

Steps to Spiritual Freedom Part One  
“Understanding Who We Are”  
Sunday, October 4, 2009  
By Pastor Edward J. Thomas Jr.

This is the first sermon in a series on finding spiritual freedom. Pastor Thomas explained that the first thing we have to do in order to become spiritually free is to understand who we are.

First of all, the church has to be outwardly focused. No church can grow if it is only worried about itself. Pastor Thomas told the congregation that there are too many open seats, and that we have to get better about focusing on others for that to change. He asked “How important is it for you to see people saved?” Of course we cannot save anyone on our own, but we know the savior Jesus Christ. To be selfish with that knowledge would be inexcusable. So we have to become more spiritual.

I John 12:1

1. Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him.

Who we are is not based on who our family is, how we were brought up, or what we do for a living. Instead, who we are starts when we are born. We were each created with a purpose and a calling on our lives. God determines who we are, and through our free will, we decide whether or not we will become what He has designed us to be. What we are is not determined by what we do. Rather, what we do is determined by who we are.

Pastor Thomas told this story:

*There was a small local church at the edge of a rural town. After years of service, the pastor died and a young new pastor took his position. It became clear very soon after the young man took the pastorship that he was not going to pull any punches. He preached the truth of God with no reservation, even when it made the parishioners uncomfortable. He would not compromise on the word of God.*

*In the congregation, there were two brothers who were very well off and had been a very important part of the church for many years. And while they had not always lived lives that lined up with the gospel, they funded all the building projects, paid for the new children’s church supplies, and supported the ministry financially in general, and one Sunday, they had had enough of this young new pastor. They went to him and explained that their country church was just fine until he showed up and started rocking the boat. The brothers demanded that he stop preaching the hell-fire-and-brimstone messages that made everyone so uncomfortable, and go back to the comforting sermons about God’s love and peace that they had all grown so used to. If he would not comply, they would leave the church and take their money with them.*

*The pastor told the men that he would think this matter over and then meet with them the following day to discuss their situation. That night, the pastor agonized over what to do with these two men. He knew that if the brothers left the church, there was no hope that they would have enough money to survive. They would surely be closing the doors in a matter of months. But on the other hand, he had a responsibility to the people of the congregation not to let them just get by and not know about God’s judgment. Ultimately, the pastor would have to answer to God for his actions and the souls of this congregation. By morning he had his answer.*

*The pastor and two brothers met first thing in the morning. The pastor told them that he would not budge on his stand on the Word of God. It was not his place to compromise, and if they did not like it they were welcome to leave, and God would provide for the ministry financially.*

*Not too long after the brothers had parted ways from the church, the older of them died. The younger brother came back to the new pastor and asked if he would please do the funeral. He was aware that they were not in good standing, but there was no other church in the town that would do the funeral. They were desperate. The pastor graciously agreed to do the service. Then, the younger brother threw another curve ball. He told the pastor that if he would call his brother a saint during the funeral, he would write a check that would take care of every bill the church had and more. Once again the pastor found himself in quite a dilemma. Certainly God wouldn't want the church to close its doors and stop spreading the gospel because they didn't have enough money, but God would not tolerate lies. The brother was most definitely not a saint, so to even think about calling him would be a lie. He spent the night before the funeral tossing and turning and wondering what God would have him to do.*

*The morning of the funeral came, and the pastor took the pulpit. He honestly shared about what a horrible man the older man was. He said it like this:*

*"The man that lays here before us was an awful man. He was unfaithful to his wife, cheated on his taxes, tried to rob the church and God, but compared to his brother, this man was a saint!"*

To God, all of his people are saints. The man in this story was not, but if we look through the Bible we see that God uses that word to describe anyone that is working to be like him. God would describe a saint as a struggling human being who is trying to be like Him. We will never be perfect. That's not how we were designed by God. Thankfully, God knows that and he can see our hearts.

Pastor Thomas said that for each of us to find peace and happiness and completely understand who we are, we need to take a look at two men who were without sin. First we will take a look at Adam before his sin in the Garden of Eden. Then, we will look at Jesus Christ.

When the center of our life is the spiritual man, our mind, will, and emotion are all driven from the inside out. When these three facets of our being are all centered on our relationship with God, we cannot be shaken by things going on around us. Instead, we allow God to control our mind and what we think about. By doing this we change our perspective. Our will is to do what is right spiritually so we can please God. And when our mind and will line up like this while focused on God, our emotions will fall into place. By allowing the spiritual man to be the center of our life, we find intense peace through Jesus Christ. We are spiritually alive and physically dead (or our fleshly man is in subjection) when God is the center of our lives.

Adam (before his sin) was the first perfect man we see in scripture. And there was only one that would ever follow him as a perfect man (which we will talk more about later). Pastor Thomas taught a bit about the needs that Adam was created with. Adam was created with a purpose. When reading in Genesis, we see that God made Adam and intended for him to work in the Garden of Eden and tend to it.

## Genesis 2:15

15. And the LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it.

Adam also had a need for safety and provision from God. He was originally designed to gather the things that God had provided for him to eat, not to go out and hunt for his food. Finally, Adam had the need for a sense of belonging. We can see how God met this need for Adam when the scriptures talk about God walking in the Garden with Adam.

According to God's original plan for Adam, all three of these innate desires and needs were taken care of through his relationship with God. There was no need for him to do anything to earn anything before they were met other than to be obedient to God's will for him. But when Adam sinned, that all changed. Today, in our lives as Christians when we give into temptation and sin, we give up on the things that God has provided for us in his plan just like Adam did. By choosing sin over God we forfeit the purpose, security, and sense of belonging we find through Jesus Christ.

Now, let's take a look at the diagram that shows when God is not the center of our life, and we allow sin to separate us from him just like Adam did in the Garden of Eden.

If God is not the center of our life, nothing can take his place. The Bible teaches us that God is our creator. And as our creator, God breathed his spirit into us and designed man to have a relationship with him. Nothing in this world will ever satisfy that need or replace God's spot in our lives. Instead, without God (or our spiritual man in a relationship with God) there is a void. When that happens, our mind, will, and emotions become unstable because there is nothing for them to lean on, and then the things going on in the world around have the opportunity to break us down. If this occurs, we find ourselves in the position of being physically alive, but spiritually dead.

When we are broken down and worn out by the pressures of this world, it is easy to fall into depression, frustration, or confusion about who we are. The first step in becoming Spiritually Free is to know who we are. We may try to fill this void with our own perception of who we are and what we can become on our own, but it will always fall short of what God intended for us.

While on a mission trip in Haiti, Pastor Ulysse and Pastor Thomas encountered several people in villages that believed they were the victims of voodoo. They noted that the people who believed that they were under attack by voodoo became sick. They even became so convinced that the power of the man holding their doll that some even died of symptoms they believed to be true. Our minds have a lot of power. If we allow that power to run rampant and don't rely on God to give us the power of a sound mind like the scriptures teach us, then we fall prey to our negative thoughts. Even to the point where we find ourselves spiritually dead.

Pastor Thomas talked an experiment he had seen about what happens to a Styrofoam cup when it is put deep into the ocean. Once the cup is submerged to great depths, it shrinks dramatically becoming a fraction of its original size. This is because the pressure of water on all sides of the cup pushes out all of the air particles that once filled the Styrofoam and gave it its size. The same is true of what can happen to our lives if we are submerged in the world around us in our daily lives without the protection of God. We shrink to a fraction of what we are designed to be because of the intense pressure surrounding us. That is what happens when we are not allowing God to be the center of our lives. The pressure of the expectations from our employers, family, friends,

neighbors, and acquaintances can be so great that it takes all of the air out of us. Eventually we will collapse without God in the center of our lives.

When we find ourselves in a situation where the pressures of the world and our day to day lives become so great that we are collapsing, we need to take the time to evaluate and see if God is still the center of our life. If not, we need to return to the first diagram and find the joy, peace, and fulfillment that comes from God being in the center of our lives. When we do this, we are spiritually alive.

Why did Adam fall into sin? Pastor Thomas proposed these options:

Adam had too many choices. By human nature, when we are told we can't have something, we want it more. Our days are consumed with choices. When we wake up we have to decide what to wear, what to have for breakfast, and what route we will take to work. How often have we found ourselves half way through our workday and decide it's time for lunch? If we are going to eat with coworkers, (which is another choice in itself) the process of deciding what to eat can take as long as the lunch break itself! When we become so wrapped up in making decisions that we lose track of where God fits into the big picture and every detail of our lives, we are setting ourselves up for sin.

Also, Adam became overcome by negative emotions after he sinned. We can fall into this trap too. He felt so guilty and ashamed that he lost perspective on what it was like to have a right relationship with God. In Genesis 3:3 we can start to understand that God knew that a life of sin would destroy us.

Genesis 3:3

3. But of the fruit of the tree which [is] in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die.

The Tree of Life was taken away from Adam and Eve after they ate of the tree of knowledge. Because of their sin, we are now born physically alive and spiritually dead. That is why we have to work on our relationship with God and actively pursue having him in the center of our lives.

Finally, because of Adam's sin, he lost knowledge of God.

Ephesians 4:18

18. Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart:

We have to know God. The Bible teaches us what we need to be in an intimate relationship with Him. We cannot know God simply by gathering data about Him. Instead, we know God by spending time with him and working on our relationship.

John 1: 14

14. And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.

I Corinthians 8:1

1. Now as touching things offered unto idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth.

I Timothy 1:5

5. Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and [of] a good conscience, and [of] faith unfeigned:

Romans 13:10

10. Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love [is] the fulfilling of the law.

God's word is truth. It is love and can be the most freeing thing we will ever experience in this lifetime. The Bible is a tool to make us like God which is what we were created to be in the first place. Following God's will and the instruction in the Bible is what allows us to live a life that God can bless. We have to know that if we call ourselves Christians and Children of God, we are living in his house. If we are living in God's house we have to live by his rules.

Pastor Thomas asked us to look at the second perfect man in the Bible: Jesus Christ. He invited us to take a look at what the scriptures showed us about Jesus.

John 3:16

16. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

Jesus lived a life that was totally reliant on God.

John 5:30

30. I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me.

Jesus surrendered all of his choices to God.

John 8:24

24. I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am [he], ye shall die in your sins.

John 14:10

10. Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works.

Jesus lived a life that had his spirit at the core of everything.

John 10:10

10. The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have [it] more abundantly.

When Adam sinned, he lost his spiritual life. Jesus came to restore that spiritual life and to give it to us abundantly.