

Seek a Deeper Conversion

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Let's turn to Luke 22 where we will begin in verse 31. This is the same scripture we used last time where Christ told Peter that Satan wanted to sift him as wheat. We're going to start with that verse and then go on. Luke 22:31, and, as I said before, unless otherwise noted, it will be out of the King James.

Luke 22:31. *And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan [has] desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat:*

32) But I have prayed for [you], that [your] faith fail not: and ... (KJV)

Now Christ gives an assignment to Peter; He says:

32) ... and when [you are] converted, strengthen [the] brethren. (KJV)

Now, at that moment, Peter was not converted, but on Pentecost he would be.

The Greek word for "converted" is Strong's #1994. It's the Greek word "epistrepho" (ep-ee-stref'-o); and it means *either literally, figuratively or morally to revert*. That means *to come back, to revert to something before*. It means *revert*, it can mean *come again* or it can mean *to return*.

The New Living Translation says this:

Luke 22:32b. *... So when you have repented and turned to me again, strengthen and build up your brothers." (NLT)*

Christ knew Peter was going to deny Him three times and he would have to repent and turn back to Christ because during the denial Peter was walking away from Christ. Christ understood that and He says, "When you're converted, when you turn around, then strengthen the brethren." So "conversion" means *to turn back, to turn around from your current course of action*. We're going to see later *to turn from what to what*, we'll answer that question.

Now most of us have been converted for decades. Most of us are old timers; not all, but most. Think back; remember your conversion. We somehow came into contact with the truth of God. The statistics of the Worldwide Church of God at about the time of Mr. Armstrong's death showed that 65 percent or slightly more came into contact with the church through a relative or an acquaintance. In my case it was over the radio. I just turned it on one day and heard Garner Ted talking. I had a friend (I've mentioned this before) who found a Plain Truth on the floor of an outhouse and picked it up and that started his road to conversion. Today, it might be the internet for many people searching.

When we came into contact with the church, of course, we devoured the Bible. We read every booklet, every article, every Plain Truth and correspondence course. And, of course, we tried to convert all of our friends and relatives. I remember telling my dad that there was no immortal soul and he gave me the blankest look I've ever seen in my life from anybody. It just didn't register, and, of course, we learned that over time.

Then we came into contact with God's true church. Some wrote in right away. Others didn't realize there was a church for years and then wrote in. At some point, a minister visited; we were invited to church; and, then, we were informed of how much we needed to change. We had to change so many things, and change we did. We got off work before sundown on Friday. We took vacation time for the holy days and the feast. We began to write out tithe checks, which we'd never done before. We changed our diet. We changed our hair and wear. We changed our child-rearing practices. We changed the people we associated with. And all of that was the initial sign—and I stress “the initial sign”—of our conversion. But this initial conversion was mostly physical when you look back on it. We wrote checks. We ate different foods. We went to different places. We developed a church language. We developed a church behavior. And in that initial conversion, a lot of it—maybe the majority of it—was strictly physical.

And after a few years down the road, after we got used to the initial changes, life took on a degree of normalcy, a familiar somewhat comfortable stability in God's church. The problem was that with too many, their spiritual growth began to plateau. There was rapid growth in the beginning and then, after it became kind of normal and the same old, same old, our spiritual growth began to slow down or even plateau.

During that same time, many brethren evolved (and we've all been there) into majoring in the minors. We would get our attention off the big picture and onto the twigs and branches. And it was done with a good heart because people wanted to obey God in every way, both big and little, but some got their eyes off the big picture. And some began focusing on the tiny little details. In the 1960s we had the great Jell-O controversy. There was huge arguing back and forth of whether we should eat Jell-O or not or this brand of Jell-O or what did it contain and on and on. It was just elevated to something pretty high up there. In the 1970s, it was the great leisure suit debate. Should we wear leisure suits or not? Should ministers stand up at the Ffast and wear leisure suits or not. That was finally decided by Garner Ted in the Poconos on the first day of the Feast when he wore a yellow leisure suit and gave his sermon. Then in the '80s, we had the on again-off again issue of make-up. We did; then, we didn't. Then we did again, and then we didn't again. It went back and forth and back and forth. Then in the '90s after Worldwide began to break up, the big issue was “Who left first?” And if this guy left a month before this other guy, he was more righteous. So, people slammed a badge on their shoulder of who left first and who was the wisest and realized the conspiracy and left first. I'm touching the tip of the iceberg. You can think of many things yourselves.

We argued and debated about relatively minor issues such as “Who is correct?” about some speculative issue of prophecy that we can’t know until it actually occurs. We’ve had fights in churches about who regulates the thermostat, who is in control of the kitchen. Brethren argued back and forth about the tiniest of matters, all the time getting their minds off the big picture.

And we were warned about that in the Bible. Let’s go to Matthew 23 and look at verse 23. Now we know in Matthew 23 that Christ is just ripping into the scribes and the Pharisees. Notice what He says to them here.

Matthew 23:23. *Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for [you] pay tithe of mint and anise and cumin, ... (KJV)*

These are tiny, tiny little leaves and they’re counting them out very carefully.

23b) ... and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, (KJV)

The King James says “judgment;” the Greek means *justice*.

23 continued) ... [justice], mercy, and faith: these ought [you] to have done, and [yet] not ... leave the other undone. (KJV)

So, there was a tendency even back then of ignoring the weightier matters of the law. Now with that in mind, let’s go to Hebrews 5 and we’ll begin in verse 12. Paul is talking about those who should have progressed to the point that they could be teachers of the law and he said, “You’re not there yet. Your progress has slowed. Your progress has plateaued. You’re treading water spiritually.”

Hebrews 5:12. *For when for the time [you] ought to be teachers, [you] have need [of] one [that teaches] you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; ... (KJV)*

They weren’t even getting the first principles.

*12b) ... and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat.
13) For every one that [uses] milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. (KJV)*

Meaning: He is spiritually a babe—meaning that person has limited spiritual growth at that time.

14) But strong meat [belongs] to them that are of full age, ... (KJV)

Meaning: Those who are spiritually mature.

14b) ... even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised ... (KJV)

In other words, they have the ability through the holy spirit:

14 continued) ... to discern both good and evil. (KJV)

That is wisdom, given by God's spirit.

Now many of us have had that problem. Many of us over our years in the church have treaded water spiritually; have not grown as we should. And we have not focused on the weightier matters of the law. We've focused on the minor stuff. During that time, God has allowed trials and tests. He's allowed them to see if we were sincere in His word, to see if we would endure in His word. The entire church had a death after the death of Mr. Armstrong. And today there are false prophets and there are divisions that continue to test us all the time.

Now back in the early 1980s, I had a private talk with an evangelist. Dorothy and I were living in West Texas at the time and he was banished from Pasadena and they moved him to West Texas of all places, out in the middle of nowhere. He was the pastor of a couple of churches and we got into a discussion. He said, "Yes, they sent me away from Pasadena. As a result of that, I've had..." and he used the term—this was his term—he said, "... a second conversion." What he meant by that was, "I've had a chance to examine myself. I've had a chance to draw closer to God. I've had a chance to look at what's really important in God's eyes and I've had," using his term, "a second conversion." I think what he meant by that was a deeper conversion—to really find out what's important and what's not important. What he was saying was "Is being at Pasadena all important? No, it wasn't." So, he went through a process of deepening his conversion and he came to that conclusion. But at that time in my Christian life when he said "second conversion," I didn't have a clue what he was talking about—didn't have a clue, but I found out a few years later.

At some point in our Christian lives, we come to "a crisis of the self." What I mean by that is we ask these questions:

- What kind of Christian am I really?
- Do I really have the mind of Christ?
- Do I act as Christ would if Christ was walking in my shoes today?
- Do I act like Him?
- Do I think like him?
- Does God recognize me as one of His?
- Or am I on the outside banging on the door, and Christ says, "I never knew you?"
- Does Christ count me as a member of His body?

This is a serious talk with oneself. When you get down to the nitty-gritty, we have serious talks with ourselves when we are in this process of having a crisis of the self to determine just how converted we are. And when we do that, when we really analyze

ourselves, we begin to see things in ourselves, in our thinking, in our words and our deeds that we have never seen before.

Now with me it began by asking for correction. This is thirty years after my baptism. I asked for correction and the answer I got was that I was too harsh. I was an elder at the time and that I was too harsh. And, I was! My dad was pretty rough and tough, rough and tough on us kids. I went to military school, Texas A&M, all male, all military. I was an officer in the Air Force, and then came right out of that into the church. And it was that environment when I came into the church. You bet. I was too harsh. I absolutely was.

I began to meditate on that and to think about it. And the light bulb finally starts to turn on a little bit, glow a little brighter. Then, I asked God to let me see myself as He sees me. Not as I want to see myself, because we generally can look at ourselves through rose-colored glasses. And I asked God to take the blinders off and "Please show me how You see me."

Now, that can be a very scary request because the results can be very unpleasant. And they were in my case, but God began to open my mind to see things about myself that I had never ever seen before. And it is a process. It's not a lightning bolt one second in time. It is a process over time when God begins to open our minds to a greater degree than before. But during that process, I read a scripture I had read for years and it never registered, never even registered. I'm sorry to say. I never applied it to myself. That scripture is in 1 John 3:14. It is there for our admonition. It is there for our education. And if a scripture can give us the answer of how can you know that you've passed from death to life, boy, we ought to pay attention! Our antenna ought to go up. Our ears ought to prick up and when I read this after having read it hundreds of times, all of a sudden the siren went on.

1 John 3:14. *We know ... (KJV)*

Not "We think we know" or "We might know" or "We suppose."

14) We know that we have passed from death unto life, ... (KJV)

And here's the answer:

14b) ... because we love the brethren.... (KJV)

We love the brethren.

14 continued) ... He that [loves] not his brother [abides] in death. (KJV)

And I read that as though reading it for the first time and it hit me like a lightning bolt. And I realized I did not love the brethren as I should. I did not love the brethren as

Christ loves the brethren and He gave His life for the brethren. I did not love the brethren as the Father loves the brethren. I did not love them to near that degree.

I began looking back on my thirty years in the church and began to slowly see that I was selfish. I put myself in front of the brethren. I was prideful at the expense of serving others when you put yourself first. And I realized how little I loved the brethren compared to Jesus Christ. Within a period of time—it was months, but—I finally was just disgusted with myself. I became ashamed at what I had thought, at what I had said, and how I had treated people, even family members. I was just absolutely blind to it.

Now, let's turn to Ephesians 4:17 because Paul is writing to Ephesus and there were some that were absolutely as blind as I was in this situation and they lived in Ephesus.

Ephesians 4:17. This I say therefore, and [I] testify in the Lord, ... (KJV)

So, this is a pretty strong statement, and he says:

17b) ... that [you] henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, ... (KJV)

Obviously, we get a clue here that in Ephesus there were Gentiles. Maybe the majority of the church was Gentiles. We don't know. But Paul says, "I don't want you to walk like you used to walk as Gentiles."

*17 continued) ... in the vanity of their mind,
18) [These Gentiles (unconverted, we would say today)] Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart: (KJV)*

Paul says, "Don't be that way. They don't have understanding because it's been darkened and it's all because they've been spiritually blind."

Now using this scripture to describe this process that I was going through about loving the brethren, I felt like I had been blind in this area for thirty years. I felt like I was a spiritual Gentile for thirty years, not understanding that if you want to pass from death to life you have to love the brethren as Christ loves the brethren. And this realization and the resultant change from it resulted in a deeper conversion for me. It just opened my mind to things that I had not seen in myself before.

What I mean by a deeper conversion is that it's a deeper understanding of who God is, what His nature is, what He is really like. And in a deeper conversion, one then begins to have a closer relationship with God and Christ because you love them, you want to be like them, and you understand who they are. Then, we understand what God really requires of us spiritually. It's so much more than writing a tithe check. It's so much more than changing our diet. It's what He requires of us in our minds and in our hearts.

And this second conversion as this evangelist described it, if you will, it can bring about an even more fundamental change than the first conversion because this is a deep spiritual change. And, as I said, the first conversion involved a lot of physical stuff and some spiritual stuff, but a deeper conversion is almost entirely spiritual. Yes, it has effects on how you deal with other people to be sure, but it is a deep spiritual change. It is a change of how we think, what's going on in our minds. And it leads to a change, ultimately, about who we are, what we are really like. And, I hate to admit it; it only took me thirty years to start that process. I hope not everybody is as slow a learner as I am.

So what we want to do today is we're going to talk about a deeper spiritual conversion today and the title is,

Seek a Deeper Conversion

We're going to talk about four points in the time left, points to consider in seeking a deeper spiritual conversion. Now the first one seems obvious, but it wasn't so obvious fifty years ago or forty years ago or even thirty years ago.

1. We need to deeply understand how much God loves us.

We didn't understand it. Now I, like the rest of the church, had been running away from the subject of love. When I came into the church in the 60s, the church was running away from Protestantism. And Protestantism at that time was just preaching love, love, love. The church didn't want to be Protestant, and so, the church emphasized other things. The Worldwide Church of God emphasized obedience, and to a much lesser extent, God's love. We didn't hear a lot of sermons about loving God because that smacked of Protestantism. We forgot John 3:16, the scripture you can see Sunday mornings on those early religious television shows.

John 3:16. *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever [should believe on] him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*
(KJV)

I didn't hear that much in my first twenty or thirty years in God's church. When you think about it though, when you think about this scripture, "God so loved the world ...," you have to ask yourself, what was the worst experience the Father has ever endured? It had to be watching His Son go through what He went through on our behalf. All of us who have children would gladly give our lives for our children with not even a second thought. The worst thing would be to watch your children suffer. And when you think of what God willingly did, to watch His Son go through what He did for us, it makes us realize how much God loves us. If He was willing to watch His Son go through that because of you and me, it speaks to how much He loves us.

And the other thing is we can learn of God by watching our children. Many times we find answers to life's questions by watching our children. What do I mean by that? Let me ask a question. When we show love to our children, what do they do in return? Do

they spit in our face? No, what they do is when we show love to them, they love us back and they want to please us. We've all been through that. When your child comes up and gives you a hug around the neck and says, "I love you, Mommy," the hearts melt. Money can't buy that. God, our heavenly Father, wants the same from us.

Let's go to Colossians 1 and look at verse 10. We learn these lessons about God from our children. When we show love to our children, our children want to love us back and want to please us. When God shows love to us, what do we do? Paul says:

Colossians 1:10. *That [you] might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, ... (KJV)*

He's obviously talking "pleasing to God." He says, "You walk in a way that is all pleasing to God," being number one, he says:

10b) ... fruitful in every good work, ... (KJV)

That is the thing that just pleases God so much, "being fruitful in every good work." And then number two:

10 continued) ... and increasing in the knowledge of God; (KJV)

That's what I went through. I thought I knew God but I didn't really know God. And this is telling us "increasing in the knowledge of God," meaning who He is. We begin to understand who God really is. Is God some harsh God that is—and this is somewhat the picture I had coming into the church in the early days because the church stressed so much ruling with a rod of iron and the wrath of God on mankind and all of that. Maybe I never heard the words, but I internalized it. I had this vision of God looking down from heaven waiting for me just to step out of line and down comes the hammer and some horrible thing would happen. I would get in a car wreck or I would have cancer or something like that because this wrathful God was just waiting for me to screw it up. And that comes from the fire and brimstone Protestant religions and in some ways it crept into the Worldwide Church of God in many cases.

But we're told here in Colossians that we need to walk worthy of the Lord to please Him and to know more about Him. That is pleasing to God. Now, let's jump to 1 Thessalonians chapter 4 and we'll begin in verse 1. Paul is beseeching the church in Thessalonica; he is begging them the following.

1 Thessalonians 4:1. *Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus [Christ] ... (KJV)*

He said, I'm bringing Christ's name into this because it's important.

1b) ... that as [you] have received of us how [you] ought to walk and to please God, so [you] would abound more and more.(KJV)

What he is telling us here is that if we walk the right path, if we have the right thoughts, if we have the right deeds, if we're heading in the right direction, it is pleasing to God. And he said, "The result is you abound more and more. That is the blessing." Remember I said that we learn from our children? When we show love to our children, they come back to us and love us and show love to us. God does the same thing. The more we please Him, the more He blesses us. Now, I'm not saying we never will have a bad day; we will never have a trial. We understand that, but even in trials, God blesses us as we know.

2) For [you] know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus. (KJV)

So, when we please God by keeping His commandments, He then comes back to us and showers us with His love when we please Him. When we keep His commandments, we show our love to God and Jesus Christ. Let's go to 1 John 5 where we'll read verses 2 and 3. If you want another reference, you can reference 2 John verse 5, which also says essentially the same thing. This is again talking about loving the brethren.

1 John 5:2. By this we know that we love the children of God, ... (KJV)

How do we know that?

2b) ... when we love God, and keep his commandments. (KJV)

When we love God and keep His commandments, something automatic happens. We'll talk about that.

3) For this is the love of God, ... (KJV)

Meaning: This is what God loves us to do. This is what expresses God's love to others.

3) For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous. (KJV)

So what this tells us is loving God comes first—above everything. It's the first commandment. Loving God comes first. But if we truly love God, won't we automatically love His children. And that's the thing I didn't get and that's the thing I think the church missed for decades. If we love God with all of our hearts, we will automatically love our brothers and sisters and our neighbors.

We should not run away from showing love. Do we tell God every day that we love Him? And I'm ashamed to say it was probably ten or fifteen years into the church before I got down on my knees and I said, "God, I love you." I told God, "I respect you. I honor you. I want to obey you," but I never really told Him that I loved Him as a child loves his father because, in that sense, I didn't get it. It took me years!

And because God loves us, guess what? He's patient with us. When we love our children, guess what? We're patient with them. We cut them a little slack because we love them. Here's what I think God says about us. He says, "My child," and then insert your name there, "My child, Becky," or "My child, Sam." "My child, Sam, will come around. Just give him some time." In other words the hammer doesn't drop right now. The cancer doesn't start right now. The car wreck doesn't happen in the next five minutes because God understands that we're human. He says, "I'm going to bring some circumstances to pass to bring them around, so let's give them some time to see what they need to see as My children." And we do the same thing with our children.

The question is, "Do we show the brethren by our thoughts, our words, our deeds that we love them?" Many are doing that. And I've talked to some people after the feast that attended with other groups that said, "Yes, we went to the feast. We went to services. And people seemed to talk with their friends." These are bigger groups. "Then, an hour after services everybody disappeared and nobody fellowshipped other than with the group of their friends. Then we came back the next day and repeated the process." Do we show love to all those around us and are we patient and kind and gentle to all of those around us?" Not just our brothers and sisters in the church, but to our neighbors, to the bank teller, to the clerk at the grocery store? Do we make their lives better by our presence?

So remember what Paul said wrapping up 1 Corinthians 12 leading into 1 Corinthians 13, the love chapter? He says, "I show you a better way," and love is the better way. So this first point is we need to deeply realize how much God loves us and how patient he is with us. Now that leads us to the second point.

2. We need to apply God's love and God's patience with us in our dealings with others.

God loves us so much that He gave His only begotten Son and watched what He had to watch. And He is so patient and kind with us; and, because of that, shouldn't we treat others the same exact way?

Our early instruction in the church taught us that we were to tow the line or we were going to get hammered. And, as we were treated, so we treated others. And I certainly did! In the early church, if you stepped out of line, you got disfellowshipped. In the early church if you got in trouble with or sideways with the deacon, you were in deep doo-doo. And there was no cutting of slack; there was no discussion. You either did it or you didn't and people suffered as a result.

In addition to that, during those early days in the church, those who were not a part of the church, who didn't attend with the church, who weren't baptized—we called them—and we do today—"unconverted." Now, that implied many things. And some used that term in a derogatory way. I remember a minister, now no longer in the church as far as I know, but this was back in 1972 and many thought it was all going to end back then.

And he was speaking and told of when he flew out of a city in Canada and he said, "I looked down at that city. 'Bye you suckers! I know what you're going to go through.'" Because why? Because they were unconverted. So in that sense, because somebody was unconverted, they didn't deserve our love and our kindness and our gentleness because they weren't part of us. Therefore, we didn't have to be nice to them because they were not unconverted.

Now, that does not square with scripture. It just doesn't. And, yet, I think all of us from time to time have fallen into that trap. We didn't understand, didn't think about the scriptures where we're told, "God is love." It's not that He has a bunch of love, but He is love. That's 1 John 4:8 and then it's repeated in verse 16. And the very first fruit of the spirit is love. So, how can we look down on others and wish them to be fried in the tribulation and have love for our neighbors and love our neighbor as ourselves?

I read those scriptures just like all of you have and for many years I didn't apply it to myself. I didn't apply it to myself and how I treated others. Let's go to Matthew 7:7. We've read this; I read it so many times. And, yet, it's easy to skip over and read over and apply it to other people but not to ourselves. This is Christ's first recorded sermon and Christ is giving us the basics.

Matthew 7:7. *Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and [you] shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you:*

8) For every one that [asks receives]; and he that [seeks finds]; and to him that [knocks] it shall be opened. (KJV)

Now the implication is knocking for the right reason, seeking with the right attitude. Verse 9:

Matthew 7:9. *Or what man is there of you, [who] if his son [asks for] bread, will he give him a stone? (KJV)*

Now we can apply that to God the Father too. If we ask God for bread is He going to give us a stone? Absolutely not!

*10) Or if he [asks for] a fish, [is He going to] give him [a snake] a serpent?
11) If [you] then, being evil, ... (KJV)*

We're all human; we're all imperfect. Christ's saying, referring to humankind:

11) If [you] then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him? (KJV)

Christ said, "If that is God's nature that when we go to God and ask for good things and right things, then what is God's response?" He gives us what we need as He just

described. If we need food, He's going to give us food. One way or another, He will give us food.

But, when we understand that, we have an obligation and that's what we're told in the next verse.

12) Therefore [because God does all of this] all things [whatever you] would that men should do to you, do ... even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets. (KJV)

And, in many cases and certainly in my case, I just blew right past that. You're having a bad day, you get short with somebody in the grocery store or you get short with somebody over the phone that's interrupting your meal or whatever it might be. And I learned over the years when you get down to the nitty-gritty of "What shall I do God? What do you want me to do?" verse 12 tells us. We do what we would want people to do to us under the same circumstances. Would I want somebody to be kind to me? Would I want somebody to be patient and gentle to me? Loving to me? Well, of course! So, when we're undecided as to what to do or how to deal with a certain incident, then we ask "What would Christ do?" well, Christ would do what we just read. He would do unto others as we would like people to do unto us.

That realization when it finally hit home—I read over it many times—when it finally hit home, it hit me like a 2 by 4 between the eyes that my Father has been patient with me for over fifty years now, and, in addition, He has been forbearing, putting up with me. He has been kind and gentle. Therefore, shouldn't I treat others exactly the way my Father treats me? Finally, the light bulb started to go on and maybe I should do the same to others as I would like them to do to me in every way in every day of my life. I'm ashamed to stand up here and say this—that I didn't realize this for almost thirty years. I mean really, really realize it. Now, that leads us to the third point in coming to a deeper conversion.

3. We need to realize and to deeply understand the simplicity and the focus of God's plan and not become distracted if we want a deeper conversion.

Let's go to 2 Corinthians 11 and look at verse 3. There was a problem in the Corinthian church and people were being deceived. They were being beguiled. Paul is addressing this. He understood this. Paul says:

2 Corinthians 11:3. But I fear [I'm afraid for you], lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his [subtlety], so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in [Jesus] Christ. (KJV)

Paul says that it's possible for converted people to have their minds corrupted, to be led astray by the subtlety of Satan.

The Greek root word for “simplicity” is Strong’s #573. That’s the root word and it’s the Greek word “haplous” (hap-looce’). It means *single* or figuratively it means *clear*. Zodhiates in his Lexicon says, and I’m quoting Zodhiates now, “translated *single*, [that is] *not complex, easy*.”

And we’re being told here, Christ’s message, the message of the gospel, the truth about God is clear, simple, easy to understand, not complex. God’s way is easy to understand, obviously, with the help of God’s holy spirit. Now it’s hard to understand if we’re carnal. It goes against everything of the carnal nature and the carnal mind.

So, let’s understand that God’s plan, our journey towards salvation, is not complicated. The concept is so simple. When you get down to it, just think of three things: (1) Love God with all your heart, with all your being, with all your mind, with everything you have; (2) love your neighbor as yourself (the two great commandments, which encompass the ten); and then (3) we need to change from the old person to the new person through the power of the holy spirit. We have to be transformed.

Now note the simplicity of God’s plan. Let’s go to Romans 12 and verse 2, talking about this third part of the simplicity of God’s plan. First is loving God with all my being; and the second, loving my neighbor as myself; and now changing from the old person to the new.

Romans 12:2. *And be not conformed to this world: ... (KJV)*

We don’t want to be part of the world. We don’t want to mix in with the world and its values—anti-God, against God, prejudiced against anybody that loves God.

2b) ... but be [you] transformed ... (KJV)

How?

2 continued) ... by the renewing of your mind, that [you] may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. (KJV)

We prove what God wants. We prove God’s will by having our minds transformed, changed from the old to the new.

Now, let’s go back in Romans to chapter 8 and verse 29. What is the new mind, the person? Who should that new person emulate and try to be like?

Romans 8:29. *For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. (KJV)*

So the goal is to change from the old person to be in the image of Jesus Christ. That means to think and act and speak as Christ would if Christ was walking in our shoes.

A third scripture is Ephesians 4:13. This is the end goal. This is where we want to be—the complete person.

Ephesians 4:13. *Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, ... (KJV)*

To know Christ, who He is and what He is. No misperceptions at all.

13b) *... unto a perfect man [human], unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ: (KJV)*

In other words, that is our goal—to measure up to Jesus Christ. You could add Philippians 2:5, “Let this mind be in you, which is in Christ Jesus.”

You see it is so simple. Love God with all our being. Love our neighbor as ourselves. And, through the power of the holy spirit, change ourselves from the old person to be like Jesus Christ. In a few sentences that is the message of the entirety of the Bible. We have to become like our Savior Jesus Christ and like our Father in heaven.

But under this third point, Satan wants to distract us from this simplicity. He wants to provoke us to major in the minors, to pay undue attention to lightweight matters that at the end of the day are of no consequence.

I know people that are so focused on finding the location of the place of safety and finagling somehow to get there, whether it's through passports or putting money overseas, or doing this or doing that, that their minds are focused on that rather than changing the self. They're missing the whole point! So, Satan provokes us to major in the minors.

He also provokes us to focus on the shortcomings of others—other groups, other individuals. Let's go to 2 Corinthians 10 and look at verse 12. That's one thing we dare not do is to become fixated on what others are doing, thereby elevating ourselves. Let's look at what Paul says to this very dysfunctional church.

2 Corinthians 10:12. *For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves, ... (KJV)*

Meaning: Measuring themselves to a human standard.

12b) *... and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise. (KJV)*

If our standard is a human standard, we will fail. We will fail because we don't measure up to the stature of Jesus Christ. Christ is our standard. So, what Satan would love to do is get us focused on what other people are doing, what other people are saying, or

what mistakes this group is doing over here, or that individual is sinning over there, rather than looking at God's word, looking at ourselves and making changes. And Satan provokes us to see ourselves as better than others. We won't go there, but the piece of scripture that comes to mind is the Parable of the Pharisee and the Publican in Luke 18 where the Pharisee is there telling God how wonderful he is and the Publican is beating on his chest and can't even raise his eyes to heaven, saying, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner." So, Satan wants us to think of ourselves as better than others, better than the unconverted, better than other people. When in reality, we're the weak of the world and we need to remember that. We need to avoid these provocations at all costs.

We need to spend our time and our energy making ourselves ready to become the Bride of Christ. And if we do that—if we measure ourselves against Jesus Christ—guess what? It will cause a deeper conversion, a spiritual conversion as we see the distance we have to go to become like Jesus Christ. That comes through knowing God and knowing Christ, and, then, looking honestly at ourselves.

4. The last point is that we need to deeply understand that faith must be practiced in all aspects of our lives.

If we want a deeper conversion, we must practice faith in every aspect of our lives. Now, in the early days of the church, faith was centered around sickness and healing. That was the big emphasis. The question was: Are you going to cave in and go to a doctor? Or if you go to a doctor, then you lack faith. That's where faith came in. Over time, I think all of us have come to realize that there is so much more to faith than whether or not we're sick or whether or not we go to a doctor.

I talked earlier about pleasing God. Let's go to Hebrews 11 and look at verse 6. We have to please God. If we obey Him and keep His commandments, that is the love of God and that pleases Him. The matter of faith does too. I think you know where we're going here. It can't get any clearer.

Hebrews 11:6. But without faith it is impossible to please him: ... (KJV)

A simple fact! And that's not just faith in some limited area. It's faith in every aspect of our lives.

6b) ... for he that [comes] to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. (KJV)

Let me give you an astonishing fact. Just think to yourself. How many times do you think faith is mentioned in the Old Testament? Just pick a number out, whatever you think. Twice. When I saw that, I was astonished—twice. How many times is it mentioned in the New Testament? Two hundred and thirty-two times. Now what's going on here? Two to over a hundred times more, why is that? What's happening? Why the emphasis in the New Testament?

When you think about it, the holy spirit is what links us to God. The door was open to the holy spirit to come first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles in the New Testament. It is a fruit of the holy spirit (Galatians 5:22). Faith is a fruit of God's spirit. Other than those few who were called during the Old Testament period, other than that, the rest of the people did not have God's holy spirit, but the door was opened at Pentecost and now because it's a fruit of God's spirit, because the holy spirit is what links us to God, then guess what? We can have faith. And, as we're going to see, not our faith, not something we conjure up. Let's go to Galatians 3 and look at verse 11. This tells us that faith is something not just to have in certain aspects of our lives, not at all. This tells us first that keeping the law doesn't justify us. "Justified" means *to be in a right standing with God*.

Galatians 3:11. *But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: ... (KJV)*

Meaning: It is there for everybody to see.

11b) ... for, the just shall ... (KJV)

What?

11 continued) ... live by faith. (KJV)

That means it is part of your daily life, every aspect of your daily life! Faith in God, every day, in every aspect of one's life. Because of the holy spirit living in us, now, we can have not our faith, but the faith that Christ had when He walked the earth—the faith of Christ that He has to this very day.

Let's now turn to Galatians 2:20. Paul says:

Galatians 2:20. *I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; ... (KJV)*

"I'm alive now."

20b) ... yet not I, but [the fact that] Christ [lives] in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh ... (KJV)

He says, "I live by" what?

20 continued) ... by the faith of the Son of God, ... (KJV)

Not the faith in the Son of God, but the faith that Christ had when He walked this earth. I can have that very faith.

20 continued) ... who loved me, and gave himself for me. (KJV)

So not only can we have the love of Christ, we can have the faith of Christ. And since we can have that faith, that's why it's mentioned 232 times in the New Testament. One huge area of faith that we can have when we understand God and we know God is that He does nothing for our harm. No matter what affliction, disappointment, trial or trouble that comes our way, it is not because God hates us. It is not because God gets some perverse pleasure in punishing us. Everything that He does, everything that He allows is for the singular purpose of good for us—our ultimate good that helps us become the Bride of His Son Jesus Christ.

God did that with Abraham. Remember three days journey knowing he was going to have to slit his son's throat? And all the agony that went on in his mind, the mental agony that Abraham had going up to sacrifice his son? And when the knife came down, God stopped him and He said, "Now, I know who you are. I know your character. You've demonstrated it to me." And guess what? Abraham had blessings he never could comprehend. All of his offspring and his seed were blessed ultimately through Jesus Christ. So, he was blessed more at the end than before he started.

What about Job? He had everything taken away—his means of earning a living, his children, all of his possessions, his animals, his flocks and herds. All those who tended the animals were all gone. His sons [and daughters] were gone. Wife only left. And, yet, after all that, then the boils, the pain, and the suffering, and the agony! At the end of the day after it was all over with, his end was better than his beginning. God blessed him. And God allowed this to come upon Job. He put limits on Satan, but God allowed this to come upon him for his ultimate blessing.

So, one of the big areas that we can have faith in is the absolute faith that God does nothing for our harm. And it's there for a reason; whatever comes our way is there for our learning, our instruction so that we can change to be in the image of Jesus Christ.

A second example is that we gain in faith and have a deeper conversion because we learn not to do things on our own with our own strength, our own power, our own abilities. We finally learn that. It took me twenty years, twenty-five years to learn that. I used to travel all over the country doing training and meetings. I'm ashamed to say that I went into many meetings in those early days in the church and I didn't ask for God's help and guidance. I just went in on my own. And guess what? The success was just due to human effort and nothing more. So, it wasn't nearly as successful as it could be if I had made God my partner in that, if I had prayed to God and asked God to inspire. I learned after falling on my face a few times, that we have to make God a partner in our lives in every aspect of our lives or we will fail or we will not accomplish as much as we could. We have to have our faith in Him and not ourselves in every aspect of our lives—on our job, around the neighborhood, with any personal human relationship we have. I can't emphasize that enough.

But getting back to talking about faith, we have to understand that God's love does come first. Remember in 1 Corinthians 13:2 Paul is talking about love. He says, "If I have all faith that I could move mountains and I don't have love, I'm nothing." So we

have love first which comes through God's holy spirit. And, then, another fruit of God's holy spirit is faith. We're told that we must walk by faith and not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7). That means every step we take must be a step of faith. Every direction we go must be guided by faith that we're doing the right thing, that we're following God.

Then, on top of that, faith becomes our shield against the devil. The reports continue to come in that Satan is attacking God's people as never before. He's attacking minds, attacking relationships, attacking ministers, attacking brethren to get us off the track. Let's go to Ephesians 6 and look at verse 16. Faith helps us against the devil and this is how:

Ephesians 6:16. *Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith [you] shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of [Satan]. (KJV)*

And I have seen Satan throw darts at God's people here the last few years like never before. I've seen people upset about things and circumstances that you just shake your head and say somebody is provoking this individual. Somebody has gotten under this person's skin. And guess what? It's a fiery dart of Satan that lands in the shoulder and it starts burning; then, people get angry and off they go. We need to have faith that God will protect us. And we face some horrible times ahead—horrible, horrible times.

Dorothy was reading an article the other day written by a famous journalist. His name doesn't come to mind right now, but he was lamenting the fact that if we lost our electric grid, this nation would come to a halt. He was talking about North Korea and some of the Middle Eastern countries that might try to hack into our grid and just shut everything down. You can't pump water. You can't pump sewage. You can't pump gas. You can't spend money. You can't get your money. If you were to take three or four days of that and this nation would be on its knees in anarchy. It would just be unbelievable.

And we are probably going to face times like that, but we can't wring our hands and worry because we have to have faith that God does not allow anything for our harm. It will be for our good. And if we're going to hang in there and persevere to the end, we must have faith. Before this is all over, we're going to need more faith than we have today.

Let's wrap this up. Let's conclude. As a result of what I described had happened to me, I had the experience, as painful as it was at times, of a deeper more spiritual conversion. I began primarily changing over fifty years ago and it was physical. Looking back on it, most of it was physical. Then thirty years after that, I began a deeper more spiritual change. And with me it centered on knowing who God was and what His nature was and what Christ's nature was and what Godly love really was, but maybe with you it might be a different area. For those of you that listen to this or watch this later, it could be a totally different area.

But if someone were to come up and say, "Hey, I don't need a deeper conversion. I'm there. I'm already converted. I've been baptized. I'm already converted." If somebody

said that to me, I would ask him a question. I would say, "Are you completed converted right now in every way? Are you exactly like Christ right now?" And there you have your answer because none of us are like Christ right now. None of us are completely converted right now.

So why cover this subject today? Why go over this? Well, it only took me thirty years to learn this and I made many mistakes along the way. I say this today because I hope it would shorten the time for you and you won't take as long as I have if you need a deeper conversion.

Sometimes we get stuck spiritually. It's like treading water. You're not going anywhere. You're just going in the same place. And we've all been there and we've all done that. We've become stuck spiritually. The solution is to have a deeper conversion. And we all need to seek a deeper conversion even if maybe we don't see it right now. We are in Laodicea, and, if any era of God's church needs a deeper conversion, it is Laodicea. One of the characteristics of Laodicea is "I don't need anything. I don't need a deeper conversion. I'm just fine right where we are. God's happy with me. I'm obeying God," but, as with Ephesus, Laodicea is just blind as bats. So, the danger is we can take on a Laodicean attitude and then come away thinking, "Hey, I'm okay. I'm alright." I don't need to change anything."

What we need to do, all of us—especially me—we need to rise to a new spiritual level which is closer to Jesus Christ, closer to the mind of God and Christ. None of us is there yet. We need to admit that. So, we need to seek a deeper spiritual conversion every day of our lives. And, if we do that, then we will be most pleasing to God our Father.