

WORLD RELIGIONS

Freemasonry And Grace Communion International (Worldwide Church of God) Lesson #21

For this lesson we will look at two more religious groups i.e., Freemasonry and the Masonic Lodge, and Grace Communion International, formerly the Worldwide Church of God. The former claims to be non-religious, but this is a lie for it certainly is a false religion antithetical to Christianity. The latter, at the beginning, fit squarely into the category of cult, but in more recent years seems to have moved away from its cult status.

I. GROWTH OF FREEMASONRY

Before looking into the growth of Freemasonry, it is necessary to assert, against the claims of Freemasons themselves, that Freemasonry is a religion. This will become apparent in this study and others have arguably proven this to be the case. It must also be understood that Freemasonry can be divided into different rites and supporting sub groups. Therefore, one must understand that there is Freemasonry for men and supporting sub groups for women and children of Freemasons.

- A. *Decker's Complete Handbook on Mormonism* discusses Freemasonry for Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, and other key leaders in Mormonism who were practicing Masons, and much of the ritual and secret practices of Freemasonry were used by Joseph Smith when he invented Mormonism. Decker writes:

Modern Masonry is a secret society and is divided (at least in America) into three major segments: the first three degrees of the Blue Lodge—the foundational initiations upon which all Freemasonry rests. These degrees are named after the ancient stonemason guilds' ranks: Entered Apprentice, Fellow Craft, and Master Mason. These are the most ancient parts of Masonry.

In the last couple of centuries, two branches grew out of the original Blue Lodge degrees: the York Rite and the Scottish Rite. The Master Mason, once he becomes proficient in his "craft," is allowed to pursue either or both branches which go past the third degree. The York Rite consists of seven degrees and culminates in a so-called "Christian" degree called the Knights Templar. The

Scottish Rite has 29 degrees and culminates in the thirty-second degree, “Sublime Prince of the Royal Secret.”

Additionally, there are a dozen or so “Auxiliary Masonic Bodies” which are available to Masons and their relatives. These include the Shrine (only for thirty-second degree Masons and Knights Templar), the Order of the Eastern Star (for Masons and their female relations), and Job’s Daughters, Rainbow Girls, and DeMolay (respectively, for adolescent girls and boys related to Masons).¹

- B. **Freemasonry makes many claims that disarm people.** They claim they are supportive of all religions, Christianity, the Bible, and that they themselves are neither religious nor political. They are merely a fraternal brotherhood and don’t offer a means of salvation. These claims have led many professing Christians to get involved in Freemasonry. As involvement and commitment increase, ever increasing peer pressure, curiosity, and eagerness to get to the next level cause many to compromise the truth until at last they are fully involved in occultism.
- C. **Freemasonry is involved in many good things.** Masons have become members, leaders, and even pastors of churches. They are involved in promoting education, business, and engage in many charitable endeavors which from the public perspective are good and wholesome. Yet like most cults, they cannot be evaluated by the good things presented to the public but by their core beliefs and practices. Most cults have attractive “bait” they offer to the public before showing their hand in private, once they have a person reeled in.
- D. **The growth of Freemasonry is expanding.** *Wikipedia* states: “Freemasonry is a fraternal organization that arose from obscure origins in the late 16th to early 17th century. Freemasonry now exists in various forms all over the world, with a membership estimated at around six million, including approximately 150,000 in Scotland and Ireland, over a quarter of a million under the jurisdiction of the United Grand Lodge of England and just under two million in the United States.”²

¹Ed Decker, *Decker’s Complete Handbook on Mormonism* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1995), 209.

²*Wikipedia* online encyclopedia <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Freemasonry>

II. HISTORY OF FREEMASONRY

- A. Masonry or Freemasonry or Speculative Masonry gradually emerged from the stone mason's guilds in Great Britain during the middle ages. Though Masons claim historical beginnings to Solomon's Temple or even to the early chapters of Genesis there is no evidence to back up these claims. Masons also attempt to connect themselves with Egyptians, who of course were great builders of cities and the pyramids. Ancient Egyptian religion, of course, was pagan occultism. The first Grand Lodge of modern Masonry was founded in a tavern in England in 1717.
- B. *Cults and New Religions* says, "Masonry gradually evolved into its present form, known as "speculative" Masonry. This distinguishes it from "operative" or "working" Masonry of the medieval stone masons. Operative Masonry slowly assimilated the mysticism and occultism of numerous religions and philosophies of the Middle Ages to become what is known as modern speculative Masonry. Most scholars trace modern Masonry to the time when four lodges merged in London in 1717 to form the first Grand Lodge."³

III. TEACHINGS OF FREEMASONRY

Freemasonry is at first glance nothing more than a social club or fraternal order. This is how it is portrayed to the public, as a benign men's social association. Yet as one gets more involved and committed the religious aspects begin to become apparent. As one moves into the upper levels of the Masonic Rites, it becomes clear that Freemasonry is mystical occultism. The fact that Masonry has secret rites should be enough to scare away any discerning Christian as the Bible does not promote or advocate secrecy but the proclamation of the truth to all nations and the need to expose what is hidden, as the Apostle Paul says in **Eph. 5:6-13**:

6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. 7 Therefore do not be partakers with them; 8 for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light 9 (for the fruit of the Light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth), 10 trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. 11 Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them; 12 for it is disgraceful even to

³ John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *Cults and New Religions* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1999), 214-215.

Speak of the things which are done by them in secret. 13 But all things become visible when they are exposed by the light, for everything that becomes visible is light.

Though the Bible is clear about these things many professing Christians have also professed to be Masons. In 1993 there were an estimated 500,000 to 1.3 million professing Masons within the Southern Baptist Convention!⁴ “For example, a 1991 survey by the Southern Baptist Convention Sunday School Board found that 14% of SBC pastors and 18% of SBC deacon board chairs are Masons. It is also estimated that SBC members comprise 37% of total U.S. lodge membership. (A 2000 updated SBC report found that over 1,000 SBC pastors are Masons.)”⁵ When pressured about the compatibility of Christianity and Freemasonry and the Southern Baptist Convention’s views on the issue, they balked and said:

In light of the fact that many tenets and teachings of Freemasonry are not compatible with Christianity and Southern Baptist doctrine, while others are compatible with Christianity and Southern Baptist doctrine, we therefore recommend that consistent with our denomination's deep convictions regarding the priesthood of the believer and the autonomy of the local church, membership in a Masonic Order be a matter of personal conscience. Therefore, we exhort Southern Baptists to prayerfully and carefully evaluate Freemasonry in the light of the Lordship of Christ, the teachings of the Scripture, and the findings of this report, as led by the Holy Spirit of God.⁶

In spite of the Southern Baptist Convention’s weak stand against the Freemasonry cult and allowing pastors and members to choose for themselves, many Southern Baptists have been up in arms about it and are battling to this day to get a more definitive declaration from the Southern Baptist Convention stating that Freemasonry is a cult and is incompatible with Biblical Christianity.

⁴John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *Cults and New Religions* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1999), 214-215. See also by John Ankerberg, *Bowing at Strange Altars*.

⁵<http://watch.pair.com/sbc.html>

⁶<http://watch.pair.com/sbc.html> And the conclusion listed at the SBC official web site: <http://www.sbc.net/aboutus/faqs.asp> For an extensive discussion see *The Master’s Seminary Journal*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (Fall 1994).

A. **False claims of Freemasonry** implied or stated in their teaching and literature are listed by Ankerberg and Weldon:

1. Masonry says it is not occultic.
2. Masonry claims not to offer a system of salvation.
3. Masonry says they are merely a fraternal brotherhood.
4. Masonry constitutes the one true religion.
5. Masonry claims to support the church.
6. Masonry claims to be tolerant of all religions in order to unite all religions.
7. Masonry claims to honor the Bible and all Scriptures.
8. Masonry does not interfere with one's religion or politics.⁷

These claims are all false and are used by Freemasonry to draw people into their "fraternal order," a pagan religion antithetical to Christianity.

- B. *Decker's Complete Book on Mormonism*: Freemasonry is a sinister, anti-Christian institution. Thus, its being woven so integrally into Mormonism is highly problematic. Masonry claims to go back to the building of Solomon's temple, although there is no biblical proof for that. It claims to go back even further, by referring to the biblical character "Tubalcain" as a Freemason, and using his name as the password for the third degree. He is regarded as the first Mason, and yet a careful reading of Genesis 4:16–26 shows that Tubalcain was of the cursed lineage of Cain—not a very auspicious beginning, considering both Freemasonry's and Mormonism's early attitudes toward those of African-American lineage.

Masonry also asserts that it comes from the Egyptians, who were indeed great city builders. But the Egyptians were pagans and their priests, sorcerers. Actually, there is no evidence for any of this historic lineage. The earliest historic link we have is with the aforementioned stonemason guilds of the high Middle Ages. History does show that these Masons ultimately began admitting non-stonemasons (called "speculative Masons") to their membership in the eighteenth century because of the decline of cathedral building.

The first documented reference in English to Masonry as a society is nearly 100 years older than that—and it is directly tied to occultism and magic. It occurs in Anderson's poem "Muses Threnody" from 1638: "For

⁷John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *Cults and New Religions* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1999), 215.

we be brethren of the Rosey Cross/We have the Mason Word and second sight.”

Rosicrucians (Brethren of the Rosey Cross) are occultists and their society exists to this day. Its most notable branch is called AMORC (Ancient and Mystical Order of the Rosey Cross) and is headquartered in San Jose, California. The “second sight” is the witchcraft power of clairvoyance—being able to see the future or faraway events by psychic power. Thus we see that from its very beginning in modern times, Masonry was linked to sorcery. . . It is from this source that all English Freemasonry comes. From its beginning, it has been filled with the anti-Christian philosophies of deism, naturalism, and universalism; and it is contrary to the true gospel of Jesus Christ.⁸

C. **Freemasonry as a Religion.** William Alston, professor of philosophy at the University of Michigan, says Freemasonry is a religion for some of these reasons:

1. A belief in supernatural beings (God or gods)
2. A distinction between sacred and profane objects
3. Ritual acts focused on these sacred objects
4. A moral code with supernatural sanction
5. Religious feelings which are aroused by sacred objects or ritual and connected to the idea of a divine being or beings
6. Prayer
7. A particular worldview which encompasses the individual’s place within the world
8. The organization of one’s life based on such a worldview
9. A social group that is bound together by the above traits⁹

⁸Ed Decker, *Decker's Complete Handbook on Mormonism* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1995), 212.

⁹Ankerberg and Weldon quoting *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (1972; Vol. 7, pp. 141-142) in *Cults and New Religions* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1999), 229.

D. Distinctive Beliefs of Freemasonry¹⁰

1. *Freemasonry claims to be the one true religion stating:*

In all the preceding degrees you must have observed that the purpose of Scotch Masonry is to overthrow all kinds of superstition, and that by admitting in her bosom on the terms of the strictest equality the members of all religions, of all creeds and of all countries, without any distinction whatever, she has, and indeed can have, but one single object, and that is to restore to the Grand Architect of the Universe; to the common father of the human race, those who are lost in the maze of imposture invented for the sole purpose of enslaving them. The Knights Kadosh recognize no particular religion, and for that reason we demand of you nothing more than to worship God. And whatever may be the religious forms imposed upon you by superstition, at a period of your life when you were incapable of discerning truth from falsehood, we do not even require you to relinquish them. Time and study alone can enlighten you. But remember that you will never be a true Mason unless you repudiate all superstition and prejudices.¹¹

2. *Freemasonry rejects the authority of the Bible.* Though Freemasons claim to believe the Bible, have many biblical symbols and names in their secret rituals, and have a Bible present on the altar of every Masonic Lodge, they deny the claims the Bible makes about itself and treat the Bible like they do all sacred writings from other religions. They believe the Bible was written in symbols which obscure the true meaning from non-Masons and that only Masons can properly interpret the Word of God. In fact, Freemasonry has stated that it has nothing to do with the Bible or it wouldn't be Freemasonry.¹²

3. *Freemasonry believes in a different God.* Their god is the “Great Architect of the Universe” but not the God of the Bible. They pray to, praise, and worship their god. The identity of the god of

¹⁰Most of the information in this section comes from H. Wayne House, *Charts of Cults, Sects, and Religious Movements* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 139-148, unless otherwise noted.

¹¹John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *Cults and New Religions* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1999), 232.

¹²Ibid. Quoting *Little Masonic Library*, Vol. IV, pp. 215-118.

Freemasonry is somewhat difficult to nail down because they accept all religions and so individual members often read their own personal beliefs about their god into the definition of the “Great Architect” god of Freemasonry. This is why the god of Freemasonry is not the God of the Bible. They believe the god of Freemasonry is to be chosen above the inferior God of Christianity.

4. *Freemasonry denies the deity of Jesus Christ.* They believe Jesus was simply a great teacher or moralist. If individuals want to believe Jesus is God they are free to do that but the official teaching of Freemasonry is that Jesus’ divinity is a man-made doctrine. They say the title “Christ” does not belong to Jesus alone, for all men have a higher “Christ” consciousness.
5. *Freemasons deny the deity and personality of the Holy Spirit.* The Holy Spirit, according to Freemasonry, is a “universal agent.”
6. *Freemasonry denies the sinfulness and depravity of man.* Men are compared to rough stones that merely need smoothing out, but Freemasonry denies that men are born depraved.
7. *Freemasonry denies salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.* They believe everyone must work his own way to heaven. Salvation is only by works, not by grace.

Thus it can be seen from this very brief summary that Freemasonry is not Christian but a false religion in the disguise of a benign fraternal order. Though a Christian might become a Mason they could never continue to accept Masonic teaching. Freemasonry and Christianity are antithetical religions.

GRACE COMMUNION INTERNATIONAL OR THE WORLDWIDE CHURCH OF GOD

Herbert W. Armstrong, influenced by the Bible, Seventh Day Adventism, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Mormonism, and Anglo-Israelism, formed his own religion which eventually became known as the Worldwide Church of God with Armstrong as the only authoritative interpreter and apostle of the movement. Armstrong’s beliefs were heretical and the cult thrived under his leadership. Fortunately, after Armstrong’s death the leadership rejected Armstrong’s unorthodox views and in an almost unprecedented move turned to orthodox Christianity. The one-time cult then changed its name to “Grace Communion International” and has evangelical beliefs.

I. **GROWTH AND STATISTICS OF GRACE COMMUNION INTERNATIONAL**

According to *Wikipedia*:

Grace Communion International (GCI), formerly the Worldwide Church of God (WCG), is an evangelical Christian denomination based in Glendora, California, United States. Since April 3, 2009, it has used the new name Grace Communion International in the US. The GCI claims 42,000 members in 900 congregations in about 90 countries as of April 2009 and is a member of the National Association of Evangelicals.¹³

II. **HISTORY OF GRACE COMMUNION INTERNATIONAL**

James Beverly, in his work *Religions A-Z*, has a good summary of the Worldwide Church of God from its inception to its final state today:

The Worldwide Church of God was started as the Radio Church of God in 1933 by Herbert W. Armstrong. Armstrong was born in 1892 and joined the General Conference of the Church of God, part of the Adventist tradition, in 1927 and was ordained in 1931. In 1933 Armstrong linked with the newly formed Church of God, 7th Day, led by Andrew N. Dugger. Armstrong lost his credentials with that group in 1937 but continued an independent ministry. He moved his base of operations to Pasadena in 1947. He ordained his son Garner Ted (1930–2003) in 1955. The Radio Church of God was renamed the Worldwide Church of God (WCG) in 1968.

The WCG became well known in the late 1960s and early 1970s through its television program, *The World Tomorrow*, and its free magazine, *The Plain Truth*. In his teaching Herbert W. Armstrong focused on some themes common to Adventists: eschatology, Old Testament law, and the Sabbath. However, he also taught that the WCG was “the” Church of Christ and that he was the only apostle of God’s end-time work. Armstrong and his son also advocated a form of British-Israelism, arguing that the Jews of the Old Testament became the people of the British Empire and the United States.

Prior to his death in 1986, the Worldwide Church of God became embroiled in controversy. Several ex-members wrote critically about

¹³http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grace_Communion_International

Armstrong's wealth and dictatorial style. The most prominent critic was John Trechak, who began publishing *The Ambassador Report* in 1976. In 1978 Herbert excommunicated Garner Ted, who then started the Church of God, International, based in Tyler, Texas. In 1979 the State of California initiated legal action against the Worldwide Church of God in relation to alleged financial improprieties, but the suit was quickly dropped.

After Herbert's death, the WCG went through major doctrinal changes under Joseph Tkach Sr., its new pastor general. In his boldest move, Tkach preached a sermon on Christmas Eve in 1994 that clearly spelled out that church members were not obligated to obey Old Testament law related to diet and Sabbath. Tkach was succeeded in 1995 by his son Joseph Tkach Jr. The WCG continued to become more evangelical in its ideology, adopting a trinitarian understanding of God and a grace-based understanding of salvation. The church became part of the National Association of Evangelicals in 1997.

The departure of the WCG from many of Armstrong's views created a crisis among its membership. Many WCG pastors broke away and started their own groups. The best-known new groups that follow traditional Armstrongism are the Philadelphia Church of God, the United Church of God, Church of God—An International Community, and the Living Church of God. After six years of litigation, the Philadelphia Church of God, founded by Gerald Flurry, reached an agreement with the WCG to hold copyright on the writings of Herbert W. Armstrong.

In 1998 Garner Ted was ousted from the Church of God, International, and formed the Intercontinental Church of God. He died in 2003 and leadership passed to his son Mark. Joseph Tkach Jr. believes that he and his father helped move the WCG toward biblical orthodoxy. He wrote about this in his 1997 work *Transformed by Truth*. "We searched the Scriptures diligently to discover the right twist to this doctrine or the correct slant to that one. We got lost in minutiae and largely missed the real treasure, Jesus Christ Himself."¹⁴

The Grace Communion International website sums up their history with this short paragraph:

In the early 1930s, Herbert Armstrong began a ministry that eventually became our denomination. He had many unusual doctrines. These he

¹⁴James A. Beverley, *Religions A-Z* (Nashville, Tenn.: T. Nelson, 2005), 263-64.

taught so enthusiastically that eventually more than 100,000 people attended weekly services. After he died in 1986, church leaders began to realize that many of his doctrines were not biblical. These doctrines were rejected, and the church is now in full agreement with the statement of faith of the National Association of Evangelicals. To reflect these doctrinal changes, in April 2009, the denomination changed its name to Grace Communion International.¹⁵

Grace Communion International's website then goes on to describe in more detail how the Worldwide Church of God moved from being a cult to being able to subscribe to the doctrinal statement of the national association of evangelicals. It is an interesting read and a rare occurrence in the history of the church. Movements rarely leave false doctrine to embrace sound doctrine.

III. **TEACHINGS OF GRACE COMMUNION INTERNATIONAL**

Because the original Worldwide Church of God has moved away from its unorthodox teachings into mainstream Christianity we could merely at this point include the doctrinal statement of Grace Communion International.¹⁶ Since several splinter groups left the main body of the church and held to the false teachings of Herbert Armstrong we will list the splinter groups and then summarize some of the false doctrines held to by them.

A. **Splinter Groups who departed from the Worldwide Church of God holding to some, if not all, of Herbert Armstrong's teachings.**

1. Church of God International (1978)
2. Philadelphia Church of God (1989)
3. Twentieth Century Church of God (1990)
4. Church of God (Philadelphia Era) (1991)
5. Church of the Great God (1992)
6. Global Church of God (1992; now defunct)

¹⁵<http://www.gci.org/aboutus/history>

¹⁶See the doctrinal statement of Grace Communion International at: <http://www.gci.org/aboutus/beliefs>

7. United Church of God (1995)
8. Church of God Fellowship (1992)
9. Living Church of God (1998)
10. Restored Church of God (1998)
11. Church of God, an International Community (1998)

B. False Doctrines of the Splinter groups, no longer held to by Grace Communion International, but still held by the splinter groups in part or whole mentioned above.

1. God is two persons, the Father and Jesus who reproduce themselves into billions of persons.
2. Holy Spirit is God's mind and power not a distinct person.
3. The Trinity is a satanic doctrine.
4. Salvation is by works.
5. Man becomes God at the resurrection.
6. The Fall was caused by God to help people attain to perfection.
7. The Bible is authoritative but only when interpreted properly by Hebert W. Armstrong.
8. Hell doesn't exist. When people die they are annihilated and don't suffer conscious torment.
9. Heaven exists only for those who embrace the teachings of Herbert W. Armstrong.