

When Jesus met the Samaritan woman at the well, He stated that “God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth<sup>1</sup>”. I do not think of this idea of truth as a direction to follow a set of “rules” as perfectly as possible. God’s commandments for us lead to His greatness and goodness, but with a necessary balance<sup>2</sup> of the overarching values of love and mercy. Our brother James<sup>3</sup> wrote that mercy in fact triumphs over judgment to illustrate this type of balance.

We become victorious<sup>4</sup> in God’s Kingdom through our worship of God in spirit and truth. There are perhaps two ways to interpret this “spirit”. One is in line with the presence of the Holy Spirit in us, and the other relates to the spirit of the law (in other words, what God the Father wants from us). We may speak of the “spirit” of our work, as we try to quantify its internal meaning and purpose. There is also, then, a “spirit” of the truth – the essence of it<sup>5</sup>.

The “truth” is not exactly just a set of rules, but a knowledge of the absolute greatness of God. We can have the proper spirit without perfect knowledge of the Spirit of God. Our obedience to God must stem from the spirit of truth, the spirit of God’s love in us as we develop a relationship with Him as His children. We must find a way to weave spirit and truth together in a way that glorifies God.

God in His mercy would rather inspire us to follow Him than shout us into it<sup>6</sup>. Jesus used parables to make us look deeper into the surface of things. They were meant to strike a resonant chord within us, to make us think about what God really wants, and what He means with His truth. The Holy Spirit was given to help us understand it<sup>7</sup>.

There are things that God values more than sacrifice (like fulfilling proscribed activities). Jesus restated the message of Samuel to Saul<sup>8</sup> as “I desire mercy and not sacrifice<sup>9</sup>”. Obedience and mercy are proclaimed as more desired than just checking the boxes of “truth”. The thing that God wants most is that we pursue Him with all of our hearts and souls<sup>10</sup>. We must seek the balance of spirit and truth that reflects the grace in the heart of God.

As Jesus described the need to put fresh wine into new, flexible wineskins<sup>11</sup>, we must also strive for a certain creative flexibility of mind in our own lives to accept this new idea<sup>12</sup>. We many times become so firmly entrenched in the idea of good works and being perfect outwardly that we forget to let the new wine of the gospel and God’s grace change us and expand us. We must always strive to be perfect, but understand that we all are human and weak, and that it only through the grace of God that we are accepted into His kingdom.

If we are to worship in spirit and truth, we need to know what the truth is: Jesus claimed that He was the way, the truth, and the life<sup>13</sup>. He is not a truth; he is not just some good philosopher who could communicate well with the people, but he was the truth. His word is truth<sup>14</sup>, and in our hunger and thirst<sup>15</sup> for Him, we should pursue and follow Him. When we do that God promises that we will be filled, and we will feel the victory of seeing the solution to a significant puzzle becoming more and more clear. But we must agree<sup>16</sup> with God’s truth to worship Him in spirit and truth.

We must understand and worship goodness, as that is the fundamental nature of God! The sacrifice of Christ is only a partial expression of the full depth of that goodness. We must pursue the ultimate victory through our true worship of God – praying daily that we are able to worship in spirit and truth!

1. John 4:24.
2. “God seeks a balance.” A Gentle Thunder: Hearing God Through the Storm, Lucado, Max; p.78. This relates to worship in spirit and truth.
3. “Mercy triumphs over judgment.” James 2:13.
4. “But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” 1 Corinthians 15:57.
5. “Jesus was a man of truth. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth, not of insistence on correct doctrine.” Living in Christ’s Presence: Final Words on Heaven and the Kingdom of God, Willard, Dallas, p.27.
6. “... think of the vivid parody of a street preacher screaming truth into a bullhorn. Have you ever met anybody who repented at such preaching? I sure haven’t. Why do we react with such emotional nausea to street preachers? Because it’s truth without spirit; it’s reality (kind of) without any kind of relational equity or loving presence.” Live No Lies: Recognize and Resist the Three Enemies That Sabotage Your Peace; Comer, John Mark; p.75.

7. John 14:25.
8. 1 Samuel 15:22-23.
9. Matthew 9:13.
10. Matthew 22:37.
11. Luke 5:37-38.
12. "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will." Romans 12:2.
13. John 14:6.
14. John 17:17.
15. "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness for they shall be filled." Matthew 5:6.
16. See the story in this volume: "Becoming Like God (Parable of the Three Sons).

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