

## Fundamentals of Belief #17A: Character and Redemption

Edited Sermon Transcript  
Jon W. Brisby; 5-11-2002

Today, brethren, we're going to continue on this series, the Fundamentals of Belief of Church of God, The Eternal, which has turned out to be a very long series and is going to be even longer. There will be many, many more sermons before we finish. We have completed number sixteen, and we are going to begin now with fundamental number seventeen. Just as a brief history to remind you that these first twenty of the twenty-six Fundamentals of Belief of Church of God, The Eternal were the very ones that were written by Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong decades ago. They were the foundation of the Radio Church of God and are still the foundation of this remnant group. That's why we've spent so much time on them—because they are fundamentals, they are anchors, of our beliefs that define who and what we are and what we believe was that original revelation that came through the last-day servant that God raised up and used in this age.

So, what does fundamental number seventeen say? It is a long one. There is a whole gamut of principles that are included in this panoramic statement of fundamentals. We're actually going to try and cover it in four sermons. I'll break this down into overall headings to let you know how we're going to tackle it over the next four sermons. Here is fundamental number seventeen:

We believe God's purpose is the creation of high spiritual character, and therefore the very object of redemption is to rescue mankind from SIN (transgressing the fundamental spiritual law), and its resulting degradation, misery and unhappiness; and that the object of the present dispensation is to fit those whom God now calls, with their consent, thru a life of trial and test and overcoming sin, growing in grace and knowledge to possess the KINGDOM and to become kings and priests

reigning with Christ after His return. We believe Christians must therefore live a clean, pure, holy life by faith according to the Bible standard, with constant Bible study and surrendered prayer, trusting God in and for all things, that yielding to pride and lust of the flesh is sin, that God hears and literally answers the believing prayers of His children who keep His commandments—according as He has promised in His Word, including physical healing, deliverance from temptation and trouble, providing the way for every actual need.

Isn't that a mouthful? There are a lot of concepts covered. How do we even begin to break that down and analyze the different components? Basically, what Mr. Armstrong did, was give us a fundamental of belief that paints a panoramic picture. It tries to take a lot of concepts and put them into an overall fabric, and show how they fit together to achieve a particular purpose in the master plan of God. What are the key ingredients of all that I just read to you? I've summarized them into three broad categories: redemption, reward and faith. Today, I hope to cover at least a significant part of the concept of redemption. If you want to put an individual title on this sermon, you can call it "Character and Redemption."

So let's begin now. I'm going to reread the first portion of this fundamental, that which we're going to focus on this afternoon. "We believe God's purpose is the creation of high spiritual character, and therefore the very object of redemption is to rescue mankind from SIN (transgressing the fundamental spiritual law), and its resulting degradation, misery and unhappiness . . ." That's what we want to begin to analyze. What is this phrase that Mr. Armstrong used when he called it "high spiritual character"? "We believe God's purpose is the creation of *high spiritual character* . . ." What's he talking about? What is character? Mr. Armstrong defined it very simply. Character is knowing the difference between right and wrong, and then always choosing the right. Character is knowing the difference between right and wrong, and having the ability to choose the right. That's what character is.

Let me read an expanded definition that Mr. Armstrong wrote. This is actually a quote from a 1957 article entitled, *Why Were You Born?* This is how Mr. Armstrong expanded on this concept, this principle, of holy character:

Character is the possession and practice of love, patience, mercy, faith, kindness, gentleness, meekness, temperance, self-restraint, and

right self-direction. Character involves knowledge, wisdom, purpose, ability, all properly controlled and developed, and through independent choice. Holy, righteous character is something that is developed *only through* experience. Experience requires time, and circumstances. And so God creates time and God creates circumstances which produce character.

So, what are we speaking of? Character, then, is not only possessing knowledge of right and wrong—understanding what truth is and how it differs from erroneous concepts in the world—it's possessing the Truth, but then using that Truth and applying it in our lives. It's putting into practice those things that we have been taught are fundamentally right, according to the divine revelation of Jesus Christ. Character is knowing the difference between right and wrong, and having the power to choose the right.

I have seen some things written of late from some of these that I'll call "Herbert Armstrong haters" or "bashers." Do you know what one of the things is that I've seen written? They've picked on this idea that Mr. Armstrong encapsulated the purpose of the Christian endeavor as the development of holy, righteous character. They say, "The Bible doesn't use the word 'character' anywhere. Herbert Armstrong just made this up. Where did he get the idea that the purpose for Christians is to develop holy, righteous character?" The Bible nowhere, from Genesis to Revelation, uses the word "character." Did you realize that? You won't find it. Did Herbert Armstrong just make up this new concept? Or, is it really contained in the Bible under a different word? It sure is. Do you know what word in the Bible is synonymous with the English word "character" that Herbert Armstrong used? The word "righteousness." How many hundreds of times did God use the word "righteousness" in the Bible?

No, the Bible does not contain the word "character," but "righteousness" is its equivalent. Righteousness is knowing the Truth and acting upon it. Righteousness is not just understanding the Truth. I actually covered this at the Feast of Tabernacles last year on the series I did on the armor of God, specifically under the subheading of the "breastplate of righteousness." I went through and explained this very principle—that righteousness is not the same as truth. What is the difference between truth and righteousness? Truth is the yardstick—the Law, the distinction between good and evil, the distinction between right and wrong. It is that which divides and tells us what is right and what is wrong as God defines it.

Is that the same as righteousness? No, it's not. You can absolutely understand the Truth—you can believe it, you can quote it to someone else—and still not be righteous. Why? Righteousness requires more than knowing the Truth; it requires that we act upon that Truth and apply it in our lives—that we're abiding in the Truth. We're adhering to the principles contained in that yardstick for living—just as Mr. Armstrong defined character as not only knowing the difference between right and wrong (the Truth), but being able to choose the right in the decisions that we make. That is character, and it is synonymous with the principle of righteousness.

Notice Psalm 15 and verse 1:

A Psalm of David. [Eternal], who shall abide in thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in thy holy hill? He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart.

Who is it that's going to dwell with God? Who is it that's going to receive salvation? Just the person who knows the Truth, who can quote the Truth, who can debate the Truth from a knowledgeable standpoint? No. "He that *walketh* uprightly . . ." It requires volition, brethren, an application of those principles in action, in work. "He that *walketh* uprightly, and *worketh* righteousness, and *speaketh the truth in his heart.*" This means much more than just having a surface understanding of the principles of Truth. It means that we have partaken of that Truth—it has become a part of us. That Truth dwells within our minds and our hearts, and it directs our paths. We make choices in our lives on a daily basis on the basis of the foundation of that Truth. It is our guide. It is the lamp unto our feet. That is the distinction in righteousness.

Notice 1 John 3 and verse 9: "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin . . ." No, anyone who is actually born into the Family of God is going to be sin-free. That individual will have, for the first time, a full measure of God's Holy Spirit with the absolute power to fight and to resist any other influence.

Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. [That is that which we hope to achieve and that which we wait upon at the return of Christ.] In this the children of God are manifest, and

the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God . . .

See, the Apostle John did not say, "He who does not understand the Truth is not of God." No, he said:

. . . whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother. For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous.

What was the difference between Cain and Abel? Was it that Abel had been instructed in the laws of God, and Cain had not? Did Abel have a special understanding of God's requirements? Was Cain left out of the loop so that he was incapable of having a close relationship with God, of being favored by Him? Or, were Cain and Abel both taught the laws of God? Yes. They were both taught the laws of God. They both understood what God required. What, then, was the difference between the one who was acceptable to God and the one who was rejected of God? Their fruits. One walked in the way of that Truth, in righteousness. The other discounted that Truth and chose instead to follow after the carnal dictates of the flesh. No need to turn to it, but Romans 2:13 says, ". . . not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified." It's not enough just to understand the difference between right and wrong; we must be able to apply it. We must be able to bring forth the fruits of that way of life in our actions in order to be called righteous—in order to prove that we have developed that which Mr. Armstrong called "holy, righteous character."

Matthew 25 and verse 33. Here, Christ was speaking a parable concerning a judgment that's going to take place between those who are going to be offered eternal life and those who are going to be rejected.

And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me

in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous . . .

Who is it who did all of these things? Those that are called righteous.

Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? [They weren't aware, in this case, that they had done any of those things to Christ. Verse 40:] And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it . . .

Inasmuch as you have, not just professed belief and love toward neighbor and benevolence to the sick or needy. These who are called righteous actually did something about it. They actually made personal sacrifices of their time and of their energies. They applied these principles of love and manifested them in their behavior one toward another.

. . . Inasmuch as *ye have done it* unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.

The righteous are those who applied it. They not only knew what love was, but they also acted in love. They didn't just profess knowing the manifestations of godly love; they didn't just spend all of their time at home reading their Bible and engulfing themselves in this principle of love; they got out there and applied love in their interaction with others. They actually manifested fruits, works, of righteousness. They manifested righteous character—knowing what was right and acting upon that knowledge.

So that, brethren, is the character that Mr. Herbert Armstrong was speaking of and which he used in such eloquent simplicity to define the purpose of the Christian endeavor. "We believe God's purpose is the creation of high spiritual character . . ." That's precisely what God is doing. There's not a better way that I, or anyone else, could ever have voiced it or written it—"the creation of high spiritual character." That's why you were put on this earth, brethren. God gave you an opportunity to put on the very mind of Jesus Christ because He is looking for those whom He is going to add to His eternal family. They are going to share

all eternity, power, glory, and dominion of the universe with the Father and the Son. But He's only going to give that as a reward to those who learn to act in righteousness, who put on the character of God—not only the knowledge of right and wrong, but the ability to always choose the right.

Lucifer, who became Satan the Devil, did not have righteous character. He knew the difference between right and wrong as well. That didn't save him. Lucifer gave in to a pull within his own mind, which was selfish, self-serving and antagonistic to the very will of God. He knew the difference between right and wrong, but he chose the wrong. Because he chose the wrong and refused to turn back, he separated himself from God and from the service of God, and became an enemy. God is not going to allow any other being out of the flesh to receive eternal life who has the potential of ever turning and choosing the wrong way once knowing the Truth. That's why character development is the essence of this Christian endeavor, and we have to be putting on the very righteousness of Jesus Christ.

The next part: "We believe God's purpose is the creation of high spiritual character, *and therefore the very object of redemption is to rescue mankind from SIN . . .*" And that sin is defined as, ". . . (transgressing the fundamental spiritual law) . . ." We've already had a number of sermons, in the early part of this fundamental series, on the topic of sin and law, so I'm not going to go back through and spend time repeating that. Those tapes are available if you want to go back and review them again.

Sin is the transgression of the law—1 John 3:4. There is no such thing as sin except there was a law first, as the Apostle Paul said, to tell us what sin was. If the law is done away, there is no sin. You can't have a penalty for breaking a law that doesn't exist. If there's no such thing as a speed limit, you can't incur a penalty for going fast, can you? The only way you get in trouble and become guilty of breaking a speed limit on the highway is if there's a law that says, "Don't exceed this speed." So, there is no such thing as sin, unless there's first a law that says this is right and this is wrong. It always fascinated me that those who call themselves Christians believe that Christ came and did away with the law. Phenomenal. Do they believe that they are sinners? Yes. But they think the law is done away. How can that be? There's no such thing as sin if there is no law which distinguishes between right and wrong. Anybody who says that Christ did away with the law is saying that Christ did away with the very concept of sin—that sin no longer exists and that we, as human beings, do not sin. That concept is an absolute anathema and comes right out of the mind of Satan.

We've covered all of those principles before. Yes, sin is the transgression of the fundamental spiritual laws that God set in motion. ". . . therefore the very object of redemption [This is the concept we want to cover.] is to rescue mankind from SIN [the infraction of those laws of which we are all guilty] . . . and its resulting degradation, misery and unhappiness." Yes, breaking God's laws brings penalties. Breaking God's laws *always* brings penalties. There is no instance when we will ever break a law and there not be a penalty. Now, sometimes we do things and we think we're getting away with it. There's probably a number of those things that we each could list on our secret tablet of faults. And maybe some of the most difficult ones to overcome are the ones where we don't see an immediate penalty. It almost appears that we can engage or fall into it and still get away with it because we don't see anything bad happen right away; but I can guarantee you, brethren, there is always a penalty for the infraction of God's laws.

It's not because He sits up on His throne in heaven and strikes us down with a lightning bolt every time we do something bad. No, He doesn't have to do that. Why? He built it into the very physical universe—cause and effect. Break the law, and there's an automatic resulting penalty that is set in motion because of that act. God doesn't have to materially think about it again. He built a system into this universe, into all that exists, that says if we break a law, there is an automatic penalty. That's the way He designed it. And God is not a Being who bluffs. He's not like the parent who tells the young child, "Johnny, don't touch that or there will be a penalty." Johnny runs over and touches it anyway, and the parent shrugs his shoulders and goes on. Little Johnny figures out, "Ah-ha, Mommy or Daddy said there was a penalty, but I found out there wasn't because nothing happened to me when I did it." God's not that kind of a Parent. When God says not to do something, you can bet that He already built in a penalty. If we touch it, if we do it or if we fail to do something that He commanded us to do, there is an automatic penalty. It's built in.

Part of the difficulties of this human existence is that we have to learn many of those lessons the hard way, and so we pay the price. We get burnt; we suffer. Sin results in suffering. It results in penalties, and yet God made it so—out of His perfect love and desire for us to be able to overcome those things and to achieve the very end for which we were created, Sonship in His Family. When we learn from those hard experiences, that is also a part of the character-building process. God realized. He made us with minds, as we're going to see in a few moments, that have to learn many of these things the hard way. Now, we can save ourselves a lot of

problems if we believe Him and if we have the strength, spiritually, to act upon it and not put our finger on that hot stove. If we just believe God when He says, "Don't touch it; it'll burn you," how much we can save ourselves. But the one who is too weak, who touches it and gets burnt, will still learn a valuable lesson that will help him next time.

What is this definition of redemption? That's what we're talking about now—a way for human beings to be saved out of the penalties of their own actions, the infractions of God's Law, which is sin. God provided the means for redemption. What is redemption? The dictionary defines it as many different concepts. Here are some of them. Redemption: a thing that saves someone from error or evil; the act of buying back or redeeming; emancipation or liberation through payment of a price or a ransom [Did you think about redemption as being a ransom?]; an act or instance of restoring, reclamation; a release from a detrimental influence or circumstance. These are all principles that are covered under this term "redemption."

Let's notice how God demonstrates this principle of redemption in Psalm 130 and verse 7:

Let Israel hope in the [Eternal]: for with the [Eternal] there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption. And he shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities.

He will redeem Israel from all his iniquities. What are iniquities? Sin, infraction of God's perfect Law. He provided a means, as a loving, merciful, longsuffering God, to save us out of the penalties of breaking His Law. God did not create us and set us up to fail. He did not place us on this earth and reveal to us His Truth with the expectation that we would turn away from it and lose salvation. No, He gave us this opportunity, brethren, because He wants us to succeed. His purpose is to build an expansive, glorious Family, but He started us with minds that absolutely reject the Truth by nature. He gave us a challenge. We have to prove that we love that plan, that we love His laws, and we love it so much that it's more important to us than anything else—any other goal, any endeavor in the flesh—and that we are willing to sacrifice everything else in order to be with Him in that Family. He wants us to make that choice. He has provided the means for us to be successful with it. It's a hard, uphill road all the way, but for those who love it enough—for those who value that Kingdom more than anything else—we can absolutely have it. There is nothing in this flesh that can or should prevent it, if we love it enough.

". . . with him is plenteous redemption." Oh yes, He wants to save us. He wants to pay the ransom. He wants to pull us out of the fire. He wants to redeem us out of the filth of our sins and our wretchedness in the flesh. "And he shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities." Yes, He is going to save; He is going to redeem.

Romans 3 and verse 23—one you know very well: "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." No, there's not a single one of us, brethren, who can stand up and claim to be worth anything of value—not one of us that can stand up and compare ourselves to anyone else in this room or in this worldwide fellowship or among any of our brethren or anyone in the world, and say that we are better.

For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace [How is it that God is justifying humanity?] through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare [What?] his righteousness . . .

Who was it that was truly righteous? Who was it that truly knew, not only the difference between right and wrong, but consistently, always chose the right? Who was it who manifested perfect, holy, righteous character? Jesus Christ. He walked in the flesh, and He never sinned. He proved that He had perfect character because He not only knew the Truth, but He knew how to use it to make the right decision every single time. It is through that very righteous example that we have an opportunity to be redeemed out of our sins.

Being justified freely by his grace [which means a gift. It's not anything that we earned.] through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.

Who is it, then, that has an opportunity to come under the redemptive power of Jesus Christ, to be saved out of the hideous filth of our sins? And we all have them. It is those who do accept that Redeemer, those who acknowledge His righteousness—that perfect Way of Life—and also, in like manner as Jesus Christ gave us the perfect example, will set about in our personal lives to begin to walk in

that same way. Now, we trip and fall, and we are still batted continually by these carnal natures. We fall face first in the mud, and we have to go and cry out to Him, Our High Priest, and ask for His shed blood to cover us, to wash us and to make us clean again. Every single day, we have to ask for that redemption. We have to ask to be purged of those sins.

Matthew 20 and verse 27:

And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.

That's why Christ came in the flesh—to be a Redeemer. It was through His experience in the flesh—qualifying through a perfect, righteous life without sin—that He came to be able to have something of value to ransom us out of our guilt. He lived and died, never having sinned; and because He was the Creator of all humanity—the one that we call God of the second part, who was the one that the patriarchs talked to and were led by—His single life was worth more than the sum total of the lives of all humanity rolled into one. By His perfect life in the flesh, He qualified with something so immeasurably valuable that He could intercede as our Great High Priest, and through His shed blood, wipe away and pay the penalty for all of our sins—the infractions of that Law. What an incredible, absolutely unbelievable, mind-boggling concept of a Master Plan that God set in motion to provide redemption for His people. That Son was willing to divest Himself of His glory, to become flesh, to endure all that He did, and suffer all that He suffered for our sake. He knew the depth of our depravity and all that we would be guilty of, and yet He willingly gave Himself so that all of that in the past could be wiped away. His life was worth more than the sum total of all human life, and so He can offer a ransom to save you and to save me from the death penalty and make us new again in life.

Why do we need that redemption? Why do we need to be saved? Why do we need to be ransomed? Well, God created us in His own image. Yes, He did. He created us to look like Him, but He did not give us a perfect, godly mind. Now, some people have a problem with that. I know. I've talked to them. They have this idea, "Well, human beings can't really be that bad, you see, because God made us in His image and God only makes perfect things. So human beings must be good by nature. We only become bad by our environment. Bad things happen to us, and it

pulls us away from the goodness that God started us with." Don't kid yourself. No, it is part of God's perfect Master Plan that He created you and me with a body that looks like Him, manifesting His signature upon us that we are created for the purpose of becoming God to join the God-Family. That's why He made us to look like Him. He made all of the beasts of the field and all of the other creatures to look like certain angelic beings, but He created man to look like the God-Family because that's what our hope is. That's why we were created—to achieve that end. But He created us with a despicable mind. He created us with a carnal mind, which, by nature from its inception, opposes every good thing that God gave.

I can't help but get into it just a little bit again, because it was one of those doctrines that was more subtly perverted back in the 1970's. I think it came and went, and not a whole lot of people really clued in to that change in doctrine on the nature of man. There were so many other changes that were going on with Pentecost, divorce and remarriage and things like that, I think the change in the doctrine on the nature of man just kind of slipped past a lot of people. It was so subtle because it was just a small change. Mr. Armstrong had originally taught us, which was substantiated by the Bible, that God created man with an evil nature from the beginning and He told us to overcome it. And yet, subtly, it was changed to say, "Well, no, God doesn't create a new little baby with an evil nature. We're created with neutral minds that are neither good nor evil, and it is only a matter of whose wavelength we tune in to, either God's or Satan's." This changed doctrine was that man really is a blank page with nothing written on it—a nature that is neither good nor bad—and it only depends on what we write upon it. See, it's very subtle, and yet it has profound impacts upon many other aspects of the Law and the understanding of the Master Plan of God. I don't have time to go through all those things again. I have gone through them, and I'm sure I will again in the future.

But rest assured, brethren, God did create us with a carnal mind. We started out from the beginning with a mind that is opposed to Him. Now, human nature is a mixture of good and evil, and that's why it can be so deceptive. We all know people that are not in the Church who seem to be good examples—good people. "Well, he's just a fine individual. He goes out of his way to help others, and he never says a mean thing." And yet, they're not called and they're not led by the Holy Spirit. So, many conclude, "Well, I have this neighbor, and they're such a wonderful example and they're not in the Church. So, therefore, you don't have to be in the Church, you don't have to have God's Holy Spirit, and you don't have to have a calling in order to be good. They must be good by nature." Not so. We just read in Romans 3, didn't

we, there is *none* good, no not one? Not a single one—not according to God's definition of righteousness.

What is deceptive? God created human beings to desire good things. Oh yes, we all by nature want peace. We value unity; we value love, mercy, kindness and all of these spiritual principles that emanate from God. We all by nature want those things. You know what the problem is? We can't achieve it on our own. God did not give the capacity to human beings to be able to achieve their hopes and dreams, even if the dreams are good. So, we have a whole world of humanity out there trying to bring about a utopian society on this earth. They want peace; they want love. They want every good thing, and they're not achieving it at all. Why? They are missing a key ingredient that God did not place within the human mind—the need for the Spirit of God. Man is incomplete. The mind of man is absolutely defective and incomplete without the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. It's like having a wonderfully-made machine with all kinds of ingenious working parts. They are all there and it looks so wonderful, but it has one little missing part, which means the whole thing ceases to work. It never can work properly because it has one critical part that's not there. That's the way the human mind is. It is a mixture of good and evil, but it is defective because it does not have God's Spirit—the missing ingredient—to allow it to achieve all that God desires.

God made us that way for a reason. Why? He is choosing the time of salvation for every human being, and He's only calling a few at this given time. Most are not even going to have their chance to receive the missing ingredient, to have their opportunity to understand the Truth and to begin to walk in a way of righteousness and put on Christ until after the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Those of you who understand the Truth because you have been called now, have been given the opportunity to receive that missing ingredient. Those of you who have become baptized have received the down payment of the very mind of God living and dwelling within you, with the opportunity to be made complete and whole, to be redeemed out of your sins, to be saved out of the defective natures with which we were born and to walk in a different way.

God gave man 6,000 years to prove by hard experience that he cannot fulfill his loftiest, worthy goals apart from God. He wants peace, and he will never achieve it on his own because he does not have the means to apply the laws of God—because by nature men hate God's laws. They like the end result, but they do not agree with the methodology that God put in place in order to achieve it. So God says, if you

want to be happy, keep the Sabbath, keep the Holy Days, do all of these things, and man says, "I want to be happy, but I think I can do it without sacrificing my time to go to a church service. I think I'm going to be happier if I go on this little excursion, or if I go hiking or jogging or running on the Sabbath, or if I put in some extra hours at work and earn some more money. I think that's going to make me happy." Mankind has a lot of good reasons for doing what he does. He thinks he's going to make himself happy by all his endeavors. And all he does is continue to pay the penalties for breaking laws, one after another. Most of the time, he never admits it or acknowledges it, but continues to hit his head against the brick wall all of his natural life. Those of you that have been called to understand the Truth have been given a priceless miracle because you have an opportunity to stop hitting your head against the brick wall, to understand that there is value in the ways of God and His laws—and to understand that, guess what? Making the personal sacrifices to overcome and to apply those spiritual principles, does bring happiness, joy, peace and every good thing, even if it makes us cringe to have to make the changes in our lives.

God gave man 6,000 years to prove that he cannot fulfill his hopes, dreams and aspirations on his own. All man has done for almost 6,000 years is to prove how ineffective and absolutely incapable he is of governing himself. Misery and anguish is the result of human wisdom.

Without that missing ingredient of the mind of God dwelling within, man is like an unfertilized egg. This was an example I found that Mr. Armstrong wrote years ago. He compared the carnal human being to an unfertilized egg. Yes, it is alive; it's a living cell structure. But it has a limited life; and if it is not fertilized, it dies. It never becomes something more. It simply lives out a short life span and then ceases to exist. Only if that egg is impregnated with the very mind of God, will it turn into a begotten being—a new creation—which then begins to grow toward maturity in order to achieve something greater than it ever could have on its own. That was the example that Mr. Armstrong used to picture conversion and the calling of those out of this world, out of the depravity of our natural orientation, to a Way of Life, then, which leads us to the very redemption of Jesus Christ—receiving the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit even as that seed fertilizes that egg and creates a new creature.

Notice 1 Peter 1 and verse 3:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us [There it is—the imagery, precisely what Mr. Armstrong said. God used the same imagery through the preaching of Peter.] again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

How was it that we came to have an opportunity to even receive the imparted life of Christ living within us? It was by His death, burial and resurrection, and His qualification as our High Priest, by which we can have our guilty past blotted out and receive the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit—the mind of God motivating us, guiding us, giving us the missing ingredient to finally make those minds work as they were intended to all along. Then, we are able to begin to step forward and fulfill our calling and our purpose—to create holy, righteous character, to actually begin to manifest the very mind and the actions of the righteousness of the God-Family.

We fight because we don't have a full measure of the Spirit. No, we've only received an earnest of the Spirit. We don't have a full measure the way that Christ had a full measure when He walked on this earth, and so our carnal natures still rise up very easily and quench that Spirit; and we do the things we know are wrong. We take the wrong path, and yet God is ever willing to redeem, to save and to cover. If we never justify those evil ways, if we never begin to say that they're right, if we never deny God's definition of truth and error, and we fall upon His throne and cry out for His mercy and longsuffering and the very shed blood of Jesus Christ to wash away those pasts, we can have that saving power. He will give us that Spirit. If we cry out to Him and ask Him for the will to obey, then He can help us overcome bad habits, no matter what they are, and put on the very mind of God.

Ephesians 2 and verse 1: "And you hath he quickened . . ." This is an imagery, a very picture of the begettal process. When a living cell—even in an egg, which has a limited life span and is incomplete in and of itself—receives the missing ingredient of the seed, which gives it life, then it begins to multiply; it divides rapidly and begins to grow until it slowly but surely, over days and weeks and months, forms a new little baby. All the while, it begins to look more and more like the very image of the parents. You, my dear brethren, were created in the image of the God-Family. Therefore, when you receive the impregnation of the Holy Spirit, you receive the power to grow more into the very image of God—the maturity of the mind, the character and the righteousness of that God. "And you hath he quickened . . ." We're talking about the gift of life, the mind of Christ living within you for the first

time—those that are members of God's Church, the very Body of Christ through the Holy Spirit. "And you hath he quickened, who were *dead in trespasses . . .*"—even as that unfertilized egg—dead, ultimately, with a limited life span.

And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we *all* had our [conduct] in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath . . .

Does this say that we were by nature neutral, a blank page? Or, does it say that by nature, meaning as God created you and me from the beginning, we were the children of wrath? He made us that way, and even as God told Cain, "If you do well, will you not be blessed? And if you do not well, sin lies at the door." If we don't receive good things, it's because there are broken laws that are at play. We're not to blame God for our misfortunes or misadventures. God has a perfect Law, and if we pay penalties, it's because some—one or more—of His perfect laws have been broken. That's why we come before Him on our knees, and we cry out for forgiveness and ask Him to show us. Sometimes we don't even know how or when we're breaking those laws, and so we say, "God show me, please. Help me to see. I don't want my ways; I want yours. I don't want to continue to pay the penalties. I don't want to continue to hit my head against that brick wall. Show me the right path. Light my feet so that I can see the right way. Cover me with the very blood of your Son. Purge me from my iniquity, which I admit and take responsibility for. Help me now to create new habits and to stop the old."

Among whom also we all had our [conduct] in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ . . .

Oh yes, He began a new life in you by imparting that Holy Spirit; and He gave you, for the first time, whenever that baptism occurred, the opportunity to be a new creation—something that you were not before. Now, for the first time, you had the opportunity to achieve your real purpose for being and put on the very mind of Christ and that perfect character.

"Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)" Yes, it was a gift. We didn't earn it. We didn't receive this calling—we didn't receive this opportunity—because God looked out and said, "Hmm, now, I'm going to pick the best people of all that I can find and the ones that are doing better than the others on their own, and I'm going to call them." That is not how it works. He did not call us, brethren, because we were better or more valuable or had more potential. He called the weak and the base things to confound the mighty, which means that neither you nor I were worthy of anything except death. We were the least among others on the face of the earth. Yet, by grace, by His gift of unmerited pardon, He provided the means for you and for me to have this chance now.

. . . (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. For by grace are ye saved through faith . . .

Yes, by that gift we can be saved through faith. We're going to talk about faith in a few sermons.

. . . and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. [No, it wasn't because we earned the right.] For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

No, we didn't earn anything. He called us and gave us this chance. Then, by imparting the mind of Christ within us, we have an opportunity now to begin to overcome, to put on, for the first time, truly righteous works. So, yes, we do have to work. We have to put off the old self. It's not like the false Christian concept that we accept Christ, He did it all for us, and we sit back and watch things unfold and just bide our time until we go to heaven. Nothing could be further from the truth. No, the endeavor of a Christian is a lot of hard work because it's only the overcomers that are going to be there. That means there's going to have to be a battle that is waging in your mind until the day you draw your last breath in the flesh—even as it is within me. We must fight against that carnal nature that wants to rise up and take control again. We have to keep the battle going.

It is not because of our works that we gain access to salvation. It is God's gift to offer and His gift to impregnate with the Holy Spirit those who accept that calling, but then we must use that Spirit to put on Christ and develop that high, spiritual character. That's what this whole endeavor is about, brethren.

What is this redemptive process like? How does redemption work? How is God actually redeeming mankind now? First, it requires a call. People do not volunteer to be Christians, although many people out there think they have. "Oh yes, I discovered the Lord. I decided to become a Christian." No one decides to become a Christian. God does the calling. In essence, brethren, we were all walking down the street, minding our own business, going our own way—we had our eyes set on something we intended to do—and it's like God tapped us on the shoulder and said, "Hey, come here. I have something I want you to do." For some of us, He actually had to grab us by the nap of the neck and pull us and say, "I've picked you. I've chosen you. You're not going to continue to do the things that you planned to do because I've got something else in mind. I'm going to call you and select you for a different purpose." And so it was for each one of us in our own unique way.

Romans 8:28:

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them *who are the called* according to *his* purpose.

You see, unlike what most people think, *Oh, well, I decided to follow Christ.* As if Christ is sitting out there with a stand or something and saying, "Ok, let's see who's going to come, and I'll work with whomever volunteers." Not a bit. No, God did the calling. He selected.

. . . we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called *according to his purpose*. [It means He had a design. He did it with volition, with purpose.] For whom he did foreknow . . .

Oh, there was somebody that He had in mind from way, way back. This is one of those contested passages of Scripture because it has to do with predestination, but as Mr. Armstrong said in that first article on predestination way back in the 1940's, He knew you by name thousands of years before you were born. Yes, He did.

For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.

It shows the progression of salvation. First, He selected by choice, before the foundation of the earth, those whom He would call—not those who would ultimately receive salvation. The very point of Mr. Armstrong's article was to say that God does not predestinate one to be saved or to be lost. That is according to our free moral agency and how we either accept or reject that call. He predestinated us to be called. He knew ahead of time to whom He was going to give the opportunity to be a part of the firstfruits harvest. That's what He predestinated, and He knew us by name. He knew who was going to be created through the unions of every human being throughout the annals of time, including the adulterous or incestuous relationships that produced offspring. I don't have a problem with that. He knew what human beings were going to choose to do, but He looked down through the corridors of time and He selected those, even in the last days, who would become the offspring of humanity over a 6,000-year period of time. He selected specific individuals, back even before the foundation of the world, and He earmarked you to get that calling now. He said, "You're one to whom I'm going to give the chance. You're going to get your chance now. I'm going to write your name in the Book of Life, and the only thing that's going to take it out is if you remove it. But I want you to make it. I want you to accept this calling. I want you to act upon it, and I want you to be there. It's up to you. I'm going to give you the power, the capacity, the very mind of my Son to dwell within you so that you can have it. All you have to do is want it bad enough. All you have to do is work at it."

It takes a call, and then we have to accept that call. How do we accept that call? We recognize and admit that we were called, and we become baptized. We cannot begin to walk with Christ unless we receive the missing piece of that machinery—the very mind of Christ working upon our minds through the Holy Spirit. We're incomplete, and we're incapable of ourselves to obey God's laws. We have to be empowered through the Spirit. Now, there are many who have been called—they've been given their one and only opportunity—and yet, they are, in essence, practicing spiritual birth control. That means that they've been given the opportunity now, but they are not choosing to allow Christ to impregnate them with His Holy Spirit. They have refused, to this point, to become baptized. And I know,

especially for ones that grew up in the Church—and I'm one of them—how do you know when you're called, when the doctrines of the Church are the only thing you were taught from the time you were little? We didn't have the opportunity to receive some monumental event in our lives that changed our course out of the world. We were always taught those things.

So, we grow up and we don't feel any different. "How do I know I'm called?" is a very common question. I've heard it dozens of times. If you understand the Truth, if the things that I'm telling you make sense, if you believe the Truth and you know those principles are right, you're called. The uncalled mind hates those principles and reacts violently to those principles. It will not entertain it and cannot understand it. God shields the minds of humanity from being able to understand His Truth or to value it. It is foolishness to the uncalled, and it requires a miracle in the mind for you to be able to grasp, to understand and to value that Way of Life. If you understand it and value it, you're called! You are! The question is, what are you going to do with it? Are you going to practice spiritual birth control and prevent the impregnation of the Holy Spirit that you need? Or, are you going to finally admit that you are called and embrace that Way of Life and have an opportunity to be redeemed out of your guilt?

Then, brethren, once we accept that call and receive the down payment of the Holy Spirit, we have to live a life of overcoming and developing that righteous character. It's painful. It's hard, and it will be as long as we live in the flesh, but God has provided the means for us to succeed, not to fail.

Man seeks his own means to gain immortality. Oh yes, human beings want to live forever. They want to leave a legacy. They want to be remembered. They want to make their mark on the world. Let's notice Psalm 49 and verse 3, and we'll see the description of man trying to achieve redemption on his own, trying to save himself, to achieve immortality—those things that are a part of his own concepts of value and success.

Psalm 49 and verse 3:

My mouth shall speak of wisdom; and the meditation of my heart shall be of understanding. I will incline mine ear to a parable: I will open my dark saying upon the harp. Wherefore should I fear in the days of evil, when the iniquity of my heels shall compass me about? They that trust

in their wealth, and boast themselves in the multitude of their riches; None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him.

Oh, you've got people that have money. They have power; they have all kinds of things that human beings look up to on the earth, and people say, "Wow, if I could just be like him or her. If I could just be Bill Gates and have all of his money, boy, I'd use it for good." That's what we say. "Oh, how happy I would be and how many things I could accomplish, even in the service of God." No, it doesn't work that way. "None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him." That money and all of those things in the flesh won't buy anything eternal. It is worthless. "(For the redemption of their soul is precious . . ." Oh yes, it is. They value the idea of being redeemed, of being saved, of being immortalized. It's precious to them, but they can't do it on their own. ". . . and it ceaseth for ever:) That he should still live for ever, and not see corruption." Oh yes, that is man's goal—that he should not see corruption. He wants to find some way to preserve his life and to immortalize himself so that he will not be forgotten.

Verse 10: "For he seeth that wise men die, likewise the fool and the brutish person perish, and leave their wealth to others." It doesn't matter how much you achieved or how successful you were in your life. It doesn't matter how great the job was that you got, how well educated you were, and how you applied that to be successful either in business or politics or in any other endeavor of life. It doesn't matter how many plaques you had engraved with your name on the wall of a hospital or a library for all of your philanthropy over the years. It doesn't matter how many times you were interviewed by the networks because of your wisdom on world affairs. It doesn't matter how rich or wealthy you were. That individual is going to die and go to the grave just like the poorest, most uneducated person on the earth. They're all going to the same place.

For he seeth that wise men die, likewise the fool and the brutish person perish, and leave their wealth to others. Their inward thought is, that their houses shall continue for ever, and their dwelling places to all generations; they call their lands after their own names.

So we have all of these great estates made of great, heavy stones that have been around for hundreds of years, some of them for thousands of years, as a testament to the ones who built them. We have the great pyramids and all of these

monuments that are still existing today, and yet they're still decaying. They are still fading. "Nevertheless man being in honour abideth not: he is like the beasts that perish." Man cannot achieve immortality. He cannot create a lasting legacy that's going to last more than a blink of an eye, even if it lasts for hundreds or thousands of years. That's still a blink of an eye in relation to eternity.

This their way is their folly: yet their posterity approve their sayings. Selah. Like sheep they are laid in the grave; death shall feed on them; and the upright shall have dominion over them in the morning; and their beauty shall consume in the grave from their dwelling. But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave: for he shall receive me.

Who is it that's really going to be redeemed? Who is it that's truly going to be immortalized, saved and prospered for all eternity with great wealth and power? Not the ones who are seeking it in the flesh today, but the ones who are putting their treasure in heaven by crucifying the self, accepting their call, walking, fighting against the carnal nature and struggling for that day of redemption when Christ returns to give a reward to those who are faithful. Which do we want to pursue? Which one is a more worthy and lofty goal? Is it trying to be like Bill Gates today? Or, wouldn't you rather be an incredibly powerful eternal being in the very God-Family? I think there's a lot more honor and glory that's going to go with an office in God's Family than that which could ever be thought of, let alone achieved, by a human being in the flesh.

. . . God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave: for he shall receive me. Selah. Be not thou afraid when one is made rich, when the glory of his house is increased; For when he dieth he shall carry nothing away: his glory shall not descend after him.

Isn't that one of the old sayings you see sometimes on bumper stickers, He Who Dies With the Most Wins? That's because there's an acknowledgment that you can't take it with you. Amass all that you can, that you think is going to make you happy in the flesh, and still, your life is going to pass like a blink of an eye from childhood to your aged years. If you haven't invested your time in something that really matters—preparation and developing character for birth into the very Family of God—if you have not been begotten and are not practicing and applying yourself in your calling, you are missing the opportunity to be truly immortalized and to leave a legacy for all eternity.

For when he dieth he shall carry nothing away: his glory shall not descend after him. Though while he lived he blessed his soul: and men will praise thee, when thou doest well to thyself. He shall go to the generation of his fathers; they shall never see light.

No, death is death. It doesn't matter how many people liked you or threw parties for you while you were alive; when you die, that's it. You're dead; you're gone. There's nothing left of all that you amassed—unless you've been doing something else. "Man that is in honour, and understandeth not, is like the beasts that perish." Man that is highly revered by other human beings for the things he accomplished in the flesh, but who doesn't understand God's Truth or Way of Life, is no better than an animal. That's exactly what God is saying here. For all of his grandiose accomplishments in the world, for all of the praises and the accolades that he derives from other human beings, when he goes into the grave, he decays just like the dog or the cat that you buried in the backyard. Ultimately, in the eyes of God, there's no difference, except for those that are putting their treasure in heaven—sacrificing the things of the flesh today in order to achieve some greater and more worthwhile calling for tomorrow.

The time of man's true redemption will be at the return of Jesus Christ. Notice Luke 21, verse 24. Here, this is Christ accounting for the circumstances that were going to exist in the last days right before His arrival to take possession of His Kingdom.

And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled. And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken. [Verse 27] And then [after all of these events and these signs] shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.

That is going to happen. That is going to be a reality. No matter how much men have misinterpreted and tried to figure it out, predicted it and called for it in times past, it is going to happen.

And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for *your redemption draweth nigh*.

When is that firstfruits harvest going to be truly redeemed and given their reward—even that which is pictured by this upcoming Pentecost? At the time when Christ comes with power and glory in the clouds. He is coming to take possession of His Kingdom, and He is coming to redeem you. He is coming to ransom you out of the flesh and the carnal minds that we still battle, and to give you a priceless reward and your office within the very Family of God.

Isaiah 47, verse 4: "As for our redeemer . . ." That's what He is. That's why He was a willing part of this plan of the Father. He was willing to divest Himself of His glory, to be born of an earthly mother, to live, to sacrifice and to experience all that He did, even at the hands of those that were supposed to have loved Him. He was beaten, scourged and crucified. He died in shame. Why did He do it? Because He knew it was a perfect plan of His Father's, and He was willing to be our Redeemer. "As for our redeemer, the [Eternal] of hosts is his name, the Holy One of Israel." Yes, He is a Redeemer. He is going to redeem spiritual Israel, and there is going to be a glorious family. That's what that redemptive process is all about, which Mr. Armstrong was capsulizing in fundamental number seventeen.

Next time, brethren, we're going to continue with some more discussion on redemption, specifically with regard to this principle of growing in grace and knowledge.