

Subject to Change

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Okay, we'll begin with the sermon. I really appreciated Les' message. It's always amazing to me how these things fit together. Not so much his with mine, but mine with his, because he talked about glorifying God. And that is something that should be in all of our minds each and every day from the time we get up to the time we go to bed at night. What are we doing to glorify and honor God in our lives with everything that we do? Our behaviors and actions are very important.

And, as you know, the title to the sermon that I'm going to give today is that we are "Subject to Change." As God's people, we are *Subject to Change*. Paul made a statement and we'll turn to that later. In fact, you can be turning there now if you would like over to Romans 10 where he said that his heart's desire for Israel, his countrymen, was for them to change. Actually, he said for them to be saved, but that certainly includes changing what they needed to do.

We've all seen that in that familiar fine print in everything that we buy: "Subject to change without notice." Personally, we are subject to change. In fact, that's a requirement for us from the moment that we come up out of that baptismal grave that we need to be changing. We've made that agreement with God that we will strive to become like Jesus Christ. We'll do that.

And that phrase that Paul used that was "his heart's desire" is over in Romans 10 and it's verses 1 through 3. I'll be using the New King James throughout unless I specify different. But in Romans 10 verses 1 through 3, it reads:

Romans 10:1. *Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. (NKJ)*

As we know, there was a fifty-fifty mix in the Roman Church. There were Jews there. There were Gentiles. There were Greeks. There were all kinds of a mixture of people in Rome at that time. But in verse 2, it goes on and says:

Romans 10:2. *For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. (NKJ)*

And, of course, he's referring to the Jewish element there, which was, as we know, a very influential element in the Church there at Rome. Verse 3:

Romans 10:3. *For they [all these people collectively] being ignorant of God's righteousness [the knowledge, the righteousness necessary for salvation], and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God. (NKJ)*

That obviously speaks to the requirement of change. That has to be present if we're going to use the right knowledge, the knowledge that God gives us when He calls us, when we have the laying on of hands, when He imparts His spirit to us, which enables us to discern the knowledge that God's given us. That's the way that we incorporate God's righteousness into our lives because we certainly can't generate any of that on our own.

Now we know that these Jews here had their own system of salvation. In fact, we'll see that in some of the early churches through some of that influence, that counter-influence to God's way of life. They thought they could develop their own system, their own belief system, their own methods and achieve salvation that way.

But Paul knew at this point; he knew that these Jews, his fellow Israelites, didn't have that true knowledge, but someday that they would. He knew that. He knew that someday way down the road they will have their opportunity just like all humankind will have, all mankind.

But one thing he did know for sure was that those that were called and had responded to that calling and had been baptized and were in the process of conversion and could be worked with. They could increase in knowledge. Like Les said, "They could have that spiritual growth, that opportunity for that." It wouldn't be something that went in an opposite direction from God.

And Paul also knew that his job description was to encourage, to admonish, and to correct when necessary, when working and serving God's people. And he did that as we know. We have the record he did that—a great sacrifice to himself! And sometimes to the people that were working with him.

But these are the ones, the Church, that Paul actually had hope and a desire of actually achieving change leading to salvation.

We just came through the Spring Holy Days recently where we talked about change, where we talked about putting sin out of our lives, talking about working on the leaven, focusing on those things. And all of us have had to do that—some big, some small. At some point whenever we were initially converted, we had to give up some things. We had to put some sins, some leaven out of our lives. It could have been smoking. It could have been any other thing, but we've all changed something in our lives. And, as we follow that narrow path that God has called us onto, we have to make some choices. And we'll see that later as we go along here. God will help us along the way in making those choices, making those changes that we need to do, all those things that affect our behaviors and our actions like Les was talking about.

Jesus Christ used Paul and all the apostles actually to encourage and admonish the Brethren to make those changes, then and now. Certainly all of these words are for us today. And we need to strive for that spiritual growth and that change just like Les talked about and just not give up as we go along the way.

And what I've done is I've just compiled Three Basic Points that will help us to do that—growing and changing. And these aren't all inclusive. And all the points that we have never are. They're just some of the things that we come up with and try to contain it

within the time that we have. But the Three Points that I have decided to cover here are as follows. Number One:

I. In order to make those changes we need to in our lives, we need to respond to God's admonishment to change.

And that's what I'll try to show as we go along here. That will come in a lot of different forms, a lot of different ways.

And the Second One is:

II. We need to ask God for the wisdom to change.

For the wisdom depending on what kind a situation, what kind of a trial we're in, or whatever it might be. We need God's help in order to change, in order if we're going to get any value—as I'll point out later—from that trial or whatever it might be, whatever the situation might be.

And lastly, the Third Point is:

III. We need to rely on God for that change.

I think all of us have been around long enough that we know the more we try to make those changes, the less success we're going to have. We're asking for failure whenever we decide to do that or think we can do it on our own. So we need to rely on God.

So, just looking at that First Point, "We need to respond to God's Admonishment to Change," let's turn over to 2 Corinthians. Actually I'm going to be turning over to 2 Corinthians chapter 6 and 7.

In the context here, Paul is making an emotional appeal to the Corinthians. He's actually kind of anxious because of the corrective letter, the corrective mode that he's had to use in approaching and working with these folks in Corinth. He's concerned about that. Some of the commentaries will say that the two letters to the Corinthians are some of the most corrective in the New Testament. And as we look through that and study those letters, we can see that that's true because of all the different problems, the issues that they had going on that Paul had to work with constantly. It wasn't an easy Church for him. It was a high maintenance Church. He was worried about the corrective approach that he had to take towards them because of that illicit relationship that was going on between the individual and his mother.

But they had their share of other problems too. I heard a sermon recently where it talked about how dysfunctional the Church in Corinth was. They had their splits. They were polarizing around different personalities, different ideas. And Paul even said at one point when they came together it was for the worse! Not for the better! They were mistreating each other. They were doing all kinds of unchristian things. Their behavior was like what Les was talking about. It was not good. They were not glorifying God in doing that.

They had their problems with the Passover. Some people would show up at the Passover drunk! Paul says, "If you're going to be drunk, do it at home! Don't shame the Church by showing up at the Passover inebriated. Don't do that." And in another place, Paul told them they were so spiritually immature, he couldn't even talk to them like adults. He had to feed them milk. They weren't able to handle any of the food that he was giving to them or that he wanted them to be eating of to be growing, to be eating spiritually to be growing. They were going backwards in a lot of cases because of their behaviors, what they were doing. You can find those examples and all kinds of other problems in those letters to the Corinthians. So, I won't quote any of those Scriptures there where those things are found. They should be familiar to you.

Also, culturally, the historians tell us that Corinth wasn't a whole lot different than our society today. And that's where we can draw on some of the lessons that went on with them and use these things for ourselves. Culturally, their society was sort of like ours. Financially, economically they were prosperous. Although we see ours fading because of some of the financial curses that we've incurred upon ourselves. Those behaviors nationally and collectively had a price too.

I just made a short list here. There was abundant idolatry to go around like there always is. That's always there. If you have human beings, there is going to be idolatry in some form or another. It can be usually in the form of material things. It can either be ideas. Anything that we put before God is going to be idolatry. But that's always around. Satan always uses that. That's that wedge that he gets between us and God—anything like that.

And another thing that they had going on that we still see today—and, again, I'm just looking at some comparisons, some similarities between that society and ours today—is they had appealing reasoning. We have really logical things for just about anything we can do. We can make more excuses probably than any society that has ever lived. Look at the things going on in politics and all that. I just wish that we had a politician—they seem to be putting forward all these politicians. And all we ever see—we never see any character out of these people whether they're men or women. All we see is the skeletons that get drug out of the closets. You know, Arnold, this other guy. I don't even want to mention some of things that are going on because it's so disgusting. But the point is that all that logical, those excuses, those philosophical ideas and all that are the same thing today as they dealt with back then. It affected the Church in a lot of ways.

I remember hearing a sermon years ago. I can't even remember the individual, the minister that gave it, but he talked about how those philosophical ideas and all those things that come down to us through psychology and all other and the social engineering and all of that. And he named names and how that has filtered down to our society today and how that's influenced and affected us.

I'm sure they had their entertainment back then. I don't know. They had music. I'm sure they did. I just hope it wasn't as awful as some of the stuff that we have to suffer in these days. Even when I go to gym, they have the music playing in the background and so far I haven't been able to buy anything that will cover that music to block it out. They play this awful rap music and stuff. I told somebody recently that I'd rather hear a

strangled cat hack up phlegm than listen to rap music! That's awful stuff. It's degrading. It's just terrible stuff.

But the point is all this stuff had a heavy influence on the population and the Church back then. And it works the same way today.

In the context here, Paul is quoting many Old Testament Scriptures—and I'm coming down to 2 Corinthians, still in chapter 6 going down to verse 14—but that's what he taught them with—Old Testament Scriptures. He tried to show them what they needed to change because all these principles that we have are in God's Word in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. There's God's Law. There are all the things that we need. Les mentioned some of their songs. There is a lot of prophecy. There are godly principles and all that are continually brought up in the Psalms and we'll even look at a Psalm extensively here later on. I'm glad that Les didn't use the one that I have. That's okay. We would have complemented each other. I'm sure.

But the point is that the Old Testament Scriptures that Paul used were not pointing to himself. He was using God's principles and things to teach them—just like it says over in Matthew 28 in the last part of the chapter there, "Make disciples of all nations. Teach them everything. Baptize them. Teach them the things that I've taught you." Christ taught that to His disciples. And I'm sure later on He taught the same thing and actually required the same thing from Paul.

Here in 2 Corinthians chapter 6 beginning in verse 14—actually I'm going to go through to verse 18. Verse 14, and again the context leading up to here, Paul is reviewing some of the things he's gone through—some of the sacrifices he's made to serve and to help and to lead these folks the way God wants him to do it—but he's come down here and breaking in on that context verse 1. It says:

2 Corinthians 6:14. *Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? (NKJ)*

They were using some of the morals of the society around them. And Paul is trying to tell them, "Don't do that." They were also false teachers that constantly came into the Church, constantly harassed the New Testament Church. And Paul said, "Don't listen to those either!"

But it goes on to say here in verse 14:

2 Corinthians 6:14b. *And what communion... (NKJ)*

Or fellowship, it's the same word as used earlier in that verse.

2 Corinthians 6:14 continued: *...has light with darkness?
15) And what accord has Christ with Belial? (NKJ)*

Which [Belial] is actually referring to Satan there, the prince of darkness. It doesn't say that in the Bible, but we know that's true.

2 Corinthians 6:15b. *Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? (NKJ)*

In other words, he's contrasting these things. They had all these problems and there was a reason for that. They were not following God's way. They were not following God's Laws and God's principles. They were deviating from those using their own ideas. Just like Paul said back there to the Romans, they were trying to generate their own righteousness. They felt really good about what they were doing with the illicit affair that was going on and the other sins that were going on in the Corinthian Church. But he's talking about opposites here—light/darkness, believers/unbelievers.

He goes on in verse 16:

2 Corinthians 6:16. *And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? (NKJ)*

Always idolatry! Always!

2 Corinthians 16:16b. *For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: (NKJ)*

And here he begins to use those Old Testament Scriptures and those principles that he's teaching them, where he says:

2 Corinthians 16:16 continued. *"I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people." (NKJ)*

That's like Les was saying in the sermonette. We should be glorifying God. Not these other things. He's [Paul] actually quoting Ezekiel 37, Exodus 29, Leviticus 26, Jeremiah 31, and Zechariah 8 in those verses there. If you have a margin in your Bible, it might list those.

Verse 17, a little more of the same thing:

2 Corinthians 16:17. *Therefore [seeing those things] "Come out from among them and be separate, (NKJ)*

Don't be like the society around you!

2 Corinthians 16:17b. *...says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you." (NKJ)*

Again, he's quoting Numbers 33, Isaiah 52, and Revelation 18. Be separate! So, he quotes a whole bunch of those things, Old Testament Scriptures. That's what he taught them with. He's telling them, "You know these things. You have the right knowledge, but you're not using it!"

It's kind of interesting that he quotes—one of the Scriptures I mentioned up in verse 16—he's quoting Ezekiel 37. That's the chapter on "Dry Bones." We hear that a lot on the Last Great Day of the Feast.

But if you look in the context of Ezekiel 37 at the very last part of that chapter, it's talking about the king. It's talking about a coming King. It's talking about a coming Kingdom. It's talking about Jesus Christ. It's referring to all those things. But the point of what he's trying to tell them is, "That should be your goal. Not these other things that you're trying to devise yourself. That should be your goal. That's why you're having so much trouble with these bad behaviors, with the bad actions that you're doing. That's why you're getting these bad results!" And he's kind of telling them, "If your goal is that, why would you want anything else? You're losing focus." That's what he was telling the folks there.

And actually, it's the same message for us today. That same thing can happen to us as we're well aware of.

But verse 18, and again, he's still quoting Scripture, Old Testament Scripture!

2 Corinthians 6:18. *"I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty." (NKJ)*

And again, you can look those up. But the point is again that Paul is quoting God's Word! Not his words. He's trying to make this point with these folks that "You don't devise your own method. You don't devise your own righteousness. You make the changes according to what God wants. You change your behaviors, your actions according to what God tells you to do."

We come then to 2 Corinthians chapter 7 verse 1. "Therefore" referring to what he just reviewed, "having these promises"—all of those promises that come out of the Old Testament of a soon coming King of God's Kingdom (which it talks about abundantly in the New Testament), the promise of eternal life, the promise of God's Kingdom.

Going on here it says, "Beloved":

2 Corinthians 7:1b. *...having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves (NKJ)*

Notice he didn't exclude himself! He realized he was in the same boat as everybody else, as we'll go on to see.

2 Corinthians 7:1 continued. *...from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, (NKJ)*

And we know that that "flesh and spirit" is referring to what they needed to clean to change. We need to change some of the exterior things we do, some of the behaviors, the actions that we do. I mentioned the smoking, the other things. God says that we're His Temple. His people are His Temple and that we should be holy and everything that that implies! That's a whole another subject, but that's very interesting to look at that. That's what we need to change. We need to change the outside. We need to change the inside—the thoughts, the minds, the motives, the things that make us do what we do.

But it goes on to say here:

2 Corinthians 7:1 continued. ...perfecting holiness in the fear of God. (NKJ)

And again, like it says over in 1 Peter 2, we are a called and chosen people. We are a different people. And it talks about being holy there. We're a holy people.

And again, just as a reference going back to 1 Corinthians chapter 6 and verse 20, this is just a reference here—and we should be familiar with this too—but it says:

1 Corinthians 6:20. *For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.* (NKJ)

And that sort of emphasizes the gravity and the seriousness of glorifying and honoring God with our lives, just like Les talked about. And that only comes by the perfecting process, by God's process. Not something we can come up with on our own. It's talking about changing our basic nature with God's help.

But let's go back to 2 Corinthians 7 continuing there in verse 8:

2 Corinthians 7:8. *For even if I made you sorry with my letter, I do not regret it; though I did regret it.* (NKJ)

In other words, what it's really saying here is that this kind of bothered Paul, but he had to correct them over the issues and the problems that they were having. It bothered him on a couple of fronts

1. They had to do it. Nobody likes to be corrective towards other people. They don't like to do it.
2. He felt partly responsible. He said to the Corinthians that they were immature. And he felt that maybe he had not taught them the way that he should have so that they would be mature enough to recognize the problems that they were being led into.

It's kind of interesting when you think about that. I can't count on two fingers the ministers that I've heard that will own up to the fact that some of the problems that have been in the Church is because the Church has been kept at a certain and has not been allowed to mature. Maybe I'll get in trouble for saying that and someone will come back at me, but I believe that and I've seen that.

But Paul felt that way. He felt that maybe he didn't give them the teaching that he should have. But going on there in verse 8:

2 Corinthians 7:8b. ...*For I perceive that the same epistle made you sorry, though only for a while.*
9) *Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner,* (NKJ)

In other words, they saw the error; they responded to it; and they changed!

2 Corinthians 7:9b. ...*that you might suffer loss from us in nothing.* (NKJ)

In other words, he was, eventually, he was giving them the help they needed to grow.
Verse 10:

2 Corinthians 7:10. *For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death. (NKJ)*

Salvation, it's talking about salvation versus the remorse of "I got caught," which is usually the way society operates. And unfortunately, probably the way we operated too before we were converted, before God called us into the process of conversion. Verse 11:

2 Corinthians 7:11. *For observe this very thing, that you sorrowed in a godly manner: (NKJ)*

They started doing things right.

2 Corinthians 7:11b. *What diligence it produced in you, (NKJ)*

In other words, they took the admonishment to heart; they changed from their attitude of indifference that they had, from the wrong way of doing things. But it goes on to say:

2 Corinthians 7:11 continued. *...what clearing of yourselves, what indignation, (NKJ)*

And the indignation that they felt was towards themselves! They were probably upset because they allowed their problems to go on for so long. That Paul finally had to intervene and correct them. This clearing means that they stopped excusing themselves, which is what we naturally do. When we get caught at something, we've got an excuse. Boy! Sometimes we've got a whole bunch of them! But it's always somebody else's fault. It's not ours. That's the way human nature works.

But it goes on to say there in the last part of verse 11:

2 Corinthians 7:11 continued. *what fear, (NKJ)*

And that's godly fear. That's godly respect. That's properly honoring and glorifying God.

2 Corinthians 7:11 continued. *what vehement desire, what zeal, what vindication! In all things you proved yourselves to be clear in this matter. (NKJ)*

They listened to what they were being taught; they listened to the admonishment; they took the correction and the encouragement from Paul; and they changed, at least in this one incident. They just paid attention to him. And there are a whole bunch of lessons for us there.

If we have the knowledge we need—I've used this story before. I can't remember if I used it here or somewhere else—but one time I was listening to a radio talk show, which I'll do sometimes if I'm traveling in a car. I don't go to the trouble to listen to them at home. The news is bad enough!

Anyhow I was going along and listening to this radio talk show. He's a financial consultant is what he was. And somebody called into the host and they were worried. They were anxious. They had some property and they were worried about depreciation on the property. And so, being a financial guy, he's got to know some numbers. He's got to know what the guy's talking about so he can give him some advice.

So he says, "Well, what are you talking about? What kind of property are you talking about?" And he says, "Well, here's what I did. I retired." And he's like about in his mid-fifties. He retired. He said, "I bought a one and half to two million dollar piece of property in Los Angeles. I built a three or four million dollar house on it."

And you can kind of feel the talk show guy, he's kind of getting a little—he's doing a slow burn with this guy because this guy's talking about millions of dollars and he's worried about his property depreciating.

And he says, "What's your nest egg for retirement?" He says, "Well, I've got like twenty million."

The talk show guy, it's kind of funny because he just kind of blew up at the guy. He says, "What are you worried about? You've got everything you need! Do you know how many people retire with twenty million dollars? And live in a several million dollar home on an expensive piece of property? And you're worried about losing it?"

It's the same thing with us spiritually! We've got everything we need in God, in Jesus Christ and all the help and everything They give us. I just made a short list of the things we have that we can change with. God provides everything we need. We don't need to be worrying about— Sometimes we worry about we don't know if we're going to make it into God's Kingdom; we're having this problem or that problem; we don't know if we're going to come out the other side of it. Just think about it.

I just made a short list here of bullets.

- God Himself calls us personally, each one of us! And He deals with us individually, each one of us!
- He gives us His spirit to help and to empower us! That's the only way we can understand some of the things we're even talking about. If I were somebody different, you wouldn't be sitting here listening to me. And if you were somebody different, I wouldn't be standing here talking to you. It's God's spirit that brings us together on that.
- Like Les said, "We can go to God in prayer. We can ask Him what our needs are and He'll provide for those things." Sometimes He doesn't do it exactly the way we want, but I can't count how many times God has answered my prayers. Even if I'm kind of stupid in the way that I ask them, God will kind of work it out.
- And God says He'll give us the wisdom, if we ask for it, to deal with our problems or situations.
- We know that God the Father and Jesus Christ love us. They tell us that.

- And They also tell us They'll never forsake us! Do we ever appreciate how important that is that God says He'll never forsake us, that He never changes? We're the ones that change. It's not God that does that.

But God does all that! He gives us everything that we need to grow and to overcome, to change, to receive all of the blessings we can in this life. And that includes immortality. That includes living in God's Kingdom. That includes salvation.

So the whole point on that First Point there was that we saw the example of these individuals that were shown their problems. They did change in that one respect. The Corinthians did. So, they listened to what was being taught them by the apostle Paul.

Going on to the Second Point here:

II. We need to ask God for the wisdom to change.

Just like those Corinthians once they were corrected, they changed. They did 180° in their attitude in the way they conducted themselves. We should do the same thing. Sometimes we need extra help in doing that. We need that wisdom. We need that help from God.

Let's go over to Titus chapter 3 and verse 8. This is Paul to Titus, teaching a younger minister here. He says in verse 8 of Titus 3:

Titus 3:8. *This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works. (NKJ)*

Not being careless like the Corinthians were. Not being careless like sometimes we are. A lot of times I can look at some of the problems that I have and I can see the carelessness. I can see how I got there in a lot of cases. But it's talking about maintaining good works. It's talking about how we conduct ourselves as Christians. It just means—to be careful means to pay attention, to concentrate on what we're doing.

But it goes on to say here in this verse:

Titus 3:8b. *These things are good and profitable to men. (NKJ)*

Now that's profitable spiritually. And that Greek word there, "profitable," just means to be useful, valuable in a spiritual sense. In other words, it's talking about really honoring and glorifying God in what we're doing, wherever we're at in our lives, whatever our situation might be.

I thought of one example. Do you ever do anything right? I'm being a little facetious with that. Whenever we do something right and it turns out right, we learn a lesson from that.

And one of the lessons I thought of was anger. And that's a very carnal reaction—anger. We've heard all kinds of examples about that. When we're younger, we're a little bit more volatile where we get angry easier.

One of the reasons God gives us the principles—and we know that God gives us some principles on containing that anger. Not getting all bent out of shape with it. Not letting it take control. And it happens in human nature because it's one of the easiest emotions. We just flare up with the anger in some case depending on how we're wired. I'm Irish. So, my Irish temperament tends to get the best of me once in a while! It's one of the easiest emotions and it's one of the hardest to overcome.

And the bad thing about anger is it blocks everything else! Have you ever seen two people—even in the Church or even outside the Church—get angry? One will sit over here and one will sit over there. They're both angry. They won't come together and just over a cup of coffee talk about their problems. And usually it's nothing. Or it's very small. I've done those things inside the Church and outside the Church.

The point here is that if we do that right, if we handle that anger right—God says, "Don't let the sun go down on it. He gives us some principles there. There are proverbs about anger—all kinds of principles. And if we do that right, it turns out right. So, that's just an example of that. It's just the Corinthians. They listened to the admonishment. They actually did it right. They turned it all around. They gained some wisdom from that. They probably never fell into that same problem again.

Sometimes we don't learn those lessons, but we just have to control that anger. It just works—to be angry and sin not. It just works! But the point there is too that if we just keep applying what we know—and sometimes it just takes perseverance. Just keep doing. And we'll see later that Paul says, "Don't give up." He said, "Stay in there. Keep your eyes on the goal and keep pressing towards the mark." But we'll eventually get it right.

Personally, in my own personal life, I kind of see myself doing that. I'm getting pretty close now. I'm getting—I'm north of seventy now. So, I keep reminding our kids. They don't like it. I said, "We don't have too much longer. You need to spend more time with your parents."

But anyhow, if we keep going, if we keep applying, if we keep using the things God gives us, if we keep utilizing the wisdom that God gives us—and we all have a lot of it. Sometimes, it just doesn't come out. Sometimes other people can see it in us, but, unfortunately, we don't see it in ourselves a lot of times.

The point I'm trying to make is that spiritually we need a lot of help from God along the way. We just need to realize that God works in our lives all the time. If we ask God—and God tells us to ask Him—if we're doing that, that implies we have a relationship with God. And when we don't have a relationship or that relationship with God gets weak, we don't ask. And that's usually when we drift into some problems.

Let's kind of see that over in James. You know where I'm going, James 1. God works in our lives all the time. He's there. If we just ask for the wisdom, if we ask for what we need, He'll give it to us. James 1 and verse 5. Breaking in on the context here, we know that in the verses leading up to this, it talks about trials. It talks about all kinds of things. It talks about patience, how to face our trials, the things we're doing. But breaking in here in verse 5, he gives us some advice. James is very pointed. It's a very

loaded book. It's full of personal pronouns. It says "you," and all of that. So, it goes on here in verse 5; it says:

James 1:5. *If any of you lacks wisdom, [he should] ask God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. (NKJ)*

I like the NIV version of that. It says:

James 1:5. *If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. (NIV)*

In other words, God never faults us for asking. Where we get in trouble and fault ourselves is when we don't ask. In fact, we have the example of David in the Old Testament. We'll turn there in a little bit, but we have his example. He asked God. He got to the point where he asked God to dig down deep in him and show him his hidden faults, his hidden sins. So, he could root those out of his life. We'll look at that Psalm in a little bit. But God really appreciated his teachable attitude. Didn't He? In spite of sometimes the grievous sins that David committed!

So the Bible gives us many answers and principles of living God's way. But it doesn't do that all at once. Does it?

When we're first called, we have certain things. I like to use the example of taking baby steps because that's exactly what we do whenever we're first called, whenever we first begin this process of conversion. I like to use the example of our grandkids. (I never mention my grandkids!) They go to school five or six blocks away. Well, we know they get out of school about 3:15. Marie will kind of watch for them. I'll kind of watch for them because they're little kids. They're vulnerable at that stage!

And God feels the same way about us. We're vulnerable at certain stages and He takes care of us in a lot of ways. And I'll talk about that little bit later, but He takes care of us in ways that a lot of times we don't even realize.

Another thing, too, it kind of pains me sometimes when I see an adult try to reason with a little child, maybe a five or six-year-old. Talk to them like an adult and get angry when they don't respond the way that they think they should. It's a five or six-year-old. It's a little child and it's to be taught. It needs to be led. We all know that from child-rearing. You have to treat a kid like a kid.

And God does the same thing to us. He treats us like a little child when we're a little child and He expects us to be mature adults whenever we're mature adults. The point there is that God knows we lack wisdom and insight in a lot of things. We have to grow in that. We have to make some progress in that.

Remember over in Matthew 7:7 where it says, "Ask and you'll receive."? That's all in the context of the Sermon on the Mount. And what's the Sermon on the Mount? It's about not being a hypocrite in the way you live. It's talking about godly character all through there—chapters 5 through 7, all the Beatitudes. It's talking about how to live. So, like James says here, we need to ask for that wisdom. God treats us all as individuals. And we all need a personal dose of wisdom at our level, wherever we're at

and whatever situation we're in. God knows precisely how much we need and when we need it.

We have the example of a couple of friends. We have a couple of elderly people in the—not me—in the Prosser congregation and one of them, Larry Torno, has quite a history. He worked at Pasadena for many years. He's got quite a history there that he talks about. He's been through all kinds of problems and trials.

Anyhow, he's put together an autobiography. I've talked to him a lot personally and he's also allowed me to have copies of that where I can read it. But he has admitted to me that God's worked with him ever since he can remember.

And we carpool with another elderly man, George Pollard, who has been having his personal problems. He's been on the prayer list a lot. Anyhow, he also talks about some of his past. He played in a band for years. He's a musician. And I tell him a lot of the problems he has—he calls once in a while—and I tell him that's from all the honkytonks he played in when he played in a band years ago before conversion and all that. And he, too, talks about how he knows that God has intervened and worked with him in his life before.

And I think that's true with all of us. We can all recount many stories, I think, of how we believe that God has worked with us. Let's turn over to Psalm 139, which is a very interesting Psalm. It's a deeply personal Psalm by David, but it kind of talks to that—how God works with us on an individual basis. Psalm 139 beginning in verse 1 and it says, "For the Chief Musician, a Psalm of David." He says:

Psalm 139:1. O LORD, You have searched me and known me. (NKJ)

Again, very personal, all these personal pronouns here. David always knew he was learning more and more of God's way. The more he lived, the longer he lived he began to see some of the uncleanness, some of the things in his life that led to the sins that he got into.

But he's saying here, "You have searched me and known me." He knew that God knew him as an individual. If we extrapolate that, if we look at some other Scriptures, and these all should be familiar to us, but if we look at the Scriptures where God says He knows every sparrow that falls; He knows the hair on our heads.

(Well, in some cases that might not be so much! Trying to be funny there! Trying to wake Dale up!)

Anyhow, if we extrapolate that, David said that God knew him personally and from whatever point in his life. And if you extrapolate that to the billions of people that have ever lived, it begins to become pretty awesome how God searches and knows each and every human being that has ever lived! If there's going to be a Great White Throne Judgment and everybody's going to be resurrected at some point—hopefully we'll be changed—God has to know all that. He has to know these individuals.

But it goes on here to verse 2. He says, (David talking to God):

Psalm 139:2. You know my sitting down and my rising up; you understand my thoughts afar off. (NKJ)

In other words, "knows his thoughts and motives." And, again by extrapolation, knows our thoughts and motives; knows our heart! Like Les was talking about. How many biblical principles are there where it says that sin starts in the mind? There's a bunch of them. And then we have the other principles about guarding the door to our mind. So, God says that He knows our thoughts. That should give us a little bit of motivation to work on those thoughts if they're giving us problems.

It goes on here in verse 3:

Psalm 139:3. You comprehend my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways. (NKJ)

In other words, there is nothing hidden from God. Nothing! He knows why we do it, when we do it and what we do.

Verse 4:

Psalm 139:4. For there is not a word on my tongue, but behold, O LORD, You know it altogether. (NKJ)

Even before it crosses our lips! Another place where it talks about that we will give an account of our idle words. In other words, we'll give an account on our motives and attitudes, what was in our heart when we said those words, the thoughts behind them which were driving them.

Verse 5:

Psalm 139:5. You have hedged me behind and before, and laid Your hand upon me. (NKJ)

That's talking about protection, about physical, about spiritual protection. Probably again, probably intervening more than we know in our lives! Again, we can think back in our pre-conversion days and everything.

Verse 6:

Psalm 139:6. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain it. (NKJ)

We can't even begin to comprehend what God knows! But we can ask. And we can tap His knowledge and His wisdom. He says that we can. He offers that to us. And He gives us the power to use that, to utilize it whenever we do get it or to recognize it when it kind of hits us.

Verse 7:

Psalm 139:7. *Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? (NKJ)*

God's power and God's omnipresence!

Verse 8:

Psalm 139:8. *If I ascend into heaven, You are there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there. (NKJ)*

And that's kind of a fascinating thought to me—if I ascend to heaven, if I go down into the earth.

I was watching a special the other day on TV. I can't remember if it was PBS or the History Channel. It talked about and it's been in the news that the space shuttle has ended. Well, they've evolved spacecraft from that space shuttle. And now, they've come to the point that the space shuttle is kind of pointless. We just keep going nowhere. Just back and forth to the space center. We want to go beyond that. So now what they've done, they've developed even more sophisticated rockets. They won't have the piggyback shuttle to go beyond that, to go beyond the moon, maybe to go the other planets and all that.

But to ascend to heaven? There's no place that we can get away from God in doing that. And descending down into the earth? I don't know whether you say that movie called "The Core" where there actually was rocket ship that bored its way down into the center of the earth. And again, I used those illustrations just to show that there's no escaping from God. There's no escaping at all. He's there. His power, we can tap in. We can use all that.

But going on here in verse 9, he says:

Psalm 139:9. *If I take the wings of the morning, (NKJ)*

That's talking about the speed of light! If I could scoot out of here at the speed of light, 186,000 mph, I couldn't get away from God if I wanted to.

Psalm 139:9b. *...and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, (NKJ)*

In other words, find an island to live on. You can't do that! Verse 10:

Psalm 139:10. *Even there Your hand shall lead me, and Your right hand shall hold me. (NKJ)*

We know in Scripture the right hand is talking about work. In other words, we can read into that there is no place that we can go or be; there's no situation where God can't guide and work and help on an individual basis. He knows, like David. He knows our lives just like He knew and helped David, even in spite of David's sins.

Verse 11:

Psalm 139:11. *If I say, "Surely the darkness shall fall on me," even the night shall be light about me;
12) Indeed, the darkness shall not hide from You, but the night shines as the day; the darkness and the light are both alike to You. (NKJ)*

We read that earlier. God is inescapable is what all that's saying. Verse 13:

Psalm 139:13. *For You formed my inward parts; (NKJ)*

This becomes very interesting, this part here. It says.

Psalm 139:13b. *...you covered me in my mother's womb. (NKJ)*

In other words, what that means, "covered," is it means God knew when David was woven together like an embroidery in his mother's womb. And, again, by extrapolation, us, too!

How many cells—I think I read somewhere there's like sixty trillion cells in a human body. God knew all of that. He saw all of that being put together as a human being, as a baby in the mother's womb.

Verse 14:

Psalm 139:14. *I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvelous are Your works, and that my soul knows very well. (NKJ)*

David saw himself in God's image. He knew his potential to be in God's Family. At some point in his life, he knew that. Verse 15:

Psalm 139:15. *My frame was not hidden from You, when I was made in secret, and skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. (NKJ)*

And, again, that's a reference to the womb. Or he was unobserved when he was being made, put together. And that also has a physical/spiritual application here.

But going on to verse 16:

Psalm 139:16. *Your eyes saw my substance, (NKJ)*

DNA? Down to the DNA level?

Psalm 139:16b. *...being yet unformed. And in Your book... (NKJ)*

This is very interesting!

Psalm 139:16b. *And in Your book they all were written, the days fashioned for me, when as yet there were none of them. (NKJ)*

It implies God had foreknowledge about us.

And I want to make a note there. I want to make it perfectly clear that I'm not talking about; this foreknowledge here is not talking about the concept of predestination. That's a Calvinist doctrine. And what that doctrine says is: God's already determined whether you're going to be saved or whether you're not going to be saved. It has a close cousin called "eternal security." That's another evangelical Christian doctrine. And all that really says is: If you identify and confess Christ, you're not going to lose your salvation. None of those things are Scriptural.

That's not what this is saying here, but what it is saying here is that the foreknowledge that God has that He has this capability that He can do this. The Church teaching on predestination was God had predetermined He was going to call the firstfruits, but that does not rule out at all that He would know us individually. Not at all! Scripture doesn't say that one way or another. And it's not inconceivable that God keeps a record. It says, "You're kept in His Book." That He keeps a record of every living thing. Maybe everything that God created!

We have all this computerization, all this high-tech. And I'm not really a high-tech, but I don't understand some of the "kajillion" bits of memory and all that, but I'm kind of like "Jack" Flintstone when it comes to that. I can get by on that. But at some point in the future, maybe God's going to look back—and we think we're so sophisticated with all this memory and all that and can catalogue and file all this information. God may look at that like we're a bunch of Flintstones. That might see pretty primitive to God. God may have some way where He actually keeps a record of all this. All that!

But another thing that this foreknowledge is talking about is it's kind of like the parent/child relationship where a parent has foreknowledge of that child. My wife was especially good at this. She knew a lot of times what that child was going to do it before he or she did it. She could catch a child in a lie and I wouldn't pick up on it at all. And she knew exactly what was going on. So, that kind of foreknowledge is what it's talking about here.

But going back to that part about the womb, that's actually pretty interesting when you think about that because I didn't really, I don't think I really had a good grasp of what that was talking about. God knew David in the womb. He knew us in the womb, too. We have to conclude that from these Scriptures.

But when you think about that, that's talking about—Les talked about a relationship between parents and children. And again, this was brought home to me recently because have you ever seen a parent grieve for a child? Especially a mother? Because she not only had that physical umbilical cord, she has that emotional one. So that child is always her child. A lot of times a child will turn out in a way that we don't expect or maybe we don't appreciate. They might choose a lifestyle or something that we would have never chosen for them. They might not turn out that way, but still that relationship is there. She carried that child in her womb. She nurtured that child. She nursed that child. And that psychological umbilical cord is there as long as that child is alive.

And David's saying that God had that same relationship with him. So that puts a lot of emotion, that puts a lot of pressure on us that God would view us in that way, in that kind of a relationship. Because by extrapolation, again, we can see that God deals with

us the same way. He's attached to us the same way. Especially when He's called us, we've responded to Him and go to Him for the things we need. And He has that relationship with us—like children!

Verse 17:

Psalm 139:17. *How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God! How great is the sum of them! (NKJ)*

I just mentioned we can't even begin to imagine the incredible detail in God's thinking! We just can't.

Verse 18:

Psalm 139:18. *If I should count them, they would be more in number than the sand; (NKJ)*

More than a *kazillion* bytes of memory!

Psalm 139:18b. *...when I awake, I am still with You. (NKJ)*

And, again, God never leaves us. He never changes. He says He won't forsake us. Again, how thankful are we for that.

Now it comes to this part, the latter part of the Psalm here, it comes to kind of an interesting insertion because verses 19 through 22, it says:

Psalm 139:19. *Oh, that You would slay the wicked, O God! Depart from me, therefore, you bloodthirsty men. (NKJ)*

Verse 21:

Psalm 139:21. *Do I not hate them, O LORD, who hate You? And do I not loathe those who rise up against You?
22) I hate them with perfect hatred; I count them my enemies. (NKJ)*

The commentators are really perplexed by this insertion here, these three verses because it doesn't kind of make sense. But when you think about what David's talking about here, He's personifying something because he sees this in his own nature. He sees that he was the enemy of God. He sees that he can revert to that. His human nature can come back in and take him over again, as it were.

We can reject God and that's one of the big arguments against anything like predestination—like God has already made up His mind. You can't discount free choice. You can't discount rejecting God and He'll reject you. It says that!

David sees his own carnality here. These "enemies," that's what he's talking about. We can look over in Proverbs where it talks about the things God hates. David saw this in himself and that's why he inserts that here. So that idea kind of makes sense of the last two verses in it where it says, verse 23:

Psalm 139:23. *Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; (NKJ)*

See what I worry about! Verse 24:

Psalm 139:24. *And see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. (NKJ)*

It's like David's saying, "I see myself, God, and I hate it. I see sometimes this carnality just spring up in me and I just need Your help. I need the wisdom from You. I need everything, all the power that You'll give me, everything that I need to dig it out. Just give me what I need spiritually. That's what I want to do." That's where he had come to in his life. And, remember, he'd done that in a pretty hard way. It wasn't an easy road for him. He just was pleading with God to give him the strength, to give him the faith to overcome that. And also at the same time, he was asking for God's love and for His mercy and that correction.

It's kind of interesting. [The Bible Believer's Commentary](#) says on these last two verses here—I think it's kind of insightful in a way. It says, and I'm quoting here, it says:

This psalm closes with a prayer [David's asking God] that has perennial suitability for all God's people, a prayer that will never die as long as there are sinning saints [Or human beings, I put in there.] on earth. It's not the challenge of a person protesting his innocence or righteousness.

I think it's kind of pretty insightful because it's someone that sees himself—and you can only do that with God's spirit, with God's help—who knows they need to change. He knows he has things to work on all the time. He knows he needs to conform to what God wants him to be. And that's what's lacking in this psalm. If you read this psalm carefully all the way through, that's what's lacking in this psalm—no self-righteousness!

Remember Paul talking to those Romans? They tried to generate their own righteousness, but there's none of that here. David knows that he needs all of that from God to change, to do what he needed to do. So, human nature isn't characterized anywhere in this psalm, which again we make excuses for ourselves.

Coming down to, bringing us down to our last point Number Three, which was "To Rely on God for Change," the changes that we need to make. Again, I'd just like to turn over to Romans 7 because there's no better example than this than Paul's dilemma here in Romans 7. If we ever think that we can kind of work up our own salvation or help dig our ways out of our own problems, Paul says differently here. In Romans 7 beginning in verse 14, kind of breaking in on the context here, he just said here in verse 14:

Romans 7:14. *For we know that the law is spiritual, (NKJ)*

He just said in the context that the Law is holy, just, and good.

Romans 7:14b. *...but I am carnal, sold under sin. (NKJ)*

Which meant that he was sold like a slave, sin was his master. Verse 15:

Romans 7:15. *For what I am doing, I do not understand. (NKJ)*

And none of us do; none of us did without God's help.

Romans 7:15b. *For what I will to do, that I do not practice [behaviors, actions]; but what I hate, that I do. (NKJ)*

Which is what happens when we try to achieve salvation by our own efforts! We can't win. We can't do that. Verse 16:

Romans 7:16. *If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good.*

17) But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.

18) For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I [don't] find [it]. (NKJ)

In other words, without God's spirit, we didn't have a clue and if we don't use God's spirit now, if we grieve that spirit by not tapping it, by not using that power, we won't see it. We'll lose sight of what we're doing. Let alone overcome it, whatever the problem might be! So, we need that power. We need that wisdom from God.

Verse 19:

Romans 7:19. *For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. (NKJ)*

That's my behavior, that's my action apart from God. It kind of fits with those enemies that David was talking about and we can be enemies of God too, in some respects if you want to look at it that way.

Verse 20:

Romans 7:20. *Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.*

21) I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good.

22) For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man.

23) But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. (NKJ)

In other words, without God it's a non-winnable battle—spiritually.

Romans 7:24. *O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?*

25) I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind [coupled with God's holy spirit] I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh [in other words, without God's holy spirit] the law of sin. (NKJ)

What Paul is saying here in this total discourse is that he's in agreement with God. He recognizes the only way to salvation is through God. There's no other method. There's no other way to do that.

He also understood the process, how that happened. We have to learn. We have to grow. We have to be fed. So let's turn over to Ephesians 4 and again breaking in here on the context in verse 11 where it says:

Ephesians 4:11. *And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, (NKJ)*

For what?

Ephesians 4:12. *for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying [the building up] of the body of Christ, (NKJ)*

That's a process. You don't build something from the top down. You build something from the bottom up. You create the foundation. Then, you build on that foundation. Just like we all learned! In fact, if you think about the learning that we so, we generally start with the simple and move towards the complex. I always did that as an instructor. It doesn't work any other way. You start people at the top and you're going to confuse everybody.

Verse 13:

Ephesians 4:13. *till we all come to the unity of the faith... (NKJ)*

That's the purpose, part of the purpose.

Ephesians 4:13b. *...and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; (NKJ)*

And that's the purpose. So, Paul clearly understood that purpose and function of the ministry. He knew it wasn't for their own aggrandizement. It was for the edifying, for the building up of the Body of Christ. And he did that in everything that he did.

In verse 14, he talks about no longer being children, being tossed about to and fro, every wind of doctrine, and all that, being vulnerable like a child. We talked about that. God brings us up from a child to a mature Christian.

Ephesians 4:15. *but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ— (NKJ)*

In other words, don't be tossed around by the trickery of men. We need to love the truth. This kind of reminds me of John chapter 4 verse 24 where we have to worship God in spirit and in truth.

Recently I was doing some study into the Protestant Reformation and you have to kind of think about where that would have gone if it wouldn't have been for the false logic and everything that was incorporated that we see in modern Christianity now.

I have a couple of books that are interesting by Alan Knight. I have a couple of editions of that. I think he came out with a third edition, but he talks about Primitive Christianity in Crisis. And it talks about how Gnosticism, the Hellenistic ideas and all that, actually crept into and became the doctrine of modern Christianity, what we have today. But you have to wonder about that.

I kind of cringe whenever I hear—and one of the first terms I ran into in looking into that was "proof text"—well, "proof texting"—and unfortunately we've heard that in the past. And I'm not referring to that and I'm not trying to be derogatory to some of the things from the past, but I'm referring to this.

I kind of cringe when I hear "proof texting" because what that means is you already have a conclusion. You just go look for the Scriptures that support it. And that's what they've done. That's how they arrived at, if you look at John Calvin's work and Martin Luther's work, and there are a lot of other individuals in Europe that contributed to that. And we eventually got it in this country.

Anyhow if we think about that—let's go over to Philippians—because we need to grow, we need to change spiritual into that perfect character of Christ. It says over in Philippians 2, and this is just a reference Scripture. I'm sorry if I led you to turn there, but it says, "Let this mind be in you." It's kind of like the metaphor of the seed. A seed doesn't grow by itself. It needs other things to grow. And that's just the way we are spiritually. We need God the Father. We need Jesus Christ. We need all the things that God will give us in order to grow. Paul knew that.

I'm going to skip a couple of things here. Let's turn over to Psalm 119. I'm just winding up here. There are a lot of different ways that we learn. Psalm 119, that's that really long one. I'm not going to read that all the way through! Just a couple of verses in there because sometimes we have to appreciate the way that God brings us along and affects the changes in us that we need to make, and sometimes, whether we like it or not! In Psalm 119 and verse 71 it says:

Psalm 119:71. *It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes. (NKJ)*

And sometimes we have to suffer to do that. We cry out to God and we make the changes we need to. We maybe renew, refresh our relationship with God. And then, sometimes we forget but God gives us those lessons.

In verse 72, it says:

Psalm 119:72. *The law of Your mouth is better to me than thousands of coins of gold and silver. (NKJ)*

In other words, the things of God that lead to salvation are much better than material things like silver and gold. Hopefully, none of us are heavily invested in the stock market right now. Or maybe we bought gold and all that—the stuff that God says later on we're going to throw to the bats in the caves to keep the bats away from us.

But what Psalm 119 verses 71 and 72 are saying is that sometimes God makes the point with us the changes we need to make. And as the result of a trial or some kind of a situation, then we reset our values to what's really valuable. We re-commit what's lasting and permanent.

So, in summary, and just referring back to Paul, his desire, both then for the Church and us now, is to use the knowledge that we have, to tap into God's love, His mercy, His wisdom, all the help that He'll give us along this path that He's called us into. We need to grow and to mature spiritually. We need to follow that example and grow up into Jesus Christ. I've just mentioned these few points, which I'll review here in summary, but part of that overcoming and change is the result of these things.

I. Responding to God's admonishment to change.

However that encouragement and that admonishment comes to us! Sometimes through a trial, sometimes through a test, sometimes it's easy. Sometimes it's hard. We need to respond to that and make the changes that we need to. Sometimes we can see those changes. They're evident during or after a trial or a test. Sometimes they're not, but we learn them along the way.

II. We need to look to God and Jesus Christ and ask for the wisdom that we need.

Again, I'd like to re-iterate that God's very knowledgeable about us. He knows us. He's active in each one of our lives. And we just need to tap into those things that He'll give us—that wisdom and help—because we all need that. And God says He'll give it to us on an individual basis, whatever we need wherever we're at.

Finally, we need to:

III. Totally rely on God to enable those changes we need to make.

The whole point of us growing, overcoming, and changing is to reach our final goal which is going to be God's Kingdom.