

The Holy Spirit and the Trinity (Part 6)

Gifts of His Will

John W. Ritenbaugh

Given 12-Sep-98; Tape #358

In the last sermon in this series I was showing that there are two major ways by which the essence of God's mind is transferred into our minds. The first is by means of words, specifically those things pertaining to the gospel of the Kingdom of God. The gospel is the power of God unto salvation. It is words which give us vision and empower us to understand God's purpose, to understand and carry out our responsibility in our daily lives, and to come to know God. The second way is through the direct actions of God Himself in our lives.

It is important for us to understand what Jesus said in John 5:16-17.

John 5:16-17 And therefore did the Jews persecute Jesus, and sought to slay him, because he had done these things on the Sabbath day. But Jesus answered them, My Father works hitherto, and I work.

The word "hitherto" is not a word that we are familiar with in this day and age. It means, "My Father is working to this very day, and I am working." Another way of saying it would be, "My Father is working right up to this point of time, and I am working." God is an active Creator. He did not just create everything physical that we are able to see, and then just sit back, cross His legs, hold His hands in front of Him, and twiddle His thumbs. He is an active Creator.

God created this universe to carry out the next step in His purpose, which is now His ongoing work. God is creating a family of beings just like Himself. He is reproducing Himself by creating us in His image. A "conversion" is that word which describes the process of the transformation—from glory to glory"—from the glory of man to the glory of God. This means being brought into the image of God.

This image is not in the way that we look, but rather in certain basic knowledge and attitudes of things that we accept and believe and submit to in conduct and in the way that we think. It is accomplished by an impregnation, a begettal, of the mind of God in us. The impregnation, or begettal, just as in human impregnation and begettal, begins a growth process. In our case, it is the growth of the mind of God in ours.

God's mind, just like yours and mine, is more than words. It is also attitudes, feelings, moods, passions, inclinations, and perspectives. These things can be described by words, but they are not words. They develop through the combination of knowledge and experience, most frequently within relationships. Remember that. We really cannot relate to a machine, but we can relate to other beings—God and men with whom we can have relationships, fellowships, social intercourse, work with, play with, and interact with. From these experiences these other things of the mind, besides words, create and develop.

As these things occur, nothing actually comes that has form, weight, or can be measured.

Rather it is knowledge gleaned from experiences, and in the case with God, it is accompanied by God personally and actively working and creating to enable us to accomplish our part in carrying out His will. Remember Paul said, "It is God who works in you both to will and to do."

Herbert Armstrong called God "the great Educator." Even as a teacher enables us to increase our power by teaching us that two plus two equals four, God also is tweaking our minds, bringing things to our attention to lead and guide us more deeply into His way, always working to enhance our relationship with Him and our brethren. But that is not all. Let us go to Exodus 31 and we will develop this thought for a while.

Exodus 31:1-6 And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, [Look at this carefully.] See, [Look here, Moses. Pay attention. Consider this.] I have called by name Bezaleel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah: And I have filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship, To devise cunning works, to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass, and in cutting of stones, to set them, and in carving of timber, to work in all manner of workmanship. And I, behold, I have given with him Aholiab, the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan: and in the hearts of all that are wise hearted I have put wisdom, that they may make all that I have commanded you.

Let us look at that even a little bit more closely. First of all, it was a personal appointment of Bezaleel and Aholiab, "I have called by name." "I have put..." Do you understand that they were given favor by God to carry out this responsibility in His behalf for Israel? God put wisdom in them. The basic concept or idea behind the Hebrew word here that is translated wisdom is more synonymous with the English word skill. It is a word with wide-ranging application. For instance, back in Proverbs it says, "Get wisdom. Above all, get wisdom." In that context, it means skill in living, skill in common sense, skill in relationships with other people. We are to be skilled at doing those things.

The example of Bezaleel and Aholiab is skill in being a supervisor over others, and in teaching others how to do things, and also being able to do things themselves. Another way of putting it would be, I have put in them strength of capacity. I have expanded their minds. In addition to that, God gave them understanding, which means discernment. In this context, in building a building, it would mean being able to arrange or to connect all the different parts together.

God also increased in them knowledge, which means a particular acquaintance. Cunning works means being inventive, and having a mind to be able to look at something and say, We need this kind of a tool to accomplish it, and be able then to produce the tool to make it. By inspiration God added to natural ability so that they would be able to execute God's design. He gave them things far over and beyond their natural abilities.

Exodus 35:30-31 And Moses said unto the children of Israel, [only now he is looking back on it] See, the LORD has called by name Bezaleel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah; And He has filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship.

It was not just Bezaleel and Aholiab, but it was everybody who was working on the building.

Exodus 36:1 Then wrought Bezaleel and Aholiab, and every wise hearted man, in whom the LORD put wisdom and understanding to know how to work all manner of work for the service of the sanctuary, according to all that the LORD had commanded.

We might also interject here a little question. Where in the world did all the materials come from? The Israelites were out in the wilderness. Let me tell you something. God had to supply that too! How many badgers were running around? This tabernacle was made out of badgers' skins. I am pretty sure a lot of the material, including the gold, came when the Israelites spoiled the Egyptians before they went out of Egypt. God put it into the minds of the Egyptians to give these things to them, I am sure, and yard upon yard upon yard of fine cloth was given to take with them. The Israelites probably wondered, "What in the world are we going to do with this?" But God put it in their minds to take it anyway.

Exodus 36:2 And Moses called Bezaleel and Aholiab, and every wise hearted man, in whose heart the LORD had put wisdom, even everyone whose heart stirred him up to come unto the work to do it.

The Keil-Delitzsch Commentary says in reference to verse 1: "The idea is this. Bezaleel, Aholiab, and the other men who understand, into whom Jehovah [they say] has infused wisdom and understanding [I want you to see this, because there is no way around it, that God gave them from His mind to their mind the ability to do this.] has infused wisdom and understanding, that they may know how to do, shall do every work for the holy service with regard to all that Jehovah has commanded."

Let us make this real personal. What is interesting is that He shows this in the context of building the tabernacle, which like the temple, is a type of the church. It also begins to show that in His creative efforts, He adds what we lack to carry out His will. God transferred some of the Spirit of His mind. God favored them. It was a gift of grace so that they could build the church.

Let us keep on carrying this thought a little bit further in James:

James 1:16-18 Do not err, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

It is important to understand "Of His own will." He gives gifts "of His own will." Are these gifts only things to sustain and enhance physical life? The answer to that is no, because in verse 18, "the word of truth" ties this into the previous context, which is about resisting the temptation to sin. He is talking about spiritual gifts to resist the temptation to sin, and overcome. Every good and perfect gift comes from God above. The gift from Him in this case would be the ability to overcome the challenges of temptation, this world, and sin. They are given for the purpose of enabling us to do God's will.

We will keep adding to this. Always keep in mind the transference of the essence of God's mind into ours, and what comes as gifts.

Matthew 25:14-15 For the kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. [The "man travelling" is Jesus Christ, and "into the far country" is heaven.] And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one: to every man [every servant] according to his several [own] ability: and straightway took his journey.

Tie this thought into Exodus 31 and 35. God gave gifts. He gave power and abilities to everybody who was working on the tabernacle. Tie this into the church. Tie this into Christ as our Leader. He traveled into heaven, as shown in the parable, and He gives gifts to His servants.

Matthew 25:16, 20-21 Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents....And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, you delivered unto me five talents: behold, I have gained beside them five talents more. His lord said unto him, Well done, you good and faithful servant: you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things: enter you into the joy of your lord.

These talents, or gifts, are attributes of His mind, His Spirit, and He communicates them to us to enable us to serve within His will. As we can see from this parable, they are not given to remain static within us, but rather are to be developed and used. In the parable the servants are commended and rewarded as to their faithful use of these gifts. God enables us to carry out our responsibilities within the church, and so we really have no excuse for not building and strengthening the church. We have no more excuse than Bazeleel and Aholiab had, and all the others who were working on the tabernacle.

Ephesians 4:7-8 But unto every one of us is given grace [gifts, favor] according to the measure of the gift of Christ. [Tie that thought into the parable of Matthew 25.] Wherefore he says, When he ascended up on high [He went to a far country], He led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men [people; not just men, but women as well].

He has given gifts to all who are part of the church. The gifts are for the purpose of carrying out His will. His will is that we resist temptation, and that we overcome sin. But it does not end there. Those things are good, but it also includes things that add to other factors that have to do with the church.

I Corinthians 12:4 Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit.

How do the gifts come? They come by means of the Spirit of God. There is a transference from the mind of God to your mind and my mind. Everybody has been gifted by God. Everybody who is a part of the church has directly received gifts from God.

I Corinthians 12:5-6 And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. [All the gifts come from the same source.] And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which works all in all.

For it is God who works in you both to will, to stir up the heart, and to do, and to accomplish it. We look back at Exodus 31, 35, and 36, and it says that those who came to work on the tabernacle were those whose hearts stirred them up. Let us ask a simple question. Who stirred up their hearts? God did. That is what it says here in I Corinthians 12. He is "all in all."

One of the things I'm leading to here is this: Salvation is by grace, and it is grace from beginning to end. We think that our part in this is so hard and so big—and to us it is that way. I do not mean to detract from that at all, because as the Master Creator, God knows exactly how much pressure we need in order to proceed from the first grade to the second grade to the third grade. The challenges to our faith will always be almost all the time right to the limit of our abilities. It has to be that way, or growth does not occur.

Sometimes the effect of this is discouraging because we think we are not growing. Yes, we are. The challenges are just getting harder. It has to be that way for God to create what He wants in us. We are growing. There is no doubt in my mind that we are growing, but sometimes we are always going to feel a sense of desperation. Again, that is good. It is working in our favor, because it makes us go constantly back to Him for the strength. If we have any desire to be like Him, we go back to Him, and He does what He does best.

What does this conclusion lead to? When this is all over, we are going to know that it was by grace, but right now we have to just carry with us a simple thought: the clay does not form itself. It is the operations of the Potter that form the clay from beginning to end. That is why that illustration is so important. Everybody understands that clay on a wheel cannot form itself into anything but a blob, but the potter is able to make it into something beautiful.

I Corinthians 12:7-9, 11 But the manifestation of the spirit is given to every man to profit withal [so that everybody profits]. For to one is given by the spirit the word of wisdom: to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; To another faith by the same Spirit...But all these work that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing [distributing] to every man severally [meaning individually] as he will.

That shows you God's intention. He singles each individual out and gives them the gifts that they need to perform the function that He wants them to perform within the body. Always it is in an overall sense to carry out the will of God, and it is to glorify God. It is to prepare the person for the Kingdom of God.

There are three categories that these gifts which Paul mentions here fall into. The first one he uses is the Greek charisma, (verse 4), which simply means gifts of grace. In verse 5, it means different services, and in verse 6, it means different activities. And so everybody's function is kind of divided, just like the organs of our body. The stomach does not do the liver's job. They cooperate and work together. Nonetheless, each has a distinct responsibility that is given to each part of the body, and that is eventually what Paul gets into. Every part of the body functions for the whole, but everybody's specific gift is given for them to carry out a more

specific function, and therefore aid the body.

So far, we have looked at an aspect that has to do with God being the One who is overseeing, guiding, and directing, and giving gifts in order to carry out the functions to complete His will for us, for the church, and for whatever else is involved. We have to look at another aspect here, because it is important to understand in regard to this.

Psalm 145:18 The LORD is near unto all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth.

The question is, "How near?" The reason this question has to be asked is because there are many times that we feel that God has gone way off somewhere. But how near is He? We have to ask this, because the Bible describes Him as a God who is both far and near. He is both at the same time. He is far in recognition of His sovereignty. He is far in recognition of His position in relation to the rest of the creation. He is far above us in that regard. He is over all, and He directs and controls everything, always with His overall purpose in mind.

If we are going to have a good relationship with God, we are going to have to take this factor into consideration, because it does affect our lives. He always does things with His overall purpose in mind. There are occasions when He may be "unable" to act in our behalf on a request that we have put to Him, because other things with other people whose lives touch on ours, must be resolved first. A very clear example of this is the book of Job.

Job was totally unaware of what was being worked out through him, around him, and about him. In this episode of Job, even Satan was having something proved to him by God, because God challenged him. In the vernacular today, we would say, Okay Satan. See if you can break Job. I challenge you to see if you can break him.

Satan could not break Job. Job stood his ground, even though he got battered mightily in the process, not really understanding what was going on, and undoubtingly appealing to God. But God could not answer, because other things were being worked out through, around, and about in Job, of which he was totally unaware.

Job was not privy to the conversation between God and Satan, and he was not privy to the fact that God was putting him through this in order that a book be written of his experiences. It could not be written until the episode was over, and so Job had to go through a great deal of discomfort, pain, and emotional anguish while the whole thing was played out. God was a God from afar there for a while.

Now that we have more understanding, and more portions of the Bible have been added, He was also a God who was near to Job, because He strengthened Job so that Job could resist the temptations of the most powerful being to tempt mankind. Job stood up just fine.

Because this book has been written, and because Job went through this, we now have a very clear picture of why at times bad things happen to good people. We can also see that this book shows that God has faith in us too. It does not work just one way. God was working from afar, with His overall picture in mind for mankind, and God was also working from near.

God illustrates His support by a number of metaphors, so let us go to Exodus 19:4.

Exodus 19:4 You have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you [Israel] on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself.

The metaphor here is "and brought you unto Myself." This is the figure from which we are to get a picture. Now is God far, or is He near in that picture?

Deuteronomy 29:2-3 And Moses called unto all Israel, and said unto them, You have seen all that the LORD did before your eyes in the land of Egypt unto Pharaoh, and unto all his servants, and unto all his land; The great temptations which your eyes have seen, the signs, and those great miracles.

Was God a God from afar here? The answer is "yes," and "no," because His overall plan was undoubtedly in mind, and He was recording this for the sake of future generations. Do you realize that from the time the book of Exodus opens up until finally they leave Egypt was eighty years? Moses was not born at the time that it says they were sighing and crying to God because of the bondage. Moses was born and preserved right through the persecution. He was cast in a little ark onto the Nile River, rescued by Pharaoh's daughter, grew up to be a man, went out into the wilderness, and at age 40 spent 40 years tending sheep. Moses was learning to be humble. Finally God had him ready. Then He sent him back to Egypt. God's overall plan was in mind for a long time, but yet all through that, He was very near to Moses, preparing him. God was afar in the sense that He was using these people to prepare a book that would be written by His servant Moses for your sake and my sake, so that we would understand the things that I am speaking to you right now.

With "the eagles' wings," God undoubtedly appeared to be far away from the Israelites who were crying out to Him for deliverance. He was really right on the spot. He was near to them. He is a God at hand. We have to keep both of these views in mind. They both impact on the transference of the Spirit of God into our minds. God is always working two things at once: His overall purpose, and then His specific purpose, with you and me, and for the church. Out of this comes a principle.

God is Yahweh-Jireh, which means the Eternal who sees, or the Eternal who provides. It is shortened into this statement: He is there. He was there when Abraham was on Mount Moriah and was about to sacrifice his son Isaac, and God provided a ram. He was at hand through all the plagues of Egypt, and He divided the Israelites away from them. He watched so closely when they left Egypt that not even a dog barked. That is what "the night to be much observed" is all about. God was observing. He was the one who was watching. He was aware at the Red Sea, and He parted the waters. He is there.

He may seem far off, but He is not. Psalm 139 would fit right in here, where David describes the nearness of God, but we are going to go to Hosea 11:1-4, to a beautiful touching illustration.

Hosea 11:1-4 When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt. As they called them, so they went from them: they sacrificed unto Baalim, and burned incense to graven images. I taught Ephraim also to go, taking them by their arms; but they knew not that I healed them. I drew them with cords of a

man, with bands of love: and I was to them as they that take off the yoke on their jaws, and I laid meat unto them.

I want you to note here how God illustrates how intimately He carries out His part. We saw in Exodus 19: 4, "on eagles' wings." In other words, He carried them, and He carries us (when we begin to understand it) on His back, as it were, teaching us how to fly. He wants us to understand that His relationship with us is intimate.

Let us again remember that Egypt in this context here in Hosea is not merely a geographic location. It is a spiritual condition portraying enslavement to sin. Harmful habits and attitudes certainly do not exemplify God's family characteristics, but even in Egypt, and to us in the world, He preserved them during their affliction. That is what is being said here. He brought them safely out of it. He was there with you before you were ever converted, before you were ever called. While you still were in Egypt, still in the world, He was there. You cannot get much closer than that.

Even when we had no mind at all to serve Him, He was watching over our lives, and waiting, preparing us for the right time. Then we were forgiven through Christ's blood, and the enslavement, just like Israel's in Egypt, is broken; but it is only a doorway. The job is not yet complete. The liberty through which Christ sets us free is an achievement. It is a new creation through godly discipline. This liberty does not happen in an instant. Yes, the door is opened. We walked through it, but we have to be completely liberated eventually from the Egypt that is in our minds. Israel never did it. The picture that is shown through the first five books of the Bible is that Israel died in the wilderness. They never overcame their enslavement to Egypt.

Think for a moment how everybody begins life in helplessness as a child. When we come out of the womb, everything has to be taken care of and provided for us by others. All we can do is cry and dirty our diapers and sleep. We are really productive! But mom and dad have to do their job. That is the picture here in Hosea 11: 1-4.

When they were in Egypt, God was there, even as mother is there when the baby is in the womb. He was there. He brought them out of Egypt, and He was with them in the wilderness. As a baby, we have to learn to walk, to talk, and to control our bowels. We have to learn the eating habits. God is saying in verse 3, "I taught Ephraim also to go." The figure here, the metaphor, is of a child in its infancy, being taught to walk, to talk, to control its bowels, and so forth. When it is walking, it falls, and God picks up.

In verse 4, the figure of child training continues, only in this verse the child is a bit older. It shows the child given a bit more freedom and being drawn, which is kind of interesting. The Hebrews apparently had a way of teaching a child how to walk "hands on." They used strings or a rope. The child grabbed onto the rope (sort of like holding onto a bicycle) and the parent drops behind the child who is taking a step. The child does not realize it when the parent leaves go of the rope, and the child is on his own. It also begins to show the child being drawn through more abstract means, but all the while God is there, helping them to walk along the only right and safe path.

He says here that He did everything mercy could suggest to make their duty to Him their

delight. He is saying, I strengthened them.

For a little bit clearer picture, let us go to Ezekiel 16. This time instead of the figure being male, the figure is female.

Ezekiel 16:4-12 And as for your nativity, in the day you were born your navel was not cut, neither were you washed in water to supple you; you were not salted at all, nor swaddled at all. None eye pitied you, to do any of these unto you, to have compassion upon you; but you were cast out in the open field, to the loathing of your person, in the day that you were born. And when I passed by you, and saw you polluted in your own blood, I said unto you when you were in your blood, Live; yes, I said unto you when you were in your blood, Live. I have caused you to multiply as the bud of the field, and you have increased and waxen great, and you are come to excellent ornaments: your breasts are fashioned, and your hair is grown, whereas you were naked and bare. Now when I passed by you, and looked upon you, behold, your time was the time of love: and I spread my skirt over you, and covered your nakedness: yea, I swore unto you, and entered into a covenant with you, says the Lord GOD, and you became mine. Then washed I you with water; yea, I thoroughly washed away your blood from you, and I anointed you with oil. I clothed you also with brodered work, and shod you with badgers' skin, and I girded you about with fine linen, and I covered you with silk. I decked you also with ornaments, and I put bracelets upon your hands, and a chain on your neck. And I put a jewel on your forehead, and earrings in your ears, and a beautiful crown upon your head.

It is a huge subject all by itself, but the theme is that though He is invisible, He is nonetheless the God who is there. He is in us by means of the essence of His mind. He is around and about us, working in our behalf so that we will achieve His will for us, which is to be in His image, and to be truly free from every impediment to growth.

When Paul says, "For it is God who works in us both to will and to do," it is the Father and the Son who are the Holy Spirit which is so frequently mentioned in the New Testament. There is no third party which closes off the Godhead to our future entrance to it. God is a family, and we are His children. We are "the apple of His eye." He has not given the responsibility of training His children to some celestial day-care center called "the third person of the trinity." It just is not there. It is the Father Himself. He is raising His family.

Before we launch into another aspect of this very vital subject, I am going to give a review about the transference of God's Spirit into our minds, because we need to grow in the Spirit of God. There are a number of facts that I think that are absolutely essential to our having a correct working understanding.

The first and most common way the Bible uses the word spirit is as an immaterial, invisible force or power that motivates, impels, and compels. It carries with it characteristics. It has the power to encourage, inspire, impress, depress, discourage, cleanse, or defile—all according to the character of its source. It educates, and it has in it the very power of life or death.

Remember Jesus said, "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life."

The second fact is that the Holy Spirit, when a person is being referred to, is the Father Himself, or the Son, depending upon the context. There is no third person in a trinity. God is a family of immortal, creating, governing Beings having form and composed of spirit. It is the Father and the Son who work in us both to will and to do.

The third is that the Holy Spirit, when a person is not being indicated, is that spirit which emanates from the mind of God. It is the essence of God's mind. "He sends forth His spirit and they are created" (Psalm 104:30). God thought. God planned. When those plans were created, those internal, invisible, immaterial plans were completed. God sent them forth out of His mind, and creation—an external visible action—took place. This is not difficult to understand, because humanly, every action we involve ourselves in begins in our minds. We think to do something, and we act externally. The thinking part is internal, invisible, and immaterial. It is spirit, and we send it forth in action to accomplish something. We invent. We do.

The fourth thing is very important. Spirit can be communicated. Indeed it is so communicable, we must be alert, sensitive, and on guard in order to ensure that only the best and most appropriate of spirit is communicated to our minds or is sent forth from our minds at any given time.

God is perfect in all of His ways, and He has invited us into a covenant relationship with Him so that we can get to know Him intimately. The church is referred to as His Bride.

How can we get more of this pure, always right, always good, spirit? How? That is what the next part of this sermon is going to be about. I will tell you in advance that we are going to see that the principles or the mechanisms by which we can receive more of God's Holy Spirit are little or no different in dealing with God from what it is in dealing with another human. In a way, it is so simple. The key, the indispensable element, is nearness.

If I get angry in my house, and my neighbor down the street who is nowhere near me, and cannot see my face, cannot see what I am doing, and cannot hear my voice, is my spirit going to affect him? Will there be any communication from my mind to his? Absolutely not. But if he were in the same room near to me, the transference of the spirit of my mind to his mind would be instantaneous and might produce all kinds of things, like a punch in the nose!

The key vital element in the transference is this element of closeness. This does not stand alone. It must be combined with other factors, but without it there would be little or no hope of having God's Holy Spirit. God reveals this vital principle. It is so vital, He reveals it before the third chapter of Genesis is over.

Genesis 2:8 And the LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden and there he put the man whom he had formed.

The word Eden in Hebrew means delight or enjoyment—a garden of delight, a garden of enjoyment. When the Septuagint Version came on the scene, they used the Greek word Parkland, which is equivalent to the English Parkland for Eden. From that came the word Paradise. In many places in the Bible, in the Old Testament really, Eden is used as a symbol of great fertility. It was a place for things to grow. The environment there was beautiful for

producing things. In this case it was not merely vegetation, but a relationship through fellowship that God had in mind—God, and Adam and Eve. Adam and Eve represent all of mankind. Eden spiritually indicates a rich and fertile place of unbroken fellowship.

Exodus 2:16-17 And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat of it: for in the day that you eat thereof you shall surely die.

In order to maintain that fellowship, God instructed the man and the woman regarding the trees in the Garden of Eden. They could eat of all of them except for one special one, "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." If they did eat of that tree, they would die. They did eat of "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil," and thus sin was introduced into Eden, right into the environment in which the relationship was to take place. They brought it right home.

Genesis 3:23-24 Therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken. So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life.

Sin was introduced, and it destroyed the relationship, and so God drove them out. God drove them out. Practically every picture or painting you see shows God kind of leading them out. No! He drove them out! It implies a punishing anger, that their relationship was broken. Right at the very beginning we have a huge major principle: Sin destroys relationships. That is the principle. Sin produces separation.

To understand this a little bit further, it is good to understand that at the heart of sin the central concept is a sense of failure. It is a specific kind of failure, or a failure that produces a specific result, a specific fruit. Genesis 2 and 3 teach us that sin is a failure to maintain a relationship—first with God, and secondarily with man. Sin produces separation—first with God, and secondarily with man. Eventually sin produces death—the first death, and the ultimate separation from which there can never be a relationship, the second death.

In addition to being separated from fellowship with God, they were also separated from "the tree of life" and access to the Holy Spirit.

A very clear progression is shown in this story of the breaking of Adam and Eve's relationship with God:

1. They became convinced that their way was better than God's.
2. They became self-conscious, and they hid from God.
3. They then tried to justify and defend what they did.

(You might think of this in regards to President Clinton.) In order to build a relationship with God, those steps must be reversed:

1. We have to drop every excuse and every justification.
2. We must drop our pride and stop hiding from God, somehow thinking He is unaware of what is going on. I just spent practically this whole sermon showing how close He is.

3. We must become convinced that God's way is better than ours.

Genesis 3:24 says that "the tree of life" is guarded. The Holy Spirit is guarded. We understand that symbolically, making it very clear that our way back to "the tree of life" and access to the Holy Spirit is not going to be easy. In fact, it is impossible! No human being is going to get past a cherubim.

If we think of these things literally, do you think you are going to challenge a cherubim? Do you think that somehow you are going to catch him asleep, that you can sneak around him? Do you think that you can overcome him with all your muscular strength and your great intelligence, or maybe whip him with a sword? Impossible! That is the whole lesson.

There is no relationship possible with God until He removes the barrier. He then personally and individually invites us to come back. Do you wonder where is the "come back"? We never had a relationship with Him before. The thought is that we were separated from Him through the sin of Adam and Eve. Adam and Eve had a relationship with Him. Adam and Eve represent all of mankind. Therefore, in God's mind, we had a relationship, but we busted it in the person of Adam and Eve. And so God invites us back to have a relationship with Him.

Psalm 65:4 Blessed is the man whom you choose, and cause to approach unto you, that he may dwell in your courts: we shall be satisfied with the goodness of your house, even of your holy temple.

God causes us to be drawn into a relationship with Him. He is in this beautiful Parkland. Symbolically, that is where He lives, and He removes the cherubim, and says, Come back to Me, and you can have access to the Tree of Life.

We have to be close to Him. Are you getting the picture? That is the key to growth in the holy spirit.

I will try to follow through with this to show how we can draw near to God and be so close to Him that His Spirit flows to us. If we can just understand it, that we are in His presence. It is that close, and because we are in His presence and there is no barrier separating us from the Tree of Life—He is the Tree of Life—we can imbibe of it, and because we do, His mind will be in us.