

The Greatest Gift

Rick Railston

June 12, 2011

Let's turn to James 1 and verse 17 as a Scripture that starts the introduction to the sermon as a reminder to all of us. Sometimes we—it's easy in this world when we are so blessed to forget this. It's a principle that we need to be mindful of every day of our lives. James 1 and verse 17, it tells us that:

James 1:17. *Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, (KJV)*

It comes from God.

James 1:17b. *[It comes] down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. (KJV)*

God doesn't change. And we can be thankful for that! And He gives us every good thing we have. Every good thing! And, as Stuart mentioned in the sermonette, what a beautiful day it is today!

We were talking to Gail Tyndall earlier. She lives in Mesa, Arizona and I said, "What's your temperature down there?" And she says, "Oh, it isn't hot today. It's got to be over a 110° for it to be hot in Mesa, Arizona." It was a 101°. And I mentioned it was 69° here and beautiful sunshine. And she was just moaning. She said, "Well, if I was there, I'd have to have my fur boots on and a parka."

But we're so blessed! If you look at the gifts God gives us, look at the beauty of the spring. We've had a lot of rain this spring. The wildflowers are out on the sides of the hills and the mountains. God gives us the rivers and the oceans and the four seasons, the beautiful sky and the clouds and the moon at night. He gives us plant life. The flowers that we see all around us! James Smyda remarked when he was out here, he said, "In Texas you don't get this lime green of the new leaves that come out." And here it is so beautiful when the leaves first come out. And that's a gift from God.

And you look around and see the abundance. The little calves nuzzling up to their mom and the baby sheep bouncing around and the little baby horses with their skinny legs, you see all this new life coming out in the springtime. And what a blessing that is.

And we have an abundance in this nation beyond measure, but that is nothing compared to God's Plan of Salvation. What a gift that is! The gift of eternal life—and that's a gift! We don't earn that. We didn't even dream of it. We had to be jerked out of the world and had our mind opened up to even understand God Plan of Salvation.

And then our calling! A hundred plus thousand people since humanity began and billions and billions of people who have ever lived and we're just this tiny little fraction of all who have ever lived who have been called by God.

But all these blessings—and we could go on for the next hour about our blessings—but all of these blessings pale in comparison with the gift that came from God that we are here to commemorate this very Day. And a miracle occurred on this Day that we cannot forget. We cannot forget it or diminish it or not think about it.

Let's go to Acts chapter 2. Stuart went there for a few Scriptures, but we're going to talk about actually what happened this Day. And we're still introducing the subject. We haven't gotten there yet. We're going to read the first four verses of Acts chapter 2. And it tells us; it says:

Acts 2:1. *And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they [referring to the apostles] were all with one accord... (KJV)*

Meaning: they were like-minded and they were in one place. Verse 2 of Acts 2:

Acts 2:2. *And suddenly there came a sound from heaven... (KJV)*

Now, it indicates that this sound was an unusual sound. It's from "heaven." It's not from this world. So that tells us something—that this sound was totally unique!

Acts 2:2b. *...a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting.*

3) *And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon them. (KJV)*

The Twentieth Century New Testament says:

Acts 2:3. *Then there appeared tongues of what seemed to be flame, separating, so that one settled on each of them; (TCNT)*

Verse 4:

Acts 2:4. *And they were all filled with the Holy [spirit], and began to speak [in] other tongues, (KJV)*

The word for "tongues" as we know is the Greek word "glossa," which simply means a language. They spoke in other languages "as the Spirit gave them utterance." (KJV)

Now the Greek word for "sound" is the Greek word *echos* (*ay'-khos*). And we get the modern English word "echo" from that word. And it means a "loud or confused noise" or it can be a "roar." Kind of like if you were standing near Niagara Falls and you heard the roar of the water coming over. It comes to mind.

John Darby's translation says, "a violent impetuous blowing,"—a sound unlike any they had ever heard.

And when you put this unique sound and then these flames like fire—it wasn't fire, but it was like fire—settling on their heads. It obviously signaled that something special was happening. Something unique was happening. Something that had never happened before was happening to these men.

And then, the holy spirit came!

And the Greek translation (verse 4) uses the word "filled." That's really not the best translation because the Greek word for "filled" is the Greek word *pletho* (*play'-tho*). It's Strong's 4130. And it means "literally or figuratively to imbue or supply or specifically to furnish."

In other words, they were furnished with the holy spirit. They were imbued or supplied with the holy spirit. And, as we will see, they were given a down payment. Sometimes when we think "filled" it means right up to the brim. That was not the case, as we're going to see. They were given a down payment. What the King James Version says, an "earnest." And we'll talk about that in a little bit.

But these were average men, just average men. And they were given an unheard of gift. At least four of them were fishermen. And one was a tax collector. And if you extrapolate that into those who have been called down through the years and the centuries given God's holy spirit, that list goes on today—just average men and women. Not many wise. Not many mighty. Not many powerful. Not many high-born men and women have been given God's holy spirit, just like what happened this Day many millennia ago.

And so what we're here to do today is to memorialize this time, to be grateful, to be thankful, and to commit to use this gift as God would have us use this gift. And so the subject of the sermon today—it's a very simple title—"*The Greatest Gift*." This is God's greatest gift to us—to give His very nature to human beings.

Now, we want to discuss today five important aspects of this greatest of gifts. And, hopefully, by the time we're through, we can come away with an appreciation to God and a thankfulness to God for what He's done for each of us here today, and we will commit ourselves, as we're going to see, to nurture and take care of this gift.

The First Point we want to make is that:

I. The gift of the holy spirit is our link and our connection to God.

We can't forget that! It is the thing that links us to God. Without it, we would have no vehicle to communicate with God or to understand God, no link between us and God.

Now, let's understand that God is spirit. Let's go to John 4 and verse 24 to see a fundamental concept that we need to understand today talking about the gift of the holy spirit. John 4 and verse 24, it says very plainly:

John 4:24. *God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and truth. (KJV)*

Now, it begs the question. If we're physical and God is spirit, how do we do that? How do we "worship God in spirit" if we're physical and He is spirit? How does that happen?

Now, I'm going to speculate just for a minute and just ask the question: Could there be a spiritual connection between all living things and God Himself? In other words, is there a spiritual component to life? In other words, is life more than just something physical? I personally believe that's true although you can't necessarily prove that.

Christ said—and we won't turn there—in Matthew 10, He said, "God knows when a bird falls." Well, how does God know that? And I'm just saying, "Is there a spiritual connection?" If there is a spiritual connection between all living things and God is spirit, then if a bird falls, if life is extinguished and there is a spiritual component to life, then God would know. If life is created, a new birth comes along and if there's a spiritual component to life, then God would know. Someday we're going to find out. That's just my speculation.

But there is definitely a spiritual component to human life. Now, if you remember back, if you were in the Church back in the seventies, Mr. Armstrong spent the better part of two years talking about a spiritual component in the human brain. And there were many articles in the Plain Truth and the Good News about that subject. And he tied the spiritual part of the human brain into the spirit in man that we read about in Job chapter 32. And he also tied it into the fact that Solomon said upon death, the spirit in man goes upward whereas the body goes downward. That's in Ecclesiastes chapter 3.

And so, I don't think that there is any question that there is a spiritual component to the human mind and possibly even to human life itself. But even though there's a spiritual component to the human brain and Mr. Armstrong pointed out that's what gives us, as Stuart mentioned in the sermonette, that's what allows humans to hope. Cattle don't hope. And that's what allows us to contemplate and to have understanding of mathematics and chemistry and philosophy and to ponder our past and to consider our future. Mr. Armstrong pointed that out that this spirit in man allows that to happen.

But for God to fully communicate with a human, then that human would need His spirit, God's spirit. Not just spirit, but God's holy spirit. And let's turn with that in mind to John 14 and verse 23. We read this on Passover evening. And Christ is trying to get some important information across to His disciples. John 14 and verse 23, He says:

John 14:23. *Jesus answered and said unto him, [He says,] If a man [loves] me, he will keep my words: [But notice!] and my Father will love him, and we [meaning Christ and the Father] will come unto him, [We] and make our abode with him. (KJV)*

Those Two! Just as an aside, if there was a Trinity, why aren't three of them mentioned? Only Two—it said God and Christ would come and made their abode inside a human being. What a concept! What a mind-blowing concept that God who is spirit, His holy spirit, would come somehow and make His home, and Christ also, in the body and the mind of a human being!

Look at chapter 17 and let's read verses 20 and 21. Referring to those of us who are here today and those who were called after the death of the apostles down to this very day, John 17 verse 20, Christ says:

John 17:20. *Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word [referring to us today]; (KJV)*

Now verse 21, I'm going to read out of the Phillips.

John 17:21: *that they may all be one. Just as you, Father live in me and I live in you, I am asking that they may live in us, (PHL)*

So, that the Two of them and a human being could be together, could live together inside the mind and we don't know how this works. Someday I have a lot of questions I'd like to ask at some point, but how this actually works. And thus, those He has called, He has a special spiritual connection with those that He has called. It is the indwelling of the holy spirit. We just read in Colossians 1 and verse 27 in the introduction, "Christ in you." That is the connection.

And the connection is not just with spirit, but with His holy spirit. You see there's a difference between spirit and God's holy spirit. Satan is composed of spirit, but Satan does not have the indwelling of God's holy spirit in him. And God's throne is composed of spirit, but not God's holy spirit. And let's understand that this connection is not with just spirit. It is God's holy spirit.

And this connection allows God to communicate with us and allows us to communicate with Him. It is this connection that makes it possible for us to have a close personal relationship with God. That's the only way it happens. This gift that we received that we commemorate this Day is the only thing that allows us to have a close relationship, a Father-son-daughter relationship, but with a Spirit-being who is all-powerful and who is our Creator. This gift that we commemorate today is the thing that makes that possible.

And what kind of gift is that? If you can just sit and contemplate and ponder that for a minute! What kind of God would give His very nature to physical temporary, sweating, stinking, belching human beings? And would allow us to communicate instantaneously with Him? And Paul talks about being "instant in prayer." God is that far away—an instant in prayer! Thanks to this gift!

So the First Point we want to make is:

I. Let's understand the gift of the holy spirit is the connection with God and with Jesus Christ.

And it was a gift that we didn't earn. It was a gift that we don't, frankly, deserve. And it's only because we are the weak of the world and not the high or the mighty or the intelligent or the powerful that God saw fit to drag us out of the muck and give us this tremendous gift that we commemorate this Day. That's the First Point.

The Second Point is that:

II. The gift of the holy spirit opens our mind to the truth of God.

If we didn't have this gift of God's holy spirit, we would not understand. And I think all of us remember the time when we read the Bible and it made no sense to us. People wanted to talk about what happens after life and we could have cared less.

And then all of a sudden, something happened and those issues became very, very important to us. Does God exist? Is His Bible His Word? These things became very important. And something happened in our mind. A switch was thrown and, all of a sudden, our mind began to change. It didn't happen overnight, but it began to change.

Let's go back to John chapter 14 and look at verse 16. Christ knew that He had just minutes, hours left to communicate with the disciples. And He's trying to tell them, "Something's going to happen after I die." John 14 verse 16, He says:

John 14:16: *[I'm going to] pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, (KJV)*

Christ was the first Comforter, obviously. And He's going to give us another comforter:

John 14:16b. *...that [it] may abide with you for ever; (KJV)*

Now the Greek word for "comforter," is Strong's 3875. And it's the Greek word *parakletos* (*par-ak'-lay-tos*). And Thayer's says about this word, he says "in the widest sense, it means a helper, or a guide, or an assistant."

Well, the logical question is: To help with what? Christ is going to give us this help, this guide, this assistant, but what's the purpose? Why is He doing that? Well, He tells us in the next verse, John 14 verse 17. He says:

John 14:17. *Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it [sees it] not, neither [knows it]: (KJV)*

We didn't before we were called.

John 14:17b. ...but [you] know [it]; for [it dwells] with you, and shall be in you. (KJV)

Now this phrase, "dwells with you and shall be in you," has two meanings.

The one, the first one refers to Jesus Christ because He was with them at that moment. His spirit was there in their presence as long as He was alive. And then He said, "My spirit will be in you." We just read in Colossians, "Christ in you." So, that's the first meaning.

But the second meaning is that the holy spirit was with them in their minds because they wouldn't traipse around the countryside following Christ; they wouldn't stay with Him and watch Him suffer the slings and arrows of the priests and the Sadducees and the Pharisees, and all of that; they wouldn't have endured all of that if something hadn't changed in their mind and, all of a sudden now, this Man and His message is very, very important. And the same thing happened to us when at some point—for me it was listening to a radio broadcast by Herbert Armstrong and all of a sudden something clicked—this started making sense. But some people, I had a good friend. He was called sitting in a two-hole outhouse. And there was a Plain Truth at his feet, and he picked it up and started reading. And all of a sudden, something clicked. And with all of us that God is dealing with right now, it was something. And it was God's spirit with them and then upon baptism would be in them.

Let's go to verse 26 of John 14. It says:

John 14:26. But the Comforter, which is the Holy [spirit], (KJV)

That we commemorate arriving today.

John 14:26b. ...whom the Father will send in my name, [Notice! It will] teach you all things, (KJV)

That refers to us too. Not just to them.

John 14:26 continued. ...and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you. (KJV)

That's why we can trust the Bible and the Gospels and the Gospel writers because the holy spirit years later starting with this Day began bringing into their remembrance everything Christ said, everything Christ did. And similarly, it will teach us all the things of God.

Not as a person teaches. Not like a classroom. The holy spirit doesn't work that way. But rather in the beginning, it was an opening of our mind to the important things of life, to the truths of life. And we began to seek those with zeal and enthusiasm—some of us more overboard than others.

A good analogy would be like two humans can't communicate if they don't have the same language. God divided the nations by disrupting a common language and the people just spread apart and went all over the earth. Two humans can't communicate unless they can have a common language. The Holy Spirit allows human beings to have a common language with God to be able to talk. Us to listen to God through His Word or through thoughts in our mind and us to communicate with God through this link of the Holy Spirit. It opens our mind to the Truth of God.

Let's go to 1 Corinthians chapter 2. We're going to begin in verse 11.

Getting back to what we were talking about earlier, Mr. Armstrong understanding that the Spirit in man gave human beings the ability to do things animals can't do. Stuart was mentioning that—art, science, philosophy, pondering, meditating. Animals don't do that.

1 Corinthians 2 verse 11:

1 Corinthians 2:11. *For what man [knows] the things of a man [philosophy, art, science, mathematics and so on, language], save the spirit of man which is in him? (KJV)*

There is a Spirit in man and interacts in ways we don't understand with the brain.

1 Corinthians 2:11b. *...even so [he says, in a similar way] the things of God [knows] no man, but [through or by] the Spirit of God. (KJV)*

We cannot understand anything about God unless we have God's Holy Spirit. We don't have that understanding. Our mind is dark. And we can all remember back to the time when our mind was dark. It was shut down. It was closed. All we thought about was us. And then all of a sudden something happened.

Verse 12:

1 Corinthians 1:12. *Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; (KJV)*

Why?

1 Corinthians 1:12b. *...that we might know... (KJV)*

The Greek means "to understand."

1 Corinthians 1:12b. *...that we might [understand] the things that are freely given to us of God. (KJV)*

And what is the gift given to us freely today? That's His Holy Spirit. And that Holy Spirit allows us to understand what is written in God's Word, allows us to understand spiritual concepts, spiritual principles that the average person out in the world is clueless about.

Verse 14:

1 Corinthians 2:14. *But the natural man [receives] not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. (KJV)*

And you look at the difference of yourself. I look at the difference in myself between before God began to call and after God called and after the receipt of the holy spirit. And it is a different life, a different world, a different mind, a different understanding, different motives, different goals, different desires all because of the miracle that occurred this very Day.

And that's why when those of us who maybe were overzealous tried to convert my parents and you did your parents, mates, brothers, sisters, whatever and you just got this blank stare. And my dad, I tried to convince dad that there was a resurrection and there was no immortal soul. And he looked at me like I had just talked Persian to him. He just didn't understand! He said, "Well, what does that have to do with anything?" And there was no recognition. And we've all been there.

And then, all of a sudden something switches. And what a gift! Think about it! What a gift that we can understand. Human beings can understand the things of God! God is such on a high plane and we're down here in the muck. And yet, God has called a few and given them His very nature so we can understand the things of God Almighty. What a gift! And we're here to commemorate that on this Day.

A Third Aspect of the holy spirit that we want to talk about today is:

III. The gift of the holy spirit gives us the power to change us into the image of Jesus Christ.

It's not just for knowledge. It's not just for understanding of godly things, but it is a power that allows us to change who we are. Now think about that. God has given us a power to re-mold ourselves, to renew ourselves, as we'll see in just a minute, or as one translation says, "to re-model ourselves" as you would re-model a house and make us new again.

Now this is the mightiest force in the cosmos. Let's go to Psalm 104 and verse 30. This force created everything that we see, created the universe—his power of God, this spirit of God. Psalm 104 verse 30, David understood this. We need to be reminded of this. Psalm 104 verse 30 says:

Psalms 104:30. *[You send] forth [Your] spirit, they are created: and [You renew] the face of the earth. (KJV)*

With power! All God had to do was speak the word and it happened—this power of His holy spirit!

And then we are promised that power. Let's go back now to shortly before this Day, back to Acts chapter 1 and we'll read the beginning of verse 8. This is a promise. The apostles were told that they would receive this power. And by extension, we are promised that we would receive this power and did receive this power. Acts 1 verse 8, the beginning:

Acts 1:8. *But [you] shall receive power, after that the Holy [spirit] is come upon you: (KJV)*

This tells us once we repent and are baptized, have hands laid on us, and the miracle occurs where God imparts His holy spirit and Christ and God begin to live in us that means we have a power that we never had before. And it is linked to that same power where God spoke and the face of the earth was renewed. God spoke and the universe was created, that same power.

And this spirit of power will do things that are even far greater, frankly, than creating the universe. It's far greater to convert the nature of a human being from evil to good or from carnal to godly or from being unholy to holy. That is a far greater miracle than creating suns and planets and plant life and deer and animals. It is a far greater thing to change the very mind of a human being. And that is what we are promised. That is what we have within us is this spirit of power.

Look at I John 3 and verse 24. This tells us something that if we can keep the Commandments of God, keep them as Christ said, in our mind and our heart as well as physically, then we have something unique. I John 3 and verse 24:

I John 3:24. *And he that [keeps] his commandments [dwells] in [Him, God the Father], and he in him. (KJV)*

Meaning if we keep God's Commandments, we dwell in God and Christ and They dwell in us. Otherwise, we couldn't keep the Commandments. We don't have the power.

I John 3:24b. *And hereby we know that he [abides] in us, by the Spirit which he [has] given us. (KJV)*

We know that! And before we were converted, we didn't have the ability to keep the Sabbath. We didn't have the ability to turn the other cheek when somebody's yelling and screaming at us. We didn't have the ability not to fight evil with evil. We didn't have that ability. I certainly didn't. I don't think you did either. None of us did, but we now do through the power of the holy spirit. And the only way we can keep God's Commandment is by God dwelling in us. That's the only way we can do it! We do not have anything of ourselves that would give us the ability to truly keep God's Commandments as Christ outlined in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5, 6, and 7) to keep it in the spirit and in the heart.

Let's turn back now to Romans 8 and verse 10. Notice a principle that reminds us of this power that we have. Romans 8 and verse 10, Paul is saying that:

Romans 8:10. *if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; (KJV)*

If we sin, the penalty is death. And if there's nothing else, we're going to eventually die and ultimately a second death.

He says:

Romans 8:10b. *...but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. (KJV)*

Now, how can we attain righteousness? Because of the spirit that he just says. We now have the power to overcome sin and to be righteous as God is righteous through His power. We can't brag about it. We can't say, "I'm doing it because of my spirit or my power." We only attain any degree of righteousness through this gift that we're talking about today. Therefore, God gets the credit of anything that is godly in us or righteous in us. Not ourselves!

Go over to 2 Corinthians now, chapter 5 and verse 17. This power allows us to be transformed, to be changed. 2 Corinthians 5 and verse 17, notice what it says.

2 Corinthians 5:17. *Therefore if any man be in Christ, (KJV)*

Meaning he is living in Christ and Christ is living in him.

2 Corinthians 5:17b. *...he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. (KJV)*

We don't have a new physical body. We have the same old physical body, but we have a new mind. And the mind controls the body. Therefore, if we have a new mind, we become a new creature. We become a new person, molded and shaped after the image of Jesus Christ because we have His mind and the Father's mind in us.

Let's go now back to Romans. This time chapter 12 and we're going to read the first two verses. There are some interesting twists on a word here. Romans 12 verse 1, we often read verse 1 because we talk about being a living sacrifice, particularly appropriate to the ministry. He says:

Romans 12:1. *I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that [you] present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, (KJV)*

How can it be holy without God's holy spirit? There's nothing in a human being that's holy, but if we have God's holy spirit, then we become holy—not because of any greatness in us but—because we have His holiness in us.

Romans 12:1b. *...holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. (KJV)*

Or some translations say, "job." Verse 2:

Romans 12:2. *And be not conformed to this world: but be [you] transformed by the renewing of your mind, (KJV)*

"Transformed" means to be changed. If you apply a little heat to water, it is transformed into steam. It's something new. It wasn't there before.

So we are transformed by "the renewing of our mind." The Greek word can also mean "renovation." And you might renovate a car, an old beat up car and make it new. Or you might renovate a home; put new wiring and new plumbing and a new electrical system in it, new heating and cooling. And so, you make it essentially new but in an old body—the frame of the house or the body of the car.

And what we're being told here is that we can be transformed by "the renewing of the mind," of what's up between the ears. And he goes on to say:

Romans 12:2b. *...that [you] may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. (KJV)*

Without the renewing of the mind, we don't know what God's will is; we don't know what God's Law is; we don't know what God's Plan of Salvation is without the renewing of the mind. And the only way we can prove what God's will is is by having our mind transformed from the old to the new, from the stinking carnal human being into the mind of Christ. And if we have the mind of Christ, then we begin to understand what God's will is for us in little things and in big things.

We all know that God's spirit can change humans. And I heard an evangelist years ago say that "That just doesn't happen," in his opinion. He says, "I just see God's people not changing very much if at all." And I beg to disagree because I have seen people who have had mental illness become totally mentally healthy. I've seen people who were physically abused and sexually abused as young kids—that traumatizes the average person for the rest of their life—I've seen them become balanced, productive members of society. I've seen people go through horrible tragedies losing parents, losing mates, being handicapped, horrible tragedies, injuries, accidents that would just devastate the average human being and yet, they become model Christians because they've been given the power to change through God's holy spirit. People do change.

And we can look in our lives and see that we change. The question is, obviously: How much do we change? How fast do we change? And, as time gets closer to the end, we have to put it in afterburner to start changing a little faster and a little more meaningful because time is short.

But the fact is look at our own lives and see how we've changed. Go back and think how we used to be and how we've changed or how your mates have changed or your parents or your kids. And I see tremendous change in God's people.

And it gets back to the gift that we commemorate today. What a gift! That we have been given the power—not our power—we've been given the power to

mold and shape ourselves into the image of Jesus Christ if we only will yield to that power. What a gift that we've been given today!

The Fourth Aspect of the holy spirit that we want to talk about is the fact that:

IV. God's spirit, as has been hinted before, God's spirit guides and leads.

God's spirit is not a sledgehammer. God's spirit is not a pitchfork in the fanny. God's spirit guides and leads. And despite being the most powerful force in the universe—God could use His spirit just to whip us into shape almost instantaneously, but we would be robots. We wouldn't have free will. We wouldn't be able to decide. We wouldn't be able to exercise choice.

And God watches us to exercise choice because you remember Abraham? When he was asked to sacrifice his son, he got right to the point that the knife was coming down over the throat. And God stopped him and said, "Now, I know." That means He didn't know before. And so Abraham had a choice. And God watches us to see what choices we will make.

But you see God's spirit is not something that forced Abraham to do what he did. Abraham did it because he chose to do what he did. And he was led by God's holy spirit. He was inspired by God's holy spirit, but he wasn't beaten up or forced or he didn't have a "holy spirit gun" to his head that forced him to do that. God's spirit doesn't overwhelm because if it overwhelmed us, we wouldn't have a choice. And, therefore, we would be robots.

Let's go to John 16 and verse 13. Christ told the disciples that the spirit, God's spirit would do certain things and would behave in a certain way. And we need to understand this because if we don't, we will not use God's holy spirit to its fullest extent or we will not use it at all. John 16 verse 13, it says:

John 16:13. *Howbeit when [it], the Spirit of truth, is come, [Notice this! It] will guide you into all truth: (KJV)*

It doesn't say "It will beat you or pummel you or kick you or force you into all Truth." It is just a guide.

John 16:13b. *...for [it] shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever [it] shall hear, that shall [it] speak: and [it] will show you things to come. (KJV)*

Now the word "guide" is Strong's 3594 and it means simply to show the way or to teach or to lead.

God's spirit opens our mind to show us the way, the way we ought to behave, the way we ought to walk, the path that we ought to take. God's spirit does that.

We won't turn there, but if you recall in Luke chapter 4 and verse 1, Christ was led by the holy spirit into the wilderness. And it says, "He was led by the spirit in

the wilderness." The spirit didn't kick Christ. The spirit inspired Him and led Him. We are not drive by the spirit. We are led by the spirit.

Contrary to the television shows you see on Sunday morning—which I refuse to watch—but you see these guys talking about the power of the holy spirit. And the music's playing and they're jumping up and down and people falling all over and people slamming their hands into somebody's forehead and all this kind of stuff talking about the power of the holy spirit. That is nonsense!

It says very plainly that God's spirit leads. It is a gentle urge. It's not a gun between the eyes. It's a gentle urge.

And for that reason, when we feel that gentle urge, we should never say, "No." This is one of the biggest mistakes we can make if we want to become like Jesus Christ is if we feel the urge of God's spirit—and we know when it occurs—if we say, "No," we get on dangerous ground. It's like the analogy I've used before about exercise. If you ever get the urge to exercise, keep lying on the couch and it will pass. The same thing is true with God's holy spirit. Exactly the same thing!

If you have the urge to pray; there's something that just comes into your mind, "I should really pray about that," or "I should really pray now," don't say, "Well, I'll get to it later. Let me finish watching this TV show," or "Let me finish washing the car." You drop what you're doing and you go in and pray. Right then! The same thing is true about study. "I need to look into that." Well, go do it!

Because if you feel like exercising and say, "I'll get around to it," then it goes away and you just sit there gaining weight and losing muscle strength. The same thing with God's holy spirit. If you say "No," to that urge, that urge is going to pass. It will pass. If we don't listen to God's holy spirit, it will pass. So let us understand that.

And this is something that we need to absolutely come to grips with—and it leads to the Fifth Point in just a second—that when God's spirit speaks to us, this gentle urge—whether it's to do good to somebody, to pick, up the phone and call somebody, to write a card, to do a kindness to somebody—do not say "No" to that gentle urge because it is gentle. And if we start saying, "No, some bad things can happen.

Nevertheless, the gift of the holy spirit is a guide and it leads us. The beauty of that gift is that we are never alone and never without help. Pansey, in her daughter's home lying on the bed, very weak, is not without help. She has God's holy spirit in her. She can instantly communicate with the Father. She can instantly tell Him what's on her mind and He knows already. You're never alone. You're never without a guide. You don't know what to do? Pray about it because God's holy spirit will guide and lead. So, we need to remember that this is just a tremendous gift to a human being knowing that we are never ever alone. We have God's holy spirit in us and that links us to the Father and to Jesus Christ. And we're never alone even though physically, humanly we might be by ourselves. So, let's remember that as we commemorate this Day.

Now, the Fifth Point, the Last Point and this is where our responsibility comes in on this Day, going forward after this Day. The Fifth Point is:

V. We must nurture and take care of this most precious gift.

We have to nurture it and take care of it. Remember God told Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, "I want you to nurture and care for the garden and take care of it," because the garden was a physical gift from God to Adam and Eve. Well, this is a far greater gift. And shame on us if we don't nurture and take care of this gift!

Now, as I mentioned in the beginning, the disciples on this Day were given a small amount of God's spirit. We were given a small amount at baptism. Let's go to 2 Corinthians 1 and verse 22 and see that. Paul understood that at baptism we are given just a taste of God's holy spirit. 2 Corinthians 1 and verse 22, Paul says to this wayward Church in Corinth, he says:

2 Corinthians 1:22. Who [referring to God the Father, who has] also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts. (KJV)

This is from the King James. We don't often hear about "earnest," but a hundred years ago, if you heard somebody say, "Earnest money," you would know that what they were talking about.

The Greek word for "earnest" is Strong's 728 and it means simply a pledge given in advance as security for the remainder.

The William's Translation says about "earnest:" a first installment. We were given a "first installment."

Now the 1828 Webster's Dictionary where "earnest" in 1828 was a very common word, notice what it says about the word "earnest" in 1828. It's very interesting. The first two words it says, "first fruits." And that is something that ties in to this Day also. And it says, "earnest is first fruits; that which is in advance and gives promise of something to come." The hope of something to come, Stuart was talking about!

First fruits; that which is in advance and gives promise of something to come; hence, "earnest" or "earnest money" is a first payment or deposit giving promise or assurance of full payment. [Emphasis added.]

So we are given a down payment at baptism. And we are assured of full payment at the resurrection. That is the only time that we will receive it all because then we will be spirit. And we will have a full measure of God's holy spirit.

And so the point I'm trying to make is we began early on when we were first baptized with just a tiny little bit, a down payment of God's spirit. Now, are we just to let it stay there? Like the Parable of the Talents, giving some talents and

you just bury it in the ground and just let it stay there? Or is it our responsibility to grow God's spirit in us?

And I'm telling you, "It is." And we have the power to grow God's holy spirit by what we do. God's spirit must be renewed daily because it can go away. It can disappear. Let's go to Ephesians 4 and we're going to read verses 22 through 24. Paul is hinting at the fact that not only does God's spirit change us from the old man to the new man, but once we have that spirit, that spirit itself must be renewed. It's not a constant amount.

One thing that we fought at the time of the Tkach Era in the Church was that Joe Jr. spouted off what seminaries teach, which is "Once saved; always saved." And once you've been given a little bit of God's holy spirit, then you've got it'll stay there for the rest of your life. And you can do whatever you want to do basically, but as long as you have that little bit that you were given, then "Once saved; always saved." And that is a heinous lie. It's just not true!

Ephesians 4 verse 22:

Ephesians 4:22. *That [you] put off concerning the former [conduct] the old man [the old way], which is corrupt according to deceitful lusts; (KJV)*

Absolutely! Human nature is corrupt according to deceitful lusts; but verse 23:

Ephesians 4:23. *And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; (KJV)*

Now, that Greek word is a different one than we talked about before, but it also means "to renovate or reform."

And you've heard of Reform School. Well, God's holy spirit kind of puts us through Reform School, changing from the old to the new, the old way to the new way, the old way of doing and thinking to the new way of doing and thinking.

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

And it says, "Be renewed in the spirit of your mind." Well, he's talking to converted Christians. He's not talking to those who are unconverted and they need to get God's holy spirit. He's talking to people with God's holy spirit and he says, "You need to renew that spirit every day of your life." Getting God's spirit and then just letting it stay there is not a one time event. It's a daily process as to whether or not we grow God's spirit in us or whether we allow it to wither and die. That is our responsibility.

And Paul likens this process to physical exercise. Let's go to 1 Timothy chapter 4. He's trying to teach young Timothy a lesson about how God's spirit works in a human body in a human mind. And he likens it to exercise because remember God's told us we can learn about the invisible things of life by looking at the visible things. And this is true with God's spirit relative to physical exercise. 1

Timothy 4, we're going to read verses 7 and 8. He's giving advice to Timothy and he says:

1 Timothy 4:7. *But refuse profane and old wives' fables, (KJV)*

He says, "Refuse those." But he says:

1 Timothy 4:7b. *...exercise [yourself] rather unto godliness. (KJV)*

Exercise! Now everybody knows what physical exercise is. Everybody understands that. And I exercise five times a week generally if I'm not traveling. And you feel changes in your body when you exercise. And you also feel changes in your body when you don't exercise. And it's very apparent and very quick.

So, he says, "But I want you to exercise yourself to being godly." Verse 8:

1 Timothy 4:8. *For bodily exercise [profits] little: (KJV)*

The NIV says, bodily exercise:

1 Timothy 4:8. *...is of some value, (NIV)*

Yes it is. It helps us in our health, mental health and physical health. In my opinion, there's no fountain of youth, but exercise is as close as we are going to get in this life. And so, what he is saying is "If it profits for a little." Some translations say, "It profits for a little time." Meaning as long as you exercise, it profits, but if you quit, it doesn't profit. Or meaning, if you exercise in the physical life, it helps as long as you're physical. And then when you're dead, you're dead. It doesn't help anymore. Or it is, as the NIV says, "is of some value."

But notice:

1 Timothy 4:8b. *...but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come. (KJV)*

The only way we can exercise ourselves to godliness is to exercise God's holy spirit. Now think about that. The only way that we can exercise godliness is to exercise the only thing that we have that is from God and that's His very spirit. So, therefore, we must exercise God's holy spirit because Paul is trying to teach Timothy and those that he taught this analogy of exercising God's spirit to exercising the human body.

Now exercising the human body, let's say you're going to exercise your biceps. Well, you lift a weight. You overcome resistance. Now normally with no resistance doing this [moving the lower arm up and down], it takes no effort at all. You could do it all day if you wanted to, but you put a thirty-pound weight there and try to pull it up. You feel tremendous resistance.

Now you might start out with five pounds and you do that for a few weeks. And guess what? The muscle gets bigger. Doesn't it? And what happens is that when you lift something heavier than you're used to, the muscle tissue actually gets shredded a little bit. It gets torn. And then, if you rest it for a few days, the muscle tissue builds back. But guess what? It builds back stronger than it was before. It's just like when you break a bone. If you go and look at a break five years after the break, right at the break the bone is thicker than the surrounding bone above and below it because it built back stronger. The same thing with a muscle, it builds back stronger.

And the key is you have to overcome the resistance. And the weight is the resistance and you have to put it in your mind that I'm going to lift this so many times. And over a period of time, that muscle gets bigger and bigger and bigger.

Exercising the holy spirit is exactly the same. Exercising the holy spirit is overcoming resistance. What is the resistance? It's our human nature—"I don't want to pray; I'm too tired. I don't want to study; I want to watch basketball. I don't want to go visit a widow because I'd like to go play golf."

That's overcoming resistance. And if you say, "No," to the flesh—"No, I'm going to put the golf clubs down. I'm going to go visit a widow."—that is overcoming the carnal resistance that we have in our mind.

And when you do that, guess what? It grows God's holy spirit. God's spirit gets stronger just like a human muscle does. So that's why we always have to say, "Yes," when we have the urge to follow God's spirit, to follow its lead or its guide. We must say, "Yes." If we do, then God's holy spirit begins to grow. We exercise it and it grows and it grows and it grows. We're overcoming resistance. It gets stronger the more it is exercised.

Just like lifting a certain weight becomes easier. You lift a five-pound weight for a few weeks and then, it seems kind of light. So, then, you go to the ten. And then, after a few weeks, it seems light. And the same thing is true. When you say, "No" to your lusts, "No" to your carnal desires, it's a struggle! People that might have a problem with alcohol, they say, "No." Well, the next time, it's a little easier. The next time it's a little easier after that. And, again, we're using more of God's spirit. We're exercising God's spirit.

So, if you say "No" to the holy spirit, we're not exercising it and it won't be as strong the next time. And like a muscle, if we don't exercise the holy spirit, it will waste away.

Now, I've visited people in hospitals as they're terminally ill. Walter Blue back in Boston, a big polish guy, I mean he was about 5' 10", but he was just—his bones were huge. His wrist was just that big around! It was all bone. He was just a bony Polack. Just a big guy! And we were good friends, but I'll tell you. In the hospital, I could put my fingers around his biceps because he had just wasted away physically. And that's the way our muscles are if we don't exercise.

And that's the way God's spirit will be if we don't exercise it. And unlike a muscle, however, when we do exercise God's holy spirit—the muscle gets bigger because of the food we take in, the protein and all of that—when we exercise God's holy spirit, He gives us more of it. If we show him we want more of His spirit by the fact that we use it and exercise it, He will give us more! We can't manufacture God's holy spirit in us. He gives us more the more we exercise it.

And if we become stuck spiritually—and we've all been there. We've become stuck. We're kind of treading water spiritually. We keep repeating sins or we keep repeating negative behavior. And we appeal to God and nothing happens. We don't get an answer and we're sitting out there treading water. It could be—think about this! It could be God saying to us, "I'm not going to give you any more of my spirit because you're not exercising what I have already given you. You are not doing what you should be doing! You have the power through My spirit to say, 'No' or to do a good deed or to change the thought pattern in your head, but you refuse. And you just want Me to wave a magic wand"—meaning Me, God—"wave a magic wand and make everything all right without you putting forth the effort."—exercising God's spirit.

So, let's understand that because Isaiah 59 and verse 2 says our sins "separate us from God." And if we get in a pattern of sin, we have that separation and we, if we don't exercise God's holy spirit, God's not going to give us more because of the separation. Our sins are taking us off in a different direction.

Therefore, if we don't exercise God's spirit, just like a muscle, we begin to lose it.

Now so, our responsibility under this last point of nurturing is, obviously, we have to exercise. The other thing we have to do is we have to ask daily. And I can tell you when I first came in the Church, it never occurred to me to ask for more of God's spirit! It's only when you bump your head against the wall so many times or you slip and fall so many times, or you're just bloodied or bruised all over from all of our carnal mistakes that you finally get down on your knees and beg God for more of His holy spirit. Now we have to be using the spirit that He's given us already, but we should ask God.

Matthew 7 and verse 7, a very familiar Scripture. Do you think God would refuse this? We must ask it says. Matthew 7 and verse 7, it says:

Matthew 7:7. Ask, and it shall be given [unto] you; seek, and [you] shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: (KJV)

Now, if we are exercising what spirit God has given us and we plead with Him and beg Him for more of His spirit—we're going through a trial or some kind of test—do you think God would not do that? Christ said, "Would a father when his son asks for some food, would he give him a snake or whatever?" No, He's not going to do that if we're doing our part.

So, this Fifth Point that we must nurture and protect and take care of this precious gift, we have to exercise it and we have to ask. That is our responsibility. And shame on us if we don't do that! Because God is not going to

wave His magic wand and give us more spirit if we're not using the spirit we already have.

But if we're in deep trouble and we're going through serious trials, then all we have to do is ask. If our heart is right and we're exercising the spirit God has given us, what Father would not give us that help, that extra help? He gives it to us for a purpose. And that purpose is so we can become like Jesus Christ. He would not withhold us that gift if we sincerely mean it and want to be like Jesus Christ and we're doing what we should be doing.

Let's conclude. The importance of the holy spirit is so great that it is the defining characteristic of a Christian. It is the defining characteristic. Romans 8 and verse 9, let's go there. It says:

Romans 8:9. *But [you] are not in the flesh, but [you are] in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God [dwells] in you. (KJV)*

You become a spiritual being. You have a spiritual dimension that you didn't have before.

Going on:

Romans 8:9b. *Now if any man [does not] have the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. (KJV)*

And then, look at verse 14. We talked about this earlier under Point Four.

Romans 8:14. *For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. (KJV)*

We must not only have the spirit, but we must allow the spirit to lead us and guide us. But it says here, these two verses make it very clear that the defining characteristic of a Christian is whether or not one has God's holy spirit or does not and whether one allows God's spirit to lead them or one does not.

And it's another subject, but God's spirit can go away. It will die if we do not exercise it and use it as we should. And that gets back to our responsibility on this Day.

So, let's focus as we go away from here, let's focus on this most valuable of gifts God has given us. And let's thank God! Be thankful for His love and His generosity to give of His very nature to each one of us! And let's not take for granted this power that He's given us. Let's not diminish it in our mind. This power can change us. This power can overcome any trial, any difficulty, any problem, any obstacle if we will just use it and exercise it.

But let's also realize our responsibility in the matter. We must nurture it. We must exercise it. We must grow that gift by exercising it as we would—as we said—a muscle.

So, as the end draws near—and looking at world news, I used to think back in the seventies, we're not even close. The world's got to get much worse. And I thought that up until just very recently. But conditions are getting to the point that this house of cards can come down really quickly. It could get very bad, very quickly. As we come closer to the end, we have to remember that it is up to us to stir up that gift. So let's go to one final Scripture where Paul again is talking to Timothy, 2 Timothy chapter 1 and verse 6. And Paul had to remind Timothy like I need to be reminded and all of you need to be reminded that we have to stir this gift up. 2 Timothy 1 verse 6, Paul says, "Wherefore." He says:

2 Timothy 1:6. *[I'm going to] put [you] in remembrance [I'm going to remind you] that [you] stir up the gift of God, which is in [you] by the putting on of my hands. (KJV)*

Obviously referring to the holy spirit. So, let's all of us as we go away from here— Now we have a period of time before we get to the Fall Holy Days. Let's use this time to stir up the gift of God's holy spirit. Let's use this time to make sure we are thankful for it and we understand it. And we are so grateful to God, but at the same time, let's not neglect it. Let's stir it up! Let's exercise it and let's use it.

So as we memorialize this Day and think about this Day, let's determine as we go forward to use and exercise and protect this gift from God. Protect it by not putting Satan into our mind, Satan into our life, which is the antithesis of God's holy spirit. Let's protect this gift from God to the end that we can become like Jesus Christ and we can be His Bride.