church? We believe that Christ is “running” the church. Exactly how He does this is not perfectly clear, but nonetheless, in faith and belief, the church is His body, of which He is the head. Organizationally, this part of God’s church is being run by the same governing bodies that have been acting on behalf of the church since 1978. The only difference is that since 1995, when Mr. Armstrong resigned as president, the Board of Directors created the Executive Committee as provided in the Contitution and By-laws of the CGI.

This finds the *Board of Directors* handling all fiduciary matters, as well as establishing corporate policies, corporate objectives and strategies, approving the annual plan and budget, and dealing with extraordinary expenditures outside the annual plan.

The *Ministerial Council* works with all the ecclesiastical matters. This includes ministerial objectives and strategy, ministerial policy, church charters, ministerial grievances, ministerial credentials, and the responsibility to accumulate, prepare, and present to the whole ministry significant doctrinal questions.

The *Executive Committee*, as designated by the Board of Directors, has responsibilities that center on the day-to-day decisions implicit in the operation of the home office.

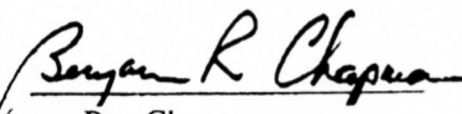
We realize there may be a few who are surprised to learn that we have been working without a single individual in charge these last two and one-half years. The three governing bodies have met regularly and have performed their responsibilities as outlined through the Constitution and By-laws.

These questions, underlined above, represent the most frequent inquiries we have been receiving. We hope the answers provided will help in some way to guide you to a better understanding of the events we have dealt with over the last two years, and in particular, the last four months. It is not a pleasure to have to inform you of these things. We do love Mr. Armstrong and hope he will come to understand the reasons for the decisions that have been made. We had hoped that Mr. Armstrong would retire gracefully, and, at the appropriate time, begin the process of restoration to service within the ministry of the Church of God, International. That has not worked out.

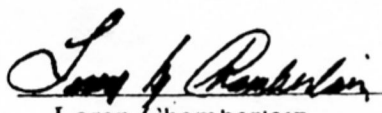
We know there are uncertain times ahead for the CGI as well as Mr. Armstrong. We need each other's prayers. Mr. Armstrong is our brother in Christ. We ask you to join us in prayer for him and his family as well as the Church of God, International family. Christ is the captain of our salvation and it is He in whom we must trust. Whatever lies ahead, we look forward to laying all our differences aside and pressing on toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

We are truly excited with the opportunities God has given us. New television programs are being produced weekly. Different speakers with the same message of repentance and salvation are reaching new viewers. The ministry of the church is becoming more involved in our warning witness. It isn't just the work of one man; it is the work of many. God is working through His people, allowing the GOOD NEWS OF HIS KINGDOM to go to the world. These are serious days in which we live. We pray that Christ will return soon. "Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober." We appreciate your vigilance.

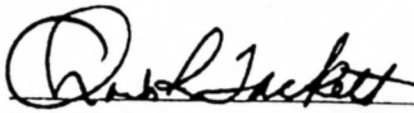
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