

Forms Vs. Spirituality (Part 6)

Making Righteous Judgments

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We are going to begin this sermon by turning to John 7:21-24. This takes place during a Feast of Tabernacles, which was about six months prior to Christ's crucifixion. I think that you are all fairly familiar with the context in which this occurs, and true to form, Jesus ran into a controversy with the people standing around there in regard to something He had done.

John 7:21-24 Jesus answered and said unto them, I have done one work, and you all marvel. Moses therefore gave unto you circumcision; (not because it is of Moses, but of the fathers;) and you on the Sabbath day circumcise a man. If a man on the Sabbath day receive circumcision, that the law of Moses should not be broken; are you angry at me, because I have made a man every whit whole on the Sabbath day? Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment.

When I began this series all the way back in mid-April, I had an overall purpose in mind, and that was that we would have a better chance of making righteous judgments. As you can see in this situation Jesus was criticized for something that He did because His critics *thought* that He had violated the Sabbath law. His response was that they should judge righteous judgment, because as it turns out, *they* were the ones who were guilty. They were guilty of making a superficial judgment of Him because of their inability to understand what is of greater importance in God's eyes.

The healing that is referred to here is the one that occurred in John 5, and it occurred on a holy day. It occurred on a Sabbath, and therefore that brought the use of the Sabbath into question.

Circumcision is drawn into the issue by Christ as an illustration to show the relative importance of matters of law. Which is more important on the Sabbath—to submit to a ritual (albeit a very important one) or to submit to

the law of mercy through making this infirm man physically whole? There is the issue. The specific situation is not one that we are going to be very frequently confronted with, but it does provide a clear illustration that not everything in God's purpose has the same value toward eternal life. Jesus obviously made a difference.

Circumcision was a matter of law, and mercy (remember from Matthew 23: 23) is also a matter of law. It is one of the weightier matters of law. If you can see in the comparison Jesus made between circumcision and mercy, Jesus held mercy to be greater than circumcision. Righteous judgment has its basis in law, and understanding how to judge righteously sometimes involves this principle that I am striving to get across to you through these five sermons, and now a sixth one.

Brethren, sometimes my illustrations are not as clear as they should be, and sometimes I stumble along trying to make this thing clear. Sometimes I am confronted with stares or hard looks from the congregation because you are not getting it. I know and understand that we are getting into some deep, deep doo-doo here every once in awhile, if you understand what I mean.

But not everything in God's purpose has the same value. Just as with man's law, some things are more important than others with God's law. Man's government, like God's, has laws that say "You shall not kill." Surely you will agree that this law is more important than one that says we should not park our automobile in a certain area or maybe in a certain area at a certain time. But if there is an overriding reason to break the parking law in order to keep a more important law—a higher law—should we not break the lower law?

Jesus was not encouraging anybody to break the circumcision law. He was only saying that making a person whole is more important than circumcision, even though the Sabbath is involved.

Our judgment affects our choices, and I think we can understand how important our choices are. We have seen that not all things pertaining to law, sin, righteousness, and holiness are equal. There are sins that do not bring the

death penalty. Illustrations are given in the Old Covenant laws pertaining to accidental death. We have seen that justice, mercy, and faithfulness, or fidelity, are *greater* matters of law than scrupulously tithing in a bad attitude.

We have seen that a wrong approach to law can lead a person to strain at a gnat while swallowing a camel. That is, making a big deal of a minor issue while overlooking a major sin, and maybe even sinning as a result.

What this does, brethren, is greatly elevate the importance of our relationships with others in regard to such things as kindness, tactfulness, goodness, faithfulness, self-control, and civility. Do you know what those things are? They are all aspects of love. They are all aspects of the fruit of God's Spirit, and these are the very things that God wants to produce in us.

We also saw that all biblical law hangs on the Ten Commandments. It is just another way of saying that the Ten Commandments supersede, are greater than, all other laws. It is just another way of saying that all other laws only make sense to God's purpose when they are viewed through the Ten Commandments.

We have seen that love is the greatest of all attributes of God, and the one that we are to seek above all others. Love is defined as "keeping the commandments"—the Ten Commandments.

We saw that even a harlot can be considered a holy woman, and thus holiness too must be understood within its specific context, or our judgment of it can easily become too generalized. Do you know what happens? Righteous judgment suffers.

In this sermon we are going to return to the verses which precipitated this whole series. Before we do that, I want to show you two practical examples that occurred in Jesus' life of the use of the principles involved in this series of sermons. Both of these occurred on the same occasion. What we have here are two situations where differing laws, or requirements of God, were brought into conflict with each other. As you can understand you are going to be able to see clearly that judgment had to be made as to which law was greater—which law was to be obeyed, and which law disobeyed.

Matthew 12:1-4 At that time Jesus went on the Sabbath day through the corn; and his disciples were an hungred, and began to pluck the ears of corn and to eat. But when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto him, Behold, your disciples do that which is not lawful to do upon the Sabbath day. [The accusation was that they were sinning.] But he said unto them, Have you not read what David did, when he was an hungred, and they that were with him; how he entered into the house of God, and did eat the showbread, which was not lawful for him to eat, neither for them which were with him, but only for the priests?

What does that tell you about David? David had God's Holy Spirit. David was able to perceive righteous judgment. The bread in question was the showbread. The showbread was inside the Holy Place, sitting on a table. As you entered the Holy Place, it was on the right-hand side of you, sitting on the table—12 loaves, one for each tribe of Israel. That bread was replaced every Sabbath day, and believe it or not brethren, it was baked on the Sabbath day, something normally unlawful. It was put out fresh on the Sabbath day for the meeting with God. There would be fresh bread there.

David was hungry. He was being chased by Saul. You can go back to I Samuel 21, and see the exact example. David went in and asked the high priest for the bread, and it was given to him. The high priest understood, too. Incidentally, that bread was only for the priests. That is what the law said. They were the only ones allowed to eat it.

Now Jesus offers a second illustration in verse 5.

Matthew 12:5 Or have you not read in the law, how that on the Sabbath days the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless?

Shall I put that into common terms? The priests broke the fourth commandment, and God did not hold them guilty. Does not the fourth commandment say *You shall not do any work*? Well, here they were, baking bread, among other things. They were lifting up huge loads of meat from the sacrifices, throwing it on the altar, and burning it before God.

Matthew 12:6-7 But I say unto you that in this place is one greater than the temple. [Meaning Himself.] But if you had known what this means, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, you would not have condemned the guiltless.

We see there that mercy is greater. You can see a judgment was made as to which was greater, and the greater law had to be obeyed, and the lesser law disobeyed. So Jesus then showed that in a case of necessity—that is, the one with David—the law of mercy overrode the ceremonial law in regard to the use of the tabernacle bread.

Similarly, in spite of the Sabbath commandment prohibiting work, the necessities of temple worship demanded the work of the priests in the temple as a service to the worshippers and to God, and so prohibition that appears in the fourth commandment against work is overridden by the greater necessity (to say it in modern terms) of church service.

Brethren, we find the same general principle of judgment at work in I Corinthians 8-10, and Romans 14. We are not going to turn to them. Eating meats offered to idols was expressly forbidden in Acts 15, and yet we find members in a Gentile city were now lawfully eating it. Paul said "Go ahead. Do not ask any questions for conscience sake." He was not encouraging them to do it, but nonetheless permission was granted.

The spin-off from this was that some people were being offended because of the source of the meat, so Paul made a judgment, and that judgment is spelled out in I Corinthians 8. He said that the idol is nothing, because the demon behind the idol cannot defile us. But on the other hand, inoffensive fellowship within the church community is greater than a law which permits liberty; that is, the liberty of eating things offered in sacrifice to an idol. Brethren, now a principle of judgment begins to arise. Obedience to which law has the greater impact on eternity is the one you follow. Obedience to which law expresses the greater in terms of love to my fellowman is the one which gets the obedience.

I Corinthians 7:19 Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God [is everything].

The words "is everything" in brackets was used in order to finish the thought. Paul makes a comparison. "Circumcision is nothing, uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments is *everything*."

The major issues in the New Testament are that salvation is by grace through faith, and its companion, growing in grace and the knowledge of Jesus Christ. That second one we might title or name *holiness*—growing into holiness. We might call it sanctification, or overcoming, so that we might be in the image of God.

The issue in the New Testament under the New Covenant is *not* doing away with laws as if they no longer exist or serve no purpose to salvation. Of importance to both of these issues—*salvation is by grace through faith*, and *growing in grace and the knowledge of Jesus Christ*—is learning to discern the relative importance of the spiritual as compared to the physical.

Under the New Covenant, even something as important as circumcision has so little spiritual significance that Paul was inspired to write **three times** in the Scripture that it, or they, are nothing. The history that is recorded in the Old Testament has proved that circumcision has no spiritual effect on one's relationship with God. I mean, how many centuries of history of Israel under the Old Covenant do we have in this book? Did circumcision change them? Why did not circumcision change them? I have given the answer a couple of times. Jesus gave the answer in Mark 7:18.

Mark 7:18-19 And he said unto them, Are you so without understanding also? Do you not perceive, that whatsoever thing from without enters into the man, it cannot defile him; because it enters not into his *heart*

Circumcising a little boy when he is eight days old does not change the boy's heart. It never has, and it never will. I do not care whether a proselyte was circumcised at age 32 or 92, it does not change the heart. It is what goes *into the heart* that changes a person. Now notice also, we could go on again to show the relative value of things.

Mark 7:19-20 Because it enters not into his heart, but into the belly, and goes out into the draught, purging all meats? And he said, that which comes out of the man, that defiles the man.

What we are looking at here is the essence of human sin. It is not the thing, but the *use* of the thing that defiles a person. It is what a person produces *from*, not what enters *in*, that is the essence of human sin. This is a huge principle, and it appears in such a common everyday subject. Protestantism has really stumbled over this thing. Now "keeping the commandments" is everything. They are the all-important matter as far as law is concerned. Now why? Because they affect character and relationships, and therefore eternity, on a daily basis.

We are going to look at a couple of scriptures that are going to lead into something here. First of all John 4:23-24. Jesus is making an announcement early in His ministry. He is talking to the woman at the well.

John 4:23-24 But the hour comes, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeks such to worship him. God is a Spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.

This will tie to things that come along later. Let us go to Romans 2. We will read through this to pick up the essence of the teaching that is here.

Romans 2:25-26 For circumcision verily profits, if you keep the law: but if you be a breaker of the law, your circumcision is made uncircumcision. Therefore if the uncircumcision [the Gentiles] keep the righteousness of the law [if they keep the commandments], shall not his uncircumcision be counted for circumcision?

The answer to that is yes, because he is obeying the most meaningful part of the law. He is obeying that which affects our relationship with God and other men on a daily basis, and he is not even circumcised.

Romans 7:27-29 And shall not uncircumcision which is by nature, if it fulfill the law, judge you, who by the letter and circumcision does transgress the law? [Speaking to the Jews] For he is not a Jew which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.

A true Jew—a true spiritual person—is one that has something happen to his heart, not some external part of his body.

Romans 3:1-2 What advantage then has the Jew? Or what profit is there of circumcision? Much every way; chiefly because that unto them were committed the oracles of God.

Let me tell you something. What Paul has just said here in regard to circumcision, that same principle is just as true in regard to Passover, to the laying on of hands, to baptism, because what good are they if one does not obey the Ten Commandments? Zilch! Nada! Nothing! On our part, brethren, the keeping of the commandments is the keystone of our responsibility to God in terms of response to Him.

Remember I told you in another sermon that that word *circumcision* includes a great deal more of the Old Testament law than just the cutting off of a piece of skin. It actually represents an entire theology. So many of the other things of God represented by circumcision, if obeyed, will contribute greatly to an abundant life, but they bear little significance towards spiritual salvation; thus they are on a lower level than the things of the spirit. The things of the spirit are those things which enter into the heart.

Now you believe this, do you not, because I do not see a single one of you wearing fringes on your garments? Because something has entered your heart, you do not need the fringes! The fringes have been replaced by God's Holy Spirit, and that is what changes us, not fringes.

Let us go now John 6. I am turning to this because I want you to see out of Jesus' own mouth He is showing that everything in God's Word is not on the same level. We always go through portions of this chapter at Passover. The people say:

John 6:31-32 Our fathers did eat manna in the desert; as it is written, He gave them bread from heaven to eat. Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven. But my Father gives you the true bread from heaven.

He is making a comparison between the physical and the spiritual. The one is greater than the other.

John 6:33 For the bread of God is he which comes down from heaven, [meaning Himself—the Word of God] and gives life.

Tell me something brethren. Did the manna that the Israelites ate in the wilderness give them the kind of life that Jesus is talking about here? Of course it did not! Which one is of greater importance? What Jesus gave, or what Moses gave? That is the essence of this whole chapter.

John 6:34-35 Then said they unto him, Lord, evermore give us this bread. [They recognized what He was getting to. They wanted it!] And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that comes to me shall never hunger; and he that believes on me shall never thirst.

So Jesus is here making an obvious comparison between Himself and Moses, and between the New Covenant and the Old Covenant, between spiritual works and the carnal.

John 6:28-30 Then said they unto him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that you believe on him whom he has sent. They said therefore unto him, What sign show you then, that we may see, and believe you? What do you work?

What is it? What is the work of God? It is *faith*! God is working to build faith, because that is exceedingly important to His purpose.

John 6:47-50 Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believes on me has everlasting life. I am the bread of life. Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This [meaning Himself] is the bread which comes down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die.

Brethren, can you see what Jesus is doing here? He is putting one scripture in relation to other scriptures, and He is showing that His Word is greater than Moses'. What Moses wrote in scripture is true, but it is not as important as what comes through Christ.

John 6:49 Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead.

It means that they went to their graves without any hope of eternal life.

John 6:59-63 These things said he in the synagogue, as he taught in Capernaum. Many therefore of his disciples, when they had heard this, said, This is an hard saying, who can hear it? [They did not get it.] When Jesus knew in himself that his disciples murmured at it, he said unto them, Does this offend you? What and if you shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before? [Now here it comes:] It is the spirit that quickens. The flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak unto, they are spirit, and they are life.

Things of the spirit—spiritual things—give life. Circumcision is nothing. Uncircumcision is nothing. "If you will enter into life," Jesus said, "keep the commandments." Which is higher, brethren?

You will never understand very much of the book of Hebrews until you understand John 6, because the writer of Hebrews used the same formula to write Hebrews, and it is brilliant! The basic theme that goes through the entire book of Hebrews is "Christ is greater than angels." Jesus Christ is

superior to everything except the Father. You can follow this chapter by chapter.

Hebrews 2: His message is the greatest message that has ever been heard.

Hebrews 3: Christ is greater than Moses.

Hebrews 5: Christ is greater than Aaron.

Hebrews 8: The New Covenant is greater than the Old Covenant.

Hebrews 9 and 10: His death is greater than all the sacrifices combined.

Christ's message *is* the spirit of the gospel essence of it, and it is what gives life. Moses' message—that is, what God inspired Moses—was fine, and it truly adds to a person's life, but only after one first really understands Christ's message. Once you understand Christ's message, Christ's teachings, His death, His example, it puts the right spin on everything. This is one of the major things that is meant by His magnifying the law and making it honorable. Jesus Christ clarified where everything fits, and He sets its level of importance to God's purpose.

In referring back to I Corinthians 7:19, judging by Paul's use of the term "circumcision is nothing," you can see in that verse that the Ten Commandments—God's spiritual and moral law—stand virtually alone in terms of their spiritual importance. Everything else, by no means done away, is of lower importance to God's spiritual purpose, and in some cases very much lower.

Let me ask a question. What is the real value of the food laws? Now think of this. Physical food feeds our bodies. It helps in its maintenance. It gives us energy, and it gives us enjoyment. Now therein lies the spiritual parallel. Physical food is a major part of life to us physically, but Jesus said, "The words that I speak unto you, they are life." They are eternal life. They are a quality of life and a length of life that can be had nowhere else. This is what feeds us spiritually. This is what enters into our heart—His Words!

Jesus Christ—the Word of God—compared Himself to manna—the living bread which came down from heaven. His Word is what enters into the mind. *It* is what is important to eternal life, and we are to strive to make that word as pure, clean, and wholesome as possible. Now, does this do away with the food laws? Not on your life! It also says we are not supposed to defile the temple of God's Spirit, but it does show us which is more significant to eternal life.

In I Corinthians 8, Paul said that physical food does not commend us to God. There is no spiritual value there. It does not make us the better or the worse. Does that do away with food laws? Of course not. He is just putting the right spin on it. Far greater is God's law, God's Word. He also said in Romans 14 that the Kingdom of God is not food and drink. Let us update that. He said, "Let's get real as to what is really important!"

Philippians 4:8 Finally brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.

How can we meditate on these things if they are not there? Let us just take this to an extreme. The mind thinks on what it takes in. Physically, you are pretty much what you eat, and mentally, spiritually, morally, you are what is taken into your heart. I should say here that we are not to think that the "whatsoever things" is limited to the Word of God, but "whatsoever things are true, honest" and so forth are the things we want to think about and meditate about. Those are the things we want to ingest. There is the food laws' value. It is the type, it is the symbol, it is God's command of what is to go into our minds.

What goes into our mind is what we make our decisions on. It is what affects our character, our spirituality, and is directly tied to the purity, the cleanness of what is going in. So the reason the food laws have been from the very beginning is for this very purpose. From the very beginning, God is showing

that we have to strive to put the cleanest thing into our mind as we possibly can. Garbage in, garbage out. The world in, the world out. The world's values in, the world's values out.

In many cases, when we should be reading the Bible, we instead might be reading books from this world's psychologists or psychiatrists. Instead of reading books of true and enduring quality, we read romance novels, or worse yet, comic books, or we watch television, which is just about on the same level as comic books.

I think we ought to be able to get the point, and I think that all of us, including yours truly, have a great deal to repent on in this area. Are you thinking of things that are pure, clean, wholesome, virtuous, and of good report?

The food laws, when applied in their spirit, are perhaps among the most important laws in the Bible. That is why they were from the beginning. Adam and Eve took the wrong food into their minds, and they sinned.

We are going to look at I Corinthians 1. I want you to see this as an example of the relative value or importance of things, and right out of the New Testament, but in a different kind of context.

I Corinthians 1:14-17 I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius; Lest any should say that I had baptized in mine own name. And I baptized also the household of Stephanas; besides, I know not whether I baptized any other. For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel.

That is all the further we need to go there. We have a comparison here that the apostle made between the spiritual New Covenant and the carnal, or physical, Old Covenant. Now which is more important in God's eyes? Baptism (a form, a symbol) or preaching the gospel? Paul gives the answer, and the answer ought to be plain. The thing that produced the spiritual result was more important. God did not call him to baptize. He called him to preach the gospel, and therefore Paul felt his function was to preach and to leave the baptizing to others.

If you can remember reading in Mr. Armstrong's autobiography, he was confronted with this question, and he finally came up with the answer that anyone can baptize. It does not matter who does it. What is important is that it is done the right way, and even more important than that is whether the person had ever repented.

So what is more important? That which produces the spiritual result, or a command to be baptized as a witness that one has received it, believed it, repented, and taken up the challenge of the gospel?

Can God save people without baptism? Of course He can! Can He save them without the message? No way, Jose! Nobody is changed without the message. Not everything is on the same level.

What enters into the heart—baptism or the message? Baptism is in the same category as circumcision, and so is the laying on of hands and the rituals of Passover, and so is getting rid of the leaven for the Days of Unleavened Bread. Are those things done away? Of course not! They apply to specific circumstances. Their value lies in a different area.

Maybe you can understand John 6 a little bit better. In John 6, Jesus compared His teaching the truth as compared to Moses' teaching, which was also true. But whose was more important? Moses' was of lesser value. Christ's Words are truly life. This is why Jesus said in John 4, "You don't have to worry about Jerusalem. Men are not even going to go there for worship because a greater than the temple is here."—meaning Himself as a source of spiritual food. So the temple was of no big deal.

Why did Christ not sacrifice? Because a greater sacrifice was coming, and He clearly wanted to draw attention to the supreme importance of *His* sacrifice to eternal life. Does this do away with our responsibility to be baptized, to receive the laying on of hands, or to get rid of the leaven? Of course not. These are things that God has also ordered to be done in specific, but for less important reasons. They have their value. That is why God gave them in the first place. Their major value lies in their ability to instruct us, as a symbol, to a greater realization of the realities that lie behind them.

I do not know whether you remember this illustration that I am going to give you. I have taken it from Elroy Farah's sermon he gave, I believe, on the last day of Unleavened Bread, or right around that period of time. I thought the illustration he gave was really helpful. He asked, "Do you know why God has us keep the Holy Days?" The following is the illustration that he gave. I do not know whether I have the figures exactly correct, but you will get the idea. He said, "If we hear something, after a period of time we retain ten percent of it. If we hear and *see* at the same time, we retain twenty percent. If we hear, see, and write all at the same time what we are hearing, seeing, and writing, then we retain forty percent of it. But if we hear, see, write, and *practice* what we see, hear, and write, we retain about eighty percent of it."

You see, much of the value of what was originally given in the Old Covenant lies in this area of being a helpful tool toward making the spiritual reality a part of our character, and thus the spirituality becomes a part of us. It enters into our heart.

You might recall that I said that even though the Ten Commandments are supreme over all other laws, there will always be other rules or laws covering specific areas of conduct; thus we have to get rid of the leaven during the Days of Unleavened Bread. People may think that it is a very minor affair, but practicing it helps engrave it into our heart, and especially engrave the far greater spiritual lesson behind it. In fact, in a way, it is one of the fundamentals of this way of life.

In perhaps every discipline—athletics, music, and art—I think most of us can understand that those who master the fundamentals, the basic details of their discipline, are usually the ones who succeed,

Hebrews 9:1 Then verily the first covenant had also ordinances of divine service, and a worldly [or carnal] sanctuary.

Hebrews 9:8-9 The holy spirit, this signifying, that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest, while as the first tabernacle was yet standing. [The greater had to yet to come. So what about the old one?] Which was a figure [a symbol, a type] for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and

sacrifices that could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience.

Brethren, look at the spiritual instruction that we are getting out of the sacrifices of Leviticus, which is the series that I interrupted to give this series. That is why I said what Moses was given to give us cannot really be understood without Christ's teaching. Once you have Christ's teaching you understand what the animal sacrifices were about, and it ingrains it into our heart, right into our mind, what God expects from us—the sacrifice of a living life in obedience to Him. That is what He wants. We are to be living sacrifices, giving ourselves wholly to Him. *Living* ones, not dead ones. The animals were killed so that we can understand He wants us to give our life to Him. He owns us wholly, and that is our responsibility.

Now consider another illustration. What role does music play in the worship of God? Can it save us? Not on your life! And yet, the longest book in the Bible is a book of music. Music does lift our thoughts to comprehend and appreciate divine truths. It fills us with an emotion that may motivate to the building of God's holy character in a way few things can. I will tell you, music gets to me. It helps us to see things that would otherwise be inexpressible. Music grabs at you. This conveys in a simple principle the linkage between the Old and New Testament, especially the writings of Moses.

One thing we have to watch out for is that we do not let circumcision—physical things—become either totally important or not important at all. What we have to deal with, brethren, is the spirituality behind it. Paul had to deal with it in his day, and God ordered it to be preserved in His Word. Therefore I understand it to be a human problem to let physical things become too important to us because we think somehow that they are earning brownie points with God. We should understand that food does not commend us to God. It has no inherent spiritual value.

Let us turn to Galatians 6:15. Here is the second time Paul says this.

Galatians 6:15 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision avails anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature [is everything].

For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision avails anything, nor uncircumcision, but the important thing is the new creation. I Corinthians 7:19 says that the important thing is the keeping of God's commandments. This verse is telling us that if we are ever going to be able to keep God's commandments, it will only be because we are made over again. We are a new creation.

II Corinthians 5:17 Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature. [He is a new creation.] Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

This ought to help us to begin to understand Galatians 6:15 and its application to the theme of this. First of all, in II Corinthians 5:17 the phrase "in Christ" means "to be in *union* with Christ." It means to be *joined* to Christ. However, it means more than merely being joined to in the sense of being *attached to*. It means to actually be *in* Christ. That is the metaphor—as though we are actually a cell within Christ's body. The union with Him, the unity with Him, the being a part of Him is looked upon by God as our literally being a part of the body of Jesus Christ. The union is that close.

Let us draw this a little bit finer by going to John 15:1-5.

John 15:1-2 I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that bears not fruit he takes away: and every branch that bears fruit, he purges [prunes] it, that it may bring forth more fruit.

He is the vine. The branches in this metaphor are attached to Him; totally joined with Him.

John 15:3-4 Now you are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. [Those words give life] Abide [live, continue] in me [inside of Me], and I in you [it is reciprocal]. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, accept it abide in the vine; no more can you except you abide in me.

This is a big one!

The branch cannot bear fruit of itself. Unless we are in Christ, we cannot bear the fruit of God's Spirit. It is utterly impossible. Unless we are a new creation in Christ Jesus, we will not receive the nourishment from Him, the strength from Him, the Holy Spirit from Him that will enable us to keep the commandments.

John 15:5 I am the vine, you are the branches; He that abides [continues, lives] in me, and I in him, the same brings forth much fruit: for without me you can do nothing.

Your body feeds yourself. Christ's body—being in Him—feeds us, sustains us, and keeps us alive. So when it says that *we are in Christ*, it is denoting that all of our support and strength is from Him, and that as a part of His body we also share in His well-being, His glory, His strength, His vigor, and His honor.

Brethren, it takes a stronger hand than ours to bend our will to God, but through this process we learn that it is He who has made us, and not we ourselves. In all this universe, brethren, what does God do? Is He twiddling His thumbs up there on the throne? What is God revealed as in the Bible? God is CREATOR! God is making something. God is making sons in His image.

Brethren, if you do not get anything at all out of these sermons, please get this: Salvation is something that is done *to us*! That is why salvation is of grace. We cannot re-create ourselves. The new creation is **everything!** Unless God is working His creation in us, we will never keep His commandments. *He* is the source of the strength. I will tell you, you had better do something about your relationship with Him, because that is where all the goodies are.

Ephesians 2:8-10 For by grace are you saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in **Christ Jesus**, unto good works, which God has before ordained that we should walk in them.

There is a reason for our being created in Christ Jesus. The purpose is to prepare us to do good works. Brethren, where does the strength to do good works come from? It comes from our Father in heaven. We are *His* creation.

Brethren, the gifts do not end with the gift of Christ's life so that we have entrance to the Father. The changes taking place in us do not earn salvation. They are an effect. They are the effect of what God is doing. It is the result of His Spirit being given, and His work in us. Our responsibility in this whole thing seems so huge to you and me, but it is so tiny. All He wants us to do is yield His Word, and He will do the rest. He even gives us the strength to yield. He leads us to repentance. He gives us the spirit. It is His love that is shed abroad in our hearts.

This next verse is so beautiful.

Ephesians 4:23-24 And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that you put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.

What is happening to you and me is a type of what happened in Genesis the first chapter—a new creation out of the ashes, out of the destruction, out of the mess of an old life. *He sends forth His spirit, and they are renewed.* What are we being renewed in? What are we being created in? **We are being changed from man to God!** That is the new creation!

Is it any wonder that Paul said what he did? Circumcision does not change a person's character. Being in Christ and a new creation does. Wealth, intelligence, age, gender, beauty, athleticism, talent, race, or ethnicity means nothing to God's purpose. What is important is whether a person is converted, having the Spirit of God, in Christ, and a new creation. Nothing else matters. That person will keep the message. Why? Because he is like God.

Galatians 5:6 For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision avails anything, nor uncircumcision; but faith which works by love [*is everything*].

This verse is saying that if we are ever going to be a new creation, it will be because we exercise faith in Christ. In the immediate context, Paul is saying that we cannot trust a theology, which he called *circumcision*, which revolves around human effort—works. Circumcision and all that it stands for does not produce godly holiness. Neither does adherence to the food laws per se, because they do not enter into the heart. Food does not commend us to God.

These things, like those laws that I just mentioned, do not make us partakers of the new nature. Did those things change the Pharisees? Circumcision and strict adherence to the food laws did not change them. What does change a person's heart is his faith in Christ, working through love. It is not that circumcision itself is so bad, but rather what it stood for. Remember, Paul had Timothy circumcised. It is the theology of circumcision which makes conformity to something physical necessary for salvation.

Of a foundation, the central issue of our relationship with God is grace through Jesus Christ, not anything that we can do. We can never let that get very far from our thinking or we will begin to think and act as if God owes us something simply because we do certain things. Remember what Jesus said in Luke 17. He said after you do all that you are commanded, you are still unprofitable.

None of this does away with law. Remember Romans 3:30-31: "Seeing it is one God, which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith. Do we then make void the law through faith?" Paul says, "God forbid: yea, we establish the law." You have to understand it does not save us.

All of these elements are bonded together by a Holy God's Holy Spirit, which brings us into union with Christ, and therefore He has taken up His abode in us, and begins to live His way of life over again in us.

The central issues for you and me are *grace* and *faith*. Therefore we have the triple requirements: I Corinthians 7:19, Galatians 6:15, and Galatians 5:6. Two of those are prerequisites to the third one. The third one is the key for you and me in our personal responsibility. This verse is saying that the person who trusts Christ opens himself to Christ's creative power. He in turn comes through circumstances—the knowledge and efforts He sends forth—

and leads us to make the choices to submit to Him. Does it not say in Philippians 2:13, "For it is God who works in us, both to will and to do"? It says this. We can go to God to get the *will* to do the things that need to be done, and we are His creation, and He will respond.

Let us put these three verses together: (1) What is important is keeping the commandments. (2) If we are ever going to keep the commandments it is because we are being made over again. We are a new creation. (3) If we are to be made over again it will be by faith in Christ working through love.

None of this does away with law, but it does establish the basis of our relationship with God, and we cannot ever afford to let the basis of this relationship get out of our minds. Salvation is by grace through faith. We are His workmanship, therefore salvation is something done to and for us.

But laws are part of the bigger picture. They are important in terms of details. They are part of the way of life, but of lesser importance than those broad principles that I just stated to you. So what Paul is saying is that if we trust Christ, His life will flow into us and with it a new nature, and a new nature begins to be created. There is a very simple principle at work here.

Please understand this. If we trust Christ, we will love Him. If you love, you can trust. It is that simple. Think of this in your own relationships. If you love somebody, do you not trust them? Your trust will make you love. Because you love somebody, you will submit. Do you not do things because you love people? Sure you do. The same thing is at work in our relationship with Christ. "If you love Me, keep My commandments." If we love, we will submit. If we have faith in Him, if we trust Him, we will love Him. It is easy to obey when you love somebody, is it not? Sure it is.

Philippians 1:9-10 And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; that you may approve things that are excellent; that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ.

I am going to read this from the *Amplified Version* of the Bible. Listen carefully. This is a prayer that Paul made for the Philippians. He made it for you and me.

Philippians 1:9-10 [Amplified Version] "And this I pray: that your love may abound yet more and more and extend to its fullest development in knowledge and in all keen insight [that your love may display itself in greater depth of acquaintance and more comprehensive discernment, so that you may surely learn to sense what is vital, and approve and prize what is excellent and of real value [recognizing the highest and the best and distinguishing the moral differences], and that you may be untainted and pure and unerring and blameless [so that with hearts sincere and certain and unsullied, you may approach] the day of Christ [not stumbling, nor causing others to stumble]. Amen."