

What is the Depth of My Conversion?

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From time to time in the church over the years and recently, we hear reports or sometimes we see it with our own eyes, of brethren committing horrible sins. Sometimes you scratch your head and say, "How can that happen? How can people that have been in God's church, have been baptized and have had hands laid on them; how can they do such things?"

That is a legitimate and logical question. One answer is that they were never converted in the sense that they had never repented of their sins. Yes, they had hands laid on them, but God's holy spirit was never imparted. I think maybe those of us that have been in the church for a while have seen situations where that is the case. The person never exhibited the fruits of God's holy spirit. God was not calling them. They may have been attracted to the church or certain aspects of the church, but God was not calling them; they never had the holy spirit.

Another, more likely answer when people get off track and do things that are totally against God's law, a more likely answer is, yes, they were converted, they were baptized, they received God's holy spirit, but they had a very shallow conversion, not a deep conversion. Ask yourself: Do I want a deep conversion or a shallow conversion? We obviously would all like to have a very deep conversion because we want to be like Jesus Christ.

So the logical question that all of us need to ask (and I speak to myself more so than anybody) is, what is the depth of my conversion today? How deeply converted am I?

What we are going to do today is take the first part of the sermon and look at the characteristics of a shallow conversion, and then in the second part we will look at the characteristics of a deep conversion to help us analyze ourselves as we go forward.

Okay, let's look at the characteristics of a shallow conversion. We're going to look at what the Bible says about a deep conversion and a shallow conversion. Also, some of these are just my personal observations of forty plus years of being an elder, what I've seen with my own eyes and heard with my own ears.

1. The first characteristic of a shallow conversion is self-centeredness.

That means that the mind is on the self, not on God, not on other people, not on the brethren and not on the family, if they have a family. In other words, not all the time, but the mind is primarily on the self: what I want, what my needs are, am I happy, am I being served? We are told that this will be a prime characteristic at the end of the age.

Let's go to this familiar scripture. I think we all know this. We've heard it so many times. Paul thought for a time that he was in the end of the age and Christ was going to

return in his lifetime, but if you read his later writings, he comes to realize that that's not the case. However, it certainly applies to our age.

2 Timothy 3:1. *This know also, that in the last days, perilous times shall come. (KJV)*

So obviously it applies more today than when Paul wrote these words.

The very first thing that he says is:

2) For men shall be lovers of their own selves ... (KJV)

Men shall be lovers of their own selves. That is the prime characteristic of the mentality of the end of the age, and it applies not only to the world, but also inside the church because we are of this end age.

Let me give you an example that happened a few weeks ago. I ran into somebody who said, "We don't need a pastor or a minister, because pastors don't have any authority anymore." They're not affiliated with Pacific. When you dug a little deeper into the conversation, the issue was, "We don't want a pastor." In other words, "Nobody is going to tell me what to do. I'm going to do what I want to do, and so, I am a lover of my own self. I'm not beholding to anybody." This is kind of wafting through the churches of God in one form or another. In other words, people like that always put their interests and desires first.

What did Christ say about this? Let's go to Luke, chapter 14. He is putting forth a parable about a wedding. I think you know where we're going, but let's read it again with the idea of talking about a shallow conversion.

Luke 14:7. *And he put forth a parable to those which were bidden [to the wedding], when he marked how they chose out the chief rooms; saying unto them.*

8) When you are bidden of any man to a wedding, sit not down in the highest room ... (KJV)

It was common in those days that the more titled people would sit, we would say today, in the living room, and then the folks that were maybe day laborers went down to the basement. We shouldn't do that, but He is talking about a situation in the world. So Christ was saying:

8b) ... lest a more honorable man than you be bidden of him; (KJV)

As far as we're concerned, there is always somebody more honorable than us, because we are the weak of the world.

9) And he that bade you and him come and say to you, Give this man place [the more honorable man]; and you begin with shame to take the lowest room.

10) But when you are bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room; that when he that bade you comes, he may say unto you, Friend, go up higher: then shall you have worship in the presence of them that sit at meat [meal] with you. (KJV)

This was common in Christ's day. As I said, it's not something we should do, but it was the tradition in His day.

11) For whosoever exalts himself shall be abased; and he that humbles himself shall be exalted. (KJV)

As far as we are concerned, the vast majority of us are not going to be exalted in this life. We look to the next life to be exalted in the sense of having eternal life as children of God.

When a self-centered person doesn't get their own way, guess what happens. More often than not, they get angry and upset. It's just like a little kid when a kid doesn't get his own way. They're spoiled and selfish. But when an adult doesn't get their own way, and their focus is on themselves, they get angry and upset, and they must be right, and they must be viewed by others as being right. That's very important for somebody who is self-centered.

Let's go to Proverbs 15. When self-centered people don't get their own way, and I'm talking about people in the church who have God's holy spirit, they sometimes can get angry and upset.

Proverbs 15:18. *A wrathful man stirs up strife: but he that is slow to anger appeases strife. (KJV)*

If a self-centered person gets angry, guess what follows; upset, turmoil, trouble, strife, argument, etc. Self-centeredness leads to competition and politicking and maneuvering to get one's own way. I find that self-centered people can easily be offended, because again, the mind is on the self. "It's all about me. If I don't get my way, I'm going to get my tail in a knot, I'm going to get upset." It happens more often than not. They can be offended, and this can occur in a marriage or it can occur inside the church.

Notice what God inspired David to write. This is a memory scripture. Let's turn there so we can read it with our eyes with the idea of self-centeredness being a characteristic of someone who has a shallow conversion.

Psalms 119:165. *Great peace have they which love your law ... (KJV)*

Now if we love ourselves more than we love God's law, we are self-centered and our conversion is shallow. But it says if we love God's law:

165b) ... and nothing shall offend them. (KJV)

No matter what the offence, it will not offend. You see, loving God's law first comes through the holy spirit, and not being offended comes from deep, deep conversion so

that we are more like Christ through that same holy spirit, and we will not get offended. So understand that self-centeredness is a very strong indicator of someone who has a very shallow conversion, not a deep conversion.

2. The second characteristic of a shallow conversion is self-righteousness.

Self-righteous people are hypercritical. They are highly critical of others. They say, "Well, I wouldn't do what they did." Or, "I would never do that." They are looking at the deeds of other people. Self-righteous people are harsh in dealing with other's sins. In other words, they are quick to criticize and condemn others.

Let's go to Luke 18. Christ is giving this very familiar parable regarding the tax collector and the Pharisee. I will read it from the Cassirer translation because it's very interesting in how it is put in that translation.

***Luke 18:9.** This is a parable He addressed to certain people who were convinced in their own minds that they were upright ... (CAS)*

They were convinced in their own minds. It doesn't say God was convinced, but they were convinced. Notice the next phrase.

9b) ... pouring contempt on everybody else.

10) Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.

11) The Pharisee took up his stand and proceeded to say this prayer to himself ... (CAS)

In other words, God wasn't present. He is praying to himself. This is what he says:

11b) My thanks to You, Oh God, seeing that I'm not like the rest of them, rapacious, unjust, given over to adultery, or for that matter, like this tax collector.

12) I fast twice in the week, I pay tithes on all the goods that I obtain. (CAS)

He was very self-satisfied and self-righteous.

13) As for this tax collector, on the other hand, standing a long way off ... (CAS)

He wasn't in the spotlight. He was over in a corner.

13b) ... He did not even have the courage to lift up his eyes toward heaven. He merely kept beating his breast exclaiming, "Oh God, have mercy on me, sinful man that I am." (CAS)

Two totally different attitudes; one with his head down and the other one is puffed up, standing up and looking for the spotlight. Christ says:

14) What I am saying to you is this; it was he rather than the other who returned to his home a man again at rights with God. The truth is he who exalts himself

will find himself humbled, while he who humbles himself will find himself exalted.
(CAS)

So we see here on two different occasions in the New Testament, the one that we just read earlier and this one; it was very important to Christ to talk about humility and staying away from self-exaltation.

Today in the church, it's sad to say, we have modern-day Pharisees. We have lots of them in God's church. I'll give you a personal example. I know a man who has cycled through six or seven different groups since the break-up of Worldwide. He started in one group, left that group, went to another group, was gung-ho with that group for a while and then left that and went to another group. What he bragged about was that none of these groups met his spiritual expectations. In other words, he was saying, "I am more righteous than anybody in these groups, therefore, how can I possibly fellowship and associate with them, because I am up here spiritually and they are down there?" None of them met his righteous standards, and so he left. Here's the truth. This individual cannot get along with anyone. He has an angry spirit, and he gets upset when people don't agree with him, and he gets upset with those who don't want to go along with his particular view of a particular doctrine. He gets angry and upset and he leaves. He can't hold a job because he is unwilling to submit to a boss. His wife has supported him for (I don't know) twenty years, because he can't work, because he won't submit.

We have modern-day Pharisees all through the church that try to throw darts and arrows at various groups over various doctrines, over real or imagined issues and all of that. They set themselves up as the Pharisees did as the example of perfect righteousness.

Now we also have prideful brethren, meaning that self-righteousness obviously involves pride. Some of these self-righteous brethren have set some very bad examples for God's church over the years.

I can remember a Spokesman's Club dinner in the sixties, and I sat at a table with an evangelist. I never sat at a table with an evangelist before. I won't mention his name, but he was bragging that every time he went to a restaurant, he would demand to go to the kitchen. He would walk into the kitchen with this self-righteous attitude and then pepper the chef and the cooks about how they prepared various dishes, to make sure that no lard was used and there was no intermingling of bacon grease and what he wanted. He would spend four or five minutes back in the kitchen quizzing everyone and then came out and sat down and then he would order. This was a badge of righteousness. Of course, the people in the kitchen are wondering, "Who on earth is this guy?" What kind of example is that? That's an extreme example, but I think all of us can think of similar examples that have happened over the years.

Let's go to Proverbs 17:19. You see, when we do things like that, we transgress the basics of God's law. We will get into that in the second half of the sermon. We transgress the fundamentals of God's law.

Proverbs 17:19. *He loves transgression ... (KJV)*

If we end up breaking God's law, he that loves transgression,

19b) ... that loves strife ... (KJV)

That guy who cycled through five or six or seven churches had an angry spirit, and that is breaking God's law, and guess what follows ... strife, trouble, upset.

19 continued) ... and he that exalts his gate seeks destruction. (KJV)

If you're parading through the kitchen and setting yourself up above everyone there, that's exalting your gate, that's exalting you as an individual. Obviously, that leads to destruction. The problem with self-righteousness is that self-righteous people are focused on other people's sins, and they're not focused on their own. We've all been there and done that. I'm not saying that we are not all guilty of that, because we all are. I am. I have been. But by definition, you see, when you focus on other people's sins and not on our own, guess what? We become careless with God's law, because our focus is on what other people are doing and whether or not they're measuring up to God's law. Then because we're not focused on our sins, we're the very ones Christ talked about in Matthew 5 when Christ said, "Cast the beam out of your own eye, so then you can see clearly to take the little speck out of your brother's eye.

Self-righteousness is a sign of shallow conversion. That's the second one.

3. The third characteristic of a shallow conversion is someone who is doctrinally unstable.

That happened in the early New Testament church. Paul was dealing with people that were doctrinally unstable. They weren't grounded. They didn't have a foundation.

Let's turn to Ephesians 4:14. Paul had to deal with this. It happened then and it is happening today. Paul is encouraging them. He said, "Don't be like children, be like mature adults."

Ephesians 4:14. *That we henceforth [from this point forward] be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine ... (KJV)*

It's like being a cork on an ocean, and you're just bobbing up and down, going here and there, or carried about by every wind of doctrine, whatever the current trend is, or whatever is hot or new, etc. It gets people in a state. They're carried about by every wind of doctrine, and who does this?

14b) ... by the sleight of men [not God], and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; (KJV)

There are those out there who want to call attention to themselves and they do so by some outrageous doctrine. It might be: Christ is a created being. "Did you realize

Christ is a created being, that He wasn't there with God?" Then the itching ears go up and suddenly people flock to this individual.

We have to ask ourselves, why is it more common today? It's obvious. It's the internet. You can go on the internet and find just about anything. If you want a weird doctrine, you can find one with a couple of clicks of the mouse.

There is a guy that calls me about once a week, and it's with a new doctrine. I look at the phone and I see it. "Did you know that the two witnesses are alive in the Philippines?" That was the last one. The week before it was something else and the week before that it was something else.

I said, "Okay, if the two witnesses are alive in the Philippines, how does that affect my life today? What am I going to do differently today than I did yesterday with the knowledge that the two witnesses are in the Philippines?" I'm not going to do anything differently, because it doesn't affect me. After a while you just think, "Oh my, how much time do I want to waste today?" We ask ourselves why do brethren do that doctrinally? Why does that happen? It's because the internet opens Pandora's Box. It really does.

We have to come back to the issue that the foundation isn't there. Individuals with a shallow conversion have never proved what they believe. They have never proved the core doctrines, the foundational doctrines that we need to hold onto, and that they are unchangeable. They are the same today as they were two thousand years ago. It doesn't make any difference what culture we live in or whether we have automobiles or donkeys, or whether we have the internet or scrolls. It just doesn't make any difference. If you never really prove what you believe and just accept what you were told in the beginning, and then something new comes along, it's easy to jump off the tracks.

We're told to do things totally differently than that. Let's go to 1 Thessalonians 5:21. This is a familiar scripture, but it's something that a lot of people never really did. Typically, they came into the Worldwide Church of God and were so excited and enthusiastic and proved a couple of doctrines, and realized that this is God's church and then from that point on, they just accepted everything, but they never proved it.

1 Thessalonians 5:21. Prove all things ... (KJV)

That's the first thing to do; prove all things. Then ...

21b) ... hold fast that which is good. (KJV)

Hold fast to those that you prove and know that you know and know they are fundamental and know they are part of your foundation. They are a brick or cinderblock in your foundation and you prove it and you hold onto it and you don't change.

Now let's see an actual example in the New Testament of a group that did this. Paul had quite a reputation, in the beginning, of doing evil toward the church. He had a reputation of killing God's people and, all of a sudden, he is preaching Christ.

Hundreds, thousands are being converted because of his action. He had quite a reputation.

Acts 17:10. *And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea ... (KJV)*

You would say a missionary journey to Berea.

*10b) ... who coming there went into the synagogue of the Jews.
11) These [Jews] were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind ... (KJV)*

They wanted to know the truth. They were hungry for the truth. Notice what they did.

*11b) ... and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.
... (KJV)*

Their goal was to see whether those things were true. They were eager to hear Paul. They heard him and said, "Okay, this sounds good, but give us some time because we're going to look into the Bible to see if what you're saying is true." They did. Once you do that, it is cemented. It is part of who we are. It's part of our foundation.

I've known many brethren, including ministers and Ambassador College graduates that, during the breakup of Worldwide, they had to go back and reprove what they had taught for decades, if they were ministers, because now their beliefs were being challenged from Pasadena with totally different doctrines. I've talked to many ministers over the years that said, "I had to go back and reprove it. I had to go back and reprove what I had been teaching." A few of them had to be very honest and said, "You know, I never really proved it. I accepted what headquarters taught me back in the 60s or 70s, but I never really proved it for myself, so I am going back and doing that." The fact is they never really proved it in the beginning. They never really paid attention to the proof of a particular doctrine and, therefore, when it was challenged, they had no ammunition, no shield to come back against those that were preaching a different doctrine.

In my case, it was due to a trial, but I never had that problem because I was a lieutenant in the Air Force when I was called and as I began to learn this, it quickly became apparent that you can't believe this and be in the military. You can't believe this and be part of an organization that is dedicated to killing people. You can't believe this because the organization works seven days a week. As an officer, you're on call 24/7. So at some point you're going to have a conflict with the Sabbath or a holy day or something like that. If you disobey a direct order, particularly as an officer, they make an example of you because you will influence others beneath you. So very early on I understood that this is jail time, this is being stuck away in a military prison. Believe me, military prisons don't have ping-pong tables and big screen TVs. They do not. They're run in a military manner, very harsh, and you're out with a sledge hammer breaking big rocks into smaller rocks.

I knew this was potentially part of the end result of obeying God. So when you start proving doctrines when you're coming into the church and you face that at the end of the road, you really prove them, because you know that your life and freedom depends on it. So thankfully I didn't have that problem, but at the time it was agonizing, but you know what God does? He gives us trials for our benefit, and they always turn out to be a blessing down the road, even though when we're going through them at the time, we think, "Oh no, what's going on here?" But they turn into a blessing down the road.

Others with a shallow conversion (I'm talking about a different group now) major in the minors. We were talking earlier about being doctrinally unstable or having to go back and prove things because we never proved them before, but others with a shallow conversion, major in the minors. In other words, the focus is not on the big picture of God, God's plan of salvation, the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, human nature and how Christ's sacrifice brings access to the holy spirit, and on and on. In other words, their focus is not on the weightier matters of the law as Christ mentioned in Matthew 23 when He was going after the Pharisees.

Let's go to 1 Timothy 6:3. Paul also had to address people that were coming into the church that were getting the brethren off of the big picture. They were down into the weeds when God says, "Can you look at the whole picture? Can you look at the forest?" No, they're down into the weeds under the tree underneath the twigs.

1 Timothy 6:3. *If any man teaches otherwise ... (KJV)*

That refers to what Paul had mentioned previously, which we don't have time to go through.

1 Timothy 6:3. *If any man teaches otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness (KJV)*

If he doesn't consent to what Christ brought,

4) he is proud [self-righteous], knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strife of words [twisting words/definitions], whereof comes envy, strife, railings, evil surmising,

5) Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness ... (KJV)

All of this is because of pride, self-centeredness, self-righteousness.

5b) ... from such withdraw thyself. (KJV)

So people who are unstable doctrinally latch onto these tiny little pieces, a part of a leaf of a tree and ignore the branch and the trunk and ignore the picture of the big tree, because the big picture alludes them. The simplicity of Christ somehow alludes them. So we see that if we are unstable doctrinally, that is evidence of the fact that maybe my

conversion isn't as deep as I would like it to be or as deep as it should be. That's the third characteristic of a shallow conversion, being doctrinally unstable.

4. The fourth characteristic of a shallow conversion is a lack of humility.

Again, it's a sign of the times. We read earlier in 2 Timothy, chapter 3: *Know also that in the last days, perilous times shall come*, and in verse 2 it said that *men shall be boasters and proud*; in other words, a lack of humility. As the world says today, "It's all about me. I'm the focus." There's self-centeredness, self-righteousness, and all of that is due to a lack of humility.

So much division in any kind of organization is caused by pride. There's so much division. It can happen within a marriage; it can happen within a church. It can happen, as we're seeing today, within political parties, it can happen in any organization. Pride, lack of humility, inability to admit that maybe somebody's wrong, that I made a mistake, that I didn't tell the truth, that I can actually make a mistake. It doesn't happen today.

Turn to Proverbs 28:25. Lack of humility results in pride. The following scripture deals with that.

Proverbs 28:25. *He that is of a proud heart stirs up strife: but he that puts his trust in the LORD shall be made fat. (KJV)*

Is the focus on me, which is pride, or is the focus on God? If our focus is on God, we will be made fat. In other words, we will be taken care of and provided for.

This scripture tells it all, because it talks about what God hates, and if we love God, none of us wants to do anything that God hates.

Proverbs 6:16. *These six things does the LORD hate: yes, seven are an abomination unto him: (KJV)*

It was common in those days to use this phrasing. You say six and then you go to seven, or you say forty-nine and then you go to fifty. It's a way of emphasizing what you're trying to say.

What is the very first one of the things the Lord hates?

17) A proud look ... (KJV)

We've all seen it. I saw it in the military. We've seen it inside God's church. Someone gets a promotion and it goes to their head. That's what God is talking about, a proud look. Because all of a sudden I am better than the rest of you.

Proverbs 16:5. *Every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to the LORD ... (KJV)*

Think about that. Any time we have pride, we become an abomination to God.

5b) ... though hand join in hand, he shall not be unpunished. (KJV)

God will take care of it in due course.

Now turn to Proverbs 21:4. We talked about a proud look in chapter 6 as being the first thing God hates, here is an expansion of this.

Proverbs 21:4. *An high look, and a proud heart, and the plowing of the wicked, is sin. (KJV)*

So we shouldn't make any mistake. When we feel pride coming in, when we feel we're a little bit better than somebody else, that is a sin. So we see here in this fourth characteristic of a shallow conversion, that lack of humility is one of the important aspects that would tell us, if we're looking at ourselves, that maybe our conversion isn't as deep as we would like it to be.

5. The fifth, and last, is the most dangerous, and that is spiritual blindness.

I have been there and done that. It is the most insidious. We have a blind spot that we cannot see. You see, brethren can be doing everything we've talked about before. They can be self-centered, self-righteous, doctrinally unstable and lack humility, but if you don't see it, you don't know. You see, being blind to our sins, faults and weaknesses, how can we change if we are blind to it? That's the insidious part of this.

As I said, I've been right there. After fifty years, from personal experience, I can look back at my conduct, particularly in the first twenty or even thirty years in the church, and I look back at some of the things I said and did, some of the attitudes I had and I just cringe. At the time, I didn't see it. I was spiritually blind to it. I did not see it. It's like that example from Life Magazine about the 80-year old woman in a bikini with lipstick on, and in her own mind she thought she was hot stuff. She was on a beach in France somewhere and a photographer from Life Magazine took a picture. She was blind to the fact that she was 80 years old. In her mind she was twenty, and everything was fine. So we can be subject to the same blindness.

The poster child for blindness were the Pharisees. Let's turn to Matthew 23. I'm not saying every Pharisee, because some came to Christ privately and secretly, but the Pharisees in general were the most blind. They were self-righteous and self-centered, and they were oblivious to it. Notice what Christ says to the Pharisees.

Matthew 23:16. *Woe unto you, you blind guides ... (KJV)*

Meaning: You set yourself up as a religious leader, therefore you're guiding other people and you're blind guides. It would be like somebody going on a safari or taking a trip up the mountains and you hire a guide, and the guide is blind. The guide is going to lead you astray. Christ says:

16b) ... which say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor! (KJV)

Like that's some big deal, the difference between the temple and the gold in the temple.

17) You fools and blind: for what is greater, the gold, or the temple that sanctifies the gold? (KJV)

He is saying, "You don't understand; you just don't get it. You are blind."

19) You fools and blind: for what is greater, the gift, or the altar that sanctifies the gift? (KJV)

They were making a distinction.

24) You blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel. (KJV)

He says, "You're down in the weeds trying to pick these little bits of doctrine and, at the same time, you miss the big picture, the camel."

26) You blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter [meaning inside us], that the outside of them may be clean also. (KJV)

The Pharisees paraded around in elaborate garments and they threw the coins in the pot and made a big noise, and they prayed on the corners to let people know how righteous they were, and on the outside they looked like they were very religious. But Christ is saying, "You need to make clean what's on the inside."

Notice in chapter 23, what accompanies spiritual blindness. Notice what Christ calls them. Verse 13:

13) But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! ... (KJV)

Spiritual blindness results in hypocrisy.

13b) ... for you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for you neither go in yourselves, neither suffer you them that are entering to go in.

14) Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! [He says it a second time] for you devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayer: therefore, you shall receive the greater damnation.

15) Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! [He says it a third time] for you compass sea and land to make one proselyte [one person converted to Judaism], and when he is made, you make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves. (KJV)

What a condemnation.

23) *Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!* [He says it a fourth time] *for you pay tithe of mint and anise and cumin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought you to have done, and not to leave the other undone.*

...

25) *Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!* [the fifth time He mentions it] *for you make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess.*

...

27) *Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!* [the sixth time He's mentioned it] *for you are like unto whited sepulchers, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness.*

28) *Even so you also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within you are full of hypocrisy* [seventh time He mentions it] *and iniquity.*

29) *Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!* [eighth time He mentions it] *because you build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchers of the righteous, (KJV)*

And then they disobey. You see, Christ's point is that hypocrisy accompanies blindness. If we don't see our sins, then we go out and commit sins. If you combine that with self-centeredness and self-righteousness, it's an evil brew that can get us all. Hypocrites see other's sins, but not their own. All of us have done that. I've seen other's sins, but not my own. I was spiritually blind to my own sins at the same time when I mentally condemned other people for their sins. We've all been there, and we've all done that.

Let's turn to Revelation 3:14. It's a familiar letter to the church at Laodicea and see that this whole situation of blindness is a huge characteristic of our time in the church. We're not talking about the world here, it's to the church.

Revelation 3:14. *And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things says the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God;*

15) *I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot: I would you were cold or hot. (KJV)*

When you study history of the area, there was cold water and there was hot water available. He said, "You're not either one. You are lukewarm."

16) *So then because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will* [not "I might"] *spew you out of my mouth.*

17) *Because you say, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing;* [notice this] *and know not that you are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: (KJV)*

Christ says, "You don't know that you're spiritually blind." Not just about doctrine, but about ourselves and who we are. We're blind to our own nature and our own conduct. We're blind to our sins, our faults and our weaknesses. That is the scary part. We've

all been there and done that. I look back and see how blind I was in certain areas of my life, and the thing that scares me to death now and what I pray for often is, "God, don't let me be that way again. Please show me where I'm blind. Please show me how You see me and not how I see myself." We see ourselves through rose-colored glasses. We always put ourselves in the best light. That's just human nature. What we want to do is be able to see ourselves as God sees us, how the truth is. Then, if we can acknowledge that, we can start to change. But if we don't see it, we can't change. We're blind and Satan wants us blind. More than anything, Satan wants us blind so that we don't change, and if we don't change, we can't be in God's kingdom. There will be those, and there were back then in the Old Testament and New Testament, and there are today. There will be those who think they have no blindness.

Turn to Isaiah 42:19. I'll read from the New Living Translation. Notice this. What a condemnation. God is saying:

Isaiah 42:19. *Who is as blind as my own people [Oh my!], my servant? Who is as deaf as my messenger [those I send]? Who is as blind as my chosen people, the servant of the LORD?*

20) You see and recognize what is right but refuse to act on it. You hear with your ears, but you don't really listen." (NLT)

It's one thing to hear, but it's another thing to listen to what is being said. When we read the words of God, we can hear them, but do we really listen and apply them to ourselves? So each one of us has to ask in verses 19 and 20, could this be me? Could this apply to me? Could I have a blind spot that I just don't see? Maybe my husband or wife sees it, maybe church brethren see, maybe my family sees it, but I don't see it. Could it be me? As I said, I'm here to tell you that over the years I've had several and it just scares me to death.

What is the antidote to spiritual blindness? That's the worst one, because you don't see it. Turn to 2 Peter 1:5. and see what the antidote is to spiritual blindness. It is so simple. Peter says:

2 Peter 1:5. *And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge;*

6) And to knowledge temperance [being mellow, under control]; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness;

7) And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity [love]. (KJV)

It all comes down to that in the end.

8) For if these things be in you ... (KJV)

Knowledge, temperance, patience, Godliness, brotherly kindness; they are all a result of love and they're all fruits of God's spirit.

8) *For if these things be in you and abound, they make you that you shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

9) *But he that lacks these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and has forgotten that he was purged from his old sins.*

10) *Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if you do these things, you shall never fall: (KJV)*

What these verses tell us is, “I’ve got to get back to the basics.” What are the basics? We’re going to cover that in the second part.

The point is that the key to spiritual blindness is to get back to the basics, to get back to the foundation, to get back to the fundamentals. If Godly love is our prime motivation, we will never fail. Godly love will open our minds to our spiritual blindness if we apply what we’re going to review in the second part.

In this second part, let’s look at the characteristics of a deep conversion. You’ve heard the saying that we and James have talked about, “The best predictor of future behavior is past behavior.” That is true when the holy spirit is not present. Humanly speaking, what a human does in the past apart from God’s holy spirit is probably what they’re going to do in the future.

You see, that is not true when the holy spirit is present. As Peter said in Acts, chapter 3, when he convinced the people that their sins resulted in the death of Jesus Christ and Christ had to die for their sins. They said, “What shall we do?” and Peter said to repent and be converted. That means to change who we are and the holy spirit makes that possible. We can radically change our nature. We can radically change who we are if we exercise God’s holy spirit. Those with a shallow conversion often do not do that. They have God’s spirit, but they don’t exercise God’s spirit. They don’t use God’s spirit.

So what is the first characteristic? Again, the antidote for a shallow conversion or blindness is getting back to the basics.

1. The first characteristic of a deep conversion is that you must love God with all your being.

Mark 12:28. And one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, and perceiving that he had answered them well, asked him ... (KJV)

Our ears should perk up. We should put a laser-like focus on this because this is the foundation.

28b) *... Which is the first commandment of all?*

29) *And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord ... (KJV)*

We’ve talked about this before. The Hebrew means: *Obey God only*. Put Him first, obey Him only. Don’t obey anybody else.

30) And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul [being], and with all your mind, and with all your strength: this is the first commandment. (KJV)

It's very clear that if I love God with all my being, God will be at the center of my life. He's going to be involved in everything I do, everything I think, every decision I make because He is the center of my life. If God is going to be at the center of our life, guess what. We have to love God more than we love ourselves. It's so simple. If we want God to be at the center of our life, we have to put Him first, not ourselves first. We have to love Him more than we love our own life.

It involves surrender. You just say, "God, I've had enough. I've had enough of the world, I've had enough of me, I've had enough of my human nature. I just bow down before you and I just give up everything. I surrender myself to You. Please, You run my life, not me." When we do that, guess what happens. We have peace. Why? Because God is piloting our ship and not us. That's the key. God is the pilot, not us. So this point is: You've got to love God with all you have, with all of your being.

2. The second characteristic of a deep conversion is that you must love your neighbor, your fellow man, as yourself.

31) And the second is like, namely this, you shall love your neighbor as yourself... (KJV)

It doesn't say, your church brother or sister as yourself, it says your neighbor. None of us has any control who our neighbor is going to be, because our neighbor might be one person, one family today, and they move out and there's another family tomorrow. They could be of a different color of skin, they could be of a different background, a different educational level. They are our neighbor.

31b) ... There is no other commandment greater than these. (KJV)

In the old days we did that. We loved our neighbor as ourselves, but we applied it to the brethren. We didn't apply it to the people in the world. Too many in God's church looked down on the people in the world because they were unconverted. They're somewhere down here and they were treated accordingly.

In Philippians 2:3 it says to esteem others better than yourselves. The context isn't necessarily talking about church brethren. It means anybody. Esteem other people better than ourselves. You see, every human being that has ever lived is part of God's plan. Every human being that has ever lived is a potential child of God. Therefore, we need to love all human beings, and we need to show them the fruits of God's spirit in our interaction with them. That includes the bank teller, the clerk at the grocery store, the guy that pumps gas, the guy that's just walking down the street and you come eye to eye with. Show the fruits of God's spirit because we love our neighbor as ourselves.

Sad to say, it's only taken me about thirty years to learn this in God's church. I hope you learn it sooner than I did.

3. The third characteristic of a deep conversion is that we must always ask God for correction.

Correction is painful. None of us wants to be corrected. You know what Jeremiah said:

Jeremiah 10:24. *O LORD, correct me, but with judgment; not in your anger, lest you bring me to nothing. (KJV)*

Jeremiah said, "Correct me." We should have that same attitude, because to be like Jesus Christ, we have to be corrected daily. I suppose some people do, but none of us can claim to be on the level of Jesus Christ. So since Christ is up here and we're down there, that means we have to make changes to get even close to Him. Therefore, we have to be corrected. We have to ask for correction. We must want to change.

Turn to Ephesians 4:22. We cannot accept who we are. You know the old Protestant hymn about, "Take me as I am, accept me as I am." That doesn't fly with God. We have to be like Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 4:22. *That you put off concerning the former conversation [conduct] the old man [or woman], which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; 23) And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; (KJV)*

Have a new mind through the holy spirit.

24) And that you put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.

25) Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbor: for we are members one of another. (KJV)

We are all part of the human race. We have to treat everyone with respect, and not be a respecter of persons.

26) Be angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath:

27) Neither give place to the devil.

28) Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labor, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needs

29) Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.

30) And grieve not the holy spirit of God, whereby you are sealed unto the day of redemption.

31) Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice:

32) And be kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another ... (KJV)

What a concept, forgiving someone who has offended us, forgiving someone who has hurt us.

32b) ... even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you. (KJV)

Ephesians 5:1. *Be you therefore followers of God, as dear children; (KJV)*

Here's the key.

2) And walk in love ... (KJV)

Walk it, not talk it. Don't we all want to be like Jesus Christ? I think that's true. I want to be like Jesus Christ so much. I want His wisdom, His knowledge, His understanding. We want to behave like Him, but we fall so far short. I fall so far short. To do that, we need to change.

Let's turn now to Colossians 3:8, and I will read from the NLT.

Colossians 3:8. *But now is the time to get rid of anger, rage, malicious behavior, slander, and dirty language.*

9) Don't lie to each other, for you have stripped off your old sinful nature and all its wicked deeds.

10) Put on [clothe yourself] your new nature, and be renewed [through the holy spirit] as you learn to know your Creator and become like him. (NLT)

We have to be renewed every day. In verse 14 it tells us the most important piece of clothing you must wear is love.

14) Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony. (NLT)

Love is what binds us all together in perfect harmony. That should be the goal of all of us. That should be the goal at the Feast. People come from all over, different countries, different races all coming together and we are bound together by love, and we can have perfect harmony.

Athletes continually correct themselves. If you saw the Olympics, it takes years of correction and correction, getting better and better to win the gold medal. They all seek perfection.

You see, correction helps us seek perfection, which is Jesus Christ. We will never get there, but we want to get closer and closer.

Receiving correction leads us to the last point of characteristics of a deep conversion.

4. The fourth characteristic of a deep conversion is that we have to develop great humility.

A humble person can be corrected. A self-righteous or self-centered person cannot. They won't receive it.

One advantage of getting older (Dorothy and I talk about this) is as one's strength declines and stamina declines and your health declines as you get older, guess what? It forces us to rely more on God. We can't do what we used to do. We can't rely on our own strength, because that strength and health and stamina is going away with every year. We realize as we get older that, apart from God, we are nothing. We can't fight the world. We can't fight somebody with a gun. We can't fight another nation, we can't fight anyone. God can, but we cannot. We must develop great humility. This is a hard thing, because we have human nature and we've got Satan there stirring the pot and provoking us.

1 Peter 5:5. Likewise, you younger, submit yourselves unto the elder...(KJV)

That can be taken two ways, somebody who is older in years, but also someone who has been in the church longer and maybe has some experience and wisdom that someone just coming into the church has yet to learn.

5b) ...Yes, all of you be subject one to another ... (KJV)

We can all learn from each other, and when you're subject to one another, you esteem the other better than yourself. Here's the key:

5 continued) ... and be clothed with humility: for God resists the proud, and gives grace to the humble. (KJV)

We all want God's grace. The only way to have God's grace is to develop humility, because God will not give grace to a proud, self-righteous, self-centered person.

Over the decades in God's church there has been too much pride, pride in rank, pride in authority, pride in position. There's been too much striving and politics for all of that, and not enough humility. I'm talking about from the top down, not enough humility. Remember, we read earlier in Luke, chapter 14 that if you exalt yourself, you're going to be abased. If you humble yourself, in due course, you will be exalted.

You see, God can't transform us, can't teach us if we are self-righteous and self-centered. The only way God can teach us is if we're like the publican and we're beating our breast saying, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner. Please show me the right way. Please give me the right path to walk on. Please give me more of your spirit, so I can be like Jesus Christ."

You see here in this fourth point that if we have pride, we're not going to make it. If we can't yield to Him, we're not going to make it, so humility is the key to deep conversion.

Let's conclude now. We've all experienced times in our lives when we had a shallow conversion, and we get into trouble. If we are shallowly converted, at that point in our life, we get into trouble. We've seen today that shallow conversion manifests itself in

self-righteous, self-centeredness, doctrinal instability, lack of humility, and most of all, spiritual blindness.

Deep conversion that all of us seek can be had so easily if we love God with all our being, if we love our neighbor as ourselves, if we always seek for correction, and if we strive for great humility. If we do those things, our conversion will become deeper and deeper, and it can happen very quickly. Believe me, it can happen very quickly. One benefit of deep conversion is peace and tranquility. We can have peace and tranquility in the middle of the greatest of trials, life and death trials.

Let's turn to a final scripture. Putting God first and loving God with all our heart is the start of deep conversion, not loving ourselves.

Romans 8:6. *The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. (NIV)*

In the days ahead, we are going to need deep, deep conversion. Let's all start that process of deepening our conversion right now.