

## ***Understanding Our Spiritual Identity in Christ***

### **INTRODUCTION**

We're going to talk about understanding spiritual identity in Christ. This is a very fundamental and simple message. For those of you for whom this is new information, it's for you. For those of you who are teachers, you can hear it, as these are some very important principles you can use when you encounter new believers.

### **UNDERSTANDING WHOM WE ARE BEFORE GOD**

We must be established with fundamental truths, or we are never going to be able to grow in our intimacy with the Lord. Our ability to experience God at the heart level is directly related to understanding who we are before Him. When the devil comes to strike at us, he always comes to lie at us in our minds; he always comes to distort the Word of God. If he can get you confused about fundamental things in the kingdom of God, he can get you into condemnation. He can get you off the path.

### **STAVING OFF THE WORKS OF DARKNESS**

So the Word of God always brings us back to the fundamental basics in terms of our attack against the enemy. When I find a person in oppression, depression, confused, or having lost their passion, I try to get them back to Christianity 101. These basic facts, even though you might know them, to be reminded of them, to renew your heart in them is what drives away the work of darkness in our hearts.

### **“IF ANYONE IS IN CHRIST, HE IS A NEW CREATION”**

One of the most important paragraphs in the whole New Testament concerning who we are before the Lord and how the Lord views us is here in 2 Corinthians 5:17-21. It says this: “Therefore, if anyone” —if any person, whosoever—“is in Christ” —meaning, they're born again, they've accepted Jesus Christ as their Savior and they new stand before God in an entirely new position.

Before, they weren't in Christ, and now they stand before the Father in all the benefit of what is true of Jesus Christ. So, what is true of Jesus before the Father has been given to you. It's true of you before the Father, because of what Jesus did for you; that's what it means to be in Christ—that everything that is true about Jesus as a man, in His humanity before the Father, before God, in terms of His standing before God.

### **THE GIFT OF A NEW BIRTH**

God gives this as a gift to you.

It's one of the most significant statements in the New Testament, that we are in Christ, that when God looks at us, He sees Jesus. It says that if anyone is in Christ, he is a brand-new creation. God has done a new work in his life. Though we don't always see the work, though we don't always appreciate it, when God looks at you, He looks at a new creation.

### **CLOAKED IN THE GARMENT OF RIGHTEOUSNESS**

The reason this is so important is because our emotions go all kinds of places. We have all kinds of negative thoughts. Or, maybe even someone in the Body of Christ will get mad at you and say something, and you'll believe it. Your feelings will get hurt and you don't feel like a new creation. It doesn't seem true, but it's true.

When God looks at you, He doesn't see what you used to be. He looks at a brand-new creation. You are a brand-new creation because you are now relating to God the Father through Jesus. You are in Christ; that's what it means. You are relating to God the Father now through what Jesus did.

So, now when God looks at you, He sees the work of Jesus, like a robe surrounding you; like a garment.

### **“OLD THINGS HAVE PASSED AWAY”**

Paul declares one of the greatest things that could possibly be true of you or me: “Old things have passed away.” Your track record, your sins before God, God says they have passed away. When God looks at us, in terms of receiving us into His heart, and receiving us with His affection, He says the old things, all of them, have passed away.

### **THE SCHEMES OF THE ADVERSARY**

Now, this is the thing the enemy doesn't want you to get hold of. If you get hold of this your emotions will become powerful and they will become confident before God. The enemy wants to tell you that the old things are still in the way between you and God.

What he wants you to do is, he wants you to come to a worship service; and instead of saying, “Lord, I love You and I am Yours,” you say, “Lord, if You will forgive me one more time, I promise You this one time, I beg You, I will never ask again, if You will just forgive me one more time. I'll tell you what I'll do: I'll go to the mission field. I'll do that if you'll just forgive me.”

### **USING THE WORD AS A WEAPON**

What happens is that people debate and negotiate with God. They try to give God a reason to like them, because they don't understand the declaration, the truth, that old things are gone.

This is a declaration of God. Now, the devil isn't going to tell you this. He's going to tell you the old things are still there. When that happens, we're instructed by the Word of God to use the Word as an enemy, as a weapon against lies. We speak the Word of God right back to the enemy. We say, “No, I am a new creation in Christ Jesus. Old things have passed away.”

### **“ALL THINGS HAVE BECOME NEW”**

Look at this: “Behold, all things have become new.” All things have become new! Your relationship with God is based on an entirely new foundation. Before you received the gift of salvation, you had to stand before God based on how good you were.

You know how horrible that is, to stand before God based on how good you've been doing. If you stand before God based on how good you are, or how good you've been the last month or two, I tell you, we're all in trouble. We will never have confidence. God wants us to have confidence when we stand before Him.

So He declares this to us: “The old things have passed; everything is new. When I look at you, there's a new look; there's a new stand. You're standing before Me on a new ground, on a new basis. Because before you received Jesus you stood before Me on the basis of what you did. Now you're standing before Me on the basis of what He did for you.”

Beloved, you can rest in that; you can relax. Your heart can unpack; you can be confident in, “I’m here to stay; I’m home. The reason I’m home in the presence of God is that I’m not in His presence based on how good the last thirty days have been in my spiritual life.”

“Behold,” Paul said, “all things have become new.”

### **EVERY GOOD AND PERFECT GIFT IS FROM GOD**

“Now all things are of God” (2 Cor. 5:18). All these things that are new are of God. They are the work of God. The new things are from God; He gave them to you as a gift.

This is the God who reconciled us to Himself. To be reconciled to God means that everything between us and God has been removed. This word *reconciled* is a big word. It means whatever was in the way is out of the way. Now, that’s why the Bible calls this the “good news.” It’s good news, because what was in the way between you and God the Father connecting is now out of the way from His point of view.

### **THE PROBLEM WITH OUR MINDS**

Now the problem is, the enemy wants to come and lie to us. The other problem is in between our ears; it’s in our own mind. It’s right here. That’s the other problem, it’s right there. Our mind believes the old information. The Bible tells us what when our mind is renewed, it believes in the new information that the Word declares. Then our heart will have confidence before God the Father.

### **THE MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION**

So, the Scripture says that all things have become new. Verse 18 tells us that all the things that are new are from God; from the God who reconciled us, who removed the barriers to Himself out of the way, and He did this through Jesus Christ.

Now, in verse 19, he’s going to get really specific. That is, now he’s specifically going to tell you about the new things that God did through Jesus Christ. “That God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself” —now look at this—“not imputing their trespasses to them.”

He did not impute our sins to us. The word *impute* means *count*. God says, “I don’t count your sins against you if you come to me in Christ Jesus.” So, when we stand before God, the devil is reminding us of everything we did, recently and in the past. We are negotiating and we are debating.

### **THE WAR BETWEEN RELIGION AND GRACE**

Religion tries to argue with God, to give God a reason that God should love you. Grace says it is already finished. “I already want you,” God is trying to convince you; but religion is trying to convince God. The spirit of religion says, “O God, give me one more chance!” The spirit of grace says, “I don’t have to give you one more chance; you are Mine forever.” It’s a settled issue. God is not imputing, or God is not counting, your sin against you.

### **HE HAS NOT IMPUTED OUR SINS AGAINST US**

Beloved, let the Spirit of God speak this to you in a fresh way. He is not imputing your sin to you. That means you can stand before God in a worship service with the confidence that He enjoys you; that He actually likes you!

Now, when this touches your heart, and it has touched many of you already, I'm aware of that, and as you use this as Bible teachers—some of you are fourteen-year old Bible teachers. You're teaching others your age, and some of them that are younger, and even some older.

You want to teach them these principles. You want to tell them, no matter what you're feeling, that the Word of God says that God is not imputing trespasses. That's another word for *sin*; He's not counting sin against us.

### **“WHO CAN LAY ANYTHING TO THE CHARGE OF GOD’S ELECT?”**

So why are we counting sin against us when God is not counting sin against us? The enemy is lying to us. As long as we relate to God based on our sin, we will always run from Him instead of running to Him. The enemy knows that. If I relate to God based on my sin, based on how well or how badly I'm doing, then I'm always going to open my heart before God and guard myself. “Oh no, I had better be guarded!” Ultimately, I end up running from Him instead of to Him.

If you relate to God based on what He did, based on the free gift, you can open your spirit wide and you can have confidence. You don't have to negotiate with God; you can relax.

You can tell Him, in your weakness, in your immaturity, in your brokenness, that you love Him and that you know He loves you; that the Word of God says He is not counting any trespass against you. Beloved, this is the glorious good news about what Jesus Christ did for us when He came and died on the cross.

### **THE MAN WHO KNEW NO SIN**

Now, Paul lays it out in the clearest fashion here in verse 21. It says, “For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

Now, what does that mean? Let's break this down. “For He” —that is, God the Father—“made Him who knew no sin” —now, who is the Man who is called, “Him who knew no sin?” That is Jesus.

Jesus was the innocent One. He knew no sin; He had no sin in His life. For God made Him, who knew no sin, actually to become sin for you and me.

### **“AND THE LORD HAS LAID ON HIM THE INIQUITY OF US ALL”**

Now, I know this is the age-old story that we've heard from the beginning, from when we first began our walk with the Lord. A billion years from now, we will never be weary of this story. We will look at Him a billion years from now, and a fresh revelation will touch our hearts, when it dawns on us in a new way that the Man who knew no sin, the Man who was innocent, actually became sin. He actually became sin.

The whole sin of the human race, your sin and my sin, was laid upon Him. The innocent One, Jesus, became guilty. The guilty ones, you and I, as a gift, became innocent.

### **THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD IN MAN**

We became innocent as a gift before God because the truly innocent One became guilty. Now, this is called justice because He took our sin; He took our failure. He paid the price for it. You and I get His righteousness as a free gift.

Now, this isn't just righteousness; this is the righteousness of God, this is the only kind of righteousness there is, actually.

This is a righteousness that can never be improved upon. Do you understand that you are as righteous in God's sight today as you will be in a million years, after you've been in heaven for a million years? Did you know that you will not, in God's sight, improve your righteousness one percent even a million years from now?

Did you know that it is impossible to be more righteous in God's sight than you are right now? I mean, this is radical. I realize it's Christianity 101; it's fundamental. Even people who have been walking with the Lord lose sight of this. The righteousness that you have been given as a free gift will never, ever be improved upon.

It is impossible to improve upon it, because it's the quality of righteousness that God Himself possesses. It is yours. Now, this quality of righteousness is called the righteousness of God. It is God's righteousness. So when God looks at me, and when God looks at you, because of Jesus He sees His own righteousness. Therefore, He welcomes us instead of driving us away from His presence.

### **DEVELOPING CONFIDENCE BEFORE GOD**

Now when this really settles in our spirit, we gain a confidence before the Lord. We don't run from Him, we run to Him when this settles into our spirit.

This is one of the fundamental things that Satan doesn't want to settle in your spirit, or in the lives of the people to whom you're ministering. Think of the people to whom you're ministering. Maybe it's one or two friends, maybe you have a Bible study back home, maybe it's a fellowship group of four or five of you. You can be sure of this: The enemy does not want this issue settled in their understanding.

They will come and say, "I feel bad, I feel this; I feel like quitting, I feel discouraged." More often than not, what they need, though it may not be only this, is they need a strong dose of this; to renew their mind with this truth.

"Well, I really blew it, so I think I'm going to put myself on probation for a while. I blew it so badly yesterday, that for the next month I'm going to prove to God how sorry I am. I'm going to be spiritually miserable for thirty days to prove how sincere I am. I'm not going to ask God for anything, because then maybe He'll understand that I'm really sincere this time."

All of that is religious foolishness; it's completely unnecessary. You cannot add one degree of righteousness by anything that you do to your standing before God. It was given to you fully, and it was given to you completely. The righteousness that you have cannot be improved upon; it never will be. The righteousness that I have today, that you have today, will be the same righteousness that we have right now a million years from now.

### **THE GREAT WORK OF PAYING FOR SIN**

God didn't just forgive our sin; He didn't just overlook our sin. He paid for it. There is a difference. He didn't just look down at the human race and say, "Well, it's tough down there!" and wave His hand. He didn't say, "You know, I'm a good God; I'm simply going to forgive you."

Some people in the Body of Christ, some people in the Church still aren't settled about this. If you ask them, "Why are you forgiven?" they say, "Well, because God is good..."

I say, "Well, yeah, that's not the answer I'm looking for, but that is true. God is good."

"Why are you forgiven?"

"Because Jesus died."

"OK, that's good. How did Jesus dying produce forgiveness for you?"

"I don't know, I don't know!"

"You know that one Christmas, son?"

"I don't know..."

"He died."

"You know the baby in the manger? He died."

"I don't know why that gave me forgiveness."

### **WHAT WAS DONE ON THE CROSS, AND ITS EFFECTS**

The reason it gives you forgiveness is because Jesus literally paid the debt and there is no more debt now. If God judged you for the sin that He judged Jesus for, then God would be acting in injustice. If God made you pay for the sin that Jesus paid for, that would be an injustice on God's part.

God is never, ever lacking justice. God cannot, will not, does not want to—cannot, anyway—cannot have you pay for a debt that has already been paid for. That would violate the truth of justice.

He did not overlook sin, He paid for it. When it is paid for, it's a whole new ball game, so to speak. The fact that our sin is paid for gives us a basis of security in the presence of God that is very dynamic and will last forever.

### **THE JOY OF GRATITUDE-BASED OBEDIENCE**

I don't stand before God because I prayed last week; I don't stand before God because of what I did. I stand before God because of what He did.

What I do is a response in gratitude to what He did. When people lose their sense of gratitude or their sense of confidence, it is these very verses, or the ones that are like them, that we need to feed our spirit with. When our spirit sees this, our confidence and gratitude grows. The more I see this, the more I want to live out of gratitude, not to get God to like me.

I'm not trying to get God to like me. The truth is, He does already. That is the miracle: He likes us already. He is trying to get us to believe and connect with this reality.

### **SPEAKING THE WORD WITH BOLDNESS BECAUSE OF OUR STANDING**

Again, when I see a person, old or young, when I'm counseling with them or they're confused, in my mind, more often than not, I almost always understand that these truths are what they're lacking; even if they've been in ministry for twenty years.

I know many guys who can preach this, but when they fail in their own life, they lack confidence. Though they can preach it, in the secrecy of their own heart they don't speak these truths when the devil comes to accuse them. The Devil doesn't care if I preach this to you. What he doesn't want, in terms of my life before God, is when I speak it to him, when he comes to try to lie to me about my standing before God.

We speak the Word; we tell him, "It is written, I am the righteousness of God because of Christ Jesus; that God relates to me through what Jesus did, and no one can move me from this place of security and this place of reality."

### **JESUS, THE ONLY WAY TO THE FATHER: AN ISSUE OF JUSTICE**

Now, this is why Jesus is the only way of salvation.

Now, this is the big stumbling block in terms of all the other faiths. It's very important that you understand this. All the other different religions around the world get really upset when Christians say, "This is the only way of salvation." Really, because here is what they hear; they hear the complete opposite of what we're saying. They hear, "You think you have the best religion and we have a dumb religion. You think you're better than us. You weigh out our ideas and your ideas, and you think your ideas are so much better than our ideas."

It's not about that. When I talk to different people who say, "How can you say that?" I say, "What other man lived perfectly?"

It's an issue of justice. Is there is any other man who lived perfectly? I've asked this to different religious leaders of other religions. They always say, "No, I don't know of anyone who lived perfectly."

I say, "You tell me the head of your religion. Did that man live his entire life perfectly in every thought, in every word?"

"Well, no..."

I say, "That is the issue. The only reason we are saved isn't because we're sincere. We have to be sincere, but it's more than that. We're saved because a man lived perfectly, and then when God was about to judge us, this Man stood perfectly in the way and took the penalty Himself.

"So in the other religions," I say, "it's an issue of justice. Did anyone else pay for your sin who was innocent his entire life? It's not an issue of being better than; it's an issue of receiving a free gift. The Man who gave us the gift had the ability and He had the power to pay that gift for us. So, that's what's going on."

**“ALL HAVE SINNED, AND COME SHORT OF THE GLORY OF GOD”**

Even people in the Body of Christ get offended about this. “Well, we don’t want to be too arrogant; how can we say we’re the only way?”

I mean, they love God too, in their own way. I say, “It’s not about all that. It’s about, ‘Did anyone else pay?’” When they stand before God, they’re going to stand in one of two positions. He’s going to say, “Either you stand in your own merits; you stand because of what you did, or you’re going to stand in the light of what Jesus did.”

Those are the only two options; there’s not a third option.

You cannot stand. Buddha cannot stand in your place, because Buddha is guilty. A guilty man cannot stand in your place. He cannot take your place because he is already guilty himself. The only person who can take our place is an innocent person. An innocent man is the only possible man. There is only One.

When we stand before God, when all the people of history stand before God, the question is: “On what basis should I let you into My kingdom?”

The guy says, “Well, I tried really hard.”

“Yes, but I am a holy God. Trying really hard doesn’t work. I cannot overlook your sin.”

Who paid for it? Someone has to pay for your sin by taking the penalty themselves for it. In all the religions of the world, they don’t have anyone who did that for them. In Christ Jesus, the innocent Man became guilty so that the guilty ones become innocent?

**“THERE IS THEREFORE NOW NO CONDEMNATION”**

Let’s go to the next verse, Romans 8:1. It says, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” —for the believer who is sincerely living right before God.

I don’t mean they’ve got victory in all their areas; I don’t know of any Christian who has a victory in every area, all the time, unbroken. All their thoughts are right, all their words are right, all their use of time is right. Their spirit is perfect all the time. I have never met such a person. Everyone has unsettled issues.

Now, here’s what Paul said: “There is therefore now no condemnation.”

God is not condemning us at all when we stand before Him as a believer. Now, He’s still working on areas of our lives. There are still issues He’s dealing with. When He’s dealing with the issues in our lives, telling you, “This has got to change,” and, “That’s got to change,” that’s an entirely different subject than God saying, “I don’t want you in My presence. Get out of My presence!” Because *condemnation* means, “Get out of My presence!”

What Paul said is, when we receive Jesus, God never says to us, “Get out of My presence!” Rather, He says, “Welcome; come near Me. Come near Me. There is no condemnation.”

### **WHO IS HE WHO CONDEMNS?**

Well, if there is no condemnation, why is it that we feel condemnation so much? Why is it that so many believers feel condemned?

What do I mean, “feel condemned?” When they go to worship before God, they say, “Oh no! God knows all the bad stuff. This is horrible! I have to get out of here. Somebody help me!”

Well, Somebody already helped you; you are a new creation. All the old things between you and God passed away. You are brand new, and the new things are the gift of God. You have become the righteousness of God when you stand before Him.

He sees the robes of righteousness around you, not just because He’s nice, but because a man who was innocent paid for them and gave us His righteousness. It’s a legal transaction. I mean, God is nice; God is good. It’s more than that. It’s a legal thing that our sin has paid for.

### **WE ARE NO LONGER INTIMIDATED BY THE PRESENCE OF GOD**

Therefore, there is no condemnation. God is not saying to you any longer, “Get out of My presence.” As a matter of fact, He is saying the opposite. He’s saying, “Come closer. Have confidence. Come to Me. You don’t have to be intimidated by My presence.”

What I mean by *intimidated* is being nervous that God is thinking about kicking us out. One reason a lot of people in the body of Christ are so unstable in their spiritual walk is because they’re always nervous that this is the week, or this is the month, when it’s all going to crash down, and they’re going to be kicked out.

The devil comes and tells us that; we even have friends who tell us that. “Oh man, you’re such a mess, there’s no hope for you!” You know what you can do? The very thing that Jesus did when the devil came to Him: He spoke the Word of God right back to the devil. You can take the Word of God and you can speak it right back.

### **THERE IS NOW FULL ACCEPTANCE THROUGH CHRIST JESUS**

It is written in Romans 8:1, “There is no condemnation.” “There is nothing that is driving me out of God’s presence. I am welcome. I am not being asked to leave. There is nothing condemning me from God’s heart. I am being accepted.”

Now, acceptance is the opposite of condemnation. When Paul said, “There is no condemnation,” he could have said it the other way: There is full acceptance because of Christ Jesus.

### **FULLY ACCEPTED IN THE BELOVED**

So you can say it either way you want, because both of them are true. You can say, “It is written, ‘There is no condemnation.’” Or you can say, because there are plenty of verses to back this up, “It is written, I am ‘fully accepted in the beloved.’” You can find that in Ephesians 1:5. It’s the same idea. We need to speak this, because the enemy will never stop accusing us.

The enemy wants us constantly unsettled on this issue. Once you get settled on it, beloved, you are going to explode in a good way. You are going to go forward in God because you have so much confidence, because your confidence won’t be determined by how well you are doing the last thirty days spiritually.

If my ability to enjoy God was only related to how well I had done the last thirty days, over these many years I've walked with the Lord, I would have quit many times.

The thing that I have had as a blessing is the leaders I had when I was younger, and the Lord taught me these things right from the beginning. Thirty-five years ago is when I met the Lord, and they taught me right from the beginning. I began to use these Bible verses, the truth, and speak them against the enemy. All my weaknesses and sin would come and the devil would say, "Oh, curse God and die! Quit! You're never going to make it anyway."

I would say, "I am a new creation. The old things have passed, from God's point of view. He sees me as He sees Christ. I am the righteousness of Christ! I am the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus, and there is no condemnation."

### **PRESENTING OUR MEMBERS AS INSTRUMENTS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS**

Now look at the next verse, Romans 6:13. Here's what Paul tells us. He says, "Now when you present yourself to God, you have to present yourself as alive from the dead. Then, present your members" —that means your physical bodies; the part of your personhood, the part of who you are; your mind, emotions, will, body, and spirit—those are your members—"present them to God as vessels" —or instruments—"of righteousness" (Rom. 6:13, paraphrased).

Now this is a really important verse. What many people do is present themselves to God as guilty. They go before God as believers and they say, "God, I love You, I love You! Oh, I'm such a mess" —we need to be honest about what we did—"I'm such a mess! I'll tell You what, God, if You're not mean to me for thirty days, I won't ask You for anything!"

They make all these crazy deals. Now, how do I know they make all these crazy deals? Well, because I used to make them, and because I've heard them for years.

Paul says that when you present yourself to God, like when you come before Him to worship—that means presenting yourself to God—when you offer yourself to Him, present yourself to God as someone who believes that God made you alive as a free gift.

Now, when I present myself to God, I don't always feel alive as a free gift. It's the truth. He doesn't want me presenting myself filled with condemnation. He wants me to come and say, "God, I believe Your Word. I believe what Your Son did. I am Yours and You love me and You see me as righteous."

That is what it means to present yourself as alive. Too many people present themselves as condemned. They offer themselves in worship as being guilty. They offer themselves as a minute away from being kicked out of the kingdom. They're on probation.

He didn't say, "Offer yourself as being on probation." Don't offer yourself to God as a person all messed up.

Now, we know we have our problems; we're not talking about being dishonest about our problems. We're talking about how God receives us heart to heart.

Now, God sees all the mess in all of our lives. This isn't what he's talking about; he's talking about the way He receives you at the heart level: He receives you as new. He receives you as those who have the righteousness of Jesus wrapped around them like a robe.

### **THE COMMITMENT TO BE HOLY THROUGH CONFIDENCE**

Now one of the reasons, here in Romans 6:3, that people don't present their members as instruments of righteousness to God—that means to be dedicated to the Lord, in holiness. When you present your members, you're presenting your body, your soul, your spirit; all of what goes into making you, you.

You are presenting yourself to God in that way, to be committed and to be holy. The reason a lot of people never sustain the second part of this verse is because they don't have the first part of this verse right. They never get around to saying, "I am Yours as a tool of righteousness;" they're so condemned and on probation and about ready to get kicked out of the kingdom.

They present themselves as dead or as guilty instead of presenting themselves alive. When they do that, they have so much discouragement in their spirit. They have no energy to present their members. Their body is an instrument in God's hand to do righteousness.

As leaders of the body of Christ, we tell people, "Go and present yourself as a servant for God to use you as a tool of righteousness."

The guy says, "I am so discouraged inside. I am depressed. I feel like I'm such a failure. You're telling me to go offer my service to God. I feel so dead inside."

### **TRUSTING THE WORD OF GOD TO DECLARE AND DEFINE OUR IDENTITY**

What we're doing is (Rom. 6:13), we're getting the order mixed up. You cannot offer yourself to serve God while you feel completely dead and condemned and kicked out of God's presence.

We've got to get the order right; we've got to present ourselves as accepted by the Lord, as enjoyed by the Lord. We present ourselves as alive in God's presence, with the Holy Spirit living in us and God enjoying us.

Beloved, when you do this, you may not feel it at all. He didn't say, "Present yourself as someone who feels good." He says, "Believe the Word, and whatever the Word says, that is how you present yourself before God."

The Word says, "You are alive," which means God enjoys you, He has accepted you, His righteousness is yours. You don't present yourself as dead, on probation, about to get kicked out, worthless. You don't present yourself as begging, "Oh, please forgive me one more time! Oh, I really mean it this time."

How many of you have got that, "I really mean it this time!"-type prayer? I've had a few of those over my day.

### **THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SPIRITUAL IMMaturity AND REBELLION**

Now, another point or two, and then we're going to draw this to an end.

Those of you who are new here, when I give you notes, which I normally do, I never finish them. Some people get ahead; I say, “Don’t even get ahead.” I go on bunny trails. I never get back, and then I stop in one second. I don’t even give you a wind-down. I just say, “OK, we’re done!” So, we’re getting close to getting done here.

Roman numeral II. Spiritual immaturity is not the same thing as rebellion. Rebellion and immaturity sometimes look the same outwardly. Now beloved, you need to hear that for your own life. Some of you have got that really clear, so I’m talking to you as leaders. Even though you might be fourteen-years old, the Lord has made you a leader anyway. Maybe you’re leading thirteen-year olds; maybe you’re leading people your own age. Maybe you’re leading five people, but you’re still a leader. You’re still teaching and helping others. That’s an important thing to do.

You’ve got to get this point clear, because most believers are confused on this point. They feel like they’re rebellious, and they love God. The truth is, they’re not rebellious, they’re immature. There’s a big difference.

If you are rebellious, God is angry, and you need to run out of His presence until you repent. If you are immature, God delights in you and you run into His presence and open your spirit.

Now the problem is, sometimes the outward activity of someone who really loves God, but who is immature, their mind still isn’t renewed; it still has old thought-patterns, but they really love God. They may do some of the same things outwardly.

### **THE POWER OF THE LENS OF GOD’S REFINING VISION**

Now, my goal here isn’t trying to talk you into, “You know that’s OK...” You don’t want to live and do wrong things; you want to resist those wrong things between now and when you get free of these different issues.

You know how, when you get free of a bunch of issues, you think you’ve got it made. It’s like you’re looking down there in the microscope. You’ve got the slide that looks all clean, and then the Lord turns up the power from ten power to a hundred power. You think, “Oh man, there’s so much dirt on that.”

I’ve had that a bunch of times over the years. I get that all cleaned up and then think, “I’m there!” Then He turns that up to a thousand power. “Ack, there’s dirt everywhere!”

So when you get a few issues settled, don’t think it’s over, because there’s a whole lot more. It’s a lifelong journey.

### **RUNNING HEADLONG TOWARDS THE EMBRACE OF GOD**

Here’s the point I’m trying to make. If you understand that spiritual immaturity is different from rebellion, then, when you see your immaturity, you don’t go run and hide from God. You run into His presence and you say, “Lord, I am weak. I am broken, but I love You and You love me.” You open your heart and you don’t guard yourself from God.

A lot of people, when they worship God, it’s like if you could picture what their spirit looks like—the way we’re supposed to worship God, our heart is wide open. I’m not talking about body language right now. I’m talking about if I could describe a person’s spirit, if they’re worshipping with confidence, even though they’re immature, their spirit is wide open.

Most people, here's the way they worship; here's what their spirit looks like: "Oh God, I love You! I'll do anything for You, I'll do anything! I'll go on the mission field. Ajohgoiaoiing!..."

The Lord says, "Shhh. Shhh."

"Just get it over with, beat me now, get it over with! Hurry up, kick me out, get it over with!"

The Lord is saying, "Put your hands down" —I don't mean your real hands, but your spirit—"Open your heart, I like you. My Son paid the price for you. I want you. His righteousness is around you. Come to Me, don't run from Me. Open your spirit."

### **TRANSFORMED BY THE RENEWING OF OUR MINDS**

I tell you, you get a person who gets this clear, and they come with all the unsettled issues, but they have confidence that God loves them and they know that they love God. They're sincere about getting these issues settled, but their own un-renewed mind, their own dark thinking, little by little is coming more into the light. More *renewed* is what the Bible calls it.

The more our minds get renewed, the more the issues get cleaned up. It's not that we're insincere; it's that our mind is unrenewed. That's why it's really important what we put in our minds. We cannot fill our minds with wrong things and expect our spirit or our heart to feel right. When we fill our mind with wrong things, our spirit gets really heavy and dark and weighed down. We have to fill our minds with right things.

### **THE SHEEP AND THE PIGS**

I have here at the end of this paragraph that both sheep and pigs get stuck in the mud. The reason I say that is that, in the Bible, in the Old Testament, in Israel, the sheep was a clean animal. As a matter of fact, we're constantly called the sheep of his pasture. We are like sheep before Him; He is the Shepherd.

We all understand that: The sheep are clean animals but the pigs are unclean animals. That's a religious category. I don't want to go into explaining that, but it's bad news, OK.

So, the pigs are unclean animals and the sheep are clean animals. Now, the sheep get stuck in the mud, and when the sheep get stuck in the mud, if you've ever seen them in the mud, they're kicking, trying to get out. Their hooves are stuck in the mud; they can't get out.

The shepherd comes and picks them up, pulls them out of the mud, and puts them on dry ground. When they're in the mud, they hate it; the sheep kick and struggle, and the more they struggle, sometimes the further they get in and they're trying to get out. Then they need help. When they're in the mud, they're trying to get out of the mud.

Pigs are totally different. You get them out of the mud, you turn around, and they go right for another mud hole. Man, they are planning for a mud hole. The first chance they get, they're trying to get in.

### **SINCERE IN PURSUING RIGHTEOUSNESS**

Many of you, when you lie in your bed at night, you're not trying to get away with sin, you're not trying to trick God, you're trying to get free from your sin. You're trying to think of a way to stop doing it.

You're not trying to think of a way to fake God out. "Well, God, if You stay really busy looking at that, then I'm going to pull off another couple bad weekends and hopefully You won't notice."

Most of you, that's not what you're thinking. You're in your bed at night or in a prayer time, saying, "O God, I hate what I'm doing! I'm trying to figure out a way not to do that. I get in this pressure and I end up doing it. I hate it!" You're like one of the sheep whose feet are stuck in the mud. The Lord wants to deliver you and He's going to deliver you, beloved, between now and your full deliverance.

He likes you. You are sincere. He doesn't see you as rebellious.

### **THE FOLLY AND PERIL OF REBELLION**

There are other people, maybe some in this room right now, who don't really care if they're in the mud, if they're in. They want to do more sin. They say, "God, You deal with it. I'm going to do what I want to do. I'll do it when I want to do it."

They're like the pigs, but they're not truly born again. A person who has that attitude, even though they may have grown up in the Church, they're not born again; they're still not in the kingdom of God. You cannot be in the kingdom just because you went to youth group your whole life. You can only be in the kingdom if your heart receives the gift of righteousness and you commit yourself to Him and He makes you clean as a deliberate act of the Holy Spirit touching your heart.

You cannot be in the kingdom of God just because your parents were in the kingdom and you went to the youth group. Even if you led the youth group, that doesn't bring you into the kingdom. There are more preachers in our nation who aren't born again. They're not even in the kingdom, but they're the heads of churches or church organizations. Let's say it that way.

So, if that is in your heart—"I'm just trying to get away with sin, and hopefully no one will catch me"—then you need to repent and you need to get into the kingdom and you need to be born again and experience a real relationship with God.

I believe that most of you in this room are stuck in the mud in this or that issue, but you're trying hard to get out. The point I'm trying to say to you is the next paragraph. I'm just going to do the next two, and then we're going to end with that.

### **WEAK LOVE IS NOT FALSE LOVE**

We all struggle with weakness, but that doesn't mean we're hopeless hypocrites. The fact that our love for God is weak doesn't mean our love for God is false. Weak love is not false love.

My love for God needs to be stronger. While it's growing, I'm not false because it's not perfectly strong. Your love isn't false because it's not mature. It's still real, it's just weak.

### **THE TRUE DEFINITION OF A HYPOCRITE**

Sometimes, I have heard this definition of a hypocrite: People say, "A hypocrite is someone who says one thing and does another." That isn't true; that's not the definition of a hypocrite.

A hypocrite isn't someone who says one thing and does another; a hypocrite is someone who says one thing and doesn't pursue the other. You are not a hypocrite because you come short of where you're aiming. I mean, we're aiming for holiness and love, which are really the same thing. If we're aiming for holiness and love, we're definitely falling short.

There is no one in this room who is perfect in holiness and love. We are hypocrites if we proclaim it, but we're not seeking to do it at the heart level. We can seek and still fail and still be real. We're still genuine, even though we're failing in issues of our life.

We don't attain to everything that we are aiming for.

### **STRUGGLING WITH SIN, BUT A LOVER OF GOD**

Paragraph C. Here's a question. Don't answer it, I'll answer it for you, so you don't say, like this one guy, "Yeah, I'm this!" No, that was the wrong answer, and he got all embarrassed.

Question: Are you a slave of sin who struggles to love God? That is the wrong answer. Or, here is the right one: Are you a lover of God who still struggles with sin? Which is the core truth of who you are? It sounds exactly the same; it's not at all. At the core of your being, are you mostly a slave of sin who's occasionally trying to love God?

"Well, you know, it's summer, I'm at IHOP-KC. I might as well try to love God! Really I'm committed to sin, but it's the summer. My parents would be happy if I came home with a good attitude. That would be nice..."

Or are you a lover of God? I mean at the core of your being, when no one is looking, you really want to love God. You're still struggling with sin, but at the core you've committed to being a lover of God. That is who you are, and that is what you're about.

Beloved, the enemy wants to come and tell us that mostly we're just sinners who are struggling to love. The truth is, we are lovers who are still struggling with sin. Yes, we still have problems with sin, but at the core of who we are, we are loved by God and we love God back. That is who we are. That is what we do, and that is who we are.

Amen. Let's stand.