

Fundamentals of Belief #10A: Spiritual Conversion #1

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This afternoon, brethren, we are going to continue, as you might expect, on this series that I have been doing for a number of months—the Fundamentals of Belief of the Church of God, The Eternal. We are up to fundamental number ten. As you will remember, there are a total of twenty-six fundamentals. We have quite a ways to go. Averaging about two sermons per fundamental, this could go on for a number of months yet.

Fundamental number ten is all about spiritual conversion. That is what we are going to be talking about this afternoon—spiritual conversion. Let's read the fundamental; it is quite a long one. It is definitely going to take at least two sermons, but we are going to see if we can get through the first half of this fundamental today.

We believe that all who truly repent of their sins in full surrender and willing obedience to God, accepting Jesus Christ as personal Saviour in faith believing, are forgiven their sins by an act of divine GRACE, justified, pardoned from the penalty of past sins, reconciled to God, and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit which literally comes and abides within, supplying the divine LOVE which alone can fulfill the law and produce righteousness; and thus are baptized by the Spirit into the body of Christ which is the true CHURCH OF GOD. We believe in a true change in life and attitude and that only those who have the indwelling presence of, and are being led by the Holy Spirit are Christ's. Bible evidence of being thus baptized by the Spirit is the fruit of the Spirit in one's life.

There are quite a number of concepts involved in that fundamental. I summarized all of that and condensed it down. What we are talking about, when we are talking about repentance, accepting Jesus Christ, being forgiven of sins, receiving the Holy Spirit in baptism, and changing the way we live, is spiritual conversion.

Let's begin to dissect the first portion of this fundamental. "We believe that all who truly repent of their sins in full surrender and willing obedience to God, accepting Jesus Christ as personal Savior in faith believing, are forgiven their sins . . ." What are we talking about? We are talking about repentance. What does it mean to repent? What is repentance all about?

Let's begin by turning to Mark 1:14. We will begin to see a definition. There are a number of scriptures that I am going to give you that will spell out and begin to fulfill a picture of what true repentance really is in the mind of God.

Mark 1:14–15:

We see the first piece of the puzzle.

Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.

What is the first manifestation we find that goes along with real repentance? It goes hand in hand with what? Believing the gospel. Whatever that gospel was, whatever it was that Christ was preaching. ". . . repent ye, and believe the gospel."

Do we believe the gospel, brethren? Do we even know what it is? What was the message that Jesus Christ brought with Him? What were the things that He taught?

Acts 3:19:

"Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out . . ." Here, we see an expansion. That process of repentance is not only believing the gospel, it has to do with a conversion—something that takes place in the mind. We

begin to think differently than we used to think. We begin to be motivated by something that didn't used to matter.

Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.

That repentance involves the blotting out of sin, a conversion of mind, believing the gospel.

Proverbs 28:13:

"He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy." We are talking about repentance, brethren. We just saw in Acts that repentance is conversion and through that conversion, the opportunity for sins to be blotted out. Proverbs tell us, ". . . whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy."

Mr. Armstrong always said that repentance is not only being sorry and admitting the mistakes of the past, it is turning and going the other way. Here, we find it is not only confessing, it is being willing to own up to what we are and what we aren't. To admit that we are separated from God; to admit that of ourselves we are nothing—we are worthless. We have nothing to offer; we have no way to guide our own lives. Following our own dictates of mind and heart, we will run contrary to every law of God and we will pay every penalty.

That repentance, that conversion has everything to do with being able to look at ourselves in the mirror and see the reality of what we are. Hating and loathing what we are by nature. It is to say, "I recognize I am separated from God. I recognize that I hate the things that God loves and I despise what I am. I loath the manifestations of the flesh." To confess what we are—not only to confess it, brethren, but to forsake that way of life. As Mr. Armstrong said, admit it, apologize for it, and turn and walk the other way. That is what we are talking about with repentance.

Notice it in Ezekiel 14:6–8:

Therefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the [Eternal] God; Repent, and turn yourselves from your idols; and turn away your faces from all your abominations.

Do we really think about ourselves as idolaters? Do we think about the fact that part of repentance is to admit that we are idolaters and that we are guilty of gross abominations in the eyes of God? Or, do we think, "Yes, I know that I am not perfect and I know that I have certain problems and difficulties, but so does everyone else"? "In the broad scheme of things, I am not that bad." Isn't that how we naturally want to view ourselves?

How many of us—even those who have baptized for years and years—can truly say that we think often enough about the fact that our sins, no matter what they are, put us in the category of idolatry and are gross abominations in the eyes of God?

"Repent, and turn yourselves from your idols." Anything, brethren, that we put before God, any compromise we make of the law of God for the sake of fulfilling a lust of the flesh—some craving, some desire to say and do the things that we want to do at the expense of obedience to a law, command, statute, or judgment of God—is idolatry and an abomination.

Repent, and turn yourselves from your idols; and turn away your faces from all your abominations. For every one of the house of Israel, or of the stranger that sojourneth in Israel, which separateth himself from me, and setteth up his idols in his heart . . .

Do we set up idols in our hearts? You better believe we do.

. . . and putteth the stumblingblock of his iniquity before his face, and cometh to a prophet to inquire of him concerning me; I the [Eternal] will answer him by myself: And I will set my face against that man, and will make him a sign and a proverb, and I will cut him off from the midst of my people; and ye shall know that I am the [Eternal].

How serious is it, brethren, to divide ourselves from the living God by virtue of holding on to ideas and concepts in our hearts which He despises? Those things that divide us from that Creator God who made us and placed us here for a purpose. He called it "putting the stumbling block of his iniquity before his face." "Putting the stumbling block of his iniquity"—what is that iniquity? We have seen it in past sermons—law breaking. Iniquity is the breaking of God's perfect law.

When we justify concepts of our own hearts and minds and compromise with that law, we set up an idol, and it is a stumbling block of iniquity. We put it before us

and it comes between us and our opportunity to have that relationship with God. They are the things that we must absolutely repent of if we are to have a relationship with that God.

What is real repentance? As our fundamental says, real repentance requires full surrender and willing obedience. Notice with me in 2 Corinthians 7:9–10:

Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing. For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of [or regretted]: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.

What are we finding here? There are two different kinds of sorrow. There are two different kinds of regret. It is important that we do not confuse the one with the other. What is the difference between godly sorrow and worldly sorrow? It is very easy for us to conclude in our own minds that we are repentant. We have an orientation of sorrow and repentance, but it may not be repentance at all.

. . . but that ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing. For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation . . .

There is some kind of sorrow, when it is appropriate, that does lead to salvation and there is another kind of sorrow that leads to death in the world.

How many times have you been aware of somebody who was very sorry for something that they did wrong, but what you find out is that they are really sorry they got caught? They are sorry for the penalty that they are paying. It is not that they are really sorry for the fact that they were outside of the very laws of God, that they separated themselves from God, that they were guilty of creating a stumbling block of iniquity. They are sorry for the strife, pain and penalties that they are paying because of doing the things that they want to do and still want to justify. That is not repentance; that is not godly sorrow.

When we are talking about real repentance, real spiritual conversion, we are talking about full surrender which means that we loathe the self and the manifestations of our sins, our lawbreaking; and we seek with everything within us to begin to walk a different way. It requires sorrow to repentance—a repentance that

leads us to make a change, to begin to walk a different way, full surrender and willing obedience.

What good is our sorrow, brethren, if we can never get out of the rut? What good is being sorry if we continue to repeat those mistakes over and over again? I know you face them just like I do. How many times do you have something nagging at you, a problem that seems like a huge stone wall and it is so insurmountable, it seems like you just can't get over? We are sorry; but it has to come to the point, brethren, that we are willing to make that a godly sorrow, the kind of sorrow that is going to cause us to finally make a change.

It is not repentance unless we do turn and walk the other way. Otherwise, we are destined to continue to repeat, to repeat and to pay and to pay and to pay. Real repentance means that we do not only recognize our guilt, but we take responsibility for it and then we do not rest until we access the power that we need in order to walk in a different way—to overcome.

Psalm 51:15–17:

What is that full surrender? What does it mean to fully surrender to God, to lay down the idols of our minds, the stumbling block of iniquity and to say, "I am ready for a different way; my heart is softened; my mind is pliable; I am ready to be taught; I am ready to learn"?

O Lord, open thou my lips; and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise.
For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.

What is that full surrender about, brethren? It is about a broken spirit and a contrite heart. Do we have a contrite heart? Do we fall on our knees before God with truly a broken spirit and a contrite heart, recognizing our faults and loathing them, crying out to Him for mercy and forgiveness and for the power to put those things away?

God doesn't want the pretense of sorrow. He doesn't want the show; He doesn't want the words; He doesn't want those things that are compared to burnt offerings and other sacrifices. No, the sacrifice that God wants is that contrite heart. Full surrender is what we are talking about.

Ezekiel 20:42–44:

And ye shall know that I am the Lord, when I shall bring you into the land of Israel, into the country for the which I lifted up mine hand to give it to your fathers. And there shall ye remember your ways, and all your doings, wherein ye have been defiled; and ye shall lothe yourselves in your own sight for all your evils that ye have committed.

That is full surrender—when we come to the point that we recognize truly how vile we are in separation from God. That the stench of our own sins is before us so that we cannot escape it and we have no alternative but to admit and to seek a different way.

. . . there shall ye remember your ways, and all your doings, wherein ye have been defiled . . .

Do we recognize the ways which we have adopted which have defiled us? Are we cognizant of those things?

. . . ye shall lothe yourselves in your own sight for all your evils that ye have committed. And ye shall know that I am the Lord when I have wrought with you for my name's sake, not according to your wicked ways, nor according to your corrupt doings, O ye house of Israel, saith the [Eternal] God.

There is a recognition that has to occur—a time when, for the first time in our lives, we begin to see something in ourselves that we never recognized before. We finally see the clarity of the real mirror that compares us to the perfect manifestation of God's Spirit, to Jesus Christ's; and by comparison, we know for the first time how totally disgusting and despicable we are.

When we have that part softened, when we are contrite, then we are in a position to finally be able to repent. Full surrender to God. To say, "God, I don't want my ways anymore. I am tired of hitting my head against this brick wall. I am tired of suffering the penalties. I recognize I am paying the price and I am separated from you. I cannot do it on my own. I want blessings, not curses. Help me."

Joel 2:12–13:

Therefore also now, saith the [Eternal], turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the [Eternal] your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil.

Do we really recognize God as a Being with that capacity for mercy—slow to anger and of great kindness in spite of our guilt? Who is really there waiting for those whom He has called—waiting for them to respond, to submit themselves to Him in willing obedience, to surrender the self, to lay it down and say, "I am tired of my own ways; I want yours"?

". . . turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning . . ." That is full surrender, brethren. "And rend your heart, and not your garments . . ." No, don't make it an outward show. It is not for the appearance of someone else's benefit; it has to do with what is deep down inside our hearts. It is between us and God.

". . . rend your heart, and not your garments . . ." Make it real. Make it something that you believe. ". . . and turn unto the [Eternal] your God . . ." What does it mean to turn unto that God? It means that when we are sorry, with godly sorrow, when we are finally sick enough of what we are and the mistakes that we are making, and how powerless we are to direct our own steps, we are willing to say, "I want your way God; help me."

Turning to that God, in that sorrow, brethren, means we begin to walk a different way. We stop breaking the commandments. We start to live our lives according to a way of obedience. Not that we can walk perfectly. We are human beings. We are going to suffer no matter how long we live in this flesh with the pulls of those carnal minds that are going to tug at us and cause us to slip and stumble and make mistakes. However, conversion has everything to do with beginning to live after a different way; not living after the lusts of the flesh and those natural inclinations, but beginning instead to focus ourselves on a different path.

It is the laws of God—obedience to His way of life—that bring those blessings. The more that we can obey them, the greater is our reward—even in this life.

Luke 18:9–14:

The parable that Christ gave that showed the difference in someone who truly had surrendered in mind and heart, was pliable and able to be used finally by God; versus the one who, in his own arrogance of mind, claimed a relationship with God, a preeminence, a self-righteousness that had nothing to do with repentance, whatsoever.

And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others . . .

Have you known people, brethren, even in the church, who claimed righteousness, but manifested their spite for others in the body? That kind of orientation is not a reflection of the Holy Spirit and it is certainly not repentance and it is not a contrite heart. When we act spitefully, abusively, toward others in the body, then it is a reflection that we do not fully see ourselves for what we are; because if we did, we would be the last ones to point a finger at another human being.

And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican.

He was pretty convinced about how righteous he was. Probably had been in the church a long time. He had probably been to the Feast of Tabernacles many, many years. Probably been baptized, using a modern day corollary, for so long that he felt he had some sort of a position of preeminence within the body. He was one to be looked up to, to be revered for his righteousness, experience and those things that he thought made him so acceptable before God. "I am not an extortioner. I am a just person. I am not an adulterer and I am certainly not like this publican over here."

And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.

More appropriately, the real context of what he is saying is, "God be merciful to me, the sinner." He recognized himself in his own mind. He recognized the depth of the depravity of his own weakness of the flesh in opposition to the perfect ways of

God and he loathed himself. When he prayed, he took responsibility and accountability. He didn't compare himself to someone else to try and make himself feel better. Saying, "God, be merciful to me the sinner, even the greatest sinner on the face of the earth."

I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

Humbling ourselves in our own eyes; recognizing our faults, our true position apart from God's perfect laws; taking responsibility; adopting a contrite heart, a lowly spirit; being willing to fully surrender and being willing to turn and to begin to obey.

Without obedience, there cannot be true repentance. We can be sorry as much as we want to. We can express our sorrow in crying and beseeching of God, but without some change that follows that orientation—to begin to walk in the paths of obedience—it is futile. We must turn and walk the other way. Are you going to be able to turn and immediately obey completely in every way? No. Well, I can only speak from my own experience. I know it hasn't been that way for me.

I have told you before; at times with me, I think I actually went down further before I started up. I was baptized at age nineteen. I knew what the truth was and I knew what I was, but I was still going through that phase of growing up. As my father says, "Having to get over fool's hill." Well, I wasn't over fool's hill at age nineteen; and getting out and becoming independent on my own, I actually faced more difficulties and felt like I did worse in the period of the next two to three years before I really started to get some momentum and come out of it. Thankfully, God was incredibly merciful to me.

So, I don't know. Maybe you had a better experience. Maybe you were able to all of the sudden blossom as an incredibly accomplished spiritual creature soon after baptism. It took a lot of hard work and a lot of banging my head against brick walls before I really started making those changes.

It has to be a fundamental desire. There has to be something burning within us so that we recognize we don't want what this world offers. We recognize that it comes with sorrow, penalties, and all kind of difficulties, pain and suffering. So that, even as we stumble along that path and we fall down, our eyes are still focused on the goal. We are not turning around, wishing we were back in the world. We are not trying to go back and recover things that have been lost in the past, pining over what we gave up.

No, when we stumble, it is because we give into weakness, but we don't lust after that way of life anymore. We repent; we put it before Jesus Christ; we ask for His shed blood to cover us; and we pick ourselves up and continue to march on the path of life. Willing obedience. Saying, "I want to obey, Father; give me the power and the strength."

What is the problem with most people—even those who were called and accepted this way of life, who were baptized for years and years and who have corrupted themselves by changing the doctrines of God?

Malachi 2:17:

Ye have wearied the Lord with your words. Yet ye say, Wherein have we wearied him? When ye say, Every one that doeth evil is good in the sight of the [Eternal], and he delighteth in them; or, Where is the God of judgment?

How many people who know better, brethren, have done the very same thing today? They were called. They once—for the most part, I believe it is true—were repentant. They did recognize what they were in opposition to the perfect law of God. They did lay it down and want a different way. They did accept Jesus Christ and begin to walk in that way perfectly; and then, somewhere along the way, they began to buy into the lies that said, "You know what? Obedience isn't really that important after all. This hard way of life—the laws of God—is not really the way we show love for our Maker."

When ye say, Every one that doeth evil is good in the sight of the [Eternal], and he delighteth in them; or, Where is the God of judgment?

How many people today are saying, "Where is the God of judgment? Our God is a loving and merciful God. He is not a God of judgment. He does not require obedience from us. All we have to do is adopt a false concept of love—love for our brothers and sisters no matter how we differ doctrinally. We just have to love one another and be tolerant and accepting of those philosophies. Everyone has a different way of coming to God. Yours might be different from mine," they will tell you, "but we are both ok. You're ok and I'm ok. Obedience to the law is not important."

What are we talking about? We are talking about an absolute fulfillment that we have seen in the last days of this prophecy—when they call evil good. It is not

that they admit that they are endorsing evil. No, it is by watering down the very laws of God and saying, "It is ok to divorce and remarry. It is ok to keep Pentecost on Sunday. It is ok to use the world's medical system because that is how God heals. It is ok to believe we were not predestinated from the foundation of the world." It is ok to do all of these things that are perversions from the original way that we received. It is a reflection of the repudiation of that spirit and attitude of repentance that used to exist at one time in the hearts and minds of the majority of those. What happened?

Luke 6:46–49:

[Jesus speaking] And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say? [What a commentary on exactly what exists in those that call themselves the churches of God today.] Whosoever cometh to me, and heareth my sayings, and doeth them, I will shew you to whom he is like: He is like a man which built an house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock: and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it: for it was founded upon a rock. But he that heareth, and doeth not [The one who is sorry, but doesn't turn and change and begin to obey.], is like a man that without a foundation built an house upon the earth; against which the stream did beat vehemently, and immediately it fell; and the ruin of that house was great.

The difference, brethren, in true conversion and repentance is that we not only recognize who and what we are in opposition to God, but we turn and we begin to obey. We build our house upon a rock, not on flimsy material or on soil. We build our house upon the rock—the foundation of our faith—which is Jesus Christ who is that Rock.

Jesus Christ is the Word made flesh. He is the truth. He is the totality of the law of God, the commandments, the judgments, the statutes. We are to build our faith upon that Rock, the revealed Christ, and He was revealed. Not saying that evil is good, not justifying a watered down concept of Christ. All that is doing is taking a jackhammer and chipping away at your own foundation; and there are thousands who have done it so that there is nothing left. Totally corrupt, totally separated from God.

No, repentance doesn't have to do with a deceptive orientation of mind; it has to do with recognizing the reality of who and what we are and what is really required in order to have a relationship with that loving Creator God. Accepting Jesus Christ, which is the next part of the fundamental.

". . . accepting Jesus Christ as personal Saviour in faith believing . . ." The bad thing about it, is that this concept is so abused by the churches of the world. That is what they will tell you and they quote it often. "All you have to do is accept Jesus Christ as your personal Savior and you will be saved." Accept Jesus Christ. What does it mean to accept Jesus Christ? Very few know.

Acts 4:10–12:

Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole. This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner.

Yes, He is the cornerstone. He is the foundation of the faith of all who believe and accept the real Christ. The question is, brethren, have we accepted the real Christ and is He the cornerstone in our life? Is He the foundation on which we are building our spiritual lives? Or, have we accepted a false Christ and have we rejected Him and taken up a counterfeit as the cornerstone of our spiritual building?

Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.

It is Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ alone. It is according to the very plan of the Father who said, "It will be through my priceless Son that I offer salvation to the world. No one will have an opportunity to be in my family for all eternity except that they accept my Son, the delegation of the authority that I have given to Him and all that He stands for as the personification of that perfect way of life and all of the commandments."

Have we accepted Jesus Christ as our personal Savior? Have we really? Only if we recognize what He really is. You cannot accept someone whom you don't know. You cannot believe and build your faith upon an individual whom you do not know. So, if we know the real Christ and we know what Christ stood for, and if we know that He is the only Rock on which we can build a sound structure, if we recognize Him as the Word, as the Truth and the source of the Holy Spirit that is given to us, then we can be building on that foundation. We can be repentant; we can fully surrender; we can begin to walk in the way of obedience. We can become converted.

Hebrews 11:6–8:

"But without faith it is impossible to please him . . ." He said it is a process, accepting Jesus Christ as personal savior in faith believing—not just making a pretense, but really believing.

. . . without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

Do you believe in a God that will reward you for your obedience? Do you really believe that He is at hand and willing to draw near to you, or do you feel isolated and alone, as if God has abandoned you? Perhaps, He is not nearby after all. If we have the proper faith in that Savior, we know He is a God of perfect love and we know He is ever willing to take care of us and provide for our needs, to help us in our times of trials and difficulties, and that He has not abandoned us. The question is, have we abandoned Him?

If we are separated from Him and if we are not receiving every good thing that He has promised to us, do we make it God's fault or do we look to ourselves? Get out that mirror again; compare ourselves to the perfect example of Jesus Christ. Is there still yet some repentance, some purging that needs to take place in our lives?

. . . without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith. By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.

What was the proof, brethren, of their humility and subjection to the living God? It was in the actions that they took, which demonstrated their faith. They didn't claim to have faith; they didn't make a pretense of it; they didn't just say it in church services once a week. They went out and acted upon the commands of God. They obeyed, even when they couldn't see humanly how it was going to turn out in their favor.

Which ones of us could have been like Noah—who believed God and took on a project that took more than a hundred years, which appeared like the most ridiculous thing in the world to human beings? A flood, really? This huge arc in the middle of the dry land is going to be picked up and save you while the rest of the world is destroyed? You must be kidding. We hear that story from the time we are children and I believe that we take it so for granted. It is just a fable in our minds and we fail to recognize what that kind of faith is really about.

Who should have more faith to live than those who have access to the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit? Moses was guided by that Spirit, but Christ was the first. Those in the church are those who have the opportunity to have that very mind and to act legitimately in faith.

Hebrews 12:1–2:

Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith . . .

Why do we believe, brethren, that Jesus Christ is the only way to salvation? It says right here, "Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith." It is Jesus Christ—the only means by which to receive salvation.

. . . who for the joy that was set before him endured the [stake], despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Yes, He acted in faith, in the flesh, taking on the responsibility of self-subjugation to the laws of God—obedient in spite of every trial and difficulty He faced—and received His reward. So, He opened that way even for us who will also be willing to act with that same faith.

Matthew 16:13–17:

When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But whom

say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.

There is no way that Peter could have understood and recognized who Jesus Christ was, except by a miraculous intervention on the part of the Father to open his mind.

So it is, brethren, that when we are talking about true repentance, we are talking about spiritual conversion. We are also talking about a miracle that occurs—a miracle of a calling that opens up a way of life that was before cut off to you and me. Do we know who that Christ is? If He stood before us in the flesh, would we be able to say, "I know that you are the Christ, the Son of the Living God"? Would we really recognize Him? Only if we have the right orientation; only if we are on that road. Spiritual conversion—there is no other way. It is a miracle.

1 John 4:13–15:

Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world. [That is why we believe it; only through Jesus Christ.] Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God.

Peter could only do it because it was a miracle. If you can truly confess that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, it is because a miracle has occurred in your life, brethren. Whether you are baptized or whether you are not baptized, if you have the understanding and the recognition of who Christ is and how He has manifested Himself in this age, if you recognize the divine revelation of Jesus Christ through a last-day servant, if you accept the teaching that came from the very beginning as the words of that Son, then you can say too that you know and recognize Christ.

The question becomes, are we really repentant? Have we really done that soul searching and laid down our lives, desiring that Christ be the one that lives and dwells within us and motivates us?

John 1:12–14:

"But as many as received him . . ." Those who knew who He was, who accepted the real Christ—the Rock, the Cornerstone—as the foundation on which they wanted to build their spiritual house.

But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name . . .

What are we talking about when we say we believe on Jesus Christ—we accept Jesus Christ as our Savior? We are talking about more than a pretense, brethren; we are talking about more than idle words spoken of men who have been raised in a false church with false christs.

"As many as received him" means they took Him in; they accepted Him literally, because they began on a path to change themselves away from what they had been before. ". . . to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe"—who really believe, who have faith—"on his name."

"Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh . . ." The will of the flesh will not help you to overcome. You can be sorry. We can all be extremely sorry for the penalties that we are paying and it won't be enough. You will not be able to overcome; you will not be able to obey; and you will not be able to believe in Jesus Christ or accept Him. You will not have the manifestations of that power that will help you overcome and receive His blessings. It will not be by the will of your own mind. It just will not happen.

Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.

Do we believe that He is the Son, the fullness of grace and truth? The truth manifested in flesh and blood, the doctrine, the commandments—the truth? Those disciples who became apostles, they beheld the glory personally, physically of that being who was Jesus Christ because He taught them; but so did we. We also, if we were called and if we accepted that way, beheld the glory of that same Christ in these last days. We were witnesses of the blessings that came from that way of life which was different from the things that we used to do.

Just as much, even though we weren't there at the time of His personalized ministry, this is for us. "(. . . we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth." You accepted that way—if you recognize it as that which came from the heavenly Father, the manifestation of Jesus Christ, the revelation divinely through a human servant of the last days who taught a way of life that showed us what the plan and purpose of God for the salvation of mankind was. If you believed it and if you lived it and if you practiced that way, then you received the blessings; and it became something that convicted you because you saw the manifestation in your own life of what that way was like.

"(. . . we beheld His glory . . ." Did we behold His glory? Are we of those who can say that we did behold the glory of the manifestation of Jesus Christ even in these last days? If we really accepted Him—if we repented and if we turned and began to walk the other way, if we really accepted Jesus Christ as our personal Savior—then yes, we did.

Well, why go through all that trouble? Why go through that godly sorrow? Why have to suffer the crucifixion of the self? What is it all for? What is the benefit for those that repent?

The next portion of our fundamental says, "We believe that all who truly repent of their sins in full surrender and willing obedience to God, accepting Jesus Christ as personal Saviour in faith believing, are forgiven their sins by an act of divine GRACE, justified, pardoned from the penalty of past sins . . ."

That is what makes it worth it, brethren. It is only those who humble themselves, who admit what they are, who take away the stumbling block of iniquity between them and God and become a pliable student, that have an opportunity to have all of their guilty past erased. No matter what it is, no matter how bad, no matter what we each have been guilty of in our past in violating God's laws, we can have all of that wiped away absolutely under the shed blood of Jesus Christ as if it never existed.

Romans 5:1–2:

Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

Yes, real repentance and real spiritual conversion, brethren, is the first opportunity that we have to have access into grace. What is that grace? Is it a license to sin? Is that what grace is? That is what the world's churches will tell you. Grace is license to thumb our noses at the laws of God, those laws of do's and don'ts, those requirements of obedience to the Ten Commandments and other principles. No, we have access to grace, but that grace is not license to reject the laws of God.

The grace that God revealed is His free unmerited pardon from the penalty of our past sins. What is that penalty? It is death. All have sinned and come short of the glory of God. All have incurred upon themselves—all human kind—the death penalty, as we have already seen in past sermons. Worthy only of death. What is that grace? It is the opportunity, brethren, to come out from underneath the penalty—the penalty of the firing squad or of the guillotine or of the electric chair. It is not license to continue a way of life of breaking those commandments and thumbing our noses at His perfect ways.

Grace is the opportunity to have Jesus Christ cover our guilt through His own perfect sacrifice and to walk out of prison—off of death row—free, with the commitment, brethren, that we are then going to walk after His righteousness—obedience to those laws. That is what grace is.

Romans 6:14–19:

"For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace." How many times have you heard it quoted? "I am not under the Law. I don't have to obey the Ten Commandments; I am under the grace of Jesus Christ." Yet, they don't read the next sentence, because Paul recognized, even as he wrote it under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that it would be misinterpreted. He knew that human beings would want to twist that into a license against obedience. So he followed then—to answer before it could get started—in verse 15.

"What then? shall we sin . . ." Shall we what? Shall we break the law, which is what sin is. Shall we transgress "because we are not under the law"? He is saying, "Is that what I am talking about? Am I talking, when I am speaking of grace, about license to avoid the law of God?"

For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace. What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid. Know ye not, that to whom ye yield

yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?

Which way of life do we want, brethren? We can have the grace that comes through Jesus Christ, accepting Him as our Savior; but whoever and whatever we value in our lives is going to be manifested by how we spend our time, what we do and how we live our lives.

Paul is saying then, what are we proving is important to us? Are we still going to go back, after saying we accept Jesus Christ, and pursue all of these lusts of the flesh? Or, are we really going to walk in a new way?

But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you.

It is a change of life. If it was legitimate, then it is real repentance. It has everything to do, brethren, with accepting the doctrine that was delivered at the beginning. What did we receive at the beginning of this age when that church was raised up by God through the last day servant? ". . . ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed [Obedience, brethren, means law-keeping.] from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you."

Being then made free from sin [from practicing, following the way of sin], ye became the servants of righteousness.

We made that commitment to seek instead a different way.

I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh: for as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness.

If we are, brethren, living and walking in a different way and if we are laying down the old self, if we are truly converted, then we do not use grace as a means to refute the requirement of obedience to God's law. We recognize grace as the unmerited pardon that takes away the death penalty and gives us the hope for life eternal in God's family.

1 Peter 1:13:

Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance . . .

Here is Peter now. He was supposed to have been converted. He was supposed to have accepted Jesus Christ as his personal Savior and here he is talking about obedience.

. . . for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation [Or, more appropriately, behavior.]; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.

What does it mean to accept Jesus Christ as your personal Savior? We have to begin, brethren, to walk and to live after the very manner that Jesus Christ lived. He set the example in His own life. He didn't say, "I lived it for you. Come under my shed blood and then you're free to live how ever you want to after the lusts of your flesh." No, He said, "Be you holy, for I am holy." He said, "Live after the example that you saw me live. Hold on to that way that was revealed."

He was the example. He was the Word made flesh. He was the personification of those commandments, those laws. He said, "If you love me, then you are going to be revering those laws by living your life in accord with that way and not after the natural inclinations that come to your minds and your hearts."

And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear . . .

Are we passing the time of our sojourning in these physical lives, brethren, in fear and respect for the real God, the real Jesus Christ who manifested Himself in our lives by a calling? Are we really of that same repentant heart and mind? Were we really converted spiritually away from our natural ways and did we take up a new way of life at the time that we received that truth?

I will have to pick up the details next time. I couldn't get to everything I wanted. Next time, we will talk about this process of reconciliation—what it means to be reconciled to God and the gift of the Holy Spirit which literally comes and abides within. We will talk about baptism; we will talk about what it means to accept Jesus Christ, to be baptized and to begin to walk along that way of ordering our lives on a different path—a change of heart and of mind that is manifested in our works and the manifestations of the fruits of our lives, which occurs when we receive the power, the Holy Spirit.

It all comes, brethren, from repentance and accepting Jesus Christ, from receiving the Holy Spirit after baptism—the only power in which we can ever hope to be able to make those changes and to live after His example.

Next time, hopefully, we will complete those thoughts.