

Fundamentals of Belief
#10B: Spiritual Conversion #2

Edited Sermon Transcript
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We are going to continue on our series of the Fundamentals of Belief of the Church of God, The Eternal. We are in the middle of fundamental number ten which I entitled *Spiritual Conversion*. It is quite a long fundamental, as far as the number of words, but overall everything we are talking about can be condensed. It all has to do with the concept of real spiritual conversion. Let me read that fundamental to you again.

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.

That is the fundamental that expresses our belief in what true spiritual conversion is all about. If you will remember last time, we went through the first

portion to analyze what this concept of repentance is all about. We learned that repentance is a sacrifice of the self. It is the laying down of ourselves through the recognition of what we are in opposition to the perfect nature of Jesus Christ and the Father. It has to do with a full and total surrender.

We also analyzed the required element of accepting Jesus Christ as Savior, recognizing Christ as the only path in which we can have a relationship with the Father and the only way we can have an opportunity for salvation. Accepting Jesus Christ as our personal sacrifice, our Savior, and being forgiven of our sins by an act of divine grace.

We looked at the concept of grace, which we have covered in past sermons; so not to over-elaborate, but just to reconfirm that grace is not grace from obedience to the law. It is not a forgiveness of our obligation to obey God according to His Ten Commandments and those statutes and judgments.

We are talking about grace as an unmerited pardon—a free and unmerited pardon from our past sins, removing the penalty of our guilt so that we are not under obligation to pay the death penalty for those sins. It is having them wiped away by the very blood of Jesus Christ who died in our stead—not justifying us in walking after lawlessness thereafter, only in taking away our sins of the past.

We found out that in order to have that relationship with the true God, we must recognize self and we absolutely must repent. We must recognize what we are by nature and how opposed we are. We must lay down that life and choose to accept instead someone else—the very mind of the living Christ to begin to live within us. Then recognize that through the acceptance of Christ, we have an opportunity to receive true grace, the obliteration of our guilty past.

We come then to the next concept. What is it that repentance and the acceptance of Jesus Christ leads to and affords us? What benefit do we derive when we are called to that knowledge? We receive the shed blood of Jesus Christ to wash away our sins. What are we talking about? We are talking about reconciliation. The next part: ". . . forgiven their sins by an act of divine GRACE, justified, pardoned from the penalty of past sins, reconciled to God . . ."

That is what it is all about—the entire plan that God has developed and created for mankind. You understand, if you have been called to understand the truth, that this plan is a calling to reconciliation. It is an opportunity to be

reconciled to the very living God who created you and from whom you have been separated by your sins according to your natural nature.

Everything about what God is doing on this earth is a plan affording man an opportunity for reconciliation with Himself. Spiritual conversion is the process by which we can achieve that legitimate reconciliation. ". . . reconciled to God, and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit which literally comes and abides within . . ." Let's begin in Romans 5:8–11:

"But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." It doesn't matter whether you were called as an adult out of the world or whether you were raised in the church as a child. It matters not, because every one of us was separated from God—separated absolutely, guilty—as sinners.

But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies . . .

How often do we stop to think about the fact that our sins, our state of being natural human beings and the motivations that we give into—the lusts, drives and pulls that we seek to satisfy day in and day out as we live after those things that seem right in our own eyes—made us absolutely enemies of the living God? Do we think about ourselves in that situation?

Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.

It is a reconciliation that we have been afforded. When we are pardoned from our sins, being united with that God through His Son Jesus Christ, in a form of acceptance, self-crucifixion, giving up our ways, our orientation, and seeking instead a different way, it is a process of reconciliation. It is a coming together, a uniting in mind and spirit, with the very heavenly Father who created us. It is that process of reconciliation that offers for us the opportunity for salvation. Only through a reconciliation with that God, can we have a hope for salvation. Those who will not

give up self, who will not humble themselves on bended knee before their Maker, will not be there.

. . . being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement.

Yes, it is a process of atonement and we will soon be coming to that high, solemn Holy Day and the fall Feast. That reconciliation, that atonement—as Mr. Armstrong used to call it, "the At-one-ment with God"—is what we are speaking of when we are talking about reconciliation. It can only happen through our spiritual conversion.

2 Corinthians 5:17–20:

Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ . . .

Really accepting Jesus Christ—not just words, not just claims, but making the change in heart and mind, legitimately accepting Jesus Christ the Savior. This means accepting how we are separated from Him because of our sins. Repenting and accepting Jesus Christ is the means which the Father established for us to be reconciled to Himself.

"And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation . . ." Paul's responsibility, as a called servant, was to preach the truth. That truth, that gospel which he was commissioned and commanded to teach, was the gospel of reconciliation. It was a ministry of reconciliation because the entire purpose of that ministry in God's plan is to bring to spiritual conversion the called and the chosen out of this world, to reconcile them to the heavenly Father. It is a ministry of reconciliation. That is what a minister is there for—to provide the means for the reconciliation of the church.

And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them . . .

Oh, we were guilty. It should be imputed to us. We are all guilty of death and yet, by this very perfect, merciful, loving plan and purpose of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, God created the means by which we do not have to bear that death penalty.

To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.

It is that message that you heard, brethren. The word of reconciliation is the very message that you heard from the end-time servant in these last days. The understanding of the doctrines, the truth, the commandments, the plan of salvation, the Sabbath and the Holy Days, all of those statutes and judgments that you learned—whether years and years ago or even recently—is the word of reconciliation. It is the word through which, if we accept it, we can have that close relationship with the heavenly Father.

"Now then we are ambassadors for Christ . . ." Anyone who is a legitimate minister—an authorized representative of the living God through Jesus Christ, preaching the truth—is an ambassador for Christ. Not one who is preaching their own concepts of mind and heart, but one who is authoritatively holding that office, is an ambassador for Christ. An ambassador is someone who represents another, who is there not to do his own will, but to do the will of the one who sent him. That is what an ambassador is.

In a sermon that I have given around the country in this past year, I have talked on the topic about verifying the source of our authority—knowing how you can judge between those who claim to be God's representatives and those who are truly authorized ambassadors of Jesus Christ. You have to be able to check out their credentials and evaluate. God has provided every means that we need in order to verify those who are speaking according to the word of God as authorized ambassadors, versus those that are speaking of themselves.

It is the truth, brethren. It is the very word of reconciliation, the gospel that came through Jesus Christ and is still being proliferated now through faithful servants in these last days.

"Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us . . ." Someone is there. Someone is beseeching. Someone is proclaiming it and God is backing them up. There are a whole lot of others who are also beseeching.

They are speaking of themselves, out of their own hearts and minds and God is not pleased with it at all. He has provided the means for us to know the difference.

". . . we pray you in Christ's stead . . ." Here is an authorized ambassador of Jesus Christ, one whom we all accept. We accept the Apostle Paul, and I know very easily believe that we would have recognized him without a question, had we been there in his time. Yet, he wasn't accepted then, and here he says:

Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.

Become spiritually converted, brethren. Become converted; give up our own minds, hearts and thoughts. Begin to crucify the self, begin to lay down the things that we want to do according to the lusts of the flesh. Begin to recognize that Jesus Christ is the only means to salvation. He is the only means to true reconciliation with the heavenly Father and He is our only opportunity for salvation. Be converted, brethren.

Whoever those faithful ministers are in these last days, who are here somewhere on the face of this earth, they are also speaking and preaching that word of reconciliation. Their message is thundering out and they are saying, "Be you reconciled to God; become spiritually converted."

Once reconciled, once accepting Jesus Christ as our Lord and Master, our High Priest and Savior; truly repenting of our sins; laying down our lives; beginning to walk in that newness, what is it that we receive? How is it that this reconciliation begins to make a difference in our lives? We ". . . receive the gift of the Holy Spirit which literally comes and abides within . . ."

John 14:15–21:

"If ye love me, keep my commandments." I don't understand how those who want to say that the commandments are done away—that the obligation to live according to the laws of God that He recorded in the Old Testament are not incumbent upon Christians today—cannot run into these scriptures throughout the entire New Testament. These scriptures reaffirm without doubt the obligation for true Christians to respect the very laws and commands of God.

If ye love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter [the *parakletos*, also translated by the Apostle John as the Advocate, who was Jesus Christ—our Advocate and our High Priest], that he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth . . .

It is His Spirit—the Spirit of Christ—which comes and dwells within us when we truly accept Him. He is the Advocate and He is the Spirit of truth. No, it is not a third person of the trinity. That Spirit of truth is literally the personification of Jesus Christ as He manifests Himself in the lives of those who have been called and who have accepted that calling.

. . . the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you.

Jesus Christ Himself made the promise. To someone, He would come and abide with them through His Spirit.

Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me: because I live, ye shall live also. At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you. [An example, brethren, of perfect harmony and unity of real reconciliation.] He that hath my commandments . . .

Who is it then, that has that relationship with the Father and the Son in perfect unity and harmony of mind and Spirit?

He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me [How can anyone pass over that simple proclamation by Christ?]; and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.

Those who accept the laws of God as that word of reconciliation—which is the personification of Jesus Christ Himself—are the ones with the opportunity to have that relationship.

Romans 8:8–11:

So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God. But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. [The only way, brethren, to have that relationship, is to have the very presence of the Holy Spirit dwelling within our hearts and our minds.] Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.

Very simple, isn't it? If you have God's Spirit dwelling in you, you are Christ's. If you are Christ's, He has made intercession for you and you have a relationship even with the Father. If you do not have that Spirit dwelling within you, you are not Christ's and you do not have that relationship with the Father either. It is either one or the other. It requires the Spirit.

And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead . . .

Who is the one that raised up Jesus from the dead? Was it not the Father? That is who we are talking about.

. . . if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead [meaning, if the Spirit of God the Father] dwell in you [the very Holy Spirit that belongs to God the Father. If the Spirit of God the Father dwells in you], he that raised up Christ [that same Father] from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.

Do we stop to think enough about the significance of the fact that the very Creator God who holds all power in this universe, has offered to you personally as one who has been called, an opportunity to have that reconciliation? He has the power to create, to destroy and to sustain. He is the Law Giver, the one who made all that exists, and sustains it by His will and choice. This Creator God has offered His Spirit—the very power of that Spirit by which He rules, commands and governs this universe. He has offered to share that with you, each one of us. He did so through the revelation and the ministry of His Son Jesus Christ.

Who then, brethren, can receive that reconciliation, that relationship, that Holy Spirit? Who is it that can have that relationship with the Father and Son? Let me ask the question another way. Who is it that can repent? We have already seen that this

reconciliation cannot happen and will never occur except for one who repents. One cannot repent unless they recognize who and what they are in opposition to the very Spirit and nature of God.

So, who is it, brethren, that has that opportunity? Who can be reconciled? Who can repent?

John 6:44 is very famous; we know it by heart. "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him . . ." It is God's choice. He chooses whom He will. Men do not volunteer to be the servants of God. They do not volunteer to be in the church. Only ones who were called have an opportunity for that. It is a gift.

Acts 11:17–18:

"Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift . . ." Who are we talking about? We are talking about the time when the Holy Spirit was manifested to the Gentiles—the opportunity of that calling to non-Israelites for the first time.

"Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift . . ." It was a gift and they recognized that it was. Even to Israel, those who were called to understand and to be converted, it was a gift—an opening of their minds.

Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God? When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.

Who is it that can repent? Anyone who chooses? Anyone who picks up and reads the Bible? Anyone who says, "I accept Jesus Christ"? Anyone who says, "I repent of my sins"? Anyone who takes the altar call, goes down the aisle and stands before the minister? Is that what repentance, conversion and accepting Jesus Christ is all about? No, repentance is granted. It is granted as a gift.

God has not called the world at this time. Through that perfect plan of salvation, we understand that the majority of man who are alive will have their opportunity at the very time that Jesus Christ returns and establishes His government on this earth. The great hoards of people—the millions and billions—will be

resurrected in the second resurrection at the end of the Millennium. There are several times of salvation, not just one.

Right now, it is limited to a call—a call to a very few in number in comparison to the number of people on the face of this earth. It is granted as a gift. Repentance is not for the taking. It is only for those who have been given that call.

1 Peter 1:2:

For anyone who has any doubt that God has a plan, that He has a design, that He doesn't just do things haphazardly, the very introduction that Peter uses to address the people in this letter, "Elect," tells you that there was somebody who was chosen as opposed to someone else. If it were open to everyone, then why is there an elect?

The world's churches teach this concept of trying to save everyone because we are all at risk right now unless we accept Jesus Christ before we die. If we don't, we will go off to hell and burn forever and ever in torture for all eternity. So, they are out with their missionary works around the world, trying to save the people of the world, thinking that they all have their time of salvation.

Then why is there an elect? There is no room for the very concept of the term elect if there is no one who is segregated in the mind of God for a particular purpose at a particular time, more than anyone else on the earth. Then there is no elect; it is just being human, isn't it? Peter addresses them and says:

"Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father . . ." He did it with purpose, those He called. It wasn't by happenstance and it wasn't by accident. He didn't wait to see how our DNA was going to fall out and then call us at a later time. If you are of the called, brethren, you were known from the foundation of the world and God knew you by name, regardless of what anyone else wants to tell you now who should know better. You were known by name and that means your very human existence now—in the form that you stand, the features of your face and of all your being, your current DNA and RNA structure. God knew you.

Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied.

That is who he was addressing. He was addressing those who were called out. He wasn't addressing the world—the masses of people who were not called and not

intended to be called at this time. He was addressing those whom God separated out for His purpose and made part of the Church through His Holy Spirit.

Who is it that can repent? Who is it that can be reconciled unto God? Who is it that can become spiritually converted? Only those who are called and given that opportunity as a priceless gift of our Maker.

What then follows that reconciliation and the receipt of the Holy Spirit which comes and dwells within us? What does that Holy Spirit do? What is its work in our lives? How does it change us?

The next part of our fundamental: ". . . supplying the divine LOVE which alone can fulfill the law and produce righteousness . . ." That is what that Spirit does if we legitimately have been converted. If we legitimately have accepted Jesus Christ, if that Spirit truly has begun implanting in our hearts and our minds and begun to grow, then we do see a change that occurs within our lives over time. ". . . supplying the divine LOVE which alone can fulfill the law and produce righteousness . . ."

The Spirit in our lives—through repentance, conversion, accepting Christ and being reconciled to God—gives us an opportunity, for the first time, to experience and manifest love. Notice it in Romans 13:9–10:

"For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill . . ." Sounds like a list of the Ten Commandments to me, doesn't it? I wonder, what was Paul thinking? Had he not received Christ? Had he not been liberated? Was he not the Apostle who is appealed to as the apostle of grace for doing away with the law? Here, he is quoting the very law.

For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

Oh, you mean the commandments have something to do with real Godly love? I thought the commandments were opposed to real love. I thought it was those hardcore commandment and law-keepers who were denying the very love of God, if we were to listen to those of the world's churches. Unfortunately, brethren, even more so, those also who used to be part of us, who were converted at one time—or at least appeared to be—and had accepted that way of life, have gone right back into the very muck and mire of those false religious concepts.

. . . Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.

Love is not the doing away of the law. Love is not instead of the law. Love is the fulfilling of the law. The divine love of God the Father and of Jesus Christ is manifested in obeying the commands. What Paul is saying is, "Those who treat their neighbor properly, with more respect for that neighbor than for the self—who are not killing, who are not stealing, who are not lying about them, who are not coveting, who are not committing adultery—are human beings who are truly showing love."

Try to show love outside of the Ten Commandments; how far can we get? Love is the fulfilling of the law. Why does our fundamental of belief say that it is that divine love that we receive through a gift of the Holy Spirit dwelling within us and abiding, which alone can fulfill the law and produce righteousness? It is the power of that Spirit, once it begins to dwell and work within our hearts and minds, that finally gives us the power to begin to keep the law more perfectly in the example of Jesus Christ. It is in keeping those laws that we are truly evidencing and manifesting love.

It is when we are selfish—and as Mr. Armstrong always said, "pursuing the way of get," doing things to help ourselves at the expense of other human beings, which is manifested in the breaking of all of the Ten Commandments—that we are not experiencing, manifesting or representing love. Love is the fulfilling of the law.

Manifesting love in your life, brethren, is keeping God's laws and His commandments. We cannot keep those commandments unless we have a power within us that is different from the motivation of our natural hearts and minds. That is the Holy Spirit. That Holy Spirit only comes through the process of spiritual conversion.

Romans 8:1–5:

There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.

Oh, it made me free from keeping the law? No, free from the penalty of having broken the law. ". . . free from the law of sin and death . . ." It is the death part, brethren, which Paul is focusing on here. Made him free through Jesus Christ, through the receipt of the Holy Spirit, from the penalty which comes automatically from breaking that perfect, divine law.

"For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh . . ." Is he saying there is something wrong with the law? No, he is saying there is only something wrong in the outcome—the potential outcome. Human beings are weak and cannot live up to the perfect law, in and of themselves.

Ancient Israel proved it absolutely, brethren. That is why they were there. God gave His perfect, immutable, divine law of love to a human people without the Holy Spirit dwelling within, so that they could prove whether a human people, without a change of mind and heart, could of themselves recognize the value of that way of life, embrace it and fulfill it.

I am very sure that there is a time coming when Jesus Christ returns and that Millennial reign is established, when the masses of human beings who were not called during this age to understand, will probably naturally ask, "Why did you not call us? We certainly would have embraced the truth, had you just given us the knowledge. We would have loved it and we would have obeyed."

You know what Christ is likely going to do at that time? He is going to point back to the example of Ancient Israel and say, "Nope, I did give it to a people. I called them out; I made them special. I made them my people and I was their God. I said, 'Here is my perfect law. Here is how you can have happiness, peace, joy and every good thing in life. Obey this; value it.' They said, 'We will obey,' but they could not. The nature and the mind of their own natural heart overwhelmed any good intention. It was stronger than their will to obey."

So it is for any human being, and obviously, brethren, for each one of us.

There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death [the penalty for breaking and fracturing that law]. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh . . .

It could not accomplish our salvation. Just the giving of the law did not, itself, accomplish the opportunity for salvation, because none of us could live up to it.

For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh [Now here was the change. Here was the opportunity that made the difference—the piece of the puzzle that Ancient Israel did not have.], and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us . . .

It wasn't a problem with the law, brethren; it was a problem with our weakness according to the flesh. It was through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ that we had an opportunity to overcome that weakness and to begin to fulfill the righteousness of the law.

That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. [They didn't have that Spirit. That was only a gift that came after the sacrifice of God, Jesus Christ, and only to those who were called and given it.] For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh . . .

Is that not what we are? Which one of you, before receipt of the Holy Spirit through baptism, could say that you were not walking after the lusts of your flesh? Oh, we don't like to think that we were doing bad things; it all made sense to us, but that is exactly what we were doing.

For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh [That is what we think about. That is what drives us and motivates us.]; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit.

1 John 2:3–6:

And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him [How many are claiming a knowledge of Jesus Christ, a relationship with Jesus Christ? How many are claiming to be converted?], and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word [What word? The word of reconciliation—the word that leads us to a renewed relationship, for the first time, with the heavenly Father.], in him verily is the love of God perfected . . .

". . . whoso keepeth His word," he who keeps the commandments, he who respects the laws of God, is what? Hard, oppressive in mind, lacking in love? No, he who keeps the commandments, he who respects the word of God, ". . . in him verily is the love of God perfected . . ."

How many people who were once with us are now ashamed of their participation in those things? They were law-keepers, Sabbath-keepers; they kept the Holy Days; they tithed, and avoided eating unclean meats. They kept all of those things that were a part of that way that we first received through the ministry of Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong so many years ago. In their attempt to have love without the law, they are overriding every scripture that tells us that the only way to manifest the very love of God is through the keeping of those commandments.

. . . whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him. He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked.

Oh, but we are told, "Well, Christ only kept the law in the flesh because He was a Jew, but that is not incumbent upon us." Then why does John, in teaching even the Gentile congregations of the church, say, "He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked"?

Christ did not give us a contradictory example. He kept the Sabbath and the Holy Days as a literal example for everyone who would eventually be called and placed within the very church of God. There is no contradiction and no confusion.

1 John 4:8–12:

We are talking about the divine love, the legitimate form of love that comes through the receipt of the Holy Spirit by those who are converted. "He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love."

Well, everyone accepts that. "He that loveth not," so we are full of love. We are not going to hold anyone accountable for fellowship based upon their acceptance of ritualistic laws of the Old Testament. That wouldn't be love, would it? We are supposed to accept everyone in their own path as they seek their relationship with God. We all have to take our own way to get there. So we are merciful and accepting, not only to those who claim to be Christians, but also to the Buddhists, the Hindus, those that pursue Islam, and all the religions of the world. They are all finding their own path to God.

No, brethren, that is not the way it works. Call us exclusive. We will accept that title. If upholding the legitimate laws of God and the definition of real love makes us appear, in the minds of others, to be hard and exclusive, then so be it. Real love is not accepting false concepts that come out of the mind of Satan. That is the perversion of the very love of God through the denial of His laws and His commandments.

He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us . . .

We did not, out of the goodness of our hearts, seek a relationship and find God. If you are called, it is because God chose you. He decided to offer you an opportunity to have and to share His perfect love, and neither you nor I could have it of ourselves. We couldn't decide to love God. We couldn't decide to seek a relationship with God. We couldn't make a sacrifice that would be acceptable in the eyes of that living God. Only if we abide in the way and the path that He has provided as the only means, can we have that love.

Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us.

That love for one another, brethren, is in the support and strength of that way and path of righteousness, not in the repudiation of God's laws and commandments.

The receipt of the Holy Spirit in conversion supplies divine love for the first time. Through that indwelling Spirit, we have an opportunity to receive and then express and exhibit divine love ". . . which alone can fulfill the law and produce righteousness; and thus are baptized by the Spirit . . ." That is what we are talking about.

We are talking about this whole process of repentance, of accepting Christ as Savior, of being forgiven of our sins, of giving ourselves up, of receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit, of being reconciled to God. ". . . thus are baptized by the Spirit into the body of Christ which is the true CHURCH OF GOD."

We are talking about a process that leads to baptism. Baptism is integral. There is no spiritual conversion without baptism. Do you recognize that? It requires baptism. Human beings will never be a part of the church, as we will see in just a few minutes, without making that vow of commitment.

Acts 1:4–5:

And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. For John [John the Baptist] truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy [Spirit] not many days hence.

John the Baptist came as the forerunner to Christ. The Holy Spirit had not been given yet because Christ had to die. It is only through Christ's sacrifice, His resurrection, His acceptance by the Father, and His ascending to heaven to begin that office as our High Priest and Advocate, that the Holy Spirit could then be given to those who would be called.

Before that, the forerunner, John the Baptist, baptized a baptism of repentance to call people to the knowledge of their error and their violation of God's law and to lay down themselves. However, they didn't have the hope that John's baptism would be able to provide the strength needed, through the receipt of the Holy Spirit, to be able to make those changes in life. He was pointing a way to Christ though, who would provide that.

Acts 19:1–6:

And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples, He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy [Spirit] since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy [Spirit].

These were those who had not heard the message concerning Christ's sacrifice, that He was the Christ and that the Holy Spirit was given.

And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism. Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance . . .

Yes, the need to lay down the self, the need to examine self and to repent, to put aside our violation of the law.

Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy [Spirit] came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied.

That is the example given which formed the basis for the ordinance that we call baptism today, which Mr. Armstrong taught and used—repentance, the laying down of self, accepting Jesus Christ and then by the laying on of hands, receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit. It is a ceremony, a vow and a contract. It is a binding contract with God to commit to a different way of life.

Acts 2:38–39:

Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy [Spirit].

That is what is required in order to have reconciliation with God. That is what is required in order to have the power to change and to stop violating God's laws. It requires the commitment of that vow in baptism, the laying on of hands, and the resulting gift of the Holy Spirit.

For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.

It is a gift and only given to a very few. Brethren, it requires that special call to have access to the promises of God. No man can take them of themselves. We must answer that call if we want to be part of Christ, if we want a relationship with the heavenly Father.

God is offering to bless us and to be with us, but we must commit to Him in order to receive those very promises. We cannot expect Him to hear our prayers if we are not willing to answer His call and make that vow. Have you ever stopped to think about that?

I was thinking about it when I was looking at my notes this morning and a thought came to mind. Do you know what it is like if you are called, but you won't make the commitment? Now, some people have a hard time even accepting the fact that they are called. How do I know if I am called? I have heard that from dozens of people over the years. If you understand the truth that you are hearing, if these scriptures open up to you, your mind comprehends them and you are not repulsed by them, if you recognize the validity of the Sabbath and the Holy Days and all the things that are taught in this way of life, and you believe that you know where that faithful ministry is teaching, then you are called. Let's get past that one. Accept the fact that if you are here, it is because you know. You are called.

God has made that calling available to you. He has given you the promise and He has opened up the opportunity; so let's get past that. Now, you know what it is like if you are called and you will not take that step to make that commitment? It is like the couple who wants the benefit of marriage without having the ceremony. It is like the man who wants all the benefits of a relationship with a woman—he wants to live with her; he wants to be taken care of and provided for and all of the things that come through that relationship—but he doesn't want to make a commitment.

That is what it is like, brethren, for someone who is called and who continues, time after time, day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year, to resist making the commitment and vow of baptism. Praying for God to intervene and to help you in your life. Yes, we want God to answer our prayers when we are in need and in trouble, but we want it without the commitment. We take it for granted.

Once we are called, we are on the hook. You only get called one time. Mr. Armstrong used to say, "Don't delay to get baptized." Many people had to delay because, back in the early years, there were not ministers and there were not churches in local areas, so people had to wait for months in order for a baptizing team to come through. Some were so convicted in what they knew to be the truth that they were not willing to wait.

I'll give you the example of a lady that I saw just recently. She and her mother took a five day bus trip during the Days of Unleavened Bread, all the way out from the east, to Pasadena, just so that they could get baptized. They didn't realize that there was this huge convocation for the Spring Days in Big Sandy, which would have been a lot shorter. They didn't know about that. So they showed up on the doorstep of the campus to get baptized because they did not want to delay for even a few more weeks for a baptizing tour to come through their area.

Now, there was somebody who really valued their call. That was somebody who loved it. What about us? Only those who are baptized are part of the Church of God. You can be with the church; you can attend with the church; but you are not legitimately a member of the literal Church of God unless you have committed yourself in a vow to that way of life.

1 Corinthians 12:12–13:

For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body [That is how we get the Spirit. That is how we become part of His body.], whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.

Galatians 3:26–27:

For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

It is those who are baptized and make that vow, who are truly repentant and who have accepted Christ. They are saying, "I want to live a different way. I recognize the value of what I have been given. I know that it is a gift. I know that I don't deserve it and I know that I need to act."

". . . as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ." It is Christ's Body, the Church. The Church of God is the Body of Christ. He is the head of that Body. The body is not separate from the head; it is one body; it is together; it is in unity and oneness. You cannot have Christ; you cannot have a relationship with Christ; you can't even expect Him to answer your prayers unless you make that commitment to act on your call.

Ephesians 1:22–23:

And hath put all things under his feet [the commission the Father gave to the Son; the authority that He divested within Him in order to complete the work of the calling, the salvation of mankind, and the growth of that family], and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.

The Church is the Body of Christ. No one is literally a part of that Body—no one has a relationship with Christ—unless they have become baptized and have received the indwelling presence—the down payment—of the Holy Spirit. It is the presence of the Spirit within you that makes you a part of the oneness of the Church, at one with Christ. The only way to receive that down payment of the Spirit is through making that vow.

There is only one call. Once called, we must act on that call. Avoiding baptism now does not preserve a second chance for us later, although I know there are a number of people who naturally think that. The idea, you see, is, *Well, I may be called, but it is baptism that puts me on the hook. So, as long as I don't get baptized, I will still have my shot when Christ returns, right?* Wrong. It is the call that puts you on the hook. Baptism is just the means that we all need in order to receive the help to be successful.

Baptism is like the sword that you need to win the battle. If you are thrust into the arena, the enemy is there; he is going to hack you to bits unless you pick up the sword, fight and defend yourself. You could not pick it up and say, "Well, as long as I don't pick up the sword, nobody can touch me." No, if you are called, you are in the arena, brethren. The battle is coming to you. Baptism is the means by which you can receive the power to fight that battle, to overcome it and to win. Don't pick up the sword, and you are still going to die because that is your one chance. God has called you and given you the opportunity.

Romans 11:26–29:

And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins. As concerning the gospel, they are enemies for your sakes . . .

Ancient Israel—those who had the promise in the flesh but could not fulfill it. Those who did not accept became enemies. Yet God has a plan for most of them to be reconciled and to receive that word of reconciliation at the appropriate time. "As concerning the gospel, they are enemies for your sakes . . ." They didn't appreciate it. They didn't accept it, but it opened the way for others to be called—others whom God would place in those offices and positions and whose names were written in the Book of Life with the opportunity.

. . . but as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers' sakes.
For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance.

It means, first: God didn't make a mistake when He called. God didn't make a mistake when He called the ones He called. Remember, He called from the foundation of the world. It was already set in motion. Whether we each accept that calling and act on it is a totally different decision. That is where our free moral agency comes into play. Will we accept the call? Will we act on it? Will we appreciate it as a pearl of great price? Or, will we run from it and reject it?

"The gifts and the calling of God are without repentance." It didn't say baptism is the point of no return. No, the calling, brethren, is that which God gave. If He called you, when you come to that knowledge of the truth, then you are on the hook and the clock is ticking.

"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"—as we have just seen. Only those who accept that way of life through baptism are part of the Church and are Christ's.

"Bible evidence of being thus baptized by the Spirit is the fruit of the Spirit in one's life." If it is a legitimate conversion, if we truly have accepted Jesus Christ and if that Spirit has begun to dwell, work and grow within us, there is something that is going to start to happen in our lives. We are going to start to think differently. We are going to start to behave differently.

It may take a while. In my case, I can tell you, that was absolutely true. It took longer than it should have, but there is a change that takes place if that Spirit is working with us.

Matthew 7:17–21:

Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.

Brethren, the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, if it is there and if it is working, begins to show fruits in our lives. If you are truly converted, if you accepted that call and if you have truly laid down your old self through legitimate repentance, accepted Jesus Christ and that Spirit dwells within you, you begin to seek a different path of life.

You are going to continue to make mistakes. You are going to make yourself incredibly angry, upset and discouraged at times with falling back, tripping and stumbling. But slowly, if you continue at it, if you press forward and value that more than anything else, there will be a change.

It will become manifested in the fruits of your lives. Your friends, family members and all the people that you know will notice the difference. They should be able to tell you that you are not the same person that you used to be. You think differently; you value things that you didn't value before. You avoid things now, by and large, more so than you used to.

Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them. Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.

Not everyone who makes a profession of it, not everyone who claims to be converted, and sadly brethren, not even everyone who received baptism, will make it. It all has to do with the mind and heart and whether it was a legitimate conversion, whether we truly recognized what we were in relationship to the perfect God, and whether we really came to loathe ourselves.

It has to do with whether we really came to recognize the idolatry of our hearts, the abominations that are a part of our own thinking and state of mind—that stumbling block of iniquity we talked about last time that we set between us and God. That stumbling block of iniquity separates us from the living God. Removing that stumbling block, brethren, is part of real, legitimate conversion.

What are those fruits then, if we have been truly converted and have accepted Jesus Christ legitimately? If we believe in His law, the word of reconciliation—the truth—what are those fruits that we are going to begin to manifest in our lives? How will they differ from what we did in the past? What is the result of the Spirit acting upon our hearts and our minds?

Galatians 5:22–25:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love [We have already seen what that love includes—a respect for the law of God, not a repudiation of it. Real love.], joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance . . .

How many of those things are resonant within us? How many of those characteristics are being manifested even in our day-to-day lives, in our interaction with other people?

. . . against such there is no law. [Why is there no law against those things? Because those are the fulfilling of the law, as we have already seen—the righteousness of the law.] And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

Our natural natures, these fleshly minds and hearts, will continue to crucify us, to war within us, to well up, to fight us, to manipulate us, to cause us to stumble. They will cause us to say things, do things and think things that are wrong. They will continue to hound us as long as we live in this flesh. However, there is a difference between making mistakes and stumbling versus pursuing a way of lawlessness. Giving in by design and living after the lusts of the flesh—there is a difference, brethren, between that and living after the Spirit, walking in the Spirit.

In spite of our trials, difficulties, and continuing failures as human beings, if we are truly converted, we will be building character. Even if it is two steps forward and one step back or maybe sometimes one step forward and one and a half steps back, if we don't give up, if we continue to fight and to push forward, we will be putting on more of the character of Jesus Christ.

No matter who we are, brethren, we have all come out of incredibly filthy pasts. There is none of us who were worthy of the call. No matter what your past sins were, no matter what your past lives were like—I don't care whether you were called as an adult or raised in the church; it doesn't matter—we are all guilty of death by the things that we have done, participated in and lived after.

One weakness, brethren, that Satan uses to try and defeat us many times, is the feeling of guilt. Lingering guilt, even after conversion, even after being baptized

when the receipt of the Holy Spirit and the forgiveness of Christ should have washed away past sins. Yet, if we do not have the faith to believe it, we can continue to be haunted by the guilt of our past lives. Notice, brethren, we all came out of filthy pasts.

1 Corinthians 6:9–11:

Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.

It doesn't matter what was part of that guilty past that you gave up. If it was a true conversion of mind and heart when you accepted that way of life, in spite of the struggles you may still experience—falling backward, stumbling, picking yourself up out of the mud again—you were forgiven, if you are not still living after that. You may continue to fall out of weakness, but if you are still struggling and not accepting or justifying it, if you are continuing to fight and suppress the self and to allow Jesus Christ to live more perfectly within you, then you can have true forgiveness. Those guilty pasts are obliterated, no matter what they were.

In spite of our pasts, we must be able to put that guilt behind us. Do we really believe that we have been pardoned through this process of spiritual conversion? Satan will try to discourage us with guilt, and I know there are some fighting this very battle right now. Those under the hearing of my voice, I hope will pay attention because Satan will use your own sense of guilt to try and make you give up—thinking you are not worthy, thinking you can't be strong enough to live that way of life, that you can't overcome, that you can't fight.

That is his ploy as much as it is his ploy to take advantage of those who will live arrogantly, believing that they are the epitome of the servant of Jesus Christ and a leader in the church. That attitude and orientation of life is definitely one stumbling block that Satan will use to affect our arrogance. Just as lethal though, are those who are so self-deprecating and self-defeating that they will allow Satan to convince them that they are not worthy, that God hasn't really forgiven them and that their filthy past is too abominable to ever think that God could love them.

Either way, there are ditches on both sides of the same road. Either way, it is a different mind that is inspiring. We can—no matter what we came out of, no matter what our past—put it behind us. We may have to continue to pay certain prices for mistakes we made in the past; but we can have the blessings and the benefits of things that come forward in life if we really are converted, if we will pursue, accept and make that commitment.

Spiritual conversion, brethren, involves a miraculous life change. It is offered only to those whom God chooses. We have one chance to accept that call. Accepting that call requires true repentance, as we have seen, a turning to Christ, recognizing Christ as our only hope for salvation. It requires a life then, of self-crucifixion—putting on the new man, Christ living within us.

Turn with me to Ephesians 4:17, the final scripture this afternoon:

"This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk . . ." It does not matter whether you are born physically an Israelite or not; in relationship to the spiritual principles, we are all separated from God. Therefore, we are all Gentiles.

This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart: Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. But ye have not so learned Christ; If so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus: That ye put off concerning the former conversation [better translated "the conduct" or "the behavior"] the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.