

Fundamentals of Belief
#17C: Growing in Grace and Knowledge

Edited Sermon Transcript
Jon W. Brisby; 6-29-2002

This afternoon, brethren, we want to continue with this series, the Fundamentals of Belief of the Church of God, The Eternal, which has turned into quite an extensive series. As you know, there are twenty-six fundamentals that state our purpose for existing, the things that we believe and the tenants that we attach ourselves to—the first twenty of which were written decades ago by Mr. Herbert Armstrong himself. Because of the times, the circumstances and events that have taken place within the Church, they were supplemented by six additional fundamentals which have taken on special meaning in these last days.

Over the last couple of years, we have been going through a fairly comprehensive evaluation of each one of these fundamentals. We are on number seventeen, and we've already looked at two parts of this fundamental. So, today, we want to go into the third part. There should be four. I should be able to finish this in four sermons, so this will be number three. Let's read again fundamental number seventeen:

We believe God's purpose is the creation of high spiritual character, and therefore the very object of redemption is to rescue mankind from SIN (transgressing the fundamental spiritual law), and its resulting degradation, misery and unhappiness; and that the object of the present dispensation is to fit those whom God now calls, with their consent, thru a life of trial and test and overcoming sin, growing in grace and knowledge to possess the KINGDOM and to become kings and priests reigning with Christ after His return. We believe Christians must therefore live a clean, pure, holy life by faith according to the Bible standard, with constant Bible study and surrendered prayer, trusting God

in and for all things, that yielding to pride and lust of the flesh is sin, that God hears and literally answers the believing prayers of His children who keep His commandments—according as He has promised in His Word, including physical healing, deliverance from temptation and trouble, providing the way for every actual need.

As I've said before, that is a mouthful. There are so many concepts that are covered in this fundamental number seventeen. So, I have been dissecting it and trying to take it one piece at a time. I have put the context of this fundamental under the heading of "Redemption" because that one word, "redemption," in one of the first sentences of that quote, really defines what this whole premise is about. This is a practice that God is carrying out in order to redeem humankind out of our natural state and to offer us something much better. That salvation is a process that requires self-crucifixion—overcoming the natural nature. Those are the principles that we have already addressed. The creation of high spiritual character means not only knowing the difference between right and wrong, truth and error, but also having the capacity to actually act upon that Truth through the power of the Holy Spirit—not only knowing the difference between right and wrong, but always choosing the right. That process of character development requires self-crucifixion. It requires overcoming. What is it that this overcoming involves? I'll go back and pick it up again, ". . .that the object of the present dispensation is to fit those whom God now calls, with their consent, thru a life of trial and test and overcoming sin . . .", as we covered last time, ". . . growing in grace and knowledge to possess the KINGDOM and to become kings and priests reigning with Christ after His return." That is precisely what we want to cover today.

We're going to begin by analyzing probably one of the most misused phrases within the church. Former members of the Worldwide Church of God—some of which are doing nothing, some of which are members of any number of three-hundred-plus splinter groups or living room churches of God—quote this phrase, "grow in grace and knowledge." You see it in their writings; you hear it in their speaking. They all lay claim to this principle and believe this is actually what they are doing. No matter what they have done or how far they have strayed from the original teachings that we all once kept together as a body, ask any one of them why they're doing what they're doing, and you know what they're going to tell you? "I'm growing in grace and knowledge. I'm growing closer to God. We've put off the error; we're learning new truth. We're growing in grace and knowledge." They all claim it.

So I want to address this concept of growing in grace and knowledge, as Peter first recorded it under the influence of the Holy Spirit. We've already seen that accepting our call as a Christian requires crucifixion of the self. It is a lifelong struggle to overcome the natural nature. That whole process that we've been describing in the last two sermons, brethren, is the process of spiritual growth. That's what self-crucifixion and overcoming the natural nature is all about. It is a process of spiritual growth.

What is the proper understanding and application of this principle spoken by Peter in 2 Peter 3:18 when he said, ". . . grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ"? Well, let's turn there and we'll analyze it. Yes, this passage is even quoted as justification for the changes that began to take place in the Church in 1974. If you go back and read the study papers on the changes in Pentecost and divorce and remarriage that happened in that year, you will find them all peppered with this idea, "What a wonderful thing this is! We have come up with new knowledge. God has revealed new knowledge to the church. We're growing in grace and knowledge. Glory be!" Was that really growth? Was that new knowledge? Was that of God? It most certainly was not, and yet they all quote it. "Grow in grace and knowledge." What does this scripture really mean? What does it mean to grow in grace and knowledge? Let's read it.

2 Peter 3:18:

But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen.

Well, the only way to get it in proper context, brethren, is to back up and read the very context of the whole passage. What was it that Peter was recording? Why was he making this statement? You can't just isolate it and think you can apply any concept that a human mind wants to, and understand the Truth. No, let's back up to verse 14 in chapter 3, and let's see what the whole context of the passage is all about. You're going to find, brethren, that it's exactly, diametrically opposed to the way it has been interpreted by the majority of God's people today. Actually, let's start in verse 13:

Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.

So, the context is speaking about that coming reign of Jesus Christ, His Millennial rule when He takes possession of His Kingdom. And so, we're looking forward to the coming of that Kingdom, as we're going to talk about in a few minutes. Verse 14: "Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things . . ." Yes, we are looking with hope and anticipation for the return of Christ.

Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, *be diligent* that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless.

So, what is it that we're supposed to be doing in the meantime while we wait for the manifestation of Christ and His glorious Second Coming? We're supposed to be diligent, and we're supposed to make sure that we are without spot and blameless. Remember, in the prophecies of Revelation, there are thousands of God's people who are going to have to learn it the hard way. They're going to have to go through the Great Tribulation before they get the picture again and come to value the things that they once had.

They are going to make their robes white in the blood of the Lamb. But right now, there are many of God's people, hundreds and thousands spread around this earth, who are wearing dirty robes because they have forsaken and rejected the very revelation of the Truth of Jesus Christ. Here, the admonition of Peter is that we take our calling seriously, that we be diligent in something and without spot and blameless. It means that there's an opportunity for us, brethren, if we pay attention, to take care of that cleansing process now. Why wait for a tribulation? Why wait to have to do it the hard way? If we just value the gift that God has given to us, we can clean our robes and make them white, even now.

. . . without spot, and blameless. And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation . . .

Do you know how much is contained in that very phrase? What is it, brethren, that gives us an opportunity for salvation? The longsuffering of Jesus Christ and the Father who, by their grace—their unmerited pardon of our sins—have provided an opportunity for us to be free of the death penalty, which we have each brought upon ourselves in full. We are all guilty because of our sins and because of the weaknesses of our carnal natures with which God made us, and yet, in spite of that, He loves us, He cares for us and He wants us to have that eternal rest in His Family. And so, it is not because we earned it—and we can never earn a place in that Family.

Yet, He has offered us salvation by His longsuffering. It means that, in spite of the fact that we do so many terrible things which make us absolutely unqualified for any mercy, yet out of His grace, He gives us that unmerited pardon and He says, "If you repent, if you fight with all that is within you to overcome that natural nature, I'm going to forgive it. I'm going to wipe out those sins as if they never happened, as if they never existed." It is through that grace that we have an opportunity for salvation.

And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation [Yes, it sure is.]; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you.

So, here, Peter makes a reference to the Apostle Paul—the Apostle Paul whose epistles to the churches contain the expounding of these principles of love and grace and how it all works in with the overall plan of God and Jesus Christ, and also explain the relationship between the law and grace. Yet Peter, in the next sentence, recognizes and capitalizes on the fact that human beings misinterpret and have totally misconstrued the very writings of Paul to make them say something they don't say all. "As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood . . ." Oh yes, the writings of Paul are not easy to be understood. He was obviously a very technical, scholarly individual who was given incredible gifts from God. He was very intellectual, trained in languages, and his writing style is complicated. It reminds me very much of somebody we knew who wrote and spoke on a level above many of us. Many of us were blessed with the opportunity to grow under the tutelage of Mr. Raymond Cole, and yet we had to pay attention to the sermons. You couldn't be tired or worn out when you listened to his sermon if you were going to get everything that was in there. So it is with the Apostle Paul, another servant that God used mightily to preserve so many of the books of the New Testament. He had that very same makeup.

. . . which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction.

There were those who were misapplying everything that Paul taught concerning grace and law and how to achieve that salvation. They were trying to say that Christ did away with the law. Verse 17: "Ye therefore . . ." In context of what Peter has just said concerning those who have wrested the very scriptures of Paul to say what they absolutely do not say—in setting that foundation—now we find the

next statement that Peter makes in verse 17. "Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before . . ." Actually, the Greek word here translated "before," more appropriately is translated "beforehand." You could even write that in your Bible if you wanted to. ". . . seeing ye know these things [beforehand] . . ." It means there was something, brethren, that the people of God had already received, something they knew and understood which was given much earlier. Look at the context now—having received something that we held in our hands and possessed; we knew it beforehand. Now what does Peter say? "Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things [beforehand], beware lest ye also, being led [to new truth] . . ." Is that what he says? No. What is the warning to those who possess the Truth? What is the potential problem that the people of God were going to face, did face in the first century, and have repeated in the last days?

. . . beware lest ye also, being *led away* with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness.

Now, if they were not a people that had first received the Truth, and therefore had been taught in a way of steadfastness, then how is it that they could have fallen? As Mr. Raymond Cole said so many times, you cannot depart from that which you never had, and you cannot fall from that which you never possessed. Unless you climb the mountain, you can't fall off, can you? So, we started with the mountain, which was the Word of God. We had that Way of Life revealed through a chosen servant of the last days. We had the Truth, and then Peter says the warning is that we not fall from our steadfastness, forsaking that which we had beforehand.

. . . beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness. But *grow in grace*, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ . . .

Now, how does that change the context of Peter's statement? What does it really mean to grow in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ? If we had something priceless and valuable beforehand, brethren, and Peter is admonishing us not to give it up—not to turn, not to change it, not to distort it, not to let these other men talk us into forsaking it—then how do we apply the concept of growth?

God's people already had the Truth. It is amazing to me, brethren; I simply cannot understand how it is that so many hundreds and thousands of those who once believed it cannot see that they are walking in precisely the same footsteps as the

ancient Israelites, who also began with the Truth. God did not give them a mixture of truth and error and say, "Ha, this is like a game show. Now your challenge is to figure out which part is true and which part is false, and replace the false with more truth." That is not how God told Israel to grow. No, God gave the ancient Israelites pure doctrine. It was called the Ten Commandments, and they were written with His own finger on two tables of stone. They were expanded, then, in the writings of Moses, by the statutes and judgments that were recorded. It was a body of law to govern them spiritually and physically as a nation, and it was a perfect law. It was a perfect way of life, and God gave them everything that they needed in order to possess the promises—the blessings—that He wanted them to have. He gave them what they needed. It was Truth.

So, what was the guilt of the Israelites? They wouldn't hold on to it. They wouldn't value what they had been given from the beginning. They wouldn't treat it as a gift, a miraculous manifestation of the revelation of God. No, they wanted to water it down. They wanted to make it more palatable for their carnal minds. They wanted to insert the practices of their pagan neighbors, which looked very appealing to them. And so, they found justification to incorporate Baal worship into the worship of the living God. So, King Jeroboam of the northern kingdom of Israel didn't do away with all of the laws of God. He didn't do away with the priesthood. He didn't do away with the Feast of Tabernacles. He didn't do away with worship; he just perverted what God gave and used his own common sense, his own human wisdom, for political and other reasons and made it more palatable to the people. He changed the Feast of Tabernacles from the seventh to the eighth month, but he was still keeping a Feast, or at least he thought so. He rejected the Levites and set up his own priesthood out of the base people of the nation, so he still had a priesthood. It still looked pretty good on the surface. He just made it easier for the people who liked the religion better when they could have a couple big calves in Bethel and Dan to worship as a part of their ceremonies for God. For all of their growing in grace and knowledge, all they did was become pagan and heathen to the core. God never accepted those sacrifices, because they changed what He gave. It was not Truth, because He had given Truth from the beginning.

When Jesus Christ came in the flesh, He brought the Truth. There was no need to improve upon it. There was no way to improve upon what Christ gave. He taught that message to the apostles whom He commissioned after His ascension to continue to preach that same gospel and to raise up churches. It was the same Truth from the beginning. So, how were they to grow in grace and knowledge by changing

the doctrines that Christ first revealed? You can't grow that way, brethren; it doesn't work. And guess what? The same thing happened in the last-day Church. Why can't the people of God see it? They also received a priceless revelation, even as God gave through Moses, through the ministry of Jesus Christ, through the ministry of the twelve apostles, including the Apostle Paul; and we also had a man who fulfilled the office of an apostle in the last days and his name was Herbert W. Armstrong. Now, I can understand it if certain people decided that they thought Herbert Armstrong was full of a lot of hot air, and they want to reject the whole thing and do something else. But I can't understand those who continue to profess that they value the message and the ministry of Herbert Armstrong, and yet they embrace every carnal, pagan, heathen practice as a part of their worship of God today—just like the ancient Israelites. They can't see it. They cannot see history repeating itself over and over again. That, they call growth.

Well, I've used this example before, but I'll use it again. Brethren, how does a tree grow? How does a tree grow? If you want a tree to grow and flourish, do you wrap a chain around its trunk, tie it to the back bumper of your truck and haul it out of the ground? Do you pull it up by the roots, and then transplant it someplace else? Is that how you make that tree grow? Well, that's what the Church did in 1974. That which they called "growing in grace and knowledge" was ripping the tree up by the roots and planting it somewhere else that it had never been before. No, a tree grows on the foundation of its existing roots and trunk. It only puts on new branches, new leaves, and new layers upon that trunk as it ages, but the tree stays right where it has always been. The tree doesn't change; it doesn't become something it never was. It's still the same tree; it just puts on new dimensions on the same foundation. That's exactly the way the Truth of God is.

So, doctrinally, brethren, God's Truth never undoes, repudiates or undermines that which we understood as Truth from the beginning; it only adds to, magnifies and expands our understanding of those priceless principles. It allows us to see the deeper layers that are there, that are hidden and waiting to be revealed through maturity of spiritual growth. That's what real growth is. That's what Peter was admonishing the people, and it was even written for us upon whom the ends of the world are come. It was written by the Apostle Peter for you and me today.

2 Timothy 3 and verse 1:

This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good [This is a prophecy, given hundreds of years ago, of what our environment would be like. Verse 4:], Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God.

What were these pleasures that the people of God wanted so badly that they were willing to pervert the revelation of Jesus Christ? Well, you know, they thought it was great when the Church wanted to change Pentecost from Monday to Sunday, because then they didn't have to take off another day from work. They just saved another vacation day. And they were overjoyed at the opportunity to have the marriage doctrine watered down, because now they could get rid of that wife or that husband they had grown tired of or were having problems with. They weren't willing to spend the time to work on it. They didn't want to fulfil their marriage vows and work through those problems. No, they wanted to do like the rest of the people in the world, the heathens and the pagans, who do it as long as it makes sense and is easy; and when it gets hard, you just toss it out and go get somebody new.

They clamored for those changes. Why? Because they were willing to put up with it for a while when they thought the Church was going to flee in 1972 to a place of safety and that Christ was going to return in 1975. "Oh, we don't have that long to go. We can stick it out for another few years," some people thought. "I've got problems in my marriage, but I'm willing to put up with it if we really do flee in '72 and it's all over in '75." But what happened when 1972 came and went? The Church didn't flee. All of a sudden, it became apparent that we weren't at the right time. There were too many things yet to happen in the prophecies that God gave that weren't even close to being fulfilled. And so, people got restless and they said, "Now, wait a minute. I can't live with this woman or this man. It was one thing if it was going to be over soon, but I can't live with them if I have to go on for a number of years." They started clamoring for change to justify it. The ministry was afraid that they were going to lose members. The laity was restless, and don't think the ministry wasn't either. I can tell you that during my time as a young student at Ambassador College in Pasadena in 1980—my family was still in the church until 1981—I could count all the ministers who were in D&R situations at that time. They had either left, or divorced their wives and married someone new. The ministers were as guilty of it as anybody in the laity.

They were all seeking a way to have their cake and eat it too. They viewed the laws of God, which we had kept as a Church for over forty years, as a burden and as a difficulty, and they wanted relief. Oh, they still wanted the hope of salvation; they still wanted to be in God's Kingdom. They just wanted the requirements of salvation to be easier, and so they turned to the scholars of the world and started justifying—saying that God allows divorce. Or, God hates divorce, but it's a sin like any other; and so once you do it, you can repent of it and then it's ok. What perversion. No, brethren, if there's any fulfillment of this last day-prophecy concerning those that were lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God, I don't know what could be more than that which we saw happen beginning about twenty-five to thirty years ago in the Church.

"Having a form of godliness . . ." Oh, they didn't give up their appearance of their religious fervor or their commitment to God. No. Oh, they were still leaders of the church, elders, those that were guiding and had the great pretense of being close to God and speaking in His name. "Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof . . ." What happens, brethren, when a ministry who was commissioned to preserve, to proclaim and to protect the very truths of God—which He gave already to the Church as a great miracle—turns and begins to water down and to teach people to break God's Law? What happens when the ministry brings in a big gold idol and says, "Hey, this is a part of our new growth in the way we're going to worship God," just like Jeroboam did in Bethel and Dan. "Here's a great new statue of a god, and let's move the Feast of Tabernacles one month later because it makes more sense."

See, we wouldn't accept that, would we? No, that's too obvious. The Church of the last days did something just as bad, or worse, when they corrupted marriage. They corrupted Pentecost. They changed the doctrine on the nature of man and divine healing, and that was only the beginning because it went downhill from there. And then, people wonder, as they look back twenty-five, twenty-six years later and say, "Where did it go wrong? What happened?" They think that the Church went wrong after Mr. Armstrong died in 1986. They think it was the successor to Mr. Armstrong that destroyed the Church. No, it wasn't. The Church was already sick and diseased. All it needed was its final death throes in the middle to late 80's, and we saw it happen and finally come to fruition in the early 90's. But that decay, that disease, began from the time that the Church rejected Jesus Christ as the revelator of Truth, all the way back in the early 1970's. And it was already working for years before that in the manifestations of an orientation of mind that rejected revelation and, instead, valued human scholarship.

Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away. For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins . . .

Now, I don't like to be sexist in my comments, but here, the Apostle Paul uses an analogy of silly women laden with sins—women who are by nature, by God's design, more emotional. The inference here, then, is that these deceivers took advantage of all of the people of God, even as a man would take advantage of a woman who is unwise and led by her emotions, leading her right down the Tully trail. That's precisely what the ministry did to the Church.

For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts.

Oh yes, the Church was full of divers lusts, people that were clamoring to be freed from the "burden" of God's Law; and the ministry gave them their opportunity and their justification. "Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth." They were growing in grace and knowledge, so they said. They were learning new truth, that's what they told us. But God here, through the Apostle Paul, said, "Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth." Who is the Truth? The Truth is personified by Jesus Christ. It's the same thing Peter said, if you turn back to 2 Peter 3, ". . . grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." You can just substitute the word "Truth" for "Jesus Christ" because Christ is Truth. They're synonymous. They're interchangeable. You could just as easily say, "grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Truth" because that's what Christ is. How do we grow in the knowledge of the Truth? You don't throw away what you already understood as Truth. You don't change to something totally different. You don't uproot that tree and move it to another spot in the yard. Not at all.

Romans 1 and verse 18:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness.

How does someone hold the Truth in unrighteousness? Truth is a manifestation of the righteous laws of God. And so, if you're holding, in essence, righteousness in your hands, how do you hold righteousness in unrighteousness? It

kind of seems contradictory, doesn't it? How does one hold the Truth—the pure, unadulterated revelation of Jesus Christ—in unrighteousness? The same way Jeroboam did. You start off with that which God gave, which was true, and then you start tinkering with it. You start perverting and changing it. You start adding and subtracting according to your whim, making it more palatable to your own lusts and to the whim of the people. That's how one holds the Truth in unrighteousness. It means that they started off with Truth, brethren. They didn't have a mixture of truth and error, and then have to get rid of the error.

I look back on it now, and I read some of those things dated even as early as 1970 and 1971 where Mr. Armstrong began to say that the proof of God's true Church is that we're willing to change when we're wrong. If we would only recognize that was the beginning of the end. I'm sure Mr. Armstrong didn't understand at the time what was really happening, under the pressures that he was facing, the influences of those around him in high places that did not love or value that original Truth. He did not realize that he was already beginning to allow those forces to besmirch the very gift that God had given to him, even all the way back in the early decades of that century. To say that the proof of God's Church is that we're willing to change when we're wrong, denies the fact that God gave the true doctrine from the beginning.

. . . who hold the truth in unrighteousness; Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them . . .

Oh yes, He gave it as revelation. They already possessed the pearl of great price. It was already in their hands, and they just didn't know it. ". . . for God hath shewed it unto them." How can we say we had error, that we didn't really have the Truth in the early years, when he said, ". . . God hath shewed it unto them"?

For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and [divinity]; so that they are without excuse.

And who is without excuse more than those who received that revelation, who understood it as revelation, and then, in the process of time, forgot and began to challenge and to rethink the gift that God gave to the Church? "Because that, when they knew God . . ." Here, again, brethren, you're seeing someone who started off with the revelation. They weren't in darkness. If Herbert Armstrong taught a

mixture, doctrinally, of truth and error from the beginning, then he never was the servant of God. All of these other ministers out here all teach a combination of truth and error. You can get a nugget of truth out of just about anybody you listen to. But guess what? That's exactly the way Satan works. Satan doesn't give you a hundred percent error. What makes him deceitful and dangerous is that he gives you a mixture of truth with error. As I said in a recent *Monthly Letter* a few months back, "Truth plus error equals error." You don't take something pure, mix it with something impure, and think that the end result of the combination is pure. No, anything impure added to a pure substance makes the whole product impure. It corrupts it. It taints it. It always works that way. Therefore, if the message that Herbert Armstrong originally gave us, including a Monday Pentecost, was part error, it means his ministry was not inspired of God. Christ doesn't reveal error. And it certainly was no better than any of these other ministers that are out here preaching their own brand of doctrine that is part truth and part error.

The only way that it was ever the Church of God is if Christ revealed unadulterated, pure doctrine. Yes, there were presumptions about future prophecies. That's a separate category. That's not doctrine, brethren. We've got many articles and *Monthly Letters* that address the distinction. We're talking about the doctrine, the tenants of the Church, even these very Fundamentals of Belief that were written from the early decades of the 1930's and 40's. If those things are not absolutely true, brethren, then we're all wasting our time being in any congregation that is an offshoot of the Worldwide Church of God. You might as well go find another religion, or give it up all together. No, the Bible shows clearly that Truth is always given to His people from the beginning, and then the commission is to hold on to it and not allow anyone to tempt us into perverting it or changing it.

. . . when they knew God [So, we start off with knowing God; we were given that revelation.], they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

That's just what we saw happen in the early 1970's. They didn't appreciate or value it. They were not thankful for the revelation God had given. They thought it had wrong elements. There were things they didn't like about it. They thought they could improve upon it. So, through their Biblical scholarship, their study of Hebrew and Greek words, and appealing to the deceived scholars of the world who don't understand anything about the Truth of God, they thought they were going to come up with new Truth. They thought they were going to grow in grace and knowledge.

Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations . . .

Oh yes, they began to think they had some skill and ability of mind because of their doctorate degrees, their education, their training and study. They became very vain in their imaginations about what they knew or what they could discern from their own Bible study. They ". . . became vain in their imaginations, and [What did that lead to?] their foolish heart [Oh yes, it was foolishness.] was darkened." They weren't growing in grace and knowledge. They were separating themselves from the God who had inspired them with Truth. They were turning instead to fables, and they didn't even know it. "Professing themselves to be wise . . ." Isn't that what they told us? "Listen to us; we have the degrees, and we've appealed to men in the world—Jewish rabbis, Biblical scholars—who all have the proper interpretation for the Hebrew word translated as 'from' in Leviticus 23, *mi-mohorat*. We understand what the word really means, and it means Sunday Pentecost and not Monday." Well, no, it doesn't, but that's another topic. "Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools." They did become fools, and all of us who went along with it for a while were also fools, until we came to understand that God gave the Truth to the Church, and that Truth never changes.

Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man . . .

Isn't that what they did? They took what Christ revealed through Mr. Armstrong, priceless Truth, and they thought they were going to improve upon it by putting the mark of a man upon it through their own human wisdom.

. . . changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things. Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves.

And so, they changed Pentecost to set the stage to change divorce and remarriage three months later, and they certainly did it. And then, the Church went off whole-hog into divorce and remarriage, and wrecked family after family after family in this country and around the world. It was lust. That's all it was, brethren—pure, unadulterated lust.

Who changed the truth of God into a lie [Yeah, they started with Truth, and then they changed it into a lie.], and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen.

Who was the creature they were serving? Their own human minds. Their own human wisdom was that in which they trusted more than God. It was the basis for every change in doctrine that we have seen over the last quarter century, and there are hundreds and thousands out there still worshiping Baal and calling it growth. It's an abomination in the eyes of God.

What does it really mean to grow in grace and knowledge? How is 2 Peter 3:18 appropriately translated? What is it that the Church is supposed to learn from it? Well, let's start with the word "grace." What is this "grace"? The Greek word that's translated here as "grace" is the word *charis*. It actually means, more appropriately, "graciousness." It's easy to read 2 Peter 3:18, "grow in grace and in knowledge," and make the automatic assumption we usually do about grace. Growing in grace—"Well, God is the one who gives grace," we say, and that's absolutely right. It's even what Peter had said earlier, as we read the passages above. "So, Christ gives us grace, and we need grace for salvation. And we're supposed to grow in grace, so that means we're supposed to grow in receiving more grace from Christ." Is that what Peter was saying here? No. Peter is not saying that we are supposed to grow in the amount of grace we receive from Jesus Christ. He has already given us unlimited grace. All we have to do is be repentant. All we have to do is be truly sorry for our sins and work to overcome, and we have access to the fullness of His grace, of His mercy, of His forgiveness, to put away our guilty past.

What is this that we are supposed to do as Christians when it says to "grow in grace"? Use the word "graciousness" instead. This word *charis* means "graciousness," and it also means "gratitude." It means "joy, liberality and thankworthy." The real context of this term, then, means that we are supposed to grow in gratitude, thankfulness and graciousness. It's not talking about a responsibility to get more from Christ; it's talking about something we're supposed to be giving to others. "Growing in grace" means that we're supposed to become more of a gracious individual. It means we are willing to give grace, to pardon and to cover the sins of others who might offend us. We're supposed to grow in the very manifestation of the mind of Christ. Christ is the one who forgives. He gave Himself fully—without question, without reservation—for each one of us. He emptied Himself totally and gave us that perfect grace. Therefore, Peter is saying, if

we respect the priceless gift of Truth that we have been given—this Way of Life, an opportunity to seek salvation—then we, too, are supposed to become gracious. We are supposed to manifest the willingness to cover the sins of others.

Let's see it in Colossians 3:12:

Put on therefore, as the elect of God [which is exactly what you are, brethren], holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.

You could just as easily transcribe in there, "even as Christ gave you grace, so give grace to others." That's precisely what Paul is saying here.

. . . even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things put on [love; put on real love—the love of God], which is the bond of perfectness. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful.

There's the concept of thanksgiving, and it's all tied up with this very concept of forgiveness, longsuffering, and forbearing the weakness of others. Why? Why is thanksgiving connected so significantly with the concept of grace, graciousness, forbearance and longsuffering? As human beings, you see, we are not capable of really pouring ourselves out to forgive others unless we recognize the value of all the gifts we have been given. We are not in a position to show mercy to our brothers and sisters unless we recognize how much mercy we have received. If we truly recognize what God has given to us, mercifully forgiving our sins, overlooking our transgressions of His perfect Law, if we value that grace we have received and we thank God from the bottom of our hearts—and it's real to us, and we don't take those gifts for granted—then we're ever more capable of turning in kind and providing the same kind of mercy and longsuffering to others around us.

And so, there is a connection between the amount of graciousness that we manifest and the amount of thanksgiving that we have for the things God has given to us. The more we are truly thankful, the more we're going to be inclined to pass along that mercy and kindness to others. So, when the Apostle Peter was saying to "grow in grace," it's really more appropriately translated, "grow in graciousness."

Grow in thanksgiving, grow in gratitude for the gift of salvation that God has offered to you and me, and be willing, then, to manifest that same mercy, love, forbearance and tolerance for others. As Christ has given it to us, pass it on and give it in kind to those around us, especially to those of the household of faith. That is what grace is all about.

What about knowledge? Back to 2 Peter 3:18: ". . . grow in grace, and in the knowledge of . . .", what? What kind of knowledge are we speaking of? It's ". . . the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." Remember, we've already seen that it's synonymous with the concept of Truth, the knowledge of Truth, because Christ is Truth.

Malachi 3 and verse 6—a prophecy for the last days. What is this Jesus Christ like? If we're supposed to grow in the knowledge of Jesus Christ, what is His character? What is He like? Is He the kind of God that tricks us, gives us a Monday Pentecost to keep for forty years, and then finally inspires His ministers to say, "Ha, ha, I've kind of been fooling you all these years, and it's really on Sunday. I've been kind of letting you slide, but now I'm revealing this new knowledge to you so that you can grow in grace and knowledge." Is that the way Christ operates? Or, is it more likely that Mr. Armstrong was right when he thundered for years and said, "God would never have raised up His Church on the pagan day of Sunday"? No, Mr. Armstrong was not a Biblical scholar like these other men. He didn't have all the degrees, but those men didn't have the inspiration of God. Only Mr. Armstrong did. God revealed it simply, and Mr. Armstrong taught it in its simplicity. It is absolutely substantiated by the same technicalities, and our articles absolutely substantiate a Monday Pentecost. We can fight on anybody's level when it comes to justifying the Truth of God. I can get in the ring and show you technically—and I know many of you can too—why it's Monday, but our confidence is not in the scholarship of understanding Hebrew words and the Hebrew enumeration rule. Not at all. Our confidence comes because we know that God is the one who raised up this Church, and God doesn't lie.

Malachi 3:6: "For I am the [Eternal], I change not . . ." That's who this Revelator was that became Jesus Christ when He came in His own flesh, and that inspired those apostles to teach the very same message. It was the same message that was taught originally—that He gave to Moses on the mountain. This is the God who says, "For I am the [Eternal], I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed." What does that mean? What does one concept have to do with the

other? Because God changes not, how does that save the descendants of Jacob? The descendants of Jacob didn't deserve anything. They're like you and me, brethren. They're weak, carnal, and subject to their own carnality. Without the revelation of God and the Holy Spirit, we would utterly corrupt ourselves. God would not have given us anything or saved any of us or any of those physical descendants had it not been for one thing. Do you know what it was? It was a promise He gave to a certain man centuries before that time—Abraham.

You see, because of Abraham's faithfulness, God made a promise. The same Being who became Jesus Christ made a covenant with Abraham and said that He was going to bless the descendants of Abraham through Isaac and Jacob. He was going to bless those twelve tribes—especially the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, those that came out of Joseph. He was going to bless them with Birthright promises, whether they deserved them or not. Those offspring never did deserve what they got, and yet God fulfilled and gave those Birthright promises, even to the modern-day descendants who have enjoyed them. Oh yes, they're losing them now, but God fulfilled His promise and gave them. Instead of giving them what they deserved for their paganism and rank heathenism, He fulfilled His promise to Abraham and saved them. He brought them down through time and blessed them. And then, even out of those pagan nations of His, he called many of you.

When God says, ". . . I am the [Eternal], I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed", we had better be very, very thankful that God doesn't change. We had better be very, very thankful that God never goes back on His promise, that He doesn't use situation ethics to decide that this is a different time and era. "Abraham has long been in the grave for thousands of years; these people aren't worthy of anything. They hate and despise everything that I've done for them. They spit in my face. They are not thankful or appreciative; they're pagan and heathen to the core." No, brethren, we deserve to be smitten, destroyed and absolutely removed. The only reason we're all here is because of the faithfulness of God and His perfect character. He always honors His word. ". . . I am the [Eternal], I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed." The very fact that we sit here and draw breath is because God honors His word. Now, is that the kind of God that you think would have revealed to Mr. Armstrong the plan of salvation through the knowledge of the weekly Sabbath and the annual Holy Days, which picture that perfect and glorious plan of how God is now working to save humankind? And yet, He would have allowed him to keep the wrong day as a memorial for Pentecost, which pictures the receipt of the Holy Spirit—the means by which we gain that

salvation. He's going to allow the Church to keep the wrong day for over forty years, and then we're going to get a chance to grow in grace and knowledge in 1974. Come on! Wake up! What kind of God are we serving?

2 Thessalonians 2:13:

But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you [And so He did.] to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.

If the Church was wrong for forty years about the Truth, what about all of those who were baptized during that era of time, who lived and died without ever receiving this "new knowledge," this "new growth," concerning the proper day of Pentecost or the right teaching on divorce and remarriage? Was their religion in vain? ". . . God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth." Did we have God's Holy Spirit for the first forty years of the work of Mr. Armstrong, or did we not? "Whereunto he called you by our gospel . . ." Yes, He did it through the foolishness of preaching of human servants. That's how He revealed Himself.

. . . by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. [When we obtained Him, brethren, we had Him from the beginning.] Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle.

It didn't say, "Grow in grace and knowledge by changing the foundation of your belief." ". . . stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle." That's an admonition for the last-day Church. That's an admonition, my dear brethren, to you and me, to all of those under the hearing of my voice who had an opportunity in these last days to hear and to respond to that Way of Life through that chosen servant—when those minds were opened for the first time to a Way of Life that was phenomenal and life-changing. And it was Truth.

The concept of growth through changing doctrine is abominable in the eyes of God. There is no warning to God's people about losing salvation because of failing to grow by changing doctrine. That's what I receive every once in a while. I'll get a

letter or an e-mail from somebody who wants to know about the basis of our belief and what we stand for. And because we hold to the same doctrines that we have for the last twenty-six years since Mr. Raymond Cole started Church of God, The Eternal in the winter of 1975—and it's the same message that he had been taught by Mr. Armstrong all the way back from the time he was a boy and that he continued to practice all of his life, and we hold precisely the same doctrines all these years later—there are certain individuals that look at us and say, "Well, you're just a stagnant group. You're not growing in grace and knowledge. There's nothing new about your doctrine; you just kind of keep holding on to the same old thing."

I don't have a problem answering that. Real growth of the tree is not changing the roots or the trunk; it's putting on new branches and new leaves, and new rings around that trunk—building upon the same foundation that we had from the very beginning. That's what we have done as a remnant group. I think sometimes we take for granted how much growth in knowledge and understanding we have learned over the last quarter century. We have a deeper understanding through the faithful ministry that we had all of these past years, brethren. The layers of the depth of the knowledge of those priceless truths have become deeper and more meaningful all of this time. We have understood, for the first time since the apostasy in 1974, how to put things into perspective concerning these end-time prophecies—these prophecies that told us these things were going to happen. That day cannot come except there come a falling away. We never understood that before. We read it, but we didn't understand it. Now we understand it. The rest of those who are out there still don't understand that one. They think that the apostasy didn't happen until 1987, 1989 or 1995. They still don't understand when it happened; we do. That's not arrogance on my part, brethren. That also was a gift. It was growth that God allowed and inspired through the ministry of this remnant body. Why? Because we refused to change the foundation of His original revelation. And when you hold on to the Truth, then He gives more understanding and a deeper appreciation.

That is real spiritual growth—when you take an understanding of the original, and you're able to understand more about it. And it becomes fuller, much more full in the application in your own life. We understand better how to apply the principles of love, mercy and overcoming, which is our responsibility as Christians, even as we've been talking about in this process of redemption—overcoming, self-crucifixion, appreciation for the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and appreciation for this glorious plan of salvation, pictured by the Holy Days which we keep year after year. God wants us to remember the things from old, to value them and to find new depth

of meaning as we apply it to growing in the future. It doesn't repudiate, it doesn't undermine the original Truth, brethren. It adds to it—magnifies it—and we have had an opportunity over the last quarter century to have that Truth magnified, not changed. That is what Peter was admonishing the Church.

No, there has never been any Biblical warning by a servant of God to say that you're in danger of losing your salvation if you stick to what you were first taught. Show me any scripture that says that we're in danger of becoming spiritually stagnant by holding on to what God first revealed. But there are a lot of warnings to the people of God for taking what He first revealed and not valuing it, and then changing it—for not holding fast to what we were taught. It's something to think about.

Jude, verse 3:

Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.

Yes, He did reveal it one time. He revealed it through a man that He inspired and who fulfilled the office of an apostle in these last days. Why was he an apostle? Because he was one that God directly inspired. He didn't have a mediator. God influenced Herbert Armstrong directly through the Holy Spirit. Yes, Mr. Armstrong studied the Bible. People misconstrue that and think, "Well, all I have to do is what Herbert Armstrong did. Herbert Armstrong came up with his doctrines by sitting down and studying the Bible. That's what his autobiography said." No, he said that he studied the Word on his knees, beseeching God for the Truth. Now, there are a lot of human beings who seek the Truth from God, and they decide that they want God to reveal to them special knowledge. Does God honor that? No. Is God duty-bound to back up the request of any human being when it's not His will? So, I decide I want to be an apostle. I want to be a prophet. I want to understand hidden things in the Bible, so I'm going to go in my closet, I'm going to fast and study, and I'm going to say, "God, please reveal this to me. I'm very sincere. " And now God is duty-bound to give me that revelation. I don't think so.

God chooses who He wants to. He decides who He's going to inspire with Truth. He decides who are going to be His chosen ministers, the servants who are going to be the teachers. He called each one of us, brethren, into that Body. He gave

us the ability to receive that knowledge, but it was through the ministry—through the preaching of a chosen human servant, even the foolishness of preaching. It was Herbert Armstrong that He chose to do that. So, Herbert Armstrong was unique because when he got on his knees, when he went before God and asked for revelation of the Truth, God had already determined that he was the man that God was going to use to bring that knowledge to this era for the first time—the understanding of that plan of salvation, the knowledge of the Family of God and your potential to be an heir in the very Family of God, to be God as God is. That knowledge was not known or understood in this age, in this century, by anyone else. Try and find it; you won't do it. Yes, there were men who understood that the Sabbath needed to be kept. There were even some who understood that the Holy Days should be kept, but they didn't understand what those Holy Days represented at all. They did not understand the meaning of the Holy Days in picturing the glorious plan that God is working out on this earth. No one else understood it but Herbert Armstrong, and he didn't get that by reading the work of any other human scholar. He got it because God gave it to him directly.

So, yes, God opened that knowledge to Mr. Armstrong as he was combing the Bible and studying the Scripture, looking for Truth. The difference was, God intended to give him that knowledge directly and to inspire him to receive it, and that is precisely what He did. Through that servant, then, we became members of the Church, we received that calling, we heard the voice that spoke in the name of God—and this was a legitimate voice—and it changed our lives. We learned a way that was unlike anything else that we had ever heard. It also made the Bible make sense for the first time because there's no other teaching by any other minister or evangelist that ever made the books of the Bible complete and harmonious from Genesis to Revelation. There's no other teaching that we received which made perfect sense, except that which we received through Mr. Armstrong.

So, yes, he was an apostle because like the twelve, and like Paul, Mr. Armstrong also was inspired directly by God, given a divine message and commissioned to raise up churches. That's exactly what he did in the last days, even as those chosen servants of past generations of time did, in fulfilling God's will. So, I don't have a problem with calling him an apostle at all.

Yes, brethren, when we understand what growth really is and what it means to grow in grace—graciousness, thankfulness—and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ who is the personification of all Truth, it has such a deeper meaning than the flippant

term that we hear quoted by so many when they say, "grow in grace and knowledge." No, there is grace and there is knowledge of Jesus Christ, and it is absolutely consistent; it never changes.

I am going to have to wait and cover the next aspect of this next time. We will get into this explanation of what it means to possess the Kingdom and to become kings and priests, reigning with Christ at His return. Next time.