Serious Worship and Self-Examination

I want to talk to you tonight about something that I think is really critical; and we’ve gotten up to it, but we haven’t gone through it. I started out on Wednesday from 2 Corinthians 6:14, “Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers,” and I tried to lay down the reality that that is an inviolable, divine law that we don’t engage in any enterprise or any effort that intends to advance the kingdom of God in connection with unbelievers. And I think that was really clear.

The popular trend is against that. Popular trend is to make as many alliances with unbelieving institutions or unbelieving allies as you possibly can under the delusion that somehow you advance the kingdom of God with such alliances. I want to see if I can address that, and especially, you’re going to find that what I say tonight is going to connect a lot of things you heard today, and even specifically with some of the things that Steve said in the last session. But I’ll leave that connection for you to make; and I don’t need to make it, myself.

The book of worship is the Psalms, so I want you to open your Bible to the Psalms. This is the book of worship, 150 psalms. I just want you to look at the opening psalm. Psalm 1 is the gate to worship; Psalm 1 is the gatekeeper. It isn’t the first psalm that was written, but under the superintendence of the Holy Spirit, I believe the Psalms are put in this order because Psalm 1 is the gatekeeper; and what Psalm 1 says establishes the divine expectation for worshipers.

As you enter in the gate of the Psalms, this is what you hear: “How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers! But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night. He will be like a tree planted firmly by streams of water, which yields its fruit in its season and its leaf doesn’t wither; and in whatever he does, he prospers.” That’s one kind of worshiper coming through the gate.

Here’s another kind: “The wicked are not so, but they’re like chaff which the wind drives away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous. For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.” God is saying to the worshipers as they enter the Temple, “I know who you are. You can’t fool Me; I know you. You don’t belong in the assembly of the righteous because you’re going to perish; you’re among the perishing.” This is the gate to worship.

God expects worshipers to be true worshipers. God is not honored in the false and hypocritical worship of the wicked—that’s from the get-go in the Psalms. Any effort to amalgamate the righteous and the wicked in an act of worship is a foundational violation of God’s expectation for what worship is. This psalm is there at the gate to stop the wicked from entering worship. And the Lord knows the righteous, and He knows the wicked; and the wicked will perish. This was a stunning reality for the Jews as they came to worship: Do an inventory. Do you belong here?

Psalm 2, really another sort of gatekeeper psalm, points in verse 11 of Psalm 2—we’ll just look at that: “Worship the Lord with reverence and rejoice with trembling.” So you come in with reverence, you come in with trembling, and you “do homage to the Son.” Isn’t that amazing, that it’s all the way back at the beginning of the psalter: And you “do homage to the Son.” Literally, “You bow to the Son,” literally, “You kiss the Son,” literally, “You prostrate yourself on the ground and kiss His feet in submission to Him, or He will be”—what?—“angry, and you may die on the spot”—“For His wrath may soon be kindled. How blessed are all who take refuge in Him!” So Psalm 1 and 2, “Welcome to worship.” This is not, “Come one, come all”; this is how you are to worship; this is how you are to approach worship.

And by the way, the Lord knows who are His. The Lord knows who are His, of course. Second Timothy 2:19, “The Lord knows those who are His.” The Lord knows those who are His. John 10, several times, “I know My sheep. I know My sheep.” And because the Lord knows who are His, He will make a distinction. Listen to that distinction in the words of Peter in 2 Peter 2: “God did not spare . . . the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a preacher of righteousness, with seven others, when He brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly; and if He condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to destruction by reducing them to ashes, having made them an example to those who would live ungodly lives thereafter; and if He rescued righteous Lot, oppressed by the sensual conduct of unprincipled men (for by what he saw and heard that righteous man, while living among them, felt his righteous soul tormented day after day by their lawless deeds), then”—and this is the point—“the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation”—or trial—“and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment.” God sorts everybody out. God knows who the true worshipers are.

Maybe there was a recollection of Psalm 1 in the mind of our Lord in the Sermon on the Mount. Turn to Matthew 7 and verse 13: “Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.” Just a brief comment: There are more people on the religious road to hell than on the right road to heaven; there are the many and the few.

Down in verse 21, “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.’”

God didn’t want the lawless and unrighteous in His Temple; He doesn’t want them in His heaven. They don’t belong in worship. I wonder, in this particular form of evangelical today, if we aren’t producing some broad-gate Baptist churches—the First Broad-Gate Baptist Church of whoever or wherever. Maybe even some broad-gate Bible churches.

We’ve been talking about the gospel; we all understand that. And you heard a classic message from Steve on preaching the Word. And in that message he came down to verse 5, and I’m going to pick up the baton at verse 5 on “do the work of an evangelist,” “do the work of an evangelist.” I think that means evangelize your church. And if you go back to Psalm 1, you know God was saying that the crowd that came in to worship Him in the Temple—side by side stood the righteous and the wicked. And it was the same in Judaism of the time of our Lord: There were those on the way to perdition and those on the way to glory; they were all there, gathered in the Temple.

And you’ll notice, as Steve commented on, 2 Timothy 4, “Do the work of an evangelist” is the only way that you can complete your ministry. How many pastors are trying to make their congregation feel good, when they ought to be feeling terrified? That term “fulfill your ministry” in 2 Timothy 4:5 is a compound verb that means “to fully accomplish.” Romans 4:21 uses it, and it says, “[Abraham was] fully assured that what God had promised, He was able . . . to perform.” Colossians 4:12 uses the same verb to mean “fully assured in all the will of God.” And Paul even uses it again in 2 Timothy 4:17, where he says—and this is the summation of his whole ministry: “The Lord stood with me and strengthened me, that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished, and that all the Gentiles might hear.” It’s a compound word that means “to fully accomplish” your ministry. And you have not fully accomplished your ministry if you have not, at the beginning, at the door, said, “The righteous and the wicked do not belong together here worshiping.” This is not, of course, to keep them out, but to bring them in through the gospel.

I think every time we come to the Lord’s Table, we need to remember 2 Corinthians 13:5, “Examine yourselves, whether you’re in the faith.” Paul says in 2 Corinthians 11, “I want to present you as a chaste virgin to Christ, and I’m afraid you’re going to be led astray, you’re going to be deceived like Eve was deceived.” This is part of the reason that I think he says, “Be sober.” You pointed that out so strongly.

Part of the soberness of pastoral ministry is you just don’t take people at face value. That’s short-sighted. That’s superficial. We have to—in shepherding the sheep, we have to know the condition of the flock, and they have to know their true condition.

It was February 9, 1969—some of you hadn’t even been born obviously—I came to Grace Community Church, on the first Sunday over in the chapel on a rainy day. Stood up and preached my first sermon at this church to a chapel full of happy, expectant people, and I preached on Matthew 7:13 to 23, and I came out with blazing reality, letting people know that they may think they’re saved, but they may well not be. Why would I do that? Because I grew up in the church; I grew up as a pastor’s kid. I saw it; I saw the saints and the aints, side by side. And I was close enough, because I was seeing the whole thing through my father’s eyes, to know that maybe, surely, far more people than we ever thought were lost in the church.

Any cursory examination of an “evangelical survey” will tell you that at least 50 percent of the evangelicals don’t even know what the gospel is. So how do we help our people to know whether they’re genuinely converted? We can preach the Word at them and preach the Word at them, but by what criteria do we evaluate their spiritual condition and help them to see it? That’s a vital part of pastoral ministry.

Ephesians 4:17, “So this I say”—or therefore—“I affirm together with the Lord”—I love that; that’s what preachers do, right? We affirm with the Lord—“that you walk no longer just as the ethnē walk”—you don’t walk that way anymore—“in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness. But you did not learn Christ in this way, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, that, in reference to your former manner of life, you laid aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and you are renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.”

You know what salvation does? It takes you from being described as futile in mind, darkened in understanding, excluded from the life of God, ignorant, hard-hearted, callous, sensual, impure with greediness; and it makes you righteous and holy. That’s how you know the difference. I don’t hear much about transformation; I hear a lot about decisions. That’s never the evidence of anything. It’s the transformation that is the evidence.

God knows His children, and we ought to know His children as well. When Jesus said, “I know My own,” He also said, “My own”—what?—“know Me.” How do they know that? Because of the transformation of their life. It’s not enough to just fire the gospel all the time; you have to bring people to a constant, incessant, honest inventory of their spiritual condition. That’s part of shepherding.

We should expect that if someone has been regenerated, converted, that they would be transformed. Is that a stretch? “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation; old things are gone, and new things come.” And you think, “Well yeah, but that’s maybe the only verse that says that.” Oh, no. No, that truth has been around since the Pentateuch.

I want to do a little Bible study with you. So if you’ve been going to Andy Stanley’s church, dust off your Old Testament, and go back to the thirtieth chapter of Deuteronomy. I want to tell you what Deuteronomy chapter 30 and verse 6 says salvation does. “Moreover the Lord your God will circumcise your heart.” Whoa. He’ll “circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, so that you may live.”

Now wait a minute, that’s the great commandment: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.” You mean God will enable us to do that? It’s just what it said. This is what salvation is: It’s when God circumcises your heart—does surgery on your heart, cuts off the diseased part, so that the result is you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. How can you tell when somebody’s been transformed? They love the Lord with all their heart and all their soul, as much as we can in our fallen limitations. If we have been born again, we love the Lord with all our soul and all our heart. That’s what He does; it’s not because we drum it up. Something else we do, verse 8. When the Lord does that, circumcising the heart, “You shall again”—do what?—“obey the Lord, and observe all His commandments which I command you today.” So how can you tell when someone is really a believer? They love the Lord with all their being, and they obey. Isn’t that what Jesus said? “If you love Me”—what?—“keep My commandments.”

When the prophets revealed the nature of New Covenant salvation, they declared the same thing. Listen to Jeremiah 11:4, “Listen to My voice, and do according to all which I command you; so shall you be My people, and I will be your God.” We’re talking about Jeremiah, and the definition there of belonging to God was that you do what He commands. Again, obedience.

Jeremiah 24:7, I love this; this is another prophetic, Old Testament description of salvation: “I will give them a heart to know Me, for I am the Lord; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God”—I love this—“for they will return to Me with their whole heart.” If somebody’s saved, the Lord gets their whole heart; that’s what He says. This is New Covenant salvation. Let’s look at those blessed New Covenant passages.

Jeremiah 31—I know you’re familiar with it—33 and 34. This is what God does when He saves because this is what He’s going to do when He saves Israel: “‘This is the covenant which I’ll make with the house of Israel after those days,’ declares the Lord, ‘I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people’”—“If I’m their God and they’re My people, My law is on their heart.” And “‘they will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, “Know the Lord,” for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,’ declares the Lord, ‘for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.’” When God forgives and God forgets sin, the same time, He gives a new heart, and He writes the law in that new heart, and it is the law of the new man.

This is repeated again in the thirty-second chapter of Jeremiah, verse 38: “They shall be My people, and I will be their God; and I’ll give them one heart and one way, that they may fear Me always, for their own good and for the good of their children after them. I will make an everlasting covenant with them that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; and I will put the fear of Me in their hearts so that they will not turn away from Me.” There’s the doctrine of eternal security in Jeremiah. God totally transforms the inner person: new heart, new affections, new law, new love.

Ezekiel also, in the eleventh chapter—not as well-known—eleventh chapter of Ezekiel, verse 19, the Lord talks about removing all detestable things and abominations. And then in verse 19, again He describes salvation: “I will give them one heart, [I’ll] put a new spirit in them.” A new law, a new heart, a new spirit. “And I will take the heart of stone out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in My statutes and keep My ordinances and do them. They will be My people, and I shall be their God.” What defines the reality of that relationship is loving God, loving the law of God, fearing God, worshiping God, and walking in joyful obedience. I just don’t think that has been communicated to people in this evangelical movement. It’s like if you prayed a prayer sometime or you had an emotional experience, or you felt a buzz when somebody talked about Jesus and the cross, that’s all it takes. That’s not a transformation.

In Ezekiel 36:26—well 25, “I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I’ll cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols.” So this is amazing. Salvation is not just forensic; it is that, but it’s not just that. It’s an actual cleansing. Paul says we’re washed by the water of the word, right? “I’ll clean you up; I’ll get rid of your filthiness and your idols.” And then verse 26, the same thing: “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit with you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.” That’s salvation—unless you’re a dumb dispensationalist, and you want to stick that somewhere it doesn’t belong. That’s salvation. Salvation is transformation.

Now let’s go back to Ephesians. So what do we expect salvation to look like? Well, let’s look at chapter 2: “And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now works in the sons of disobedience.” You were in serious condition. You were dead. That’s as low as you can go; there’s nothing below dead. So the metaphor to describe your condition is the lowest possible concept: You’re “dead in your trespasses and sins.”

You’re walking, your conduct is “according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air”—Satan—“the spirit . . . working in the sons of disobedience.” You are essentially, according to verse 3, living in the lusts of the flesh, “indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and [are] by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.” You’re like everybody. Everybody’s like that. “But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ.”

Now this is a monergistic work of God, right? He has—took the dead people and made them alive. By grace we were saved. And not only did He make us alive, but He “raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” In other words, we are elevated to the very throne of heaven with Christ, “so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace [and His] kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you’ve been saved through faith; that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that [you] may boast.” But look at verse 10: “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for”—what?—“for good works”—now look at this—“which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.”

You talk about the sovereignty of God in your salvation; that’s the sovereignty of God in your sanctification. Do you know He has foreordained your good works? He has foreordained your life. He has foreordained your preaching, your praying. He has foreordained every expression of love toward Him, every act of worship; He wrote it down before you ever existed. His sovereignty covers our lives, so that if God has given you a sovereign salvation, He has also given you a sovereignly designed sanctification.

There shouldn’t be any mystery about who’s a Christian. But part of your responsibility as a pastor is to know that and help people know that. The last thing you want to do is make people feel secure when they shouldn’t.

Now go back to the fourth chapter. The description here is very obvious. The Gentiles, or the ethnē, the ethnicities—there is only one race, one human race, but a lot of ethnicities, and they all basically are the same. Only one human race, and all the ethnicities in that human race can be described the same way: They are futile in their mind, darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God, ignorant, hard-hearted, callous, sensual, impure, and greedy.

When I originally was going to speak on this last Sunday, they asked me, What was the title of my sermon? And I said, “The title is, ‘What’s Wrong With Everybody?’” That’s what’s wrong with everybody. That’s what wrong with everybody.

But look at verse 20 again: “But you did not learn Christ in this way, if indeed you have heard Him and been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus.” The language here in verses 20 and 21 refers to an action in the past. When the Ephesian congregation was exposed to the gospel, heard the gospel, and believed, they learned Jesus. That’s an expression to describe their salvation. They learned the truth of the gospel. They were taught the truth in Jesus, as verse 21 says. They learned Christ, and they learned Him at the moment of their salvation; and at that moment, they passed from one kingdom into another, from one family into another. And the transformation was absolutely epic because immediately, they “[laid] aside the old self . . . corrupted in accordance with lusts of deceit.” They were “renewed in the spirit of [their] mind, and put on the new self” that had been created again, created by sovereign design by God, foreordained, “created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.” What a dramatic change. That’s normal for real salvation.

Now you’re going to get some good support for that if you turn with me to Romans 6, Romans 6. Listen to this, verse 17: “Thanks be to God that though you were”—what?—“slaves of sin, you became obedient from the”—what? There’s that heart again that we saw all over the Old Testament. “You became obedient from the heart to that form of doctrine to which you were committed, and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.” This is not forensic—this is conversion; this is transformation.

“I’m speaking in human terms,” he says in verse 19, “because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, resulting in further lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification. For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. Therefore what benefit were you then deriving from the things of which you now ashamed? For the outcome of those things is death. But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life.” Wow, what a dramatic transformation.

First John 5:20, “We know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding”—we’ve learned Christ—“understanding so that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.” We are now in Christ.

Learned Christ—go back to that in the fourth chapter, there in Ephesians. You learned Christ. Do you remember what Jesus said in Mathew 11:29? “Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me.” Even in the gospel of John, I think it’s chapter 6, verse 45, “It is written in the prophets,” says the Lord, “‘And they shall all be taught of God.’” “They shall all be taught of God”—borrowed from Isaiah. “Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father, comes to Me.” I love that. You have to learn to come to Christ. “What do you mean, ‘Learn’?” You have to hear truth; it has to be taught to you. Faith comes by hearing the word concerning Christ, Romans 10:17. You have to learn the gospel.

We have in all these passages this stunning transformation of conversion laid out. Add to that Colossians 3 for just a comparative, verses 6 and 7, “For it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience.” What things? Verse 5, oh, “Immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. It’s because of these things that the wrath of God will come on the sons of disobedience, and in them you also once walked, when you were living in them. But now you also, put them all aside.” Why? Verse 10, because you “have put on the new self, being renewed to a true knowledge,” created in “the image of the One who created him.” You’ve been made new. It’s not enough to just accept someone’s notion that they made a decision for Christ, or they understand who He is, or they understand the gospel; part of your responsibility—and I think it really comes down strongly around the Lord’s Table—is to constantly call your congregation to an honest inventory of self-examination. The transformation is so dramatic that, in Ephesians, you go from being an old self to being a new self. Same in Colossians.

Again, I’m drawing to Romans 6 because the first part of the chapter we read, starting in verse 17. But listen to this. We’ll pick it up at verse 3, Romans 6: “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized”—or immersed—“into Christ Jesus have been immersed into His death? Therefore we’ve been buried with Him through baptism into death.” Again, the depth of this metaphor takes you down as far as you can go. You can’t have anything more transformative than to be dead and then come to life. This is not like some minor alteration. “We have been buried with Him through baptism into death, [just] as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. If we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with”—really? The body of sin is done away with? Yes—“so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin. So”—verse 11—“consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God.”

That ought to show up in how you live, right? I mean, I get it. I understand Romans 7 is there. I mean, we’re not perfect, but we are transformed. Puritans used to talk about affections. It’s not the perfection; it’s the direction and the affection.

So back to Ephesians 4—sorry to be jumping around. So when Paul says, “You don’t walk like the Gentiles walk,” you don’t do that anymore; that’s not you. I don’t know if you get this question asked you as much as I do; people very frequently ask me, “How do I know I’m saved?” This is the answer: Do you love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, as much capacity as you have? Could we say about you that you have no other loves? Could we say that you saw the pearl, and you gave everything up, and you bought the pearl? Could we say you saw the treasure hidden in the field, Matthew 13, and the treasure hidden in the field is Christ, and He was so valuable, you gave up everything? Can we say you heard Luke 9:23, “If any man come after Me, let him”—what?—“deny himself”? Did you give it all up? Is there any other love in your life? Is Christ not the supreme and only love?

You can love the Lord with all your faculties because that’s what He does to you. We saw that; that’s New Covenant salvation promise. So you look at what you used to be; it’s pretty serious. Let me just give you a few words that you can use to describe this—and we’ll hurry a little bit.

Futility of mind, the first one—futility of mind. What is that? Well, let’s just call it selfish, selfish. In other words, you literally, in your own mind, spin out your own worldview. Oh, by the way, “mind,” “understanding,” “learned,” “mind”—all through this portion; it’s all about how you think. But since our Lord said, “All . . . evil things proceed from within,” Mark 7. So yeah, this is what it’s like to be an unconverted person: You just live in your own world; you just spin out your own truth.

There was a time in human history, I suppose many times, when people having their own truth was suspect. But if you are suspicious of anybody’s truth, you’re liable to get canceled. “Futility,” mataiotēs, that which is useless, worthless, empty, void. They’re braindead; everyone doing right in his own eyes. I mean, we’re seeing this all over the place. This is what it means to be a fool and think you’re wise, Romans 1.

So they’re marked by being selfish; secondly, by being senseless, verse 18, “darkened in their understanding.” Lost in the foolishness of their own mind, they become senseless, so senseless, because they are “excluded from the life of God”; in that ignorance they become hard-hearted.

They’re not only selfish and senseless, but they are shameless. Maybe that works for verse 19: They become “callous,” being past feeling. You know, Paul says in Philippians 3:19, “[Their] glory is in their shame.” Can you imagine? Yeah, you can. People parade their shame. That’s what pornography is. That’s what pride does—blatant, boastful, arrogant, brash, pride.

Unconverted people are selfish, they are senseless, they are shameless, and then he says also they are sensual. They literally “deliver themselves over”—very familiar verb—“deliver themselves over, hand themselves over to sensuality, for the practice—for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness.” They are impure, and they can’t be satiated; they can’t be satisfied. “Practice,” by the way, is a term ergasia, used to mean “business”; turning yourself over to the business of “impurity”—big business. Pleonexia, insatiable craving, uncontrolled appetite.

That’s a picture of the people who haven’t learned Christ. That’s a picture of those who are described in 1 John 3 as “the children of the devil.” But it’s not true of us. We have been transformed. We learned Christ.

Verse 22, “In reference to your former manner of life”—it’s gone. The implication here is that these things have happened, and you are being “renewed in the spirit of your mind.” You’ve literally been renewed. You have a new mind; you have the mind of Christ. You “put on the new self . . . in the likeness of God,” or literally, which in God “has been created in righteousness and holiness to the truth”—and that’s godlike. So what marks you is righteousness, holiness, and truth. This is a very, very high standard, isn’t it? But it just happens to be the right one.

So you want to worship? You’d better stop at the door and do a heart examination before you come in. When you enter the presence of the Lord to worship, He knows the truth about you. And I think as a pastor and a shepherd, you need to know the truth about your people, and they need to know the truth about them; and that is part of what we heard earlier, of doing the work of an evangelist. And it doesn’t mean necessarily that you’ve always preached the gospel, what it does mean is you always describe the fruit of true salvation.

Maybe I’ll close, maybe I won’t—but maybe I will. Malachi 3. I will; you guys have heard plenty of preaching. Malachi 3. Malachi’s bringing down judgment, and verse—well, we can pick it up at verse 16. The Lord is going to judge the people who do wickedness; verse 16, “Then those who feared the Lord spoke to one another.” Conversation probably went like this: “I hope you can tell us apart. I mean, there’s a lot of judgment flying around. I hope we tell us apart.” So they “spoke to each other.”

And the Lord was eavesdropping, and He “heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the Lord and who esteem His name.” He didn’t say, “For those who made a decision,” He said, “For those who fear the Lord and exalt His name.” “They will be Mine,” verse 17, beautiful verse, “says the Lord of hosts, ‘on the day that I prepare My jewels’”—literally, “My jewels,” I think the Authorized says—“They will be Mine . . . and I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him”—because that’s who they are, and that’s what they do. “So you will again distinguish between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who doesn’t serve Him.” This is the word of the prophet to the people: “You better help people sort out which group they are in. He’d better know whose children you are.”

I think that’s huge part of pastoral responsibility, especially here; maybe not so much in dire conditions of persecution, which purifies the church. But in an insipid, superficial, shallow form of Christianity, this really doesn’t have much of a place. If you do the work of God and you do the work of an evangelist, your people are going to know whether they are the devil’s children or the children of God. And you’re not going to make the crowd feel comfortable as the children of the devil and the children of God stand side by side and sing the same hymns. Very important part of shepherding.

You say, “Does that make your ministry harsh?” Well, I’ll tell you what it does. It makes people who’ve been in church a long time get saved; that’s what it does. Every Sunday night, we have this baptistry behind me. Sunday night after Sunday night after Sunday night we have the same testimony: “I grew up in the church; I always thought I was a Christian. I thought I believed; I thought I knew the Lord. I found out when I was tested by the Scripture, I didn’t love Him; I didn’t love His Word; I didn’t have a new heart; I didn’t have a clean heart; the filthiness wasn’t cleaned out—and I knew I wasn’t a believer.” Can you give a greater gift?

You can’t be content with somebody saying, “Lord, Lord,” and hearing, “Depart from Me, I don’t know you.” You don’t want that blood on your hands. So doing the work of an evangelist is more than just giving them the gospel all the time; it’s confronting them with the realities of what the gospel does, and is it a reality in their lives. Do that, and they will thank you forever.