

GOD'S CALL

Major themes in the Scriptures

The Holy Spirit (16)

Freedom in the Spirit: progressive

Reference: GDC-S18-016-Mw-R00-P2

(Originally spoken on 4 May 2014, edited on 10 May 2014)

Web site: <http://www.ajourneyinlife.org> and <http://www.ajourneyinlife.com>

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The Lord willing, today we will consider the subject, “The Holy Spirit”, the sixteenth message, in seeking to appreciate major themes in the Scriptures. A short summary of today’s message:

God wants us to know true freedom in all its fullness. However, this is developed progressively. There are greater depths and higher levels of freedom in the Spirit that we can enter into in all its glory and meaningfulness.

We will seek the Lord to appreciate more of what this means.

We have sought to consider what true freedom ought to be and we can see that true freedom is the power to be what we ought to be and to do what we ought to do.

If we do not live our lives that way, if we do not develop in that direction then we will find that something is seriously missing in our lives and there cannot be ultimate freedom and meaning in our lives.

So how can this freedom be fully attained?

In the absolute sense, God is the only One who has absolute freedom. God is the only One who has the absolute power to be what He ought to be and to do what He ought to do.

How about us? How then can we have true freedom in its fullness?

Is that possible or is that only for God?

In the Scriptures, it is clear to us that God wants us to know true freedom in its fullness. How then can we attain it?

Since God is the only One who can have absolute freedom in the absolute sense and it is because of His moral perfection and His absolute power, then we must learn in some way or other to become like God if we are to find that kind of freedom.

How can we become like God in the right sense as God intends?

We know the evil one sought to be like God but in the wrong sense. He wanted power but of the wrong kind. He wanted authority, power, glory, position – to be like God. But that was not what was good for him; so it is also not good for us.

But God does want us to become like Him. God created us in His image so that this is possible.

So what does that mean?

How can we develop our lives so that we can become like God?

Let us turn to **Matthew 5: 38-48**.

Matthew 5: 38-48

- 38 "You have heard that it was said, 'AN EYE FOR AN EYE, AND A TOOTH FOR A TOOTH.'
- 39 "But I say to you, do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.
- 40 "If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also.
- 41 "Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two.
- 42 "Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you.
- 43 "You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR and hate your enemy.'
- 44 "But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,
- 45 so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on *the* evil and *the* good, and sends rain on *the* righteous and *the* unrighteous.
- 46 "For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?
- 47 "If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing *than others*? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?
- 48 "Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

The Lord Jesus told His disciples as well as all others listening in: "...you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect". The basic meaning is: "You must be, you ought to be, you should be, perfect in the same way, in the sense and meaning as your heavenly Father is perfect".

What does this mean and how is that possible?

If we ask the question: "Can we be perfect in the same sense as God is perfect?" we can say that is not possible: We can never be perfect like God in His absolute perfection.

Why is that so?

God is infinite; He is the Creator of all things. His perfection is infinite. We are created beings; we are finite creatures; we can never be like God in the same sense as God is in the fullness of it.

But then the Lord Jesus says here: "...you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect". Therefore, we should also say, "Yes, we can be perfect like God in the same sense as God is perfect."

What then does that mean?

So it is important for us to ponder over this. Consider what is the meaning of being "perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect". In what sense can we not be; in what sense can we be?

We need to differentiate, so that we can work at what is meant for us and not strive for what is not meant for us and is not possible for us to attain.

Let us then look at the context. Why did the Lord Jesus say this? He said this: "Therefore you are to be perfect..." which means that He said certain things upon which He based this final sentence: "Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect".

We know this is part of the Sermon on the Mount, and from **Matthew 5: 1**, the Lord Jesus began to communicate very important issues with regard to moral perfection, moral character, attitudes of heart, values of life: how we should live, how we should consider situations, how we should respond, how we should conduct ourselves.

Basically we can say it is about what we ought to be and what we ought to do.

The expressions that are mentioned are the result of the meaning within the heart. The heart must first be properly developed and then actions should follow from there. We should manifest the glory of God as a result of first becoming like Him.

So here in this passage the Lord Jesus spoke about moral and spiritual issues, and the way He communicated it tells us that He was quite aware of how we usually think, and how we ought to think. There is a very great difference between the two.

If you look at what the Lord Jesus said: "You have heard that it was said, 'AN EYE FOR AN EYE, AND A TOOTH FOR A TOOTH' and then He says, "But I say to you..." it tells us that He was very conscious that generally, people thought along those lines but He was trying to show to them: "You must go beyond that; you must live your life at a higher plane."

The first part of it sounds quite right: 'AN EYE FOR AN EYE, AND A TOOTH FOR A TOOTH.' Is there anything wrong with that? No. In the Old Testament, the Law does prescribe that: injury for injury, 'AN EYE FOR AN EYE, AND A TOOTH FOR A TOOTH.'

But then the Lord Jesus says, "But I say to you, do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also." This is not how we usually think. And to many people, it may not make sense. It is unwise and it is something that will cause you harm. If somebody is evil, he wants to harm you and you allow him to continue to harm you further – that is not good sense. So it seems to be. Then why did the Lord Jesus teach that we should do that?

He says: "If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also." Why do that? The person wants to take your shirt, he sues you for that; why do you need to give your coat also?

"Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two". So we see that generally, the things that are mentioned sound very reasonable, that we should not do what is mentioned in the second half. We concentrate on 'AN EYE FOR AN EYE, AND A TOOTH FOR A TOOTH.' We should resist an evil person. If a person wants to sue you and take your shirt, you should not offer anything else. That sounds very reasonable.

"Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you." Is not that very unwise? There are many people going around asking for money, for things. Do we just give to them? Will it not increase their wrong appetite and approach and laziness just to get whatever they want?

"You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR and hate your enemy.' Is not that proper? Your enemy is seeking to harm you, so you hate your enemy but you love your neighbour: sounds reasonable.

But the Lord says: "But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you".

Why did He say all these? **Verse 45:**

- 45 so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on *the* evil and *the* good, and sends rain on *the* righteous and *the* unrighteous.
- 46 "For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?
- 47 "If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing *than others*? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?
- 48 "Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

First, let us consider what in reality the Lord Jesus was saying.

Was He teaching them that in every situation when there is an evil person trying to do harm to you, you should not resist? Does it mean that whenever someone slaps you on the right cheek, in every such situation you should in practice turn the other cheek to him? Is that what the Lord Jesus was saying?

If we pause and reflect on the life of the Lord Jesus, we know that cannot be the case. The Lord Jesus Himself never did that.

When the people wanted to kill Him, push Him down the cliff, He walked through them and went off. He did not allow them to push Him over the cliff.

When Pilate questioned Him, He kept silent. He did not respond to what he wanted. When Herod wanted to see some miracles to be done by Him, He did not do so.

When His brothers told Him, "Go to Judea and let people hear You, see You", He did not go at that time.

So was the Lord Jesus contradicting all these things that He said? Obviously not!

So the difference between His conduct and what He says here is something of importance for us to understand.

The Lord Jesus here is talking about attitude: the attitudes of our hearts, the willingness in us, how far are we prepared to go to do what is meaningful.

So, do we always demand for justice – 'AN EYE FOR AN EYE, AND A TOOTH FOR A TOOTH'? "Somebody has harmed me in some ways; I must retaliate, I must get back"?

"No," He says, "You do not do that. Even if they were to slap you on the right cheek, you must be prepared to turn the other cheek and be hurt further." But what is the purpose of that?

The purpose of that is to manifest the love that you have for the person; it is to seek to do good to that person. If in your assessment, doing this will help the other person in a meaningful way, are you willing to do it? Or would you say, "No, I want justice. Justice must be done"?

But that is the difference between justice and grace.

If God demanded justice from us, all of us would have perished.

There would not have been the cross – we all would have been sentenced to eternal death.

It is the love of God manifested in the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ that helped us to come to Him, to be born of the Spirit so that we can become children of God.

So then why did the Lord Jesus conduct Himself in that way that seems to contradict this?

The answer basically is: wisdom.

There is a difference between willingness and wisdom.

In our heart we must be willing to go to any extent, to do anything that would be good and meaningful, even if it is costly to us, difficult, painful, humiliating: We are willing to do so, but we do not have to prove it by constantly doing these things. We need to exercise wisdom. There must be genuine love in our hearts, to really care for people but that love must be with discernment; we must understand how to express that love in a way that would be good and meaningful.

And that was what the Lord Jesus did.

He loved the tax collectors and the notorious sinners, and He cared for them; He helped them in their need. But He rebuked the Pharisees who were hypocrites; He pronounced woes on them because that was what was suitable – wisdom in His conduct. He did not give in to Herod's desire because that would not be helpful in that situation. He did not answer Pilate because He wanted Pilate to know who is the real authority. So the Lord Jesus had His reasons for the things that He did. He had good reasons for everything that He did. So we can say that is wisdom.

But the genuine willingness of the Lord Jesus to go to any extent to do what was good and right was supremely manifested at the cross. It is the greatest suffering ever possible; it is the greatest sacrifice that we can imagine. He was willing and He did so. When the time came for Him to die, He did not refuse to die. When the time came for Him to suffer in that way, He willingly went. The Lord Jesus was willing to do that.

Are we willing?

Will we develop that kind of character and quality of our being so that we are genuinely willing to go to any extent, to do whatever may be necessary and good in accordance with the will of God?

The willingness is there, but we need wisdom, we need to pray, we need to consider: Is this what God wants me to do? Is this really the most meaningful path to take?

So the Lord Jesus said, "...love your enemies" but in the Old Testament, we see the Lord commanding the Israelites to kill the enemies. It is the same God. That is because while we may love our enemies, we may at times kill them. We must understand the two can go together. We are to love others with a genuine love but there are times when we need to take action because otherwise the consequences will be more serious. So for the Israelites, they were to obey God to do that because in that situation if they had not done that, the whole nation would have been corrupted.

So here the Lord Jesus said: "...love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven". God loves all mankind. God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son to save us, to help us.

So He says: "...if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?"

On the basis of selfish calculations, we are quite prepared to love people who will love us; we are prepared to do good to people who will do good to us – we will benefit if we do that. That is the general approach; that is worldly wisdom: worldly wisdom to benefit from our conduct. We consider: Will I benefit?

But the true character that is good does not calculate in that way (“Will I benefit from this action that I do to somebody else?”) but we consider: “Is it something good and meaningful before God? Is it something that will benefit and help the person that we are relating with or in relation to God’s purposes to be fulfilled?”

So then He says, “Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” So what then does that mean?

Well, in **Isaiah 55: 8 and 9**, God tells us who He is so that we can understand how we should develop to become like Him.

Isaiah 55: 8-9

- 8 "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways," declares the LORD.
- 9 "For *as* the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways And My thoughts than your thoughts..."

So the Lord Jesus showed that our ways are not God’s ways. The way we think, the way we respond are much, much lower. God’s ways are much, much higher. So that is why He says, “You must change. Change your ways; change your values; change the way you think and consider and how you are going to respond, what kind of attitude you should nurture ...so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven”.

So “be perfect” in this context means: Develop the kind of moral quality that is characteristic of the heart of God; be like Him in terms of the level and quality and meaning of moral goodness.

Do not just go by your own natural thinking and how people of the world think or even parts of the Scriptures when we read without understanding the total picture of what God is seeking to work at.

So we are to be perfect; we are to be like God – to be like Him in this sense: in the meaning of His moral goodness; and we are to be the utmost best that we can be, we are to develop that. “Be perfect” – you ought to be, work at it; develop that.

So then is it the same as God in His perfection?

As you have seen, it is not. There is an aspect we can be; there is an aspect we cannot be.

What we can be in the moral realm is to be the very best that we can be in our finiteness. We are finite beings; we are limited but we can develop to be the best that we ought to be. And what is the meaning of that best? The meaning of that best, we can also say – being “perfect” – means that we are what we can be properly expected to be. That means it is in order for people to expect us to be like that; if we are to be called sons of God then we ought to develop these qualities.

But that does not mean that we are like God in His absolute holiness because He is infinite and He is the Creator of all things; so there is a vast difference.

Here we see that the Lord Jesus helps us to recognize that there are higher and higher levels of moral and spiritual meaning which we may not quite understand nor appreciate in the earlier stages of our development.

So we need to learn to appreciate what God expects of us, what He wants us to develop into, and in order to do that we are to look at Him and His character.

We are to see how God acts; we have to look at the life of the Lord Jesus, we have to understand the values that He held and the way He lived, the meaning behind that.

So when we have developed as we should, our attitudes, our values become like that of God, the right kind; in that sense we can say we have become perfect – perfect at that stage of our development, perfect in that context of our lives.

But there are always higher and higher levels to develop; there is much, much more to go in our development and for us as finite beings, this is limitless and it is meant to go on for eternity.

Let us look at another passage that may help us to appreciate how we should develop.

Luke 12: 42-48

- 42 And the Lord said, "Who then is the faithful and sensible steward, whom his master will put in charge of his servants, to give them their rations at the proper time?"
- 43 "Blessed is that slave whom his master finds so doing when he comes.
- 44 "Truly I say to you that he will put him in charge of all his possessions.
- 45 "But if that slave says in his heart, 'My master will be a long time in coming,' and begins to beat the slaves, *both* men and women, and to eat and drink and get drunk;
- 46 the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect *him* and at an hour he does not know, and will cut him in pieces, and assign him a place with the unbelievers.
- 47 "And that slave who knew his master's will and did not get ready or act in accord with his will, will receive many lashes,
- 48 the one who did not know *it*, and committed deeds worthy of a flogging, will receive but few. From everyone who has been given much, much will be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more.

Here the Lord Jesus was talking about being ready for His coming again and each one of us must be careful that we live our lives in a state of readiness, always ready for the Lord to come. And here He tells us that if we do not respond well, there will be serious and negative consequences; there will be judgment.

He says: "...that slave who knew his master's will and did not get ready or act in accord with his will, will receive many lashes, the one who did not know *it*, and committed deeds worthy of a flogging, will receive but few."

So this tells us that there are different requirements in different stages of our lives, in different levels of knowledge and maturity: What is required of us is not the same.

The slave who knew his master's will but did not do it, he will receive many lashes. If we are at a stage of development where we have come to know specifically and we have failed to obey even though we know clearly, that would be serious. Here the context tells us there are times when the slave may already know what the master requires and yet he does not do it.

And this is true of Christians in many situations. There are many things we already know, we are clear about, but we do not obey; we go our own way.

So, the principle behind it is: many lashes, if they are serious.

On the other hand, He says, the one who did not know it will also receive lashes. How can that be? If he does not know, how can he then also receive lashes? Why will God judge us if we do not know? So we may think we will not be punished. But that is not so.

The Lord Jesus said: "...the one who did not know *it*, and committed deeds worthy of a flogging, will receive but few." That means you may not be so clear about it. You may not know specifically; you may not have been taught; you may not have been told but you ought to know. It is within the scope of what you can know, should know but you did not know, so you are responsible. That is because God will always punish us only when there is a moral failure. There cannot be a moral failure if there is no awareness of what is right or wrong.

But the fact that we do not know something specific does not mean that we have no awareness: We know it is there but we choose not to find out. So that is why people can claim ignorance. They know there is a law relating to this issue but they say, "I do not want to know. If I know then I have to obey. If I don't know I can say I am ignorant." Is that true? No. The judge will still judge you. You ought to have known, you could have known, but you chose not to do so, not to find out.

But there are occasions of a different kind where because of our level of maturity, our state in the development of our spirit, there are certain things, which we may not be aware of but it is not our fault. We are not yet of that level.

That is a different category. That kind of development will take time. It is just like a child. When the child is a baby, you cannot expect him to carry a heavy weight. As he becomes a toddler, he grows bigger, he can carry a little bit of things. So what you expect of him must be in accordance with what he is capable of doing at that stage.

But if a child is very lazy, he does not develop himself, so he becomes very weak. So when he is five years old and he is supposed to be able to carry a certain thing but he cannot do so because he has been lazy, then he is responsible for that. But if he has developed well, he has done all that he should, at five years of age we can say he is perfect: perfect in the sense he can carry what he ought to be able to do at that age and he has done so. Likewise as he becomes ten years old, he can be a perfect ten year old in the sense that what is properly required of him, he can do and he will do.

So too, when we become an adult, we can say there are certain things that are properly required of us, we can properly expect, but we may not, because we have failed to do our part.

But then if we do our part and we become an adult who can fulfil our various responsibilities properly, we can say yes, in that sense you are perfect.

But that does not mean that when you develop that kind of perfection, that is all that there is. As an adult you can develop further and further and further in that context.

In the spiritual realm this is even more interesting. We develop that kind of attitude that ought to be: we learn to love people as God loves; we learn to concentrate on what is really meaningful. We can develop that kind of perfection like God, but God is infinite and there are greater and greater depths for us to continue to work at and to develop. It is endless.

So that kind of perfection of God in His absoluteness we can never reach, but we can continue to make progress and this is something that we should work at for all eternity.

There is a hymn that I appreciate for many years and it is written by someone who has written many meaningful hymns over the years in her life. It is called "Like a River Glorious" and written by Frances Havergal.

Like a river glorious, is God's perfect peace

Over all victorious, in its bright increase

Perfect yet it floweth, fuller every day

Perfect yet it groweth, deeper all the way

It seems to me that she appreciates aspects of that kind of meaningfulness that can ever increase in its meaningfulness.

God can grant to us His perfect peace, something very meaningful, wonderful, and yet that peace, that perfect peace, can continue to grow, to develop, to mature.

So she then says when our hearts are fully abiding in God then we will find, as He promised, perfect peace and rest. These principles are expressed in **Isaiah 66: 12** and **Isaiah 26: 3**.

In **Isaiah 66: 12**, God says, "Behold, I extend peace to her like a river". That is a reference to Jerusalem in the future, that God would bless her: peace like a river. And in **Isaiah 26: 3**, it says, "The steadfast of mind You will keep in perfect peace, Because he trusts in You..." So, when we develop the right kind of relationship with God, a healthy, meaningful faith, we can experience God's perfect peace. He will keep us in perfect peace if we maintain that spirit of resting in Him, abiding in Him, trusting Him.

I now want to go on to consider with you the meaning of progressive development towards perfect freedom in the Spirit, in the spiritual realm.

What is the meaning of "progressive development towards perfect freedom in the Spirit"?

God wants us to have perfect freedom, fullness of freedom in the Spirit, but this is progressive in various senses and they are not all the same.

Some aspects of progression are not essential but the result of our failures. That means we progress by learning to deal with wrong attitudes and values in our lives, so we make progress.

Other kinds of progress are not the result of failure but of development of our being.

When we come into this world, we have a spirit but the spirit is not yet developed: just as in the physical realm, a child who comes into this world will develop with time; the capability and what it is able to do and experience are not the same.

So as a spirit we are developing as we go on, but as time passes by we are expected to develop. That is why the apostle Paul was very concerned and upset with the Corinthians. He said, "You are still carnal; you are still fleshly. You are still behaving like babies in the spiritual realm. By now you ought to have grown. Time has passed by, you have had opportunities to learn, to develop, but you have not."

So that is the result of failure; they should not develop like that. So that is not desirable. That is something that we ought to avoid: the failure to grow, the failure to develop.

But for them at the very beginning, to be like a child wanting spiritual milk before they partake of spiritual meat, that is in order; that is development in accordance with what ought to be.

But if we develop well, we respond to the utmost we can, we may also find that there are still failures that we did not realize. We thought that we responded so fully but as time passes by we realize we did not really understand what we were saying. So that again is failure. It should not be, need not be, but we have failed, and we must learn from it.

That kind of failure is very understandable and God does give us a lot of room for that kind of failure. But we must repent when we recognize it.

That kind of failure we can see like the apostle Peter: he was sincere; he was genuine; he wanted to love God with all his heart; he said he would be faithful to the Lord Jesus no matter what happened.

But when the test came, he failed. The Lord Jesus already knew that he would fail because He could see in his heart the wrong confidence. He was confident in the flesh, in himself; he was not depending on the Lord and he would surely fail.

So, we may learn in the process how not to depend on the flesh, how to depend on God. So we make progress, we develop. We put off the old man; we put on the new man. That is a process of progressive development.

A person like Job described as “blameless, righteous”: he responded well but still there were areas in his heart not yet properly dealt with. That is why when the test was strong enough, he faltered: he blamed God; he said things he should not have said. But God was understanding: God knew the difficulties were great and so God helped him. But it required Job to respond properly; he had to repent and he had to respond well. Otherwise the judgment of God would come.

So to develop to be what we ought to be is not an easy path. It is very difficult and we can easily be mistaken. We think we have developed well but it may not be so. But do we then need to be so anxious and afraid? No.

The main thing is: Are we prepared to be honest, humble, contrite? Are we prepared to learn and when we recognize we have gone astray, to acknowledge, to correct ourselves?

If we do, there is no need to fear. God is very understanding. The meaning of the cross is so great that God is prepared to forgive us any sin as long as we have genuinely sought to live for Him; and along the way we fail, we falter, God will be prepared to forgive us if we have sincerely repented.

God is a compassionate God. He does not follow the path of justice at all times, but justice will be upheld because the Lord Jesus died for us. That is why God can show that grace to us, to help us in our need.

So the Lord Jesus tells us, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." Then if we are not pure in heart, what will happen to us? Does it mean we cannot see God, we cannot relate with Him?

No, because Isaiah tells us that God dwells with him who is a humble and contrite person. He dwells with him who is of humble and contrite spirit, although God is a High and Lofty One. So God is absolute in His holiness but He is prepared to relate with us deeply if we have a humble and contrite spirit.

And God can relate with us in this way because of the cross. It is the cross that brings us together. It is through the cross that we can approach God. Otherwise it is not possible for us. God will have to judge us and destroy us. But because of the cross, punishment for us has been taken by the Lord Jesus if we are repentant, we are identified with Him.

So I will just go through some of these aspects, which, the Lord willing, we can consider more in future messages. But I will just share with you some aspects of the progressive development towards perfect freedom in the Spirit.

There can be progressive development from bondage in condemnation for sin to freedom in forgiveness for sins. So, there can be a progressive development.

At one stage, we are condemned because we have sinned and there is no hope for us. Life is bleak and black; there is nothing for us to look forward to but judgment.

Then we come to experience God's forgiveness through the cross as we repent. We come to Him, so we find forgiveness. So we find freedom, peace, but this is in different degrees. Many people who have experienced freedom from condemnation for sin subsequently again experience that and sometimes quite severely. When they sin again, they may find themselves condemned in their hearts.

This aspect of progression from condemnation to forgiveness is necessary because we have sinned. If we had never sinned then this would not be necessary. We have all sinned so we need to move from condemnation to forgiveness and there can be different degrees of our experience of this and we can falter again and again in the future. This is in the area of justification by faith.

Do we appreciate our justification is by faith?

If we do not sufficiently appreciate this then condemnation will come again and again. If we are seeking to live for God, we will find ourselves condemned because we fail again and again.

But if we understand sufficiently justification by faith, we can be free even though we fail because when we fail in the context of a genuine desire to obey God, we can come to Him in repentance and in faith seeking His forgiveness, His cleansing, and we can continue to walk with God with joy and gladness of heart.

Then we can see progressive development from self-seeking pursuits to seeking to live for God: the change, the progression from self-seeking pursuits, following the world, desiring the things of the world, to seeking to live for God; our minds set on things above, we are seeking to develop that. So here again there are different degrees. There is progression.

Sometimes we think we have given everything to God but subsequently, something happens and we know clearly we have not: We are still clinging on to many things in this world, there are many things in our heart that are still not right but we may not recognize it.

So God may help us through various situations of life to help us understand the need to progress in this area. We can say this is in the area of consecration, giving our lives to God. We want to live for God, we give ourselves to Him, there is a desire to work in that way, but it is very often not perfect, it is not complete; it is not what it ought to be. But we may think it is very good, we may compare with other people and at times we may feel very good. But, there are objective grounds by which we can come to know whether our consecration is deep enough, meaningful enough or not.

Then there is progression from living by depending on the natural self to living by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Again in this area there is a need for us to develop consistently and long term. Depending on the self in the natural realm is something that takes place very, very easily. Even if we want to live for God, we are conscious, we give our lives to God, we consecrate ourselves to Him, it is very easy for us to continue to live by our own natural desires, inclinations, abilities.

We need to learn to live by the power of the Holy Spirit, His enabling: we can say, in the realm of being filled with the Spirit, a life that is lived constantly filled with the Spirit.

Then we can consider the development of the being. What we considered earlier has to do more with the things we do, what we seek for, what we work at. But there is a need for the development of the substance of the being.

What kind of being are we?

So we need to develop from self-seeking being to self-giving being in oneness with God. So as we learn increasingly to become one with God, our being will be transformed to become like His: from self-seeking to become self-giving.

We can say this is in the realm of the fruit of the Spirit: the fruit of the Spirit growing within us more and more and there is no limit to this. The fruit of the Spirit can continue to grow within us for all eternity.

And so we come to the final aspect that I want to raise to your attention and that is: from self-giving being like God to higher and higher levels of self-giving being like God. That is: we develop more and more moral and spiritual substance within our being, moving towards infinity, and it will continue forever.

A piece of pure gold that is one ounce is very different from a piece of pure gold that is sixteen ounces.

We may have reached a very meaningful level of oneness with God but there is an infinite level to continue to develop towards and this is a very wonderful path, very, very meaningful: being perfect as God is perfect in increasing quality.

As you have seen, God is perfect in His absoluteness but we are finite. But in our finiteness, we can develop increasing levels of substance and meaning. So we move towards the infiniteness of God but we never reach it because we are finite beings. But even as we move in that direction and we have not yet reached and we will never reach, yet the meaningfulness in our lives will be extremely great.

It is what God has created us for. He wants us to be like Him to the utmost that we can ever be, at the highest level possible.

But the sad thing is that many of us are not prepared to work at it. We are quite satisfied with very low levels of our spiritual life: "As long as I can pray to God, He answers my prayers, I can attend meetings, I have fellowship with the brethren, I care for the poor, that is enough." That is sad if that is all that we want.

Our lives are not static; it does not remain at a certain stage all the time. If we do not work towards increasing quality, it will likely move towards decreasing quality. If we do not increase in our love for God, it will move in the direction of getting cold. We cannot allow this to remain as it is - "I want it to stay at 70 percent." If we do not work at moving towards hundred percent, it will move downwards to 50 percent. So we need to be very careful not to become presumptuous, that we can ensure that we will remain that way.

Yes, we can stay off drugs for 30 years and still relapse. But if we are careful to seek God, to maintain that spirit of dependence on Him, to nurture that love for Him, then we can continue to grow.

Our moral choice is dynamic. We can choose. No matter how much you have developed, you can always go back. You can always degenerate.

God does not degenerate because God is infinite and absolute in His perfection.

But because we are not in that category then we can also degenerate if we are not prayerful, we are not careful.

But the more we develop substance in our being, the less likely it is going to happen. The more we are one with God in greater and greater measure and significance, the less likely we are going to degenerate. We will become more and more consistent.

A person like Daniel and a person like Paul who have gone through depths of consecration, dependence on God, learning to trust God, walk with Him, they are not so likely to degenerate but it is possible. It is possible for anyone to degenerate.

So then what is the underlying principle that we need to pay attention to?

The underlying principle in all these areas basically is: whether we live by faith in God, following His instructions and depending on His life and power, or we go our own way and live by our own ideas, our own desires and preferences and on natural ability without dependence on God.

It is one or the other.

But there are different degrees of that. At times we live by faith; at times we live by the flesh. So we need to be very careful to make sure we always live by faith, we always walk with God, we always depend on Him, we always want His will.

In case we falter and go our own way then we must quickly come back, seek His forgiveness, ask Him to enable us and we go on. Then we can develop.

But if we harden our hearts, we are not prepared to repent and change then we will degenerate.

So finally, I want to bring across this important aspect for us to remember that can help simplify matters in our understanding of these issues. And that is to remember always: we are created moral beings. It is very important to recognize that – these two aspects: created and moral beings.

“Moral beings” means we have a moral choice, a genuine moral choice. And in that area, God is helpless. God cannot make our moral choice for us although He is the Creator because that will violate and contradict the very essence of the meaning of moral being. So God must give us a genuine moral choice and that means our choice is so very, very important.

We must exercise that well every moment. It is a gift that God has given to us, which He did not give to the animals and plants. So too it is a responsibility that we have to give an account, which is not required of animals and plants.

So we need to recognize that. We are moral beings and we have to make sure that we choose well; otherwise there will be judgment, there will be consequences. Every moment we live our lives, every direction that we seek for will affect us. Our being will be affected as we make our moral choices.

As moral beings we make the choice but the choice will make us. The choices that you make will make you what you become in your being and that being will make further choices.

You make wrong choices, the being becomes negative; it is more likely that you will make more negative choices.

But that does not mean it has to continue that way. You can repent, you can change, but it is more and more difficult if you keep on making negative choices.

So too the other way: The more you make good choices, the more your being becomes good and the more likely you will make good choices and when it becomes stronger and stronger, you become more and more consistent.

But you can always degenerate and make bad choices and become negative. That is why God tells us in the **book of Ezekiel** how a person who is good can become bad; a person who is bad can become good.

Our moral choice is ours.

Then the other thing to remember is we are created moral beings.

We are not independent moral beings like God – self-existent... we can decide however we want to live and the consequences in various aspects. We are created moral beings. Therefore we must live our lives according to the framework that God has created us, in accordance with what God has decreed and He has allowed us to work at.

If God says your body needs oxygen but you say, “No, I decide to breathe carbon monoxide”, you will die because God in His sovereignty made you that way. You are a moral being, you can make your moral choice, you can disobey God, but God has created you so that you dwell in a body that needs oxygen. You cannot change that.

So too, God created you finite: you cannot become infinite.

God created you such that you need His life. You have no life in yourself. You can choose what is good but you cannot be good in yourself. So you require God’s life, you must come to Him, you must receive His life. If you do not recognize this, you want to be good by yourself, you will fail; you will surely fail.

So, we are created moral beings. We must recognize the framework of God’s creation of us. And if we understand that and we work within that, life will be very, very wonderful because when we live in accordance with what God intends for us, just consider what can happen to us: God in all His infinite greatness will be with us.

So, we can do all things through Him who strengthens us; so, we will have fullness of freedom to be what we ought to be and to do what we ought to do. God will enable us whether it be in the spiritual realm or in the physical realm. Whatever God wants us to accomplish, we can do but not if we want to go our own way, not if we have our own plans, we want to do the things we like. It is only for those who will obey Him, who will walk with Him, who will do things according to God's will and purposes.

So if we want to live our lives well and fulfil God's call in our lives, we must learn to progressively develop true freedom in all its fullness in the Spirit. Let us be conscious that God does want us to become like Him in His perfection, but we must understand our limits, we must know what we can be and what we cannot be, what we ought to be, what we ought not to be. And if we learn to cooperate with God, work with Him properly, our lives will blossom and we will find life to be very, very meaningful every day and through all eternity.

Let us as we come before the Lord ask Him to help us to understand these issues more clearly and also to know the practical implications for our daily lives, that we will not so readily forget what God wants to tell us.

If you have come to understand and you recognize the right path, then to whom much is given, much is required. Where God has taught you and shown to you, you are required to live by that. God will hold you accountable for whatever you have come to understand and appreciate.

So let us ask the Lord to help us to deepen in our love for Him and to appreciate what He has done for us through the Lord Jesus Christ and through the working of the Holy Spirit in our hearts.