

Fundamentals of Belief
#17B: Redemption Through Consent and Overcoming

Edited Sermon Transcript
Jon W. Brisby; 6-1-2002

This afternoon, we want to continue our Fundamentals of Belief series. Last time, we began fundamental number seventeen of the Fundamentals of Belief of the Church of God, The Eternal, with an overall title that I've given this fundamental, "Redemption, Reward and Faith." This is one of those fundamentals that has a lot of material, a lot of concepts, all wrapped up within it; and so, we want to take it piece by piece, and we began to do just that last time. To get us started again, let me read through the fundamental in its entirety:

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.

That is fundamental number seventeen. Last time, we began by taking the first phrase, "We believe God's purpose is the creation of high spiritual character . . .",

and we went through and showed how Mr. Armstrong had originally defined character—a word that's not found in the Bible at all, and yet it absolutely captures the essence of what it is that Christians are to accomplish. Mr. Armstrong said that character is the ability to know the difference between right and wrong and to choose the right. So I went through and showed you that the way God described that very principle in the Bible was the subject of righteousness. That is precisely what righteousness is. Righteousness is more than just knowing the Truth. Righteousness is acting upon the Truth and putting it into practice in our behavior. That's precisely what Mr. Armstrong defined when he used the word "character." It's not only knowing the Truth, but being able to apply the Truth—choosing right over wrong when faced with those temptations.

Fundamental number seventeen tells us that the purpose of our being here and all the experiences that God has given us, is the development of high spiritual character, and ". . . therefore the very object of redemption is to rescue mankind from SIN . . ." And so, we went through and discussed this topic of redemption. Why is it that man needs to be redeemed, saved, ransomed, and from what? From our natural natures with which we were born. God gave us, by design, a carnal nature that is opposed to him and said, "Now, you overcome it."

We found that although mankind desires good things, he does not have within himself the capacity to achieve them. So he sets lofty goals; he desires peace, love, fulfillment and happiness, and yet cannot achieve it because he does not agree with God. Mankind, by nature, opposes God and hates the laws that God gave to govern our existence. Thereby, we live in the flesh, in "resulting degradation, misery and unhappiness." That's precisely, then, the state of this world because mankind, even from the very beginning with Adam and Eve, has rejected the very means to achieve those things that we desire so much. Therefore, as a people around this world for thousands of years now, we have continually paid the penalty—the prices—that go automatically with the rejection of God's priceless Law. Those penalties are automatic, and it does bring degradation, misery and unhappiness.

So, why is it that God allowed mankind to descend into this terrible state, and why does a loving and a benevolent God allow His priceless children whom He loves, the billions upon the earth, to suffer so dramatically? It's probably one of the most fundamental questions that is asked by people around the world, and the one that theologians are hard-pressed to answer because they do not see or understand the

plan of God. People ask innocently, "Why would a loving God allow little children to be so abused and to starve to death in countries around the world and to be victimized and murdered? Why would these things be allowed if there really is a God in heaven who loves us and cares for us?" It was only Herbert W. Armstrong who understood in these last days the real answer to that question and taught all of us that very perfect plan of salvation which God is working out. Man is paying the price for his disobedience according to his own lusts and the dictates of his mind. For 6,000 years he has been allowed to suffer those penalties. It is only with the intervention of God, the gift of a calling, that mankind has the hope of escaping that life of misery and agony. And so, we want to look more deeply at a part of that redemptive process that God has set in motion.

Again, quoting part of the fundamental, and the one that we want to address today: ". . . 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 . . ." Now, possessing the Kingdom is the reward, and we're not going to talk about the reward today. That's going to be the next sermon. We want to talk about this process of redemption and how it is that God has set about to redeem mankind.

First, as we just briefly went through last time, it requires a call. John 6:44—one that you know very well, but let's turn to it again. "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day." This very statement of Jesus Christ synoptically tells us the whole plan of salvation. No human being can achieve salvation on his own. No human being, on his own accord, can decide to embrace Jesus Christ. We don't find Christ; Christ calls us according to His will and according to His purpose. It is one of the single factors that is most misunderstood and lost upon those who claim to be Christians in the world. They believe that they can, of their own accord, decide to embrace Christ; and yet Christ Himself said, "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him . . ." Their assumption is, "Well, yes, but the Father has made it open to call anybody who wants to come. It's an open-door policy for anybody who wants to respond." Is that true?

How about 1 Corinthians 1 and verse 26? "For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called." Right here, we find that God has not called the mass of humanity at one time. He has not given every human being an opportunity to find God. Even the

ones who are most educated, wise and accomplished are the ones who least understand and fathom the purpose and the will of God. Why? Because God has blinded their minds. He has prevented humankind from grasping that incredible Truth. If God puts a veil over a human mind, there is no human being who is going to lift it. Only God can lift that which He has blinded.

For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty.

According to God's perfect will and His plan, He has kept most of this world in absolute darkness, unable to come to a knowledge of the Truth and to understand how to apply the principles which bring happiness, contentment, success, fulfillment, peace and love. Man cannot achieve it on his own. It has only been given to a very small few. And who are those few? Are they better? Are they the ones that have distinguished themselves as being more worthy than the rest of the world? No, He called the weak and the base to confound the mighty. If you are one who understands that Way of Life, then consider that you too, like me, are one of those that were least deserving—weak and base and most miserable of all humanity. Yet, by virtue of that call, the opening of your mind to understand that priceless knowledge, you have an opportunity to achieve more than any human being on the face of the earth—to embrace the Truth, to apply it within your life, and by the very grace of Jesus Christ through that calling, to come out of the pit of the mire of the filth of our human condition. That is what that redemption is all about. We are by nature in the mire, in the garbage heap of our own rationalizations of mind, doing everything that seems right to us and paying the prices continually. It is only, then, by a miraculous call and the opening of those minds by the power of God that we have an opportunity to walk in a different direction—to understand the laws that govern our existence, to acknowledge that they do matter, and then to begin to apply ourselves in that way.

We must respond to God's call because He only calls once. If we reject that call, He's not going to give us another one. We are never going to be compelled to be redeemed. God will not compel anyone to achieve salvation. He's going to offer it to you at the particular time of His choosing, but we need to act upon it because we won't get another chance. God is not going to compel any of us to walk in that way.

He certainly is not going to compel us to secure salvation. No, it requires free moral agency. What is free moral agency? It means we use our own volition to decide that we want the things that God has offered. We recognize that we've been called. We recognize that God has lifted from us the veil that has kept us from the knowledge of the Truth—we understand it, we see it and we know it's right. Then, we decide of our own volition that we want it and that we are willing to make the necessary sacrifices that it takes to achieve that relationship with the Father and the Son.

Deuteronomy 30 and verse 19. God called a people out of the world. He set apart ancient Israel, and He gave them the opportunity to have all of the blessings that come from obedience to the Law. Now, He didn't give them the Holy Spirit, so the most that they could do was to try and obey physically; but God gave that Truth to a people called "Israel" for a reason. They set an example for us, and we're going to talk about that a little bit more in a moment. But here, concerning this concept of free moral agency and human volition, God says:

I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life . . .

No, He's not going to compel, but He puts it in front of those whom He has called, those whom He has separated, and to whom He has provided this special opportunity. He puts it before you—lays it out on a table before you—and says, "Here are your choices." Now, the rest of humanity can't even choose. He says, "I haven't even given them the opportunity yet. The only thing I'm allowing them to choose is death at this time, walking in the way that leads to death." They don't know the way to life, they won't know the way to life—most of them—until after the return of Jesus Christ when He opens up that avenue. But you, brethren, even as ancient Israel, have been given that opportunity now. What a priceless gift. God, in essence, laid out these choices before you on a table and said, "Here, you have the option now to choose life instead of death." If we want that salvation, He requires us to choose, to use our volition, to use our free moral agency to decide that we want life, that we want to come out of the pit of the mire of the filth of our physical existence—that we want to be redeemed, that we don't want to pay the price and the penalty now for the ways that lead to death.

. . . therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live: That thou mayest love the Lord thy God, and that thou mayest obey his voice, and that thou mayest cleave unto him: for he is thy life, and the length of thy days: that thou mayest dwell . . .

Now, here's why. Why would you want to choose a way that is so hard?

. . . that thou mayest dwell in the land which the [Eternal] swore unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them.

Salvation, the Promised Land. And the question that we have to ask ourselves is, is the goal and is the reward that God has offered worth it? Is it worth the sacrifice and the commitment we're going to have to make in this life for what He has offered to us in the future?

Luke 9 and verse 59. Here is a parable that speaks about the difficulties that human beings have in making a commitment. Oh, we love the result; we love the good things. If we could jump from point A to point Z and miss all the steps in between, we would all love to do that. We want salvation, we want every good thing that God has offered, but so many human beings find it hard to make the commitment for the long haul to do what's required. "And he said unto another, Follow me . . ." That implies a calling. Here, in essence, Jesus Christ has opened the door to a particular individual and has said, "Follow me, I'm giving you this opportunity. I'm not giving it to all of these. I don't want them to follow me yet; it's not their time, but to you, I'm giving the option. Follow me."

But he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God. And another also said, Lord, I will follow thee . . .

Oh yes, I want to follow you, I want to have a close personal relationship with you and I certainly want salvation. I certainly want to be in your Kingdom and have all of those glorious things that you're willing to give, but . . .

. . . let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house. And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.

Now, was Christ speaking of the fact that we shouldn't have funeral services when He said, "Let the dead bury the dead"? No, we're talking about a priority of life, of mental orientation. Was He saying that we shouldn't go and see our family members, that we shouldn't visit them or take them into consideration? No, but what Christ is showing here is that the Kingdom of God has to come first in our thinking,

and if Christ says, "Come and follow me," we don't say, "Well, yes, but give me a little time to do this instead first." We say, "Yes, Lord." We follow, we obey the laws of God first, and then we take care of our secondary responsibilities after that. You see, it requires an orientation of mind that we value the gift of this calling more than anything else. We love it so much that we desire to sacrifice everything else required in order to have it.

Matthew 13 and verse 45:

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.

Here, by physical analogy, is a man who found an exquisite gem—a pearl—that was so valuable compared to everything else, that he was willing to sell everything else he possessed in order to have that one item. Now, in the flesh, those physical things never have long-lasting value, but again, Jesus Christ gave this as an analogy of the Kingdom of Heaven—the very Kingdom of God that He is going to establish on this earth. He compared it to something that human beings can understand, and said, in fact, we have to respond in our calling even as this man did. He sold all that he had in order to buy this great, exquisite pearl. Do we love that Way of Life that God gave us in that way? Do we value that Truth, those doctrines that we learned so many years ago? Do we value it so much that it is absolutely first in our priority, and we are willing to sacrifice anything else necessary in order to uphold that Truth in our lives? Or, like most human beings, do we make excuses when the going gets tough and when hard choices have to be made between right and wrong? We rationalize around it in order to achieve the things that we want in the flesh at the expense of the spiritual. That's what most human beings find a way to do. Human beings love to have their cake and eat it too. And so, they told Christ, "Oh yes, I want to follow you, but let me do this at the same time. Give me five minutes. Let me do this first." Christ said that no one is fit to receive the Kingdom of God if they cannot absolutely prove that they love it and are willing to sacrifice all.

". . . 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 . . ." So, the call to the way of God, the way of redemption out of the mire of our natural orientation and the penalties that come from breaking God's Law, is a very difficult road. We've

gone through this; I went through this even recently during the Spring Holy Days and the Days of Unleavened Bread. It requires a life of trial, test and overcoming; and if it sounds like I'm a broken record by talking about the need to overcome, then get ready, brethren, because you're going to hear it continually. When Jesus Christ said that it is the overcomer who is going to inherit the Kingdom of God, then it must mean that it is very important that we focus on overcoming. We won't have time to read it, but you know Revelation chapters 2 and 3, the messages to the seven churches—the warnings to the people of God that apply to all of us in these last days. To all seven of those churches, Jesus Christ repeats that it is those who overcome that are going to receive the good things that He has in store—to be a part of the very Family of God. Only those that overcome.

So, overcoming is a life-long process, and it is painful. It has horrendous effects upon the mind and our being. Why? Because we're denying and crucifying the natural orientation of mind which God gave to us from birth. We're having to root out those things that come naturally—that seem right automatically in our thinking—and we're having to deny those things, and instead, walk in a different way. That is the hardest road that a human being can ever have to walk.

Matthew 7 and verse 13:

Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat.

Oh yes, the mass of humanity is doing precisely what makes sense to them according to their human wisdom. They're following precisely the things that make sense to them. They're not trying to do it wrong. They're not trying to make mistakes, but because they are without a rudder, spiritually, to understand the truths of God, they cannot make the right decisions.

. . . wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate [more appropriately translated "narrow"], and [troublous] is the way [better translation than the word "narrow" here], which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.

So, if you're one who has been called and who has embraced that calling, and you set on the road to walk in that way, you are committing to a troublous, torturous

way of life—a road that is going to show you many trials, temptations and difficulties. Why? Because the people of God are always a mark for the adversary who seeks to destroy us more than anyone else. He wants to do anything he can to prevent the fulfillment of God's plan to add to the very Family of God; and because you, as the firstfruits, are given that opportunity now—if you are successful—you're going to be the first ones born into that Family. Now, Satan already has the rest of the world in his clutches. They're deceived, and they can't do anything but follow the dictates of their natural minds and the inspiration of Satan himself. But, see, they're not at risk, so Satan really doesn't accomplish anything by tripping them up. They're not even on the hook yet. God hasn't even opened their minds to give them their opportunity for salvation, which means whatever mistakes they're making, whatever evils they're perpetrating—no matter how heinous they are—are all a part of the natural orientation of a deceived mind.

By contrast, now, those of you that have been called, and that veil has been lifted and you've been given the opportunity to see yourself—to know what you are and to come out of it—it is those that Satan wants to destroy. Once you're called, that's your one calling; and Satan knows that if he can get to you and cause you to give it up, then he has successfully prevented the birth of a new member of the Family of God. That's why you're going to be the target. And because you're living in a world of those who are absolutely inspired by Satan and who hate the manifestation of the Truth, then you are going to be a target by all of those around you, sooner or later, if you're going to be faithful. And so, the way is troublous. It's troublous also for no other reason than the fact that you're going to continue to live all of your life fighting a carnal nature that wants to rebel against God. It's going to be a burden, a problem and a difficulty that you're going to fight as long as you draw breath. That's why Christ didn't sugarcoat it. He told it the way it was. "Because strait is the gate, and [troublous] is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." Why? Because there are very few that are willing to pay the price required to achieve the reward.

There are few that really love God's way enough to make sacrifices in the final analysis. They might walk along that way for awhile, but when they get to an obstacle that seems insurmountable, it's very easy to turn their back and to rationalize their way out of it. ". . . [troublous] is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." So, if you're one, brethren, who has been called—you've been given your one opportunity now—and if you have embraced that calling and have become baptized, thereby receiving the opportunity to have the power of the Spirit that you

need in order to battle that spiritual warfare, then you are setting out to walk on a very troublous path. But, you see, all along the way you have an opportunity to have the peace of mind and the contentment that comes only through sharing the Holy Spirit with the Father and the Son. Even in the midst of very serious trials and difficulties, you can have total fulfillment. You can have peace of mind. How valuable is that peace of mind? To know that you understand the Truth, that you're applying yourself as best as you can to walk in that way—you're not justifying the self, you're not substantiating human carnality. You're crucifying the self daily and you're putting on more of the very mind of Jesus Christ, which brings incredible blessings not only in the present, but more so because we're building treasure in heaven for that future reward. Let's see some of those things now.

Isaiah 64 and verse 8: "But now, O [Eternal], thou art our father; we are the clay, and thou our potter; and we all are the work of thy hand." This summarizes precisely what God is doing and what the work of Jesus Christ is among those whom He has called. This redemptive process to save us out of our natural orientation and the penalties for our weaknesses is likened to a work in progress—God being the potter. We are a lump of clay. We start off as something that's nondescript and without value, and yet through molding and through working that piece of clay, He is creating something that will have real value. What is the value? Only that in us which is of the Holy Spirit. Of the flesh, there is no value in any one of us, and yet when Christ lives within us, that Spirit within us gives us intrinsic value. The more that the mind of Christ dwells within us, the more value we have because it's only God and the work that He does with us to mold us as a piece of clay, that has value. We don't start out as anything at all. We have to go through terrible changes—changes of our minds and orientations—in order to become something of value. We have to be willing to change. We have to be willing to be subject to the potter and to His will to work and to mold us.

John 15 and verse 1. Yes, God has called us to a life of trial and tests in this painful process of overcoming. That's how we become redeemed—the only way out of our natural state.

I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.

Now, the way we'd like to see it happen is, we'd like to be able to manifest a few good fruits—maybe some minimal changes in our lives—and have God say, "Hey, that's wonderful. You've made some real progress there. Sit over here on the sidelines and just take a rest for a while. You've done enough." Isn't that the way we would like it to be? But He says, no, ". . . every branch that *beareth* fruit, he *purgeth* it . . ." He puts it to the test. He tries, through tribulation and difficulty, ". . . that it may bring forth more fruit," because we're still a work in progress and we're only just beginning. When we accept our calling and we walk in that way, we are walking on a road that is going to be filled with difficulties. But God has provided every means for us to overcome those obstacles and difficulties, and to be absolutely fulfilled in mind and heart with confidence and determination and a sense of peace of mind in the midst of whatever those trials may be because we know that we are being led by the Holy Spirit. We know that we are growing, that we are overcoming and accomplishing more than we ever accomplished in the past by the very mercy of God. We can look back and say, "I would not want to be where I was last year, or five years ago or ten years ago. How blessed I am, in spite of how painful the process has been, that I have made it at least to where I am now." And then, God says, "Well, you're not going to stay put there. Don't rest on your laurels. I'm not going to allow it to happen because you've got a long, big mountain yet to climb." And so, we're going to continue to be tested and tried as He develops and molds us with the character to manifest the very fruits of the Spirit of God.

Athletes are coached. Why do athletes need coaches? They need someone who can give them direction and help them achieve their goals. Professional athletes all hire coaches. They have someone who helps point them in the right direction, who tells them what they're doing wrong and helps them break bad habits that are impeding their progress to achieve the results that they need to be successful. So, coaching is an incredible part of the athletic experience, and even the very experience that Paul described in Hebrews chapter 12 and verse 1. Let's notice it:

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

Through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul uses the very analogy of an athlete in a physical competition. It is a race. We are running; and we have to be developed, educated and trained as an athlete to be able to succeed, to endure and to finish that race.

. . . let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith [He's that potter. He's the one that's molding us; He's the one that's coaching us through the changes that we have to make in order to be redeemed.]; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

This also goes to answer the question, "Well, why would God put us through so much trial and difficulty?" The first answer is that He hasn't required anything of us that He hasn't already experienced and endured Himself. In fact, we will not even begin to approach the tribulation, the persecution and the torture that He experienced in His own life. Jesus Christ has led by example. He has not required of you that which He was not willing to endure Himself. He led out in front of us, and He showed us by His example precisely what we need to do. He was the first, the first of the firstfruits, who received that reward—resurrection from the dead, glorious power and strength. His eternal life, His divinity as a member of that illustrious God-Family—but now also as the Son of God—was restored at the right hand of God. And He was only the first because all of you have that opportunity to follow and to inherit the very same reward that was given to our Elder Brother and High Priest, Jesus Christ. He set the standard. He showed us what He was willing to endure—how much He loved the Father and was willing to sacrifice in order to have it. He gave everything. He emptied Himself out completely of all that He had so that we might have that opportunity.

For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.

And maybe that's one of the greatest temptations that we have, even at this late date now—the beginning of the 21st century—when probably most of us thought that Jesus Christ would have returned long ago. Yet, here we are, without knowing how far in advance that return of Christ is going to be and how much longer we may have to walk and continue to fight these carnal natures in the flesh and continue this process of growth and overcoming. How nice it would be if it could be over, but it's not over, brethren, because most of us have a lot of work yet to do. I know I certainly do. I expect you're probably in the same position that I am. I have a lot of overcoming yet to do, and I have a lot of tests to pass in the future. We have to be prepared for those things; and even as Jesus Christ was willing to suffer all and prove that He loved that Way of Life as a pearl of great price, so we are yet being tested to

prove that we love it. One of the ways is just simply to endure—not to get tired, not to give up and decide that the price is too great, or the obstacle or the wall is too high. We're going to continue to fight. We're not going to be weary. ". . . lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds. Ye have not yet resisted unto blood . . ." Christ, through the Apostle Paul, said, "You have not yet resisted unto blood." Jesus Christ certainly did. He resisted unto blood. We haven't resisted unto blood, ". . . striving against sin."

And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.

So, we understand it and Paul follows up, then, with the analogy of the chastening of a father toward a son that he loves. A father recognizes that for a son to be successful as an adult, he needs to learn certain principles and acquire certain knowledge and wisdom; and if he doesn't, he's going to be at a severe disadvantage. He's going to be handicapped. He's going to make serious, critical mistakes that may even cost him his life. A human father who loves his son works with that son and teaches that son even difficult principles that may seem painful at the time, but a father who loves his son wants that son to succeed; and so he helps him. He teaches even the hard lessons because he knows it's going to be needful; it's going to be good in the long run.

Verse 7:

If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?

The only fathers I know that don't discipline their sons and their daughters are the ones that don't care that much about them. They just let them grow up like weeds. They're not willing to put in the effort to help that child have the best possible future that they can have. How many families have paid the price because of mistakes of the parents? Even as it says, the sins of the father are carried down to the third and fourth generation; the fathers eat sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge. How many young people, then, have been severely impacted because of the mistakes of parents? There's no guarantee, brethren, even if you did a perfect job as a parent, that your children would still make the right decisions. Because, guess

what? They also have free moral agency, and ultimately, they have to choose what they're going to do, what they're going to love, what they're going to value. There's only so much you can do, but a parent who truly loves that child is going to work with them. They're going to spend the time. They're going to teach those principles so that they have the best opportunity to have a successful future. That's precisely the way God deals with us as the workmanship of His hands.

We still have the free moral agency, which means we have to want it. He can't force us to accept salvation. He can't force us to embrace the Kingdom of God. All He can do is offer it, open your minds and give you the opportunity, and provide you the tools you need to achieve it, but then we each have to work. We have to put in the effort—the blood, the sweat and the tears—to make it happen with His help, with His grace.

Verse 8:

But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit . . .

See, there's no question that the motivation of God is for our good, because He wants to share all of His glory and power with you. He wants you to share as a son of God in the very Family of God, and have all power, dominion and glory that comes from being a Family member. He wants you to have that. He wants your good; and so if He requires you to endure chastening, trial and tribulation now in the flesh, for a time, it is because it is necessary in order for you to ultimately have eternal life and all of the benefits that go with it.

. . . but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness [or, as Mr. Armstrong called it, "holy, righteous character"] unto them which are exercised thereby. Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed.

Yes, we are in a healing process. We are, brethren, by virtue of our calling, in a redemptive process—being redeemed out of our sins, our natural carnal way of life, walking along a path that leads to life eternal and salvation. It is a troublous, difficult path because we have to fight the carnal nature all along the way, never justifying it, and yet it is so worthwhile if we recognize its value.

Galatians 2 and verse 16:

Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified. [What is Christ saying through Paul to the Galatians? Verse 17:] But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is therefore Christ the minister of sin? God forbid.

Is Paul now speaking, as many claim, of doing away with the Law of God, and saying that Jesus Christ did away with His commandments? Not at all. What he is saying is that we cannot be justified by the commandments, in and of themselves. Possessing the Truth is not enough. The Israelites possessed the Truth. God gave them His priceless doctrines on two tables of stone, but they weren't saved, were they? Just having access to the Law and understanding it is not enough. We have to actually be able to act upon the Truth. We have to apply the principles. We have to manifest character—not only the knowledge of the difference between right and wrong, but acting and choosing the right. That's what the Israelites didn't do. They possessed the Law, but they did not act upon the Law because their carnal natures pulled them in the wrong direction. So, understanding the Truth—having the Law—is not sufficient for you to have salvation. Being called is not enough to have salvation. We have to act upon our calling. We have to embrace it. We have to become overcomers.

Verse 18: "For if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor." No, Paul is not saying that Christ did away with the Law. He said, as he did in many places, "God forbid."

For if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor. For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God. I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me . . .

That is what we are called to do, to crucify the self. Now, those who claim to be Christians in this world would have you believe that God accepts you just as you are. All you have to do is acknowledge the name of Jesus Christ and say, "I believe," and then God does all the rest for you—that Jesus Christ will accept you just as you are. As Mr. Armstrong said so many times, succinctly, "God will not accept you just as you are." No, He will not. That is one of the big lies that humanity has embraced. He will not accept you just as you are. Right now, brethren, you and I are a lump of clay with no value. Unless we change, overcome and put on the very nature of Jesus Christ, we still won't have any value. There won't be any salvation, there won't be any redemption for anyone who cannot come out of the natural orientation with which we were born.

For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God. I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me . . .

Christ totally fulfilled the Law. He never broke a law of God. He lived perfectly in the flesh through the power of a full measure of the Holy Spirit, and He never sinned. So now, if Christ is living within us, guess what? We're also going to be living in accordance with those same laws. We're not going to be justifying and committing sin.

. . . and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. I do not frustrate the grace of God . . .

No, you know who frustrates the grace of God? The ones who misinterpret the concept of grace, who want to say that grace does away with the need to overcome, to change, and to obey God's laws. Now, that's frustrating grace. Grace, brethren, is what we received in the mercy of our calling—the opportunity to be pulled out of the mire of the filth of our natural minds and the penalties that we would pay naturally in the flesh.

Those of you who were not called until you were an adult probably understand it even better than ones like myself who were raised in the Church. Those of us who were raised in the Church became the beneficiaries of that Way of Life in so many ways, even if our parents weren't perfect and even if they made many mistakes. Yet, we received so many blessings by growing up in a family that understood the Truth

and did their best to practice it. I think maybe that's a reason why many of us, as we call ourselves "second-generation Christians," have a harder time appreciating and applying it. We don't have the same experiences that others do of having paid those serious prices in the flesh—living as adults and tripping over ourselves, and paying every serious penalty for the infractions of God's Law. To be called and to receive your calling once you have already paid the serious prices, and to be able to look back and see why those things that seemed so right at the time, were so wrong, then there is an appreciation, a flush of first love, for the Truth and the calling like a pearl of great price. But very often, for the second generation who grew up with the benefits of the families who were obedient, it is difficult for us to fathom. I remember as a young man, becoming an adult and taking many of those things for granted. I had to lose some of those things in small ways before I began to appreciate that I couldn't do anything I wanted and still preserve those blessings. No, I had to walk, even as my parents walked, in a way of life in order to secure those benefits and blessings from God. So, in some ways, it's difficult. For those who can appreciate, value and not take for granted what they have been given—that it comes as a fruit of obedience to God—then they are way ahead and have an opportunity to really have the fulfillment that God promises and offers.

I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.

Yes, if righteousness is simply knowing the Truth, then Christ didn't need to die, because God gave that Truth to the Israelites of old, did He not? If the only thing needed for salvation was the gift of the Truth to a people in the flesh, then that already happened with ancient Israel. Why does Christ need to die in order for man to be saved? Because knowledge of the Truth itself is not enough. We have to have the very power dwelling within us to allow us to act upon it because righteousness is character—not only knowing the difference between right and wrong, but being able to act, to make the right choices in the heat of battle. "I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain." No, we had to know the Truth. We had to know how our natural minds were opposed to that Truth by birth, and then God had to impart the Holy Spirit to us to give us the power to walk in a different direction.

Galatians 5 and verse 22:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. [No, there's no law against those things because those are all attributes of the very mind of God.] 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.

See, that means more than just knowing the Truth. It means acting upon it. Walking is different than just sitting and reading. Walking means we do it. We put it into practice. "If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit." How many are out there thinking that they are embracing Jesus Christ, and they're not crucifying the flesh at all? No, they are of those that believe that Christ has accepted them just as they are. There is no need for them to make any changes in their orientation. They can believe the way that they have believed from birth according to the natural dictates of the mind, and they think that Jesus Christ did it all for them. Not so. ". . . they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts." It means that we acknowledge the laws of God which say, "Thou shalt not covet. Thou shalt not commit adultery. Thou shalt not steal. Thou shalt not bear false witness. Keep the Sabbath. Do no murder. Love God," and all of the rest of the commandments. We live those things, we practice them by the very power of the Holy Spirit.

Is the price of salvation too great? Has God set the bar too high so that we believe that it just can't be achieved and maybe it's just not worth it? Those are really all of the decisions that you and I are making, whether or not we verbalize it or even think it out loud to ourselves. Those are really the things we're asking, sometimes on a daily basis. Is the price too high? When we face certain trials and difficulties along the way, and we know what is right and what we should be able to do, and we find it hard to do it, it is so much easier to try and change the rules to lower the bar of expectation—either to make it easier to achieve, or else, we get up against that wall and say, "I don't know if I can do this. Maybe I'm just not cut out for it. Maybe what God is offering is not worth what I'm going to have to put into it to achieve it." That's what we are all going to have to prove. Is what God has promised in redemption valuable enough to you that you treat it as a pearl of great price, and you're willing to sacrifice everything else in the flesh to achieve it? That's what He wants to know because He's not going to give the kind of power, glory and dominion in the Spirit to anyone who has not proved that they want it bad enough. God is offering something so valuable that He has set the bar very high to achieve it.

It's not like one of those teachers that we all loved in school who made everything really easy. We probably didn't learn nearly as much in those classes. I had some teachers who would actually give you the test in advance, and let you study and look up all the answers; and then three days later they would give you the same test. We used to memorize every answer and see how fast we could take that test. How was that showing what we had really learned and accomplished? No, the teachers we learned the most from were the ones who probably required a much greater effort on our part, a greater sacrifice and commitment to study and learn the lessons. That's precisely the kind of teacher that God is. He is a potter who is molding us into something incredibly valuable, and it causes pain and suffering in the flesh for human beings to go through that development process. Is the price of salvation too great for us? That's what we have to answer.

John 16 and verse 20: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, That ye shall weep and lament . . ." Yes, for those that have been called to this Way of Life, it is a very difficult process. ". . . ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice . . ." While you are making sacrifices to keep the Sabbath, people in the world are out doing their heart's content. While you are faithfully saving your second tithe in order to attend the Feast of Tabernacles, people are going out and spending it on restaurants and movies and anything they want. You're making the sacrifices to obey God's Law, and it appears that these people in the world have a much better life, unless you look deeper and find that they're not really happy at all. But on the surface it seems that way.

Verily, verily, I say unto you, That ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice: and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy. A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish . . .

That's what the Kingdom of God is going to be like for each one of us who is willing to pay the price now. What glory there will be at that time! Verse 22:

And ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you.

You are building something now, brethren, if you've accepted that call, that no being, flesh or spirit, can take from you.

Matthew 6 and verse 19:

Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

Where is your treasure, my dear brethren? Where is that thing which you love the most? What do you value more than anything else and for which you are willing to make the greatest sacrifice? Is it God's Law? Is it the hope of salvation, the opportunity to be a son of God forever and ever in that glorious Family? Or, is it some material thing on this earth that has captivated your fancy for a time, that is taking your energy and your thought—something that's going to fade away?

In the end, brethren, we are willing to make sacrifices only for the things that we truly value. As one former minister said, and he was absolutely right, "In the end, we all do what we wanted to do." How true it is. So, brethren, we can never blame someone else for the decisions or the choices that we make, no matter how hard the road is. How many times in your life have you wanted something so bad that you didn't let anything stop you from achieving it? Yet, for the things that we don't value as much, we can come up with all kinds of excuses for why we can't do it or achieve it. How many examples have we seen, even of very accomplished people in the world, figures of history, who have overcome apparently insurmountable odds and achieved incredible things? It was only because they had the perseverance not to give up. Obviously, these were individuals who had a goal and they valued something so much that they wouldn't let anything deter them from achieving that objective. So, it is within the capacity of human beings to desire, to set goals and to achieve the things that they want. Unfortunately, most of the goals of human beings are not worth that kind of sacrifice, but what about for you who have been given the ultimate gift of a calling and an opportunity for salvation in God's Kingdom? God wants those who value that opportunity more than anything else and who are willing to tenaciously go after it—to take the Kingdom by force, to let nothing stand in their way to achieve it. Now, it is not by virtue of your own power because you can't do it on your own—the ancient Israelites proved that—but by the grace of Jesus Christ through the gift of the Holy Spirit. With His direction, His workmanship as a coach, as the potter, forming and developing that clay into something of value, then you have an opportunity. But you have to want it, brethren. You have to use your

personal volition, your free moral agency, to love it and to value it more than anything else. In the end, we are willing to make sacrifices only for the things we truly value.

Luke 14 and verse 16: "Then said he unto him, A certain man made a great supper, and bade many." That's a calling. This is an analogy of God, through His Son, calling human beings to salvation.

Then said he unto him, A certain man made a great supper, and bade many: And sent his servant at supper time to say to them that were bidden, Come; for all things are now ready.

That's what God is saying to you. He's saying, "Come, I've made it ready for you. I want you there. I want you to enjoy it, to have the fullness of that which I'm offering."

. . . for all things are now ready. And they all with one consent began to make excuse. The first said unto him, I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it: I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them: I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.

How many have been derailed by virtue of a family member—a husband, wife, son, daughter, parent or relative—whereby they have respected and loved that individual and their opinion more and have been willing to sacrifice even the gift of salvation?

And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come. So that servant came, and shewed his lord these things. Then the master of the house being angry said to his servant, Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind.

What does this tell us? God's plan is not going to be thwarted. Those offices in the Kingdom of God are going to be filled by someone who loves it. Now, He has given you and me the opportunity right now to prove whether we want them; and if we choose to apply ourselves and treat it as a pearl of great price, then we can have it. But guess what? If we choose that we don't love it enough and we don't want it,

it's not going to undo God's plan. He's just going to get somebody else and give them the opportunity until He finds the ones who will love it. You've been given the opportunity now, brethren, and your names are written in the Book of Life. Your name is there on one of those offices. All you have to do is pursue it, grab it, and take it by force. But if you don't, that office is not going to go unfilled. God is going to give it to someone who will love it and who will put on the character, the righteousness, that is required in order to be in that Family.

. . . Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind. And the servant said, Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room.

This is an indication that even after those who were, in essence, given the opportunity when some of the first ones failed, there are still offices that are unfilled. There are still slots for the firstfruits—that harvest that is going to be resurrected at the very time Jesus Christ returns.

And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. For I say unto you, That none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper.

No, for the ones who did not love it enough to make the sacrifices, but instead made excuses and let their hearts be turned to physical things instead of the pursuit of the very Kingdom of God, it's going to be a sad thing; but it's not going to thwart the plan of God. He's going to fill those offices with people who love it.

For I say unto you, That none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper. And there went great multitudes with him: and he turned, and said unto them, If any man come to me, and hate not his father . . .

A more appropriate translation of this is "to love less by comparison." It means putting God ahead of anything in the flesh, including our feelings for our family members.

If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. [It's that straightforward; it's that simple.] And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.

It means accepting that calling, walking in that way of redemption out of the filth of the flesh.

For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish. Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassage, and desireth conditions of peace. So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.

Have you counted the cost, brethren? Have you analyzed and accepted the fact that you have been called? Have you evaluated the state of your calling and where you are on that troublous road—that narrow way which leads to life? Have you counted the cost of what is required of you in order to achieve salvation—the reward that God is offering? Are you as committed now as you were when you were first called and when you accepted that way? Or, do we not all, very likely, need to stir up that Spirit within us, get focused again, prepare ourselves for the tests, trials and tribulations that are yet ahead, which are going to be even greater than any that we have seen in the past? ". . . whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple." Is it worth it, brethren? Is the redemption that God has offered—the opportunity to escape the way of sin and the penalties that lead to every evil in the flesh—worth it?

1 Corinthians 2 and verse 9 in closing:

But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.

Yes, it is beyond our wildest imagination to fathom what it is that God has offered. How priceless, how glorious, is that salvation—that opportunity—if we can only get the picture, if we can only see it in our mind's eye to the best of our ability.

. . . Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit . . .

And so, He has. If you understand it, if you see it, if you fathom the plan of salvation that we were taught from the beginning of this age, then yes, you have received that revelation, that opportunity.

But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.

If we love it as a pearl of great price, if we are willing to make the sacrifices to walk on that troublous road, then we can be redeemed through the process of character development.