

Remembering Your Vows

Baptism

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As I look back over the years, I have always liked cameras. I seem to remember that I was about six or seven years old when I got my first Box Brownie. There was something exciting about looking into the small prism and seeing the world through that prism and be able to go “click” and take a picture. I began to find that it was cheaper to take the pictures than it was to have them developed. So by age 16 I had my own darkroom, and my own enlarger. When I went to college, which was an agricultural college, I got on the photography staff and shot animals for publications like equestrian, dairy, and hog publications. And it was here that I learned a valuable lesson, never photograph a black horse against a black barn.

When I came back from overseas, I was assigned to Ft. Lewis in Washington, and I put in for the army photography school. I went through that. When I got discharged, I wanted to make some extra money, so I went to work on weekends at the largest wedding studio in Oakland, California. I was a freelance photographer. I had to purchase my own camera, 2.25, 3.25 speed graphic with two roll films back, and a strobe flash. And I loved that flash gun. That flash gun was like the sun exploding when I had the battery packs set at full power. The only drawback was that the battery weighed about as much as a car battery, and by the end of the wedding you were exhausted.

On the first weekend I was sent out, I went out with an experienced photographer, and I watched how he did it, and from then on, I was on my own. And I soon began to learn that the wedding photographer ran the entire wedding, because many a bride would come and say, “What do we do next?” So, I would tell them what to do next.

I also had to learn the money shots: These were the shots that people would buy: The father of the bride talking to his daughter; the flower girl with the bride; the bridesmaids, and so forth.

It was a lot of work to shoot a wedding. I do not think anybody had any idea of the effort that has to be put forth. First, you had to rush to the bride's house, wherever it happened to be, and as she was getting dressed, towards the end of her getting dressed, you shot the maid of honor putting the veil on the bride, and then bridesmaids around her, and all the shots we had there.

And then, when she was ready to go to the church, you had to get in your car, and rush to the church in advance to be there first, to take a picture of her getting out of the car, but then you had about an half an hour to hour to just stand around. And it was during this time that you would go up to the groom, and ask if there were any shots that he would like? Usually, he would have a shot with his best man, shaking his hand; or with his father, talking to him, or the groomsmen; and then you would ask if there were any family shots you would like to have taken? And this foolish question would lead to the largest wedding picture I ever took.

There was this Italian wedding up in the Hotel Claremont in Berkley California. And I asked the groom if there were any family shots he would like to have taken, and he said yes, I will meet you in the ballroom. That should have been my first clue that something was wrong or different. I got in there, and I think he had somewhere between 185 and 250 relatives. I stood there panic-stricken by what I saw. So I told them to line up on this side of the ballroom, and I went to the other side, and made sure that they could see me with their both eyes; and I stood back, and put that wonderful flashgun on full power, and I could barely fit them in the frame, and I pressed the shutter, and took two or three shots, and they all came out beautifully! I was so proud of that!

The saddest wedding I was ever at was a wedding where their father had just lost his wife to some serious disease, and his last daughter was leaving home, and she was on tranquilizers (he was a doctor) and she was almost a zombie. I could not get her to smile. But then when she would finally look at the groom, she would break out into a big smile. I have always remembered that wedding.

Now, when I came into the church, I quit shooting weddings on the outside, because most of them were performed on the Sabbath. I found it (shooting

weddings) was a gift that I could give the young people in the church, and I did so for many years, because photographers are expensive. And though it was a lot of work, it was special work for me—it was happy work. I always enjoyed shooting a wedding.

These young couples were making the second most serious decision of their lives. And though it was always work, by the time they played the wedding march, and the audience stood up, and the bride started to come down the aisle, and her hand was on her father's arm, and she looked around nervously, and she saw people on her left and right, and then she looked down the aisle and saw the man waiting for her she was going to marry, and spend the rest of her life with, it just seemed to be all worth it to me, because they were going to exchange their vows, and it was a wonderful thing. So, I have always enjoyed weddings. It is a special thing for me.

Now, some of us are not married. And yet, we have all made vows concerning a future marriage and a commitment to become the Bride; to be faithful to our Groom, Jesus Christ. That vow was made at baptism. And just as vows are sometimes repeated, like at an anniversary which reminds the couple of what they promised to each other, it is good for those of us who are baptized to review occasionally what we have promised to do as well.

And for most of us much water has passed under the bridge since our baptism, I think it is a good thing to refresh what we said; to revisit what we promised before God. So, let us take a trip down memory lane for each of us, and let us take a look back and see how we came into God's church.

Before we could be baptized, we had to be called.

John 4:23 “But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him.”

Here we have God the Father seeking such to worship Him in spirit and truth. I do not know why God called you, and I do not know why God called me. We have to realize it was not our good looks, our wealth, our brilliance. God saw something in us that He wanted.

John 6:44-45 “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught by God.'”

So here, God the Father reached out long before you knew what you were going to do, and He started to draw you. That can be applied as a fishing term. In other words, He hooks you, and while you pull away, He slowly reels you in. It may take years.

Can you personally remember when God started to work with you? I can think of little bits and pieces here and there, but I can remember when my first thoughts came of trying to do what Jesus Christ wanted. I had come back from overseas, and I was at my mother's home, and she had a book, entitled, *What Would Jesus Do?* It was a simple little book. It was a story from a Protestant church that had maybe a thousand members (and looking back, I smile at it). The minister stood up and said, “How many in this congregation would like to make a vow to live as Jesus Christ would for one year?” You would have thought the entire congregation would have stood up, but only six came. I think there was a lawyer, a newspaper man, a liquor store owner, a wealthy lady, and a couple more. I do not know what they all did, but I know that the newspaper man tried to print good things on the front page rather than bad; the liquor store owner tried to sell more soft drinks; the lawyer was honest and kind; the wealthy lady tried to give some of her money away to help the poor. And though, each of them did what they thought God would do, yet, in looking back, they probably truly did not do what Jesus Christ would do.

And yet, the concept grabbed my mind: What would Jesus Christ do if He was living in my shoes?

So years later, when we started to hear the broadcast, the challenge to live as Jesus Christ does just seemed to pull me along into contacting the church. Yet it really was God all the time. He had just used that method to drag me along. I do not know what He did in your case.

In thinking back on the steps that preceded baptism, do you remember when you first came to church? I know we were excited and were scared at the same time! And my wife, who you do not think is shy, at that time was very

shy. She would hide behind me and peek out around me to see who was there. It was really cute. And now, I peek around from behind her, because she is so outgoing!

We knew that everybody we met was perfect! Nobody had any problems because they were in God's church!

Do you remember how you craved every scrap of knowledge about God? About how you read every *Plain Truth* magazine from cover to cover, and always did the correspondence course, and always attended every Bible study? You could not be put off. Every minister you knew was perfect and had all knowledge; he understood everything. And you just could not get enough!

Then, after you attended for a while, you started to ask about baptism. One of our ladies told me, she asked her friends, when should I get baptized? And they told her not to worry, she would know. She would ask again. And they said, "Don't worry, you'll know." Finally, she asked the pastor about when she should get baptized, and he said, "Let's talk about it." So, all she had to do was ask him.

Once we asked, the ministry had a responsibility to help us understand what we were really getting into. This was not just some little thing we could do, and then forget. This was to be the most serious commitment that we would ever make (remember I said earlier that the marriage commitment was the second most serious) and that we would be held accountable for the decision that we came to. And thus, the ministry truly had to make clear to us what our desire to be baptized really meant. We had to truly understand what baptism was, what it represents, when it should be done, and what its prerequisites were. We had to learn to count the cost the best we could.

Why do we have to be baptized? We learned that it was necessary to have our sins washed away; that it was part of the salvation process; that it is commanded. We had to understand how it was to be done, and by whom it was to be done.

I did not have much insight on this, but I knew that some were sprinkled, because I had seen pictures of that; I even remember some people in our

country, and others, being drowned when they were baptized, making it right into the Kingdom without coming back out of the water. Some ministers got carried away, or they got washed down the river. I really did not understand what baptism meant. There was much more to it than my shallow understanding by far.

Turn to Romans 6 regarding these things:

Romans 6:3-7 Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin.

Now this is the overall viewpoint of baptism. There are two definitions: Everyone who comes to believe in God, and receives baptism as proof of that belief, takes up the profession of living a righteous life. When you are baptized you profess; from that time on that is your profession, to live a righteous life. To be baptized into Jesus Christ is to receive the doctrines of Christ; to receive baptism is proof of the genuineness of that faith, and the obligations to live according to its precepts. So now you know the overall definition of baptism.

We were baptized into His death. In other words, Jesus died, completely taking our past sins, our IOU to forfeit our life, because of our lawbreaking—because of our sins.

Let us see what was taken to the cross. Earl Henn wrote an article on this: (<https://www.cgg.org/index.cfm/library/article/id/532/was-gods-law-nailed-to-cross.htm>).

Colossians 2:13-14 And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with

Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.

People use this passage to say that the law has been done away with. But what he is talking about, here, is the Greek term, *cheirographon*, which leads to mean an IOU: When we sin, it is just like giving God an IOU—I have sinned; I have broken your law; the wages of sin is death; I now owe You my life. And because of that, God has taken those IOU's that you and I owe Him, and put them on the cross, and did away with them. He died—no spark of life remained in Him. He took our sins in doing so, and thus we are to be baptized and to die completely to sin—this is the concept the ministry wants us to understand. We must have the intent to have no consort with sin, no more connection, no more allowing it to influence us after baptism (and before).

We were buried with Him into His baptism unto death. We are reminded that baptism puts to death the old self. Being submerged under water pictures the old self with its ways, its habits, its rebellion against God being left behind in the water. We come up out of the water free from the penalty of past sins. Sometimes physical penalties can carry over.

According to Romans 6, we are planted with Him, the thought being that if we are planted with Christ, and put away the old man, then we live in new ground of God's instructions, and guidance that will nourish us, and cause us to grow into the fullness of Jesus Christ. This is what baptism is about. Now we have a set of new goals; and as we pursue these new goals, we will grow into the ultimate goal of becoming like our Lord and King Jesus Christ.

There is a wonderful promise given to us that just as Jesus Christ was raised from death by the resurrection, so we will be raised to glory at our resurrection. It really is pretty exciting stuff to remember and think about. It has been a long time for most of us.

And knowing that our old body was crucified with Him, how are we to be able to live this new life we have been given? Again, part of it is by crucifying the old man. This is really important. The old man has to be put to

death by the destruction of the body of sin—our human nature, and the wicked carnal mind itself. That has to go. That is no small chore.

I know that when we were baptized, the minister reminded us that Egypt was sin, and just like Pharaoh's army chased after Israel, that he was going to chase after us. I must admit over my life, I have chased after sin, too. It is not easy to put sin out.

But the idea is that we must understand from that time forward we should not serve sin in any way. He who has died is freed from sin. It does not mean that you are free to commit sin, but you are free from your past sins.

Colossians 2:12 buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of [the operation of, KJV] God, who raised Him from the dead.

Again, this pictures us being buried with Jesus Christ who was in the earth three days and three nights and rose again at the end of the third day. And so, we are pictured coming up out of the water, a new creation, by the operation of God. I never caught that phrase before. When you look up "the operation of God," it is "by the power; the active energy of God that was used to raise the dead Jesus Christ that had been torn to shreds, and changed Him into a Spirit being sitting at the right hand of God." The point is that same power is going to be used on us to bring us to the Kingdom of God. It is truly exciting!

Now, when should we be baptized? That was a question we asked often.

Acts 2:37-38 Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

The next thing we had to understand was repentance. I do not think I understood repentance. I want to read you what *Unger's Dictionary* has to say about repentance:

Repentance is a change of mind and of heart in a theological and ethical sense; a fundamental and thorough change in the hearts of men from sin toward God.” “Repentance contains as essential elements, (1) genuine sorrow toward God because of one’s sins; (2) an inward repugnance of what we are deep inside one’s nature and sins, followed by the actual forsaking of our nature, and our sins; changing our way of living; (3) and humble surrender to the will and service of God.

Adam Clarke says:

Repentance implies that a measure of divine wisdom is communicated to the sinner (John 6:44), and he thereby becomes wise unto salvation; that his mind purposes, opinions, and inclinations are changed; in consequence there is a total change in his conduct. It can scarcely be remarked that in this state a man feels anguish of soul because he has sinned against God, unfitted himself for the kingdom, and exposed his soul to hell. Hence, a true penitence has that sorry whereby he forsakes sin, not only because it has been a ruinous to his own soul, but because it has been offensive to God. He comes to the point where he does not want to offend God.

That is a marvelous thing!

When God reveals Himself to us, and we become convicted, we ask the question: What must I do to be saved? We get a broader picture of it in Acts 16.

Acts 16:25-29 But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were loosed. And the keeper of the prison, awaking from sleep and seeing the prison doors open, supposing the prisoners had fled, drew his sword and was about to kill

himself. But Paul called with a loud voice, saying, "Do yourself no harm, for we are all here." Then he called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas.

He (the jailer) knew what they had been preaching, he knew what was all over town. He knew the truth.

Acts 16:30 And he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

He was not concerned about the loss of the prisoners because they had not been lost. You see, he wanted salvation for himself and his family so he asked how he could be saved. The response is another step towards being baptized.

Acts 16:31 So they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household."

Believing—believing on Jesus Christ, believing in Jesus Christ.

Now today, we also have God's Word to read, but back then they had to believe in what they were taught. Believe means to trust God, to have your faith on Him, to have your faith in Him, to believe that He is going to answer your prayers, that all that He says is true. Belief in God is another step we had to learn prior to baptism; to believe upon, to rest upon, and to profess God.

Adam Clarke has one little sentence about this I want to share:

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, receive thou the religion of Christ, which we preach, and let your household also receive it, and you shall all be placed in the sure way to final salvation.

This sounds so simple!

So prior to being baptized, 1) we had to be obeying God's Word; 2) we had to repent; 3) we had to believe in God's way of life.

Then came something that I do not think any of us could do. And yet, we were expected to do it—Count the cost of what we were getting into.

If you were to go into a café, and you want a cup of coffee, and ask them, “How much is it?” They reply, “It’s \$2.25.” You have to make the decision do I really want that cup of coffee? Do I want to pay the price? The cost is what you pay for something. As we were told to count the cost, we could count the cost in part, “Yes, it’s going to cost me tithes, holy day offerings, time that I would have spent elsewhere,” which is all part of the costs. “It’s going to cost me time in prayer, study, fasting, and meditation. It’s going to cost me time in going to Sabbath services, and time in going to the Feast of Tabernacles. It’s going to require obedience.”

I had not been used to all of this. I had not put on the new man, yet. But I have to! You see? The bottom line of the cost is the price we are going to pay to follow Jesus Christ. That is the cost. Because we cannot see down the road, we cannot see what all of the price is. But we are expected to count the cost and make our decision.

For those of you who are married, remember when you got married, you tried to look down the road, and counted the cost as best as you could. You had no idea what might take place, but you counted the cost.

Remember husbands, you said something like, “I faithfully promise, and covenant with God in the presence of these witnesses to take this woman to be my lawfully wedded wife, for as long as we both shall live; to love her; to cherish her; to honor her; and to provide for her.” And you wives responded with something like, “I faithfully promise, and covenant with God in the presence of these witnesses to take this man to be my lawfully wedded husband, for as long as we both shall live; to love him; to cherish him; to honor him; and as God had ordained to submit myself unto him.” And then you brides came back down the aisle with your new husband to start your new life. And as best as you both could, you counseled, you thought, you counted the cost.

There is just no way you could predict the future. For some families, children were born deformed with birth defects. For other families, there were health problems with serious ailments. For other families, there come along

financial problems that had to be worked out. For others, there were bad habits that were discovered later, and had to be worked on.

But still, you had made those vows, even though you could not see everything, could you? You still worked out your marriage on the terms of the agreement that you made before God.

So it was with us in counseling for baptism. We can only work with the facts we have at hand. And yet, it was the minister's job to help us try to see past the immediate facts, and to prepare us to stand no matter what might come. That is a tough job for the minister.

So then, these are the scriptures we are going to look at. It is going to give you a little insight as to what you promised. Maybe you were not counseled with all of these scriptures, but you are going to be counseled today with them! It will be a reminder for most.

Luke 9:23 Then He said to them all, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me."

Now to deny oneself means to disown; to renounce yourself; to subjugate all work, interests, and enjoyments to God. What this means is to measure what we desire against what God's standards are. And then act accordingly.

To take up your cross means to endure any affliction that might have to be endured because of the need to conform to Jesus Christ. "I don't work on the Sabbath, so my family disowned me." That is your cross.

Luke 9:24-26 "For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake [sticking with what God has taught him] will save it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and is himself destroyed or lost? For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, of him the Son of Man will be ashamed when He comes in His own glory, and in His Father's, and of the holy angels."

This is what Jesus Christ was saying, “What happens if you gain the whole world?” As I get older, what would it mean to me if I were going to die with my room full of hundred dollar bills? Or the garage full of Rolls Royce’s? It would not mean a thing. I am going to stand before Jesus Christ next, and so I would better have my house in order. So He said, “What does it matter if you gain the whole, but lose the Kingdom of God?”

There are basic conditions that had to be met. We were told that one should have a sincere desire to belong to Jesus Christ, and to come to Him voluntarily. We come to Him. Nobody can talk you into baptism. Nobody can force you to be baptized. This is an agreement that you take upon yourself. You have the calling. You understand it. You understand what is required. And then you come to God, and come to Him without pressure.

We were told that we should renounce all our prejudices, errors, idolatry, and wrong environments. Part of the price that had to be paid was that you could not associate with the people who were going to lead you into wrong actions. You had to change your way of life.

One has to submit to the teachings of Jesus Christ and His doctrine. One must set his mind to continue to endure steadfast in the faith unto the end.

The big set of scriptures that we all remember is Luke 14. I am going to cover that whole chapter, because it teaches a lot of lessons, especially for those who are about to be baptized.

In verses 1-6, it shows the stubbornness of the Pharisees in not wanting to change from their lists of dos and don’ts. They were hanging on to their old traditions. And they were hardhearted.

Luke 14:1-6 Now it happened, as He went into the house of one of the rulers of the Pharisees to eat bread on the Sabbath, that they watched Him closely. And behold, there was a certain man before Him who had dropsy. And Jesus, answering, spoke to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?" But they kept silent. And He took him and healed him, and let him go. Then He answered them, saying, "Which of you, having a donkey

or an ox that has fallen into a pit, will not immediately pull him out on the Sabbath day?" And they could not answer Him regarding these things.

We are required not to have a hardness of heart. We are required to change; to make the changes in our lives.

In the next section Jesus Christ gave the parable regarding being puffed up and taking the chief seats at the wedding. The lesson we will find is that whoever exalts himself is going to be abased, while those who humble themselves will be exalted. What a wonderful lesson for the beginning Christian to understand. Jesus Christ was the most humble of men.

Luke 14:7-11 So He told a parable to those who were invited, when He noted how they chose the best places, saying to them: "When you are invited by anyone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in the best place, lest one more honorable than you be invited by him; and he who invited you and him come and say to you, 'Give place to this man,' and then you begin with shame to take the lowest place. But when you are invited, go and sit down in the lowest place, so that when he who invited you comes he may say to you, 'Friend, go up higher.' Then you will have glory in the presence of those who sit at the table with you. For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

A real lesson for all of us is to not seek things out of context, or out of time.

Now the next section of verses 12-14 talks of serving those who are less fortunate than ourselves:

Luke 14:12-14 Then He also said to him who invited Him, "When you give a dinner or a supper, do not ask your friends, your brothers, your relatives, nor rich neighbors, lest they also invite you back, and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just."

Here we have the example of going to visit those in prison, taking care of those who cannot respond to you in the same way. Serve others not looking for praise or reward now, but to look for service that needs to be performed for mankind. We have the example of Jesus Christ who served all of mankind by giving His life. And thus, we should emulate Him in our serving of others. This is part of the Christian calling; part of the price that has to be paid.

Now the next section of verses 15-24 talks of the great banquet that was to be given. Many were invited but made excuses for not attending. There are some real lessons here.

Luke 14:15-24 Now when one of those who sat at the table with Him heard these things, he said to Him, "Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!" Then He said to him, "A certain man gave a great supper and invited many, and sent his servant at supper time to say to those who were invited, 'Come, for all things are now ready.' But they all with one accord began to make excuses. The first said to him, 'I have bought a piece of ground, and I must go and see it. I ask you to have me excused.' [Something in the world took his attention away from God']

And another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to test them. I ask you to have me excused.' [His interests were outside of God's interests.] Still another said, 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.' So that servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house, being angry, said to his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in here the poor and the maimed and the lame and the blind.'

And the servant said, 'Master, it is done as you commanded, and still there is room.' Then the master said to the servant, 'Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. For I say to you that none of those men who were invited shall taste my supper.' "

It is a scary thing to realize, brethren, that if you understand that you are called by God, 1) you had better answer the invitation, and 2) these people were sidetracked by the things in the world, and they left God's calling, doing their own thing. So, God says they will not taste of His meal.

So, in counting the cost, God really wants us to add it up, look at it, to compute it, to consider all the facts to complete what we start.

Now, this next section will likely be the one most of us will recognize:

Luke 14:25-26 Now great multitudes went with Him. And He turned and said to them, "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple."

For the many who do not understand, this turned off many people. "I'm supposed to hate my father and mother?" He did not mean that. He meant that you are to love them less, to rather love Jesus Christ first. How many of you when you came into the church had your parents exclaim, "You're going to keep Saturday? What's wrong with you?" Or, the company said, "You can't work in this company if you keep the Sabbath." If you gave in to them, you would have loved their opinion and thoughts more than you would the instructions of God and Jesus Christ.

Luke 14:27-30 "And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it—lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish'?"

God wants you to count the cost; to figure the price.

Luke 14:31-33 "Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends

a delegation and asks conditions of peace. So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple.”

You see? Jesus Christ wants us to make an advance, conscience commitment made with a realistic estimate of the ultimate *personal* cost involved. Even though you could not see down the road, He wanted you to make it. He wants us to understand that Christian discipleship following Jesus Christ is not some good-luck charm, or theoretical thing, but it is hard reality. You signed the agreement; you are in for the duration.

Verse 33 above, I think, puts it all in proper perspective: “Be ready to give up whatever it takes to follow Christ.” That is it in a nutshell.

Luke 14:34-35 “Salt is good; but if the salt has lost its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is neither fit for the land nor for the dunghill, but men throw it out. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!”

That simply means, if we do not have the zest and zeal for the calling of God, what use are we to God?

Turn to Luke 22, verse 42 where we have the example of Jesus Christ who figured the price out early on. He paid the price even though it was a price He did not want to pay. This is Christ praying in the Garden of Gethsemane. He is on His knees, perspiring blood:

Luke 22:42 saying, "Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done."

See? Jesus Christ knew what the cost was, and He counted the cost, and He knew it, and lived up to it. Yet, He desired some other way, if possible, but this is how it had to be to honor His Father.

Turn to Acts 5 where we see more about the price that we may have to pay.

Acts 5:25-29 So one came and told them, saying, "Look, the men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the

people!" Then the captain went with the officers and brought them without violence, for they feared the people, lest they should be stoned. And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest asked them, saying, "Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name? And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this Man's blood on us!" But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: "We ought to obey God rather than men."

They stood for God in spite of possible serious consequences. This is a lesson we had to consider when we counted the cost. It shows that we are going to be at odds with this world, and its religious groups. If we hold as important what the world thinks, we should probably reconsider what we promised. We need to rethink our intent, re-examining what is the best thing for our future. Can we be concerned about what men think? No! We have to be wise. We have to be careful. When it comes down to it, we have to consider this as part of the price we may have to pay.

Acts 5:32 "And we are His witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him."

The Holy Spirit is given when we obey, to those who obey.

Next, turn to Romans 12. We have been at this recently several times, but we are going to go at it again because it paints a picture we need to have.

Romans 12:1-2 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

This is familiar, but we are going to look at it in a different way. The sacrifice is to change what we have been to what God is. This is good for two reasons. It is good for us. And it is good for God's plan. The metaphor of presenting our bodies is from bringing the sacrifice before the altar of God. We are exhorted to give our *self* up in the spirit of the sacrifice.

Now, to be wholly the Lord's property, the whole burnt sacrifice was completely burned up on the altar. It was not used for anything else. It was entirely given to God. That is what the principle is here; to be wholly the Lord's property—the whole burnt offering—not being part or devoted to any other place.

To be a living sacrifice as opposed to being a dead sacrifice—a dead sacrifice just had to lay there and be consumed by the flames. But we are a living sacrifice, meaning we have to mortify—have to kill—what is all wrong in us to conform to Jesus Christ. And as we do this, we become acceptable to God.

All these phrases are sacrificial, showing that there must be a complete surrender on our part—the person, the body, the whole man, the whole woman, the mind, everything—given to God. One can no longer consider themselves their own, but the entire property of God.

(tape is turned over)

That is hard for us in America to conceive of, we are just so independent. We really are.

We are not our own. Why? 1) because God created us, and 2) He redeemed us. We belong to Him. Like it or not, you and I belong to God.

And do not be conformed to this world, meaning do not allow yourself to be pressed into the world's mold. As we look at the world around us, we see they operate on different standards, moral ethics, and business matters. The world is basically against what God is for.

We know that the world is going to pass away (I John 2:15-17), and as it is going to pass away, I do not think we want to be a part of that world and its systems.

To be transformed means that we are to be made new persons with new habits with a new way of life. And as God has given us new understanding, we are to serve in newness of spirit, not in our former ways. We are to

change. Transformed implies a radical and thorough change, both outwardly and inwardly. God's purpose is to be entirely renewed. That is what this life is all about.

The change we are coming to will start inwardly through prayer and study, through understanding. But soon it will start to be reflected outward in how we conduct ourselves in business, ourselves with God, with people, with the brethren, and with the environment we live in. These changes will all start to come about as we grow.

As we do this, we are going to understand what the perfect will of God is. We are going to understand that living God's way is the only way to live. It will produce the right fruit. It is a wonderful thing.

Somewhere prior to your baptism, you were told that your body was going to be the temple of God's Spirit.

I Corinthians 6:19-20 Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.

Again, this brings out that everything we have belongs to God. We know that as a slave who was purchased with money, and was the property of his master, so we have been purchased with the blood of Jesus Christ, and we belong to Him. And as the slave who was purchased by his master, he had to give all his effort to the benefit of his master in the work that he performed, the same goes for us. We are to use our life for promoting the honor and glory of God by the way we conduct ourselves. Pretty heavy responsibility.

Then, brethren, we wanted the gift that was going to be given. With all the serious understanding we knew there was a gift that came with baptism. And each of us wanted it. The gift gives us the ability and the power to overcome, and to make the needed changes in our life.

Acts 2:38 Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

So many wonderful things came with the gift of God's spirit.

Romans 8:9-17 But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you. Therefore, brethren, we are debtors—not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh.

For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father." The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.

There are some wonderful promises here.

If one has the Spirit of God, he is considered a member of the God Family. And it is the spirit of adoption, too. And God's Spirit bears witness to God that we are His children. And as His children, we are joint heirs with Christ and all that is He is going to inherit.

Now remember when the minister gave you your baptism date? I do. We got all atwitter. Ours was in November 1966, and they tried to warm up the baptismal pool. I remember he snapped off the faucet of his hot water heater.

It is odd what a person can remember. I remember we were anxious to be baptized that we would have all our sins done away, and God's Spirit would at last be given to us. And we would be a true member of the God Family. Because that is what it takes.

We were baptized, and then David Jon Hill laid hands on us and asked for God to give us His Spirit. I remember that I went home that night knowing I am clean. I am clean from all my past sins. I woke up next morning, and first thing I said was, "We are clean." It just felt so good to have all those sins taken away. And because of that, something happened.

Romans 5:1 Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God . . .

In the past, I had been going against God. And now I was clean, and I could be with God. So He gave us peace.

Romans 5:1-2 . . . through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand. . .

We were not able to stand before. But the sacrifice of God enabled us to stand before Him.

Romans 5:2 . . . and rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.

One of our men said one of the great things that he lost when the Worldwide Church of God decided to do away with the teaching of being part of the Family of God, was just that. What hope is there? Here, we are going to be members of the Family of God. And it broke his heart to see them take that away.

And so, we are going to be sharing in the glory of God. We have hope in that. And not only that, but we

Romans 5:3-6 And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint,

because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us. For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.

The ungodly—I substituted my name, the ungodly John Reid. Jesus Christ died for me.

Romans 5:7-10 For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.

By living like Jesus Christ. This is something that helps us to repent, and count the cost, is that we realize that with all the horrible things that you and I did, still God forgave us, and He died for us while we were yet sinners.

Then the years flew past and our growing for the most part toward the last years with Worldwide Church of God slowed down, and in some cases went backwards, because the truth was not being taught. Small changes and different attitudes started to take place, and the church, for the most part, just sat back wondering about it all.

And when Mr. Armstrong died and the new leadership led the church, the changes ceased to be small, but became a great, ripping at the foundation of our beliefs, and we were forced to re-prove what we had learned. And as hard as it was, we had to take a stand against what was being taught, what was being published by the church.

For many—for most all of us—this required leaving the organization we had grown up in. What a heart breaker that was. It was a wrenching time. We were forced to stand on our two feet, and to make decisions. No longer were we part of a group that did everything together. We were now on our own. It was a strange, funny feeling.

On the one hand, it was frightening. On the other hand, it was exciting! And yet, with all that was taking place, there came an independence in us, a feeling of liberty—to think on our own, we had to think on our own. And with this liberty, many began to take stands against what they had been taught. They took stands against the ministry, God's holy days, tithing. Some wanted a 15th Passover. One group was against another group. Confusion reigned supreme. It was a difficult time.

People did not know what to do. And to many it seemed that they could do whatever they wished. It seemed that God had gone off somewhere and just did not care. Nothing could have been further from the truth because God cares so very much.

God in His great love for us shook us out of the warm bath we were in, a warm comfortable environment which did not require much of us, and forced us out into the cold to wake up.

Now, the question I will ask: Does all this frustration, confusion, and uncertainty relieve us from or do away with the vows that we took at baptism? No.

This all was part of the price that you and I did not understand at the beginning—part of the cost that we could not count accurately. You and I had no way of seeing down the road this far into our Christian life. And now, the future is even more invisible. We do not know what is going to happen next. And still, you and I are required to remain faithful to the vows we took. God made us an offer and we took Him up on it, and in that offer there is no backing out for us. We have to do what we promised to do.

Will God quit on us? In all the confusion, will God quit? Will He become frustrated to work with us? Or to remember what He promised? Is this time of uncertainty too difficult for God to work in?

Philippians 1:6 being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.

Adam Clarke remarks: “There shall be nothing lacking on God’s part to support you, and make you wise, holy, and happy; to bring you at last to His kingdom of glory.” God will not quit.

Expositor’s remarks:

The good work refers to the salvation begun at their conversion. God not only initiates salvation, but continues it, and guarantees it is consummation. Paul is asserting God will bring His work to completion. Nothing in this life or after death will prevent the successful accomplishment of God’s work in every Christian.

Are God’s promises true to His people Israel, and to us?

Romans 11:29 For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.

Adam Clarke remarks:

For the gifts and calling of God, the gifts which God has bestowed upon them, and the calling and invitation in which He has favored them, He will never revoke. In reference to this point, there is no change of mind in Him, and therefore the possibility and certainty of the restoration of their original privileges of being the people of God, enjoying every spiritual blessing with the fullness of the Gentiles may be both reasonable and safely inferred.

The New English Bible: “For the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable.”

The Living Bible: For God’s gifts and His call can never be withdrawn; He will never go back on His promise.

You see? God’s going to do His part.

Take a quick look at Numbers 23, verse 19.

Numbers 23:19 "God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent. Has He said, and will He not do? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?"

This is the God we worship. He will not go back on what He told us.

There is John 8:31, which I will not read, where He is talking to the Jews, and it basically says, “If you continue in My way, you will be My disciples.” The key is to continue, because nothing has changed, and we still have to overcome. We have to do it right.

Colossians 3:1 If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God.

Colossians 2:12 buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.

Colossians 3:1-15 If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.

Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them. But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth.

Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all.

Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful.

Appreciate the calling that you have! That is the job we are to do.

Now here in II Peter we have an outline that will assure us of getting to where we are to go.

II Peter 1:4 by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

And then in verses 5-8 we have a list of the growth areas we must work in.

II Peter 1:5-8 But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We are to have faith in God. Then we are to add to that virtue, which means courage or fortitude in times of persecution; strength. We are to add knowledge, which includes true wisdom.

We are to add temperance or self-control, the proper and limited use of the pleasures offered by this world, keeping every sense under control, never permitting the carnal to overpower the spiritual.

We are to have patience to bear all trials and difficulties with an even mind, enduring in all, and persevering overall. We are to have godliness, a deep respect and reverential fear of God, of not only worshipping God with every outward act, but truly learning to love Him with our whole heart.

We are to add to that brotherly kindness which is the love of the brotherhood; a strong attachment to the church; to feel as though each member is part of your own body.

Now it is an interesting thing that we are judged on our relationship with God, and God judges us on our relationship with each other. So, we are to show brotherly love. And then finally, we are to add charity to that; love all mankind.

Peter tells us in verse 8:

II Peter 1:8 For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And then in verse 9 comes a warning to all who made the commitment:

II Peter 1:9 For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins.

The sense of this is that he who winks at sin is just like the man that stood in front of the mirror, and sees things, and walks away, forgetting or ignoring what he saw. “Oh, this can’t be me!” So he goes off in the way he had been going. He that blinks or winks at seeing his old sins, and winks at overcoming, pretending he does not have to, lets down on his commitment to God that he made at baptism, forgetting that he was purged from his old ways.

And like it says in II Peter 2:22, the sow returned to what made her dirty. And the dog returned to what made it sick.

This is the one who seems to think that he can wink at the agreement with God, and says to himself that it is not important that he change, because he cannot see far off. To him, judgment always seems far away, but that day will come. Then, it will be too late to mend the broken vows.

II Peter 1:10-11 Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble [fail]; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

What a wonderful thought.

Of all the wedding photography I did, one of the most enjoyable jobs I ever had was to photograph a 50th wedding anniversary. Here was this couple who lived up to their vows they made in the beginning for 50 years. Was it all roses, and peaches and cream? You bet it was not. I am sure this couple had many trials they went through. Did they do it perfectly? No.

But they stayed together in spite of it all. They had 50 years under their belt through all the bumps and rough spots in the road.

And the couple looked pretty good. The man wore a dark blue blazer and gray slacks. I do not remember his tie. The woman I think was dressed in pink. He was gray. He stood slightly bent and had no stomach. She still had her figure. And they cut a handsome couple on the dance floor. Though they did not repeat their vows, you could tell by the way he held her, and looked into her eyes, that he loved her; that these 50 years of being obedient to the vows that they took upon themselves had paid off for both of them.

You see? This is what God wants from us. He wants us to be proud and thrilled at our anniversary. Although at times it may not seem worth the price of the struggle, yet believe me, you are going to see that it is worth that; the price is nothing compared to what you have in store for you!

This last passage is often used first when explaining or proving our receiving the Holy Spirit. The book of Ephesians was something special for Paul. Corinthians seemed to have problems in the church all the time, not that Paul did not have problems at Ephesus. But in the church it just seemed like God gave this church to Paul, as well as the surrounding areas, as a breather. The problems were not there. And it was in this church that Paul began to see things. It is a message that we have from him that is so encouraging, it was almost like he had a clarified vision of God's sovereign, overall plan. He saw the plan for the church, and for the world. It was exciting to him. And he saw on a breathtaking scale what God was doing.

So, I would like to go through part of it, because shows us what is in store for us:

Ephesians 1:5-6 having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.

He gave us the gift of Jesus Christ to die for us, and therefore we have been made to be accepted in Jesus Christ, a gift from God the Father. Paul thought about that, a most marvelous thing.

Ephesians 1:7-10 In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound [lavished] toward us in all wisdom and prudence [He is given us specific wisdom here], having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him.

Here Paul is saying that he could see it. Jesus Christ is going to gather the entire world to Himself. It is going to work! He is going to bring peace, prosperity, and a wonderful world that He will gather unto Himself. It just seemed like Paul had a chance to see the vision, here.

Ephesians 1:11-14 In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory. In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.

This earnest (King James Version) is the Holy Spirit. And one commentator said, “The Holy Spirit is the engagement ring.” That is interesting! “It is a pledge of heavenly inheritance. And He who could produce this earnest, this witness of the spirit in the day of judgment, will provide entrance into the Kingdom of God for us.” It is shown as a down payment from God as proof that we are going to be resurrected, proof that we are going to be redeemed, changed if we are still alive at the return of Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 1:15-23 Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers: that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power, which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

I can try to amplify this just a bit: Paul had heard of their faith toward God, and their love toward the brethren. And because of that faith, he was moved

to continually give prayer for them, and prays that God would give precise knowledge about Himself to them. And because He wants their understanding to be enlightened in the hope of the calling to really understand just what God has prepared for us that we may truly understand the glorious abundance in the wonderful world tomorrow that God has there.

He wants us to understand the utter greatness of the power that God processes, that is available for us, to resurrect us, to change us into His spirit Family. Paul wants us to realize that the power of God surpasses anything we can possibly dream of, and it is to be used for our benefit.

This power was used to raise Jesus Christ from the dead, and set Him as His Father's right hand, far above any other power we can relate to in this world, far above the power of wealth, or atomic bombs, or above charismatic leaders, far above everything in this world or the world to come. This power is able to make Him over all things and also the Head of the church.

We who are baptized and work at living up to what we have promised are going to be joint heirs with Him. We the church—you and I—will receive from God. It will be in us, His body, His Family in which He manifest the fullness of His power. That great power is going to be in us—His goodness and His truth.

The cost we pay now is peanuts, because when we are standing at that wedding feast we are going to be so thrilled, and so pleased that we went through all we have.

Do not be discouraged at these times. We have a lot to look forward to. So do not let down, fix your eyes firmly on Jesus Christ. Remember the promises of the calling you read of in Ephesians 1.

Let us all live up to our vows we made before our God!