

Truth (Part 4)

Holy Spirit and Truth

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The series on truth is going to continue one more step today. In a way, I feel I need to explain something to you because I started out on this with *one* sermon that I had given in the past, but it has grown like topsy all over the place. I keep seeing avenues that I have never explored before. I believe we are now in our fifth sermon in this series. I think that we are going to pretty much conclude it today. At least, that is my objective.

In last week's sermon we spent a great deal of time in I John 1:5-8 in which John sets a hypothetical situation showing that a person who claims to have fellowship with God must be walking in the light. That is the phrase that he used. Light, among other things, symbolizes truth. If a person is to have fellowship with God, that person must be responding to truth.

Fellowship with God is something that needs to be restored. I think we could agree with that because Genesis 3 shows mankind, in the persons of Adam and Eve, ushered out of the presence of God, put outside of the Garden of Eden, and thus cut off from God, but not without the hope that fellowship might be restored through fulfillment of the prophecy of a Savior also given in Genesis 3.

So God does not leave man hopeless. He shows mankind cut off, but there is a possibility of having that fellowship restored through the Savior.

I defined fellowship for you as "joint participation with someone else in things possessed in common by both." That definition is going to be important the first part of this sermon. Fellowship with God, or fellowship with anybody really, is joint participation with someone else in things possessed in common by both.

Today we might use the term companionship or even friendship. Friends have things in common. You are companions of those with whom you have

things in common. You do not have companionship with strangers. You have companionship with those who are part of your family or part of your work circle or part of your social circle. You have things in common that draw you together, and so you have a joint participation, at least in some part of your life, with those people that you have things in common with.

The kind of fellowship that we are talking about, though, is the fellowship with the invisible Great God and those who have the same Spirit as He does, as we will begin to see. The person who claims to have fellowship with God and fellowship with Christians is claiming that he believes the same things, that he has the same common likes and dislikes, a common nature, and a common way of life with those others.

Now think about this. We are very different from one another. Sometimes people are deeply offended at one another and even wars are fought over differences. Some of us are tall. Some of us are short. Some of us have hair on our head. Others do not have any. Some people's hair is brown, others gray, some black, some blonde.

These are all superficial differences, but when we begin to look further there are other differences. We are different in terms of race, and even if we are not different in terms of race, we come from different families within those races. We speak different languages and we have different cultural upbringings, different religions.

Some of us might adhere to a socialistic form of government, others capitalistic, others communistic. So differences abound all over the place. Some of you are from the north, some of you are from the south, some from the east, some from the west. We have inflections in our voices that are different. We sound funny to one another. We have different perceptions of things as a result of this, and so these differences tend to divide, do they not?

How can we say that we have things in common when there are so many obvious differences? Is it not possible that because of these differences fellowship might be very difficult?

When we think of this in terms of human beings, the differences are obvious. How different are we from God? Oh, the differences there are unbridgeable,

it seems. He is absolutely pure, transcendent in everything. He is Spirit and we are flesh. His mind permeates every part of the universe. We are confined to the area in which we are in. The differences between us and Him are so immense they seem to be unbridgeable. How can we say that we have fellowship with Him? It is so difficult to have fellowship with one another and God even says in His Word, how can we say that we love God when we hate our neighbor whom we can see? There are difficulties presented by this principle of fellowship and claiming to have things in common with one another and with God as well.

The differences, when we begin to think about these things, become obvious and very difficult. We can also begin to see that something must be done if this awesome chasm that exists—between us and God especially—is ever going to be bridged.

Unless that chasm is bridged we will never have things in common with God and very likely we will never have very much in common with each other as well. For those of us who have been in the church for quite a number of years, it is very likely that this is probably number one on your scriptural memory list because we heard Mr. Armstrong say this verse so many times.

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.' Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me.

That something that bridges the gap between us and God is initiated by God. See, no man can come to the Son unless the Father makes an effort to initiate a bridging of that chasm in order that there might be a fellowship because man will not do it. Indeed, he cannot do it. Why? Because he is so deceived. Mankind does not even know where to look for God. Satan has done his work of deception remarkably well. He has the whole world confused, deceived, according to God's own Word.

So if a man on his own began to look for God, where would he look? What would be the form, the shape? What kind of ideals would he look for? What kind of form of doctrine? What would be the hope? What would be the purpose? What would be the plan that he would begin to look for?

So mankind is helpless in that regard and all he can do because of his helplessness is to come up with idols, false religions with false doctrines and false ways. It is absolutely essential that God initiate the bridging of the chasm between us or we would not do it. We cannot do it. We are too deceived to be able to do it. If it is up to man, then we can hardly expect to have fellowship with God or with others under that circumstance.

I think, brethren, that even we do not fully appreciate how deep and thorough the deception of us has been. I wanted to read verse 45 because I want you to see here what Jesus is saying is that the scriptures will play a major role in the removal of the deception and the drawing us to Christ. "They shall all be taught by God." That is something that appears in the Old Testament.

But you have not been taught in person, as it were, by God and yet we claim to know God's truth and we claim to have fellowship. Where did that instruction come from? It came from out of God's Word and His Word is true. In other words, we are introduced to truth by God in some way. There is a mechanism by which He accomplishes this.

But let us carry this thing about fellowship, and the lack thereof and how it is bridged, one step further by going to the book of Ephesians and we will go through this rather rapidly.

Ephesians 2:1 And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins

The "you" is Christians and specifically in this context Gentile Christians. So let us follow the apostle's line of thought through this. Verse 1 is telling us that there was a time when all of us were separated from God and that we were spiritually as good as dead, "who were dead in trespasses and sins."

Ephesians 2:4-5 But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved).

God in His mercy fulfilled what Jesus said in John 6:44 and He began to draw us. He began to move to bridge the gap and to give us life. See, we were dead, but He made us alive and He began to give us light.

I want us to be aware here at this point that life means more than endless life, eternal life. It means "quality" as well because endless life is a blessing only if the quality is good. So the definition of eternal life has to include quality of life.

And God revived us, as it were. He resurrected us from a state of spiritual death and He gave us life. He gave us life not for the purpose only of giving us eternal life, but for changing the quality of life. That almost has to be a given because why resurrect us, as it were, if we are going to go right back into the same kind of life that brought about the spiritual death in the first place?

No, He resurrected us from a spiritual death in order that we might have a different quality of life, that is, a quality that includes the capability of having fellowship with Him as we will see in just a minute.

Ephesians 2:10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

There we go, you see? We have been resurrected to life, as it were, so that there will be a change in the kind of life in which we are living because God is at work. The Creator is at work and it is so interesting that that word "workmanship" can be translated "work of art." That makes it so interesting because it is not merely a God who is giving a command and molding and shaping. What He is molding and shaping is artistic in its form.

He is taking into consideration all the nuances of all of the personalities, all of the differences of all of the people with whom He is working: Japanese, Chinese, Armenians, Syrians, Americans, Jews, and everybody else. All these people have nuances to their personalities and He is working with these people, you and me, not just in a manner to stamp out as with a die, an impression, but rather He is being artistic about this. And you know what art

is like. There are so many expressions of art that are available. So there is the greatest Artist of all that is at work within us.

Ephesians 2:11 Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands

What God is beginning to do here is show us He is dealing with a people of great diversity and we understand that the word "uncircumcision" is referring to Gentiles, Gentiles by race ethnically. But I want us to think of this in terms of a Jew, in the spiritual sense, being a converted person and a Gentile being an unconverted person, regardless of what you are racially.

Remember that you were once unconverted in the flesh. Let us just interject that.

Israel, the only nation that God was working with on earth, was only one nation, and really a minor nation at the time that this was being done. They were a small people, a weak people, by God's own definition. But how many other families of people are there on earth? The peoples of the earth are overwhelmingly Gentile, not Israelite and the greatest diversity of people is Gentile, not Israelitish. So He is dealing with people of very great diversity.

Ephesians 2:12-13 That at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

What he is describing here is a people, as far as he was concerned, who are underprivileged. Not only are the Gentiles of great diversity, they are also underprivileged in terms of their relationship with God. God revealed Himself to the Israelites. But to the rest of the world, He did not.

It is not that they could not find some aspects of Him, because as Romans 1 says that what is known of God is manifest. They can find out that there is a Creator God, but He still did not reveal Himself to them and as a result they did not know about the covenants. They did not know about His law. They

did not know about a lot of things: what the hope of mankind was, the resurrection of the dead.

These people had no rights as citizens, even of Israel, and therefore, they could not even hope to have any kind of fellowship with God. They were cut off from all of the blessings of the covenant, and ignorant of God. Therefore, they could not believe in Him. Do you see why they were underprivileged?

Okay, we were in that position. I do not know what I am ethnically. My ancestry is all German, but yet most people think that I am an Israelite, and in a sense it does not matter. I am converted. But before I was converted, regardless of my race, I was underprivileged because I was cut off from God. I had no fellowship with Him. This is the way all of us are "BC"—before conversion.

He is dealing with a very diverse group of people with all kinds of nuances to their personalities. How is He going to bring them into harmony so that they can have a fellowship with Him and a fellowship with each other? That is what Paul is talking about here.

Ephesians 2:13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

Yes, being in Christ Jesus, being drawn to Him (John 6:44-45), God is saying, opens up a new smear of possibilities because of reconciliation with Him through Christ.

Ephesians 2:14 For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of division between us

Through Christ alone is the possibility of a relationship established with God, and if first with God, then also with men. But the relationship first must be established with God. Now do you begin to see the mechanism that God is using?

He begins to pull diverse peoples together regardless of where they are from on the earth, regardless of their language, regardless of whether they are tall or short, from the south, the north, the east, or the west, regardless of the

inflections in their voice, regardless of any difference that they might have with other peoples. He begins by establishing something we all have in common and that is salvation through the blood of Jesus Christ. A Personality is interjected into our midst that we all have in common and that Personality is Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 2:14-15 For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of division between us, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace.

Very interesting statements. The death of Jesus Christ does not do away with law, but with enmity. The enmity of the law is the penalties that come with the law. A law always has penalties. The enmity of the law can be considered those prejudicial things that we expressed in dogmas that also separated other peoples and nations, in this case from the Israelitish people. But because we both believe in Christ and therefore have Him in common, it begins to break down the enmities and prejudices that have kept us separated. Did you notice I said it was only the beginning?

Let me add one more thing here (this becomes important in just a few minutes). It is interesting at the end of verse 15, "so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace." It is very easy for us to be drawn into thinking that what He is doing is when He calls the unconverted person, or when He calls, let us say, the Gentile, and He brings them in contact with the Israelite, that the Gentile is going to be brought up to speed, and brought up to the same level as the Israelite. Get that out of your mind. That is not what He is saying here.

Do you know what He is saying? He is saying this: He is bringing the Israelite and the Gentile together and He melts them both down and puts them together into one. That is a wholly different picture altogether. Look at that. "[T]o create in Himself one new man from the two." From two, you make one. You melt them down and mix them together because neither one of them is any good.

We have got to begin to approach our relationships with one another from that standpoint. The Israelite should have an advantage because of his introduction to God, at least being introduced in terms of having the Word of God, having the covenants of God, those kinds of things available. But to whom much is given, from him much is required, and the Israelites squandered their advantage. So the Israelite is no better.

What God is doing is melting them both down and a new man, one new man, is being created. Notice the term "created"? A Master Craftsman, an Artisan, is at work on all of us. He instructs us. He chastens us. He does whatever is necessary to blend us all together into the image of what? Into the image of the one thing that we have in common—Jesus Christ. Not an image of an Israelite, not an image of a Gentile, but the image is of Jesus Christ. That is the direction that we are headed.

Ephesians 2:16-18 And that He might reconcile them both to God in one body [that body of course being the church] through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.

Now Christ is preached (verse 17). He came and preached. He did not do it Himself specifically, but He did it through His apostles, evangelists, and pastors, and so forth, and they preached to the people the truth of God, and through the truth of God, the Great God, the Creator, was revealed and they were led to Jesus Christ by the Spirit. One Spirit.

A fellowship is open as the result of the Spirit working in the lives of the ministry, the Spirit working in the lives of the hearers who are turning and responding and accepting Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 2:19 Now, therefore [here is the result], you are no longer strangers and foreigners . . .

No longer are you underprivileged, no longer are you cut off from God, no longer are you cut off from the household of Israel, not this time the physical nation of Israel. Now it is the Israel of God, the church, the body of Christ.

Ephesians 2:19 . . . but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God. [Brought into a family.]

A little bit earlier I mentioned that the two are being melted down into one. Do you realize what is happening? Formerly, before God began to work in this way, there were two kinds of people on earth. We might call them the converted and unconverted. But let us be a little bit more specific. In the context of Ephesians 2, the two kinds of people were Israelites and Gentiles. But when you understand verses 16-20, He is saying now a third class of people is arising. There is the Gentile. There is the Israelite. And there is the Christian—the new man.

This is what God is creating. He is creating a family. He is creating a nation. He is creating something that is unique on the earth. He is creating a family that gets along with each other. I will tell you, that would be unique. That is different in the histories of man, and you understand that there are no wars (when we consider families as being nations, families grown great) that are more vicious and terrible than inter-family wars called civil wars.

God is creating a family that gets along with each other and it begins with the acceptance of the blood of Jesus Christ. It begins there, but God expects that it is not going to end there. God expects that because of the fellowship that we have with Him through Jesus Christ that that fellowship will begin to expand out through the others that He is calling as we begin to have more and more things in common. It begins with the Spirit of God working with the person and eventually that Spirit being in a person.

Now we play a major role here because we have choices to make in regard to the use of the truth that God gives to us. But let us continue on. Notice the creative terms:

Ephesians 2:20-22 Having been built [workmanship, built, created] on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus

Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a habitation of God in the Spirit.

In verse 18, and again in verse 22, the Holy Spirit is mentioned. This creating, this building, this growing that He is talking about here is a process by which we come to have more and more in common so that there can be a continuing fellowship, and the Holy Spirit is the, I will use the term "mechanism," by which this is accomplished.

The eradication of all the differences that we bring with us into the church and the building of the commonality is primarily the creative work of God. He is the Artisan who is at work and we are being created in Christ Jesus into a fellowship that is so close that it is likened to a family.

Everybody knows that families have things in common. It begins with a biological affinity, and we know that the children of a mother and a father are even more genetically close than the parents are. What are we called in the church? Brothers and sisters.

Families have looks in common, do they not? Families have practices in common, do they not? All those kinds of things. That is what makes them a family—what they have in common. So God has to build a commonality in order to give us the family, and therefore the fellowship that is going to enable us to continue and fellowship with Him and with others.

Let us go to II Corinthians 5:17. We will look at this quickly just to add some emphasis to the fact that this is what is going on, this creative effort.

II Corinthians 5:17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. Now all things are of God. . . .

Please connect this in thought to the theme that I have been following here. There is one source that is producing the commonality that makes us a family, and that one source is God. It is His truth. God is the personality that is guiding and directing this. He is engineering it. He is creating it. The Holy

Spirit is the means by which it is being accomplished. All of the teaching is being funneled from the Father through the Son, Jesus Christ, and out to the church by means of the Holy Spirit, and that teaching is His truth.

We hold a critical position in all of this because we have the power to accept or reject that truth and it is the acceptance or rejection of the truth of God which is going to mean that we are going to have greater and better fellowship. We are going to be more and more a part of the family or we are going to be less and less a part of it. That is the critical factor in all of this.

God is faithful. God has done what He has done. He has initiated the contact. He has made the bridging of the gap possible through Jesus Christ. He has given us the mechanism by which it can be accomplished, and now the critical part is in our hands in yielding to the truth that He gives to us. If we do that, then God's creative efforts are not going to be frustrated.

I Corinthians 15:49 And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man.

Here we come to the end of the process and it is encompassed in just a brief phrase. We were born into the human family and we have borne the image of that family in which we have been born and all of us have humanity in common. All of us have the human spirit. We might be different ethnically. We might be different from the person who is sitting next to you, but now in Christ Jesus He is building a commonality. That commonality is intended by God to be used by us to increase the fellowship with Him, and to increase and deepen the respect and fellowship that we have for one another until we come to bear the image of the heavenly. And then of course the fellowship will be in totality. That is where we are headed.

I have gone through all of this in order that we might see that the key ingredient, the mechanism for the understanding of truth and the use of truth, is the Holy Spirit.

Mankind can have truth. All of you are well aware that there are a lot more intelligent people out there than we can even begin to dream. They can

observe things about the creation of God. They can observe things about life and they come up with truth. They study the Bible and they come up with truth, but they simply cannot put it together in the right way.

But God by His Holy Spirit has enabled us to put it together so we see not only the purpose, we also see the plan. We not only see the purpose and the plan, but we are also able to yield to it in a way that these people cannot, and we make it a part of our life, and we begin to live by faith. We need to go on. It is a never-ending process of growth that is taking place within us.

Now what we were explaining here out of John 16 is the mechanism by which this is accomplished through the Holy Spirit.

John 16:13 However, when it, the Spirit of truth, has come, it will guide you into all truth; for it will not speak on its own authority, but whatever it hears it will speak; and it will tell you things to come.

We found that there are three steps here that Jesus explains. It is going to convict the world of sin and of righteousness (verse 8), and of judgment. The key word here is *convict*. It has the force in the English of our words cross-examine. It has the sense of cross-examining until one sees and admits his errors and acknowledges the truth of his opponent's arguments. In this case, the opponent is the Word of God, and we have to be moved to come to the place where we are convicted that we are wrong and He is right.

I read to you out of the *New English Bible* and they translated that word convict into the English word confute and that means to overwhelm in argument. What God by His Holy Spirit does is He presents us with arguments in such a way (coming from the truth of His Word, from our own experiences, He brings these things together in our mind by His Spirit) where we are backed into a corner and we have to accept the proposition that we are sinners. We need to change our lives or our lives are not going to continue very long, and there is a better way of living and that that way of living is His way of living. Then what do we do? We repent.

What we are going to see here is that all three of these points are in one sense the same thing. They are all tied together. They are all linked. They have a commonality that runs through them.

The first one has to do with conviction of sin. I said the Holy Spirit acts very much like Nathan did in the episode with David. David sinned and David undoubtedly knew the truth of what he had done, however the impact of it never hit him until about nine months later when he was confronted by Nathan with a very logical and forceful and simple argument and he said, "David, you are the man." "Uhhhh," David said, "That's right." And he saw it. And what did he do? He repented.

Out of that came the beautiful Psalm 51, for he says, "Against You and You only have I sinned and done this evil in Your sight." That is what the Holy Spirit does with us. That is why you are here. The Holy Spirit was used by God to bring you to the place where you were willing to admit that you were wrong and there was something better to do. So you admitted your sins before God because of the force of God's argument.

I showed you that the Jews did not understand when they killed Jesus. This is admitted by Peter in chapter 3, that they did it in ignorance. The apostle Paul said that he did what he did in persecuting the church in ignorance. What brought about the change? The Holy Spirit did. Those multitudes of people who were part and parcel of putting Jesus to death, they repented on the day of Pentecost when God poured out His Spirit on mankind, or shortly thereafter anyway.

The same process has continued until it got to you. God began to work with you and He began to bring you toward His Family.

Let us go on to the second point where it says that He is going to convict the world of righteousness. What it does (if I can put it in another word) is it convicts us that what Jesus said and did was right. Think about this. Jesus was to the Jews of His day a dangerous and an evil heretic. He was tried for blasphemy, found guilty, convicted, and crucified as a criminal.

To the Romans, He was a dangerous character. They were not real sure about Him (in the person of Pontius Pilate), but he was convinced that He was possibly a revolutionary and He was executed as a criminal. This is how men at their worst have looked at Jesus Christ.

To many, many others He was a nice fellow who went around doing good, or He was nothing more than a historical personage about whom they have heard, or He was somebody that we heard about in Sunday school, but we do not really understand very much of.

I do not know where you fit in all of that scenario, but what is it that changed your opinion of Him so that now you look upon Him as your Savior, as the one Person who has ever lived, of all the billions on earth, upon whom salvation of ourselves and the whole world depends? It is the Holy Spirit that enables you to see Christ in that way.

And it is by means of the Holy Spirit that we are made aware of this holiness. It brings us into a sense of awe and admiration, coupled with the desire to be like it. It is not just enough to recognize that this "thing," this God, this Holy God, is something that is good. The Holy Spirit also imparts to us the beginning of the desire to be like that as well.

We must be made aware of this before we can even begin to become aware of our sinfulness. We have to be able to see the true standard of righteousness, because if we do not, if we are not brought to that place, human nature is so deceitful it is going to force us to compare ourselves with some other human being.

“Oh I'm not so bad. Look at what Adolph Hitler did. Look at what Joseph Stalin did. Look at what Attila the Hun did. I'm not like them. Look at all these druggies out here, mainlining, shooting it up in their veins. They're not only destroying their bodies and minds, they are out robbing banks so that they can . . . I'm not like them. Therefore I'm pretty good." Or, "I'm just as good as that fellow down the street who's a banker. He's an upright citizen. He pays his taxes. He's not getting into trouble with the law. He's not a common criminal, and I'm just like he is.”

We can come up with endless rationalizations. We have to be able to see something that is so great, so good, so pure, so transcendent, that regardless of how good we *think* we are, we pale into insignificance against this awesome purity of transcendent goodness. The Holy Spirit does that.

Normally if we were brought into that position, we might quail before Him. What the Holy Spirit does is it makes us love it. It makes us want to be like it, to have that in common because it would be very easy to be repulsed by absolute purity and righteousness.

I will bet you, people felt guilty around Christ. He convicted them just by the fact that He was there. Something has to overcome that. It is God's Holy Spirit.

What we are beginning to get into here are elements of the grace of God. This is all the work of God by giving us the Holy Spirit to enable us to begin to see these things.

I John 3:1 Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him.

I John 3:4-5 Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness. And you know that He was manifested [He was brought into the world, made visible, as it were, to us] to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin.

Now if this does not impress you, then I would begin to wonder whether I was converted. "In Him there is no sin." That is awesome for anybody who understands the sin that dwells in us.

We need to begin to see even some of this. We cannot see it in its fullness. I think we understand that. We could not stand it. But the Holy Spirit enables us to see enough of it so that we see that we are falling far short of it and that we need to make a change. We cannot repent until we are able to compare ourselves with the standard of righteousness and to admire it and to love it so much we want to be like it. It is part of God's grace that He gives us His Spirit to enable this to be built within us.

Let us carry this a little bit further.

Hebrews 9:14 How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

Without spot! Now holding on to that thought, let us go to chapter 4.

Hebrews 4:14-15 Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.

Do you see the way the Bible presents this absolute standard of righteousness? It is presented to you and me not as something that is perfect afar off, but rather as a life spent as a human being lived to absolute perfection. It is something that we can relate to. That absolute standard of righteousness is God in the flesh.

Otherwise we could always excuse ourselves and say, "Well that's the way God is. He was not tempted the way men were." But God squashes that argument and He said, "My Son did it for thirty-three and one-half years and He never sinned."

That standard of righteousness is not presented to us as something that is just distant and pure and holy, but also presented to us as a life that was lived in absolute holiness and sinlessness. That brings it right home.

The second thing the Holy Spirit does is it not only convicts us of our sin, but it also convicts us of the absolute standard of righteousness for men being in a life that was lived. The life of Jesus Christ. Let us not forget. Why is God doing this? He is doing this so that there can be fellowship with Him. So that there can be fellowship with others of the same mind so that He, by His creative energies, can create a whole new family of beings that are like Him.

The third thing that the Holy Spirit convicts us of is judgment (John 16:8). Judgment occurs when a thought or action is evaluated against an absolute principle. We are talking about biblically here. The judgment occurs when a thought or action is evaluated against an absolute principle.

When human sin, or the human condition, is confronted by Christ's righteousness, condemnation occurs, judgment occurs. It carries this a little bit further because Satan is mentioned, the prince of this world. The ruler of this world is actually the way it is translated in my *New King James* and this has to be taken into consideration.

The king of sin—the very prince of sin—has been convicted and judged and defeated by Christ through the crucifixion and the resurrection. We have to understand that the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ is able to defeat all sin done by those who are lesser than the king of sin. This means, therefore, that Christ's death and resurrection is sufficient to pay for all the sins of all of mankind for all time—including yours.

Not only are we brought to condemnation, but we are also given the hope to know that because Christ did this, we can judge that our sins can be covered. We are not left without hope in the face of this onslaught of truth before which we may quail having been brought into condemnation through the cross-examination of God's Spirit and having to judge our lives, our actions, our thoughts, against the absolute standard of righteousness in the flesh, Jesus Christ.

The Holy Spirit then not only brings us the condemnation, it also gives us the hope to know that there is more and good beyond this. The crucifixion and resurrection play a very, very large part in this.

I Peter 4:17 is where it says judgment is now on the house of God. We are still on this theme of judgment and judgment is on the church. I want us to turn to II Corinthians 5:9-11, and let us make this very personal.

II Corinthians 5:9-11 Therefore we make it our [Christians'] aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done,

whether good or bad. Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are well known to God, and I also trust are well known in your consciences.

The Holy Spirit gives us the unshakeable conviction that we must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. So we have a mix of feelings, understandings, truths, that are working together in our minds; all of it patterned or produced by God by means of His Spirit to get us motivated to move toward fellowship with Him that can open up fellowship to others through which the creative process that He is working can be brought to pass. He throws a little fear into the game too. We are going to have to answer for the way that we use our lives.

We see God working every angle. He gives us hope of the resurrection, but yet the fear of judgment. He gives us a tremendous standard of righteousness that seems far out of reach, but yet on the other hand He gives us His Spirit so that we want to be like that, and we are not intimidated by it, and yet we are impressed by it. We say, "I want to be that way." All these things are gifts from Him by means of His Spirit.

These things are part of the true knowledge of God, and this true knowledge of God is central to life because that knowledge will determine character, and character determines conduct, conduct determines the quality of life, and eternal life is first of all quality of life. God uses the Holy Spirit in us to work to change our conscience and character.

God's responsibility in this is clear. That is to bring about in us (those that He is calling) an attitude of acceptance of truth. Or we might say that God, by His Spirit, leads us to a recognition of truth and this, of course, then leads us to repentance, and repentance is change, or the beginning of change.

Matthew 18:1-4 At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" [Now here comes a truth, a true principle.] Then Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them, and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted [changed, turned about] and become

as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."

I do not think I need to carry it any further—"unless we turn." In life what we do is pretty much determined by what we are aiming at. If you aim to be a pilot you do in your life things that will enable you to become a pilot. If you want to be an engineer, you do the things that will make you become an engineer. You get the principle.

What is it that you are aiming at? Are you aiming at the Kingdom of God? That is the question. Is that the overriding concern in our life, to be in the Kingdom of God?

If we really want to be in the Kingdom of God, then we will do what is necessary to be in the Kingdom of God. We just got a true principle from Jesus Christ about how to be there. He said, "Unless you are converted [unless you turn, unless you change your aim in life] and become like a little child."

Look at Jesus. He was God incarnate, born to be a King, and yet He made Himself of no reputation and became a servant. Herein lies a key that dovetails with becoming converted and being like a little child. To be a citizen, to be one of the household of God (I should say to be a citizen in the Kingdom) involves this principle that we are talking about here in Matthew 18:1-4. It involves almost forgetting the self. I say "almost" because God does permit us to love ourselves as much as we love others. We do have to take care of ourselves, but I think you get the idea. It involves the spending of self in a life which aims at service and not at power.

Look at the illustration. How much power does a kid have? As far as society is concerned, a kid has no power at all. A child has no conscious thought of being great. He may act like he is great because he has not been well-trained, well-raised, but he does not have the capacity to think of himself as being great. That is the point here. The point here is: what do we think about ourselves? What we think about ourselves is going to determine very greatly whether or not we are headed toward the Kingdom of God. That is what Jesus is talking about.

The most insignificant member of society is a child. What can they do? What can they produce? They are not trained for anything. Their intellect is not developed. They are not even in school yet. They have not learned their numbers. They do not know how to read or write. They cannot produce a thing as far as society is concerned. They are nothing more than, let us say, a necessary evil because they are the next generation.

Are we getting the point of what it is that aims us toward the Kingdom of God? It has everything to do with what we think about ourselves. We have got to be able to make use of these principles that are in John 16. So we connect this to this to give us the right aim. It has everything to do with what we think about ourselves.

We understand that what we are talking about here is not possible of and by ourselves. See, God by His grace, by His Spirit, by the gift of leading us and guiding us, puts us into the position where we can make the proper choices. He gives us hints along the way, like this one about being a child. Make yourself insignificant.

If you are insignificant you think of yourself as essentially weak, in the right kind of way, and therefore you are willing to cooperate. You do not compete, you cooperate. You are not trying to be the head; you are trying to serve.

This begins to have very interesting practical ramifications and it is the key to the right kind of fellowship—what we think of ourselves in relation to others. A person who is childlike is not going to try to take over. He is not going to exert his will against others. You begin to understand that what this childlike person does is he uses all of his efforts and energies to clear the way so that others will be able to grow in grace and knowledge. He will clear the path, as it were, for the spiritual growth of others, and he will not be getting in the way, trying to cut them off.

Jesus is saying that unless we are prepared to be insignificant like a child, we are aiming at the wrong thing because from the kingdom of heaven those who are proudly self-sufficient are excluded.

One more thing. Notice it is a choice. He is not telling us that this is something that happens by magic (this turning, this conversion), ". . . unless you are converted." We know that He is talking in principle here about humility. James 4:7 and I Peter 5:5-6 show very clearly that humility is a choice.

I do not think that we can be truly humble until we have true choices to make. A choice between the truth of God and what our flesh or what society or what the world might ordinarily say, "This is the way to go." Then we have the choice of whether we are going to take the childlike way, the humble way, or are we going to go the way of the world, which is essentially the self-centered, narcissistic, self-indulgent, self-centered way?

Israel did not have a choice like we do. Deuteronomy 29:4 said that God never gave them the Spirit by which they might be able to do these things. But you see He has given to us the Spirit and we are in a position where much of this responsibility is now on us.

I think that this is about a good of a place as any to stop. I will not not be continuing this series directly next week because I have already planned out next week's sermon. But you are going to find when you hear it that it is somewhat connected to this series regarding truth.

Please let me just restate something here at the end of this series. If there is anything that I want us to get out of this series that I have given [this is it]: You will recall that it was about ten sermons ago that I began on Satan ["Satan (Part One)"], and I did that with forethought because Satan has deceived the whole world and he has done his job remarkably well so that when God begins to reveal His truth to us we have a very difficult time with it. In many cases the easiest part of this whole process is conversion at the very beginning—getting started.

The more difficult times come as we go along the way toward the Kingdom of God because what happens is that we have a tendency to let down. That is a natural thing to do, and human nature begins to subtly rear its head. Remember Romans 7, where Paul said that sin still worked in him, and the way that it does it—Remember Jeremiah 17:9: "The heart is deceitful above

all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?"—is that it deceives us into glossing over sin. And what it is effectively doing is it is getting us to lie to ourselves that everything is okay as it is. As long as we are in that mode, we will not grow.

Answer this question: Are you honestly as righteous as God? Are you as righteous as Jesus Christ was in the flesh? We have a long way to go. Do not allow sin in you, do not allow that human nature, do not allow it to deceive you into thinking that things are okay. There are many, many areas in which all of us (including yours truly) can improve. We can improve a great deal.

Do not lie to yourself. I think that is the most deceptive lie there is.