



Intimacy
with
GOD

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Topics subject to change without notice

JUNE 5 - INTIMACY WITH GOD, WHAT IS IT?

Although the word "intimacy" does not appear in the King James Bible, the thought of an up-close walk with God does. Therefore it is necessary first to define our theme.

JUNE 12 - INTIMACY WITH GOD, HOW TO DEVELOP IT

Intimacy with God is sometimes viewed as an alternative to "sound doctrine" or "dead orthodoxy." It has resulted in spiritual anarchy in the religious world, by which man is exalted and God is trivialized. Let's learn the Lord's way for a closer walk with Him.

JUNE 19 - INTIMACY WITH GOD THROUGH WORSHIP

Worship is drawing near to God. God has appointed times for the assembly of all believers to draw near to him as a community or fellowship of His people. To believers it is not a celebration, but the most sacred hour of the week.

JUNE 26 - INTIMACY WITH GOD BY A FAITHFUL LIFE

There is an obvious need in today's world for a better understanding of the harmony of keeping God at a distance and drawing nearer to God. Let's see.

"INTIMACY WITH GOD, WHAT IS IT?"

John 17:1–3

As we approach the beginning of a new century—and even a new millennium—we're surely thankful for much of what we've been blessed in this century. Through the development and growth of science and technology, the industrialized world is enjoying living conditions far, far above anything our foreparents could ever have dreamed about. In fact, probably more of them than we'll ever know were like my father, who hearing his first radio and seeing his first television, said of each of them, "They'll never perfect it; it'll never work."

But with a hundred years of extraordinary human achievement has come also the devaluation of God. Being so totally surrounded with all this "stuff" we've made for ourselves, God has become rather irrelevant, hasn't He? With the recent cloning of an animal and now so much talk about cloning humans, God seems to be even less important. All this materialism has made a closer walk with God difficult, to say the least, and even the church is found minimizing God.

These messages are not intended to be a rebuke to anybody, but an effort to restore our respect and reverence for God, and to exalt Him and strengthen Him in our spiritual family and national lives.

The word *intimacy* is not found in the King James Version of the Bible. It's possible there was no such word in the English language when the King James Version was translated in 1611. However, it is a word now—a very legitimate word—in common use today; therefore it does appear in some of the modern English translations.

That points up a legitimate need for modern speech translations. Some television viewers have written me and asked why we need new translations. Well, this is one reason. I wouldn't venture a guess how many new words were added to our English dictionaries just last year alone. We'll be using these new words to express old thoughts about—well, just about everything, including our faith in God and in Christ. This is not an endorsement of all modern versions, of course not. And I pray you won't take it as such. But since some of the English words used four hundred years ago are no longer in common use—someone has given me a list of some five hundred such words, probably there are more—and since we're constantly coining new words to express those thoughts, it's helpful to have a reliable, and I stress, a reliable translation of God's word in the vocabulary currently in use.

The dictionary defines intimacy as "the state of being intimate." Of "intimate," it says:

Belonging to or characterizing one's deepest nature: marked by very close association marked by a warm friendship through long association: suggesting informal warmth or privacy: of a very personal or private nature (*Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*).

To a lot of people, that defines a sexual relationship. It would certainly include it, all right, but it could hardly be that exclusively. But look, that's what the Bible is saying in Genesis 4:1: "And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain." Now this isn't Adam's first introduction to Eve. That had already taken place, and we'll return to it later. But here he knew her intimately—sexually—and she conceived. The same idea is in Genesis 4:25: "And Adam knew his wife again; and she bare a son, and called his name Seth." That "intimacy" is sexual. In some daytime talk shows a guest might be asked, "Were you intimate?" meaning, of course, did you have sexual relations?

And despite the fact that some people deny it—even some theologians—that's exactly the situation in Sodom in Genesis 19:1–11 when the Scripture says,

The men of Sodom, compassed the house [Lot's house] round, both old and young, all the people from every quarter: and they called unto Lot, and said unto him, Where are the men which came in to thee this night? bring them out unto us, that we may *know* them (Genesis 19:4–5).

Don't let yourself be deceived into believing these men were the welcoming committee from the chamber of commerce come to know or get acquainted with Lot's guests. They wanted a sexual knowledge—what's sometimes called carnal knowledge—of these men, and since they refused to accept Lot's daughters instead, it's clearly obvious they wanted a homosexual relationship. This is the sin of Sodom that God calls "grievous" in Genesis 18:20 for which He utterly destroyed the city. So that's one aspect of intimacy in the Scriptures.

There's another kind of intimacy in the Bible, too. It's found in Genesis 2 in the creation story. When all the animals which God had made were brought before Adam, he gave them names. But among them all, there was no suitable helpmate found for Adam. So it's said in Genesis 2:21,

The Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; and the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.

That's an intimate relationship—the most intimate human relationship we'll ever know.

In Ephesians 5:22–33 the Holy Spirit uses this "one flesh" intimacy to teach us another kind—a very, very close relationship between Christ and His church. He says,

Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: for we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband.

The idea of intimacy with God is nothing new. It's taught in the Scriptures. I believe that is what is meant in Genesis 3:8 when it's said, "And they [Adam and Eve] heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day." I must admit I don't comprehend all that says, but I believe the Holy Spirit is conveying the idea of a very warm, close, intimate fellowship for which God created man, and which existed between Him and His offspring (Acts 17:28–29), prior to the transgression, which relationship is restored when man is reconciled to God by Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17–19).

But intimacy has been talked up for a long time in some theological circles as an alternative to what some have called "dead orthodoxy" and more recently others have dubbed "legalism." It's an escape from "sound doctrine" as we read in 2 Timothy 4:3 and other passages. It's a kind of super-spirituality that's founded, not on the word of God, but that grows out of what feels like a super-

experience with God, which has resulted in the (1) trivialization of God, (2) abandonment of the doctrines of the atoning and mediatorial works of Christ, (3) rejection of biblical authority, (4) desertion of real Christianity, and has resulted in further fragmentation of believers into super-sects.

But what we're encouraging in this study of intimacy with God, as we also expose the dangers and pitfalls of which we've just spoken, is a person's genuine, Bible-based, close-up knowledge of God, a genuine nearness to God as the Holy Spirit compares it to the closeness of the husband-wife relationship. It's a closer walk with God, what David, the shepherd-boy-become-king said in the greatly loved Twenty-third Psalm:

The Lord is my shepherd;
I shall not want.
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures:
He leadeth me beside the still waters.
He restoreth my soul:
He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.
Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil: for thou art with me;
Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.
Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies:
Thou anointest my head with oil;
My cup runneth over.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life:
And I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

We're saying what the apostle Paul is saying in the New Testament:

What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ . . . *That I may know him*, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his suffering, being made conformable unto his death (Philippians 3:7–10).

And what he wrote to Timothy:

I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day (2 Timothy 1:12).

And again in 2 Timothy 4:16–18:

At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge. Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom be glory for ever and ever.

It's what John is saying in 1 John 1:3:

That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship [partnership, join-participation, communion] with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.

And it's what Jesus Himself was talking about in prayer the night before His crucifixion:

Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee: as thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him. And this is

life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent (John 17:1–3).

It's the closer walk with God that we sing about,

O Master let me walk with Thee
In lowly paths of service free;
Tell me Thy secret; help me bear
The strain of toil, the fret of care.

Or—

When we walk with the Lord
In the light of His Word,
What a glory He sheds on our way!
While we do His good will,
He abides with us still,
And with all who will trust and obey.

And—

There is a place of quiet rest,
Near to the heart of God,
A place where sin cannot molest,
Near to the heart of God.

And another—

Nearer, still nearer, close to Thy heart,
Draw me, my Savior, so precious Thou art;
Fold me, O fold me close to Thy breast,
Shelter me safe in that haven of rest.

Finally there's that favorite of many, written by our beloved friend L. O. Sanderson, now deceased:

Be with me, Lord—I cannot live without Thee,
I dare not try to take one step alone,
I cannot bear the loads of life, unaided,
I need thy strength to lean myself upon.

So what we're talking about in these messages—about intimacy with God—is knowing God and living in conformity with His will—the desirability of it and the dangers of it.

Enoch is a name that's familiar to most Bible readers basically for two reasons. First, he is one of only two people of whom the Bible says, he “walked with God.” The other was Noah (Genesis 6:9). The second reason we remember him is that he walked so closely with God that he pleased God and he didn't die, for God just took him (Genesis 5:24). The New Testament book of Hebrews says of him,

By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God (Hebrews 11:5).

Enoch's life, then, is a biblical example of intimacy with God. He lived close to God. His life was not one of austerity or contemplation, far removed from the interests and cares of the world. It wasn't that he joined a monastery and cut himself off from the rest of the world to walk with God. His wasn't a life without fault. Of course not, nor was Noah's; they were men of like passions with us, as the Bible says of Elijah (James 5:17). But Enoch believed in God and it's said of him that he

“pleased God,” meaning he obeyed God. The prophet Amos asked, “Can two walk together, except they be agreed?” (Amos 3:3).

Intimacy with God is knowing God up close, and the Holy Spirit says, “And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments” (1 John 2:3). That makes sense, doesn't it? How can a person say he knows God who doesn't permit God to direct his ways? In the next verse He says, “He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.” Oh, that's strong language, but it's the truth—straight from the Holy Spirit.

My friend, how is it with you? Are you living and walking close to the Lord? Have you committed your life and your self to Him and His will? I certainly hope so, but we hear from television viewers every week who were not, who have now turned their lives around to do just that. If you haven't already done so, may I insist you do it today. Repent and be baptized into Jesus at once (Acts 2:38). Say, the Lord's way to live life is the best, the very best. Get to know God. He'll be a blessing to you. He's never been known to be anything but a blessing. We love you.

"INTIMACY WITH GOD, HOW TO DEVELOP IT"

John 14:1–10

Knowing God! Knowing God intimately or up close! What an awesome thought that is! Or is it? Our twentieth century American society—even we in the church express little to no awe in the divine presence, before whom every thought, every intention, every action of our lives is a matter of record! (Hebrews 4:12). What a loss! What a terrible and tragic loss we suffer for our irreverence. God forgive us and have mercy on us.

The prophet Isaiah wrote,

In the year of King Uzziah's death, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings; with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called out to another and said, Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory. And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of Him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke. Then I said, "Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I live among a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts" (Isaiah 6:1–5 NASB).

Isaiah expressed the fear others in the Scriptures experienced when they were personally confronted with the immediate presence and holiness of God.

The apostle Peter was one of Jesus' intimate friends. He and James and John are sometimes called the inner three. They were chosen to be with Jesus on some very special events where others were not included. On one occasion Peter and his friends had fished all night without success. In the morning Jesus borrowed his boat from which He preached to the multitudes assembled on the shore of lake Galilee. When He had finished, He commanded Peter to launch out into the deep and let down the nets for a catch.

And Simon answering said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net. And when they had this done, they enclosed a great multitude of fishes: and their net brake. And they beckoned unto their partners, which were in the other ship, that they should come and help them. And they came, and filled both the ships, so that they began to sink. When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord (Luke 5:5–8).

The aged apostle John exiled on Patmos for the word of the Lord wrote,
I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard
behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet . . . And
I turned to see the voice that spake with me . . .
And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead . . .
(Revelation 1:10–17).

Very few people nowadays who profess an intimacy with God behave in the Divine Presence as did Isaiah and Peter and John and others in the Bible. The god they know and worship and serve is not that awesome. Their god is not one to be feared. They much prefer a god who is just one of us—a pal, a "locker room" friend, a buddy, or as an Australian would say, "a mate." Many of us express more awe at the appearance of a favorite sports or music star or politician on a TV show than we do in the presence of the one holy and true God. I'm not exaggerating. I'm simply stating a fact. There's a reason

for it. Despite our boasting, we don't really know God. At this point someone's sure to quickly rejoin, "But I do know God!" Perhaps. However, I ask in all honesty, is it God you know, or an image of Him?

We can know God because He has revealed Himself to us for that very purpose. But in our attempt to know Him up close or intimately, we must strictly guard against two very grave dangers. On the one hand, there's the danger that through a perceived holiness acquired by our own doings, we may elevate ourselves to the level of deity. Some actually do that. They believe they are gods. On the other extreme, as an alternative to that, or as an escape from sound doctrine commonly called "legalism," we may bring God down to our size, to be one of us. Many are they who do that. Let's see then how and how much of Himself God has revealed.

First, Romans 1:18–21 says,

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse (NASB).

The invisible things of God are visible to those who will see, being reflected in the things He created. There's that popular psalm, too:

The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night showeth knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard. Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world (Psalm 19:1–4).

Secondly, God has revealed Himself through the person of His Son, Jesus Christ. The Gospel of John focuses sharply on this aspect of the incarnation. For example, in John's account of Jesus' long and sometimes difficult controversy with the Pharisees over His deity, in chapter 8, verse 19, he quotes Jesus as saying, "You know neither Me, nor My Father; if you knew Me, you would know My Father also" (NASB).

And in the passage we read at the beginning, John 14:1–10, Jesus had announced to His disciples His imminent death and departure from among them. Naturally their hearts were heavy, so He gave them the message of comfort found in John 14, 15, and 16. He began by saying (this time I'm quoting from the NASB), "Let not your heart be troubled;" He said, "believe in God, believe also in Me." After promising He was going away to prepare a place for them, He said He would return for them, to take them to that place. Then to dispel any wonder or doubts they had about where He was going, He said,

"And you know the way where I am going." Thomas said to Him, "Lord we do not know where You are going; how do we know the way?" Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me. If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; from now on you know Him, and have seen Him." Philip said to Him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us." Jesus said to him, "Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how do you say, 'Show us the Father?' Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me?" (NASB).

My friend, Jesus Christ is the way to the Father. He is the revelation of the truth of the Father. He is the way to life with the Father. No man knows or can know God apart from His Son Jesus Christ. So by knowing the life and teachings of Jesus, we can know God. In Hebrews 1:1–4 the Holy Spirit says,

God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.

Again in Colossians 1:15 He says of Christ, "Who is the image of the invisible God . . ." And again in verse 19, "For it pleased the Father that in him should all fullness dwell." And once more in 2:9: "For in him dwelleth all the fullness of the godhead bodily." In Jesus Christ God came nigh to sinners. In Him God became a man and walked among us.

Thirdly, we can know God through the Scriptures. Jesus told those Pharisees we mentioned a while ago to "search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me" (John 5:39). If they had known Christ, they would have known the Father who had sent Him, and they could have known Him had they known their own Scriptures, because those Scriptures testified or gave witness to their Messiah, Jesus Christ.

Those are the Scriptures which are said to be "the oracles of God." The dictionary defines an oracle as "a person through whom a deity is believed to speak" or "a shrine in which a deity reveals hidden knowledge." In Acts 7:38 Stephen said of the Mosaic Law that it was "the oracles of God." Paul spoke of "the oracles of God" with reference to all the written utterances of God through the Old Testament writers. In Hebrews 5:12, the oracles of God refer to the substance of Christian doctrine; and in 1 Peter 4:11, the idea is the utterances of God through Christian teachers. All that needs to be emphasized because there are so many people who profess an intimate knowledge of God through an experience with Him, apart from the written word of God. And the more dramatic that experience, the greater the intimacy is believed to be. That's the popular understanding of "intimacy with God."

J. I. Packer says in his 1995 book, *Knowing Christianity* (page 16),

All theology that moves away from the Scripture is basically trash, and one of the miseries of the modern church is that much of its literature, preaching, and thinking is so much trash at this point. What is called for now . . . is the humility which bows before the Scriptures and accepts them as instruction from God. They are God preaching, God talking, God telling, God instructing, God setting before us the right way to think and speak about him. The Scripture are God showing us himself: God communicating to us who he is and what he has done so that in the response of faith we may truly know him and live our lives in fellowship with him . . . This Word is what the world must have if ever it is to know God. Thank God for it, then, and value and prize it.

I couldn't have said it better. (That's one reason I quoted him.)

We've talked about knowing God (1) through His revelation of Himself in the created world, (2) through His revelation of Himself in the person of Jesus Christ, and (3) through His revelation of Himself in His oracles—the Scriptures. There's this yet to be said, and I've kept it until now for a reason.

There is so much that needs to be said about it that we'll have to address it more directly and fully later. It's the rich fellowship we have with Him through faith. Now I'm not talking about the same thing that some call experiential knowledge, that is, knowledge gained by experience apart from God's revelations of Himself in creation, in His Son, and in the Scriptures. I'm talking about an acquaintance and association the Christian has through an active faith in personal involvement with God in His divine purpose and teaching. Faith is more than mere acceptance of a certain set teachings; it's more than consent to the reality of a divine order—meaning God. It's also an active involvement in that divine

order. "By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain" (Hebrews 11:4 NASB). "By faith Noah, being warned by God about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark" (Hebrews 11:7 NASB). "By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed" (Hebrews 11:8 NASB). And the apostle, when he was talking about his sufferings for Christ, said in 2 Timothy 1:12,

For this reason I also suffer these things, but I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day (NASB).

My friend, I'm talking about the kind of life you can live with God if you will by faith accept His will, and obey Him in repentance and baptism for the remission of your sins, as He teaches in Acts 2:38. The person who believes he can live on an up-close friendship with God and do it separately from the teachings of His word, is doomed to disappointment. "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17). God bless you, we love you.

"INTIMACY WITH GOD THROUGH WORSHIP"

Titus 1:15–16

They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate.

Oh, that's strong language! But it's true. It must surely have been true when it was written and it's obviously true today.

There's no doubt about it, for centuries some people have thought they enjoyed a special space in God's presence because of the good works they did, or do—their sacrifices or missionary work—or because of their absolute loyalty to the creed of some mainline orthodox church group, or because of their ascetic life—perhaps in some monastery. But from what I'm reading and hearing in the modern religious media and from what I'm witnessing in the churches I visit, that isn't the chief concern in churches today. As a matter of fact, it's the very opposite that's most troubling. It's the almost total absence of respect for God and the irreverent lack of awe in His holy presence, justified by a profession of a personal intimacy with Him.

The current mania is what is viewed as an escape from traditional Christian belief and teaching and worship, by way of a dramatic experience with Him—apart from what the Scriptures themselves call “sound doctrine.”

If traditionalism has been the cause of religious division among professed Christians of past generations, then individualism with its unlimited freedom, irreverence, spiritual anarchy, and its paganism is that curse today. Lifting one's self up to God's level by good works and devotion to dogma to achieve a supposed intimacy with Him is not refuted by reducing God to one's own level to accomplish the same goal. It's admittedly true that sound doctrine, as is mentioned in the letters to Timothy and Titus, has been badly abused by the profane and vain babblings of some teachers, who concerning the truth, have erred (2 Timothy 2:16–18). But it's no mark of superior spirituality to abandon biblically defined sound doctrine in favor of an exhilarating personal experience with a god specially invented to meet a person's individual needs.

The apostle John, who enjoyed the very closest relationship with Jesus Christ during His earthly ministry—he is known as one of the “inner three” of the apostles—wrote 1 John in which he said in the opening verses:

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life.

My friend, you're not going to get much closer than that.

That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that [a statement of purpose] ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.

You see, John was writing things of which he had absolute knowledge; and he was writing them so we might enjoy the fellowship he enjoyed with God and with Christ. And without his and other such writings, we cannot enjoy that fellowship or communion or intimacy. Its power far exceeds that of any religious experience you or I may have known. Otherwise, in converting the lost, it would be more effective to witness of our own experience than to preach the gospel of Christ which is the power of God to salvation to everyone that believeth, to the Jew first and also to the Greek (Romans 1:16).

But John doesn't stop there. He continues that line of thought and he says,

My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world. And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him (1 John 2:1–4).

What was that our text said about,

They profess that they know God; but in works [deeds NASB], they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate?

In the preceding message of this series we spoke at length of the ways we have of knowing God: (1) through the created things about us (Romans 1:18–20), (2) through knowing Jesus Christ whom He sent in human form to live among us (John 14:6), (3) by His own word, His revelation of Himself, the Scriptures (John 5:39), and (4) through faithfully and obediently participating with Him in His divine purpose as did Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and others mentioned in Hebrews 11.

The professed believer who repudiates the sound doctrine of the Scriptures assumes to have a better way—a better way of knowing God, a better way of salvation that leaves out all that Christ did at Calvary in favor of a confrontation with the Holy Spirit, a better way of life, a better way of worship, all in this life and a better hope for the life hereafter. He (or she) seems to have some sort of a mysterious, mystical, unrevealed passageway, like a secret tunnel to the presence of God. The old brush-arbor preacher boldly made such claims when, as he beat himself on the chest, he would shout, “I would rather have what I felt right down here than a stack of Bibles to the ceiling.” Such audacity! disrespect! irreverence! such disregard for the word of *God!* So everybody with his own private experience leads a group of followers off into another fellowship, thereby proliferating division.

There’s a very widely held but erroneous assumption that a direct personal working of the Holy Spirit is more powerful, therefore more to be desired than His working through the word of God. Of course, the same mistake is made with reference to the working of God, Himself. But really now, a miracle is not a demonstration of a greater power of God or of the Holy Spirit, than that power seen in the ordinary workings of the deity. To have “experienced” God or the Holy Spirit is believed by some to be the ultimate. Make no mistake about it, the Holy Spirit is always present and active in saving a sinner and in his growing in holiness in the Lord. But the Holy Spirit does not act independently of the word of God to achieve either salvation or intimacy with God.

In John 16:7–14 when Jesus promised the apostles the Holy Spirit, He said,

And when he is come, he will reprove [convict NASB] the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they believe not on me; of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged.

Now that’s the working of the Holy Spirit on the heart of the sinner to bring him to Christ. There’s never been a person brought to Christ without it. The question is, “How does He do it?” It seems to me He has two possible avenues through which He may work: (1) He may use force, I mean by this that He may swoop down upon the sinner and convict him of sin, righteousness, and judgment by taking control of his heart and life—even against his will, as some claim—or (2) He may use teaching and persuasion, in which case He would work through the word of God, the preaching of the gospel. The first may have more appeal to the sensationalist, but the second is the real truth about how the Holy Spirit works in the heart of man.

Dr. Michael Horton said it well in his recent book, *In the Face of God* (page 133). He says,

Nowhere in the Scripture do we find a pattern of evangelism or revival in which individuals respond to the gospel by simply being “zapped” by the Spirit. They are always responding to the preached Word. It may be one-on-one, or in an assembly, but it is the Word proclaimed that gives life to those spiritually dead. Furthermore, even after they are converted, believers do not grow in their walk, deepen in the Christian experience, or learn new truths by the direct activity of the Spirit apart from God’s ordained means.

While there may be people who deny the leading of the Holy Spirit in conversion and in growing in holiness (intimacy) with the Lord, I don’t recall ever having met such a person or heard him preach or read any of his books. But it’s as Horton says further,

Apart from the Word, there is no salvation and no activity of the Holy Spirit in the lives of God’s people. Where the Word is rightly preached, the Spirit is active in power. Where the Word is not rightly preached, the Spirit is not active in power. It is impossible to have a place in which the Word is preached clearly (as the proclamation of Christ), where the Spirit is absent in power and saving strength. It is equally impossible for the Spirit to be actively present if the preaching of Christ is not the central focus.

Well, there is no short cut, no substitute for the word of God, either by personal perusal or by the preaching of it, for bringing about conversion to Christ or for spiritual growth in the life of the Christian. People who “profess that they know God,” as our text says, who make that profession on the basis of some loaded super-experience with Him, rather than obedient acceptance of His sound teaching, actually deny Him by their works or deeds.

The person who says that God comes and sits on the edge of his bed and talks with him in a chummy, friend-to-friend sort of way, and he enjoys these affable, cordial, private chats with God on a regular or frequent basis, is not being entirely truthful with you, my friend. In John 15:14–16 Jesus said, Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you. Ye have not chosen me [as a friend, He’s saying], but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.

Friendship with God is not of our choice, lest we should trivialize God, but it is His choice and it is conditioned on our doing His commandments.

The biblical experience of sinful man’s encounter with the holy and true God is never seen as a celebration. It is always clothed in fear and trembling. When Moses had received the law written on the tables of stone by the finger of God and had returned from Mount Sinai to the camp of the Israelites to deliver that law to them, Exodus 20:18–21 says,

And all the people perceived the thunder and the lightning flashes and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they trembled and stood at a distance. Then they said to Moses, “Speak to us yourself and we will listen; but let not God speak to us, lest we die” . . . So the people stood at a distance, while Moses approached the thick cloud where God was (NASB).

Moses, the great deliverer, lawgiver, and mediator of the Old Testament was given privileges with God that no other person has ever enjoyed. God acknowledged him as a friend who had found grace in His sight. On these conditions Moses asked of God that he might see God’s glory. God said to him, I know you; I know you as a friend; I know you by name and I will grant what you’ve asked.

I will make all my goodness pass before thee . . . and will be gracious . . . But He said, Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live (Exodus 33:19–20).

The writer of the Bible book called Hebrews says, “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Hebrews 10:31). “Holy and reverend is his name” (Psalm 111:9). Let’s keep it that way.

Since the fall in the Garden of Eden, man has never had direct access to God the Father. He has always had to go to God through a mediator. In the age of the patriarchs, the fathers as the heads of the households mediated with God for the members of their families. That is why Joshua could say, “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” (Joshua 24:15). As we just saw, Moses was the mediator of the covenant God made with Israel at Mount Sinai. Jesus Christ is our mediator under the new and better New Testament we have with God, enacted on better promises. The Scripture says in 1 Timothy 2:5–6,

There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.

To profess a direct personal relationship with God is to circumvent the atoning and the mediatorial ministries of Jesus Christ. It’s tantamount to rejecting Him and the ransom He paid for us. Yes, we can know God. It’s as it should be that we be intimate with Him. We are also to remember who He is and hold Him in reverence and awe, and remember that we are but sinful men. God bless and keep you now. We love you.

"INTIMACY WITH GOD BY A FAITHFUL LIFE"

Psalm 139:7–13

In the back of an old hymn book I have from somewhere in the past—it's been a long time because the pages are yellowed and tattered—someone has written the title of some favorite hymns. At the top of the list is

I am thine, O Lord, I have heard thy voice,
And it told Thy love to me;
But I long to rise in the arms of faith,
And be closer drawn to Thee.
Draw me nearer, nearer, blessed Lord,
To the cross where Thou hast died;
Draw me nearer, nearer, nearer blessed Lord,
To Thy precious, bleeding side.
And there's another that says,
Closer to Thee, near to Thy side,
Closer dear Lord, I would abide;
Hold me in Thy embrace,
'Neath every smile of grace,
Grant me, Thy child, a place
Closer to Thee.

Yes, those were some of the favorite hymns of a generation that's now moving swiftly into eternity. They had meaning. Millions of souls were drawn into a closer walk with God by singing those hymns.

We've already learned that we can't attain this nearness to God, of which we sing and for which we pray, by elevating ourselves to His level by our works or law-keeping on the one hand, nor on the other hand, can we achieve it by reducing Him to the level of a god invented for our special selfish needs and wants. So how do we achieve it?

Well, before we even begin, it's a must that we be totally and completely honest and open with God—no play-acting, no games, no charades, no pretense, just plain openness and sincerity. It has been said we can deceive some of the people all the time, and all the people some of the time, but we can never deceive all the people all the time. It's true, but we can't fool God, not even for a moment. He knows us better than we know ourselves. It's as we read in the first part of that 139th Psalm:

O Lord, Thou hast searched me and known me.
Thou dost know when I sit down and when I rise up;
Thou dost understand my thought from afar.
Thou dost scrutinize my path and my lying down,
And art intimately acquainted with all my ways.
Even before there is a word on my tongue,
Behold, O Lord, Thou dost know it all.
Thou hast enclosed me behind and before,
And laid Thy hand upon me (vv. 1–5 NASB).

That's a great thought!

In preparation for intimacy with God, we must also commit ourselves totally and unreservedly to Him and His way. God doesn't come to us on our terms. The question of Amos 3:3 is relevant here too: "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" To walk with Him, we must do it on His terms. Some resist that; they can't accept God like that. David helps us again. This time in Psalm 37:5 he says, "Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass." Our lives must be committed to Him first (Matthew 6:33).

And if we've not already done so, we must repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of our sins (Acts 2:38). Sin separates, alienates, people from God (Isaiah 59:1–3). But repentance rids us of the practice of sin, and in baptism the blood of Christ washes away all our guilt of sin (Acts 22:16). From the baptismal waters a person rises to a new life in Christ (Romans 6:3–4), born again (John 3:3–5). "Oh but, my pastor says I don't have to be baptized." Okay, I'm not here to debate the issue. Each of us must decide for himself who we're going to obey. But there's one thing sure, my friend: No man can walk close to God who quibbles over anything He says do. And it's a fact that simply cannot be ignored, that every person who came to Christ, the details of which are recorded in the book of Acts and the Epistles, was commanded to be baptized or did so.

Now that the preliminaries have been taken care of, let's talk about drawing near to God. First Peter 2:1–2 says, "As newborn babes [as newly born Christians], desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby."

Paul wrote the young man Timothy about the same thing. He said, "Give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine" (1 Timothy 4:13). Some versions have it, "Give attendance to reading the Scriptures." You see,

All Scripture is inspired by God [God breathed] and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that [and that means it's a statement of purpose, *that*] the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

Reading and studying the Scriptures is permitting God to speak to us—it's the only way He speaks to us nowadays—and it will adequately support us against the temptations to sin or wander from His way. In Psalm 119:11 the man after God's own heart said, "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee."

Unless it's while a person is in serious perusal of the word of God, I suppose it's in private personal prayer He comes nearer to God than at any other time. Jesus taught us to go to a private place—He called it a closet—and close the door and pray in secret (Matthew 6:6). Go where there's no television or radio or CDs or music or people talking or children playing or telephones or pagers or door bells—where there are no distractions, where we can be absolutely alone with Him—and open up our hearts to Him in prayer. And He promised, "The eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers" (1 Peter 3:12). Pray in the morning, when we sit down to eat, when we're driving in the car alone, when temptations or dangers or disappointments lurk in the way, and to close out the day. The Scripture says, "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17), and that's what it means. They don't have to be long prayers, but they need to be sincere and frequent and intimate.

But some people believe they're more like God and closer to Him when they're doing a good deed—helping someone in need in the name of the Savior. Well, we know that about the nature of God as He has revealed Himself in the person of Jesus, of whom it's said, He "went about doing good" (Acts 10:38). Jesus said,

Whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in my name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward (Mark 9:41).

That isn't trying to get close to God by good works—no! no! It's a matter of *being* good, not *doing* good.

The persecutor Saul—turned apostle Paul—knew and expressed the joy of being a worker together with God (2 Corinthians 6:1). That's what those great people in Hebrews 11 were: Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Moses, and the others. Their names are there because they were workers together with Him in His eternal purpose. Never have I personally been more conscious of the presence of the Lord than when I've been working with Him in something for His cause that was too much for me to do without Him—this ministry, for example. He said, "You go and teach and I'll be with you." And He's present all right! Oh yes!

Well, in all our private devotions, Bible reading, prayers, hymn-singing, and in our service to Him, as we've just spoken, we're drawn into a closer walk (intimacy) with God. But there's another great, very strong, and effective way we come near to Him. It is in worship.

God has seen the appropriateness of a specifically designated time for the community of believers to assemble (Hebrews 10:25), and in a specially designed worship form to draw near to Him. In every age since the days of Cain and Abel, God has had His own established form of worship—His way by which men might seek intimacy with Him. And He's always been very jealous and protective of it.

Because God is deeply involved, it is a very sacred and hallowed thing, and for the worshiper to minimize the importance of the details of worship is but to trivialize his God. We learn that from the example of Cain a way back in Genesis 4, at the very first mention of worship in all history. Cain obviously didn't appreciate the importance of a blood sacrifice to the Lord. God says that without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins (Hebrews 9:22), and the blood offerings as far back as Cain's day pointed to the offering of Jesus Christ, the "Lamb of God" which would take away the sin of the world (John 1:29). "So what?" says Cain, "With me, the blood sacrifice is a non-issue." That's modern terminology with reference to the music of worship, the Lord's supper, Bible reading, preaching in the worshipping assemblies. God had no respect for Cain's worship, and He has no respect for worship offered Him in that spirit in our own day. In fact, such a worshiper has no respect for his own offering. It's trivial with him—a non-issue, without conviction. People are not converted to Him today, not because they don't believe what He says, but because He's portrayed by such worship as trivial, a non-issue in critical times.

I agree with Dr. Donald W. McCullough, president and professor of theology and preaching at San Francisco Theological Seminary, who in discussing these things says,

When the true story gets told, whether in the partial light of historical perspective or in the perfect light of eternity, it may well be revealed that the worst sin of the church at the end of the twentieth century has been the trivialization of God (*The Trivialization of God*, page 13).

An article in the May issue of *Current Thoughts & Trends* says, There's an "aggressive informality" in worship today that manifests itself in the trend toward "dressing down" for worship. This speaks of a casual relationship to God, and it deceives us about the fundamental matter of God's nature and character.

I don't know the author; I don't know who he is, but oh, he is so right! He adds, The carelessness and frivolity typical of so many aspects of contemporary worship puts forth "the sentiment that nothing extraordinary is going on, that what is happening is a gathering of ordinary people enjoying the experience of community."

He says,

Most contemporary forms of worship are, despite their claims of success, based on a fallacy: that “the value of worship depends on getting something out of it.” The idea that worship should seek to meet people’s needs, to “meet them where they are,” denies the very nature of worship . . . Worship is meant to be focused Godward, not manward . . . When worship becomes a selfish seeking after our own good, it demonstrates an underlying atheism.

But, my friend, in true worship, as Jesus said, “In spirit and in truth” (John 4:24), something extraordinary is happening! The worshiper is presenting himself—not in a casual, but in an open and humble and intimate way—before the Lord God of heaven and earth! Worship is our offering of sacrifice to the almighty Creator and Sustainer of this grand universe, the all-loving Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whose sacrifice at Calvary; we have access to Him. Worship, sinful man’s approach through Christ, to the only absolutely sinless and holy One, the sovereign Judge of the human race! To me, that’s a very unusual, an awfully special, a most extraordinary occasion! Shame on us for our casualness toward the worship of the one and only true God! Forgive us, Lord, we pray in Jesus’ name! Despite all feelings about it, no one has or ever can achieve intimacy with God who knows no awe in His Divine Presence in worship. Intimacy is not casualness. In the Scriptures, true worship of the true God is never called a “celebration;” it’s always an awesome occasion.

We have no right to expect “liberties” in prescribing the avenues by which we approach God in worship! God and God alone may do that true worship. What arrogance and presumption it is on the worshiper’s part to assume liberties before the great I AM. That’s the lesson to be learned from Nadab and Abihu, the two priestly sons of Aaron who offered strange fire before the Lord, which He commanded them not. And there went out fire from the Lord, and devoured them, and they died before the Lord (Leviticus 10:1–2).

What we’ve been studying as “intimacy with God,” some have called “holiness,” without which, we’re told in the sacred text, “no man shall see the Lord” (Hebrews 12:14). Again, “Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name; worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness” (Psalm 29:2). Others define it as growth and maturity. The psalmist wrote, “It is good for me to draw near to God: I have put my trust in the Lord God” (Psalm 73:28). And God promises,

Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty (2 Corinthians 6:17–18).

I am fully convinced that the hidden cause of the strife and confusion many churches are experiencing nowadays is the lack of awe in God’s presence. To put it in stronger terms, the absence of reverence and fear of God. Or in still another way, the down-sizing of God to fit our personal and private needs and whims. It shows in our culture, and it is even more radically seen in the modernization of worship where men are made the audience instead of God.

We love you.