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Together for the Gospel, Part 2

Selected Scriptures

Prayer: *Father, we just again, we thank you for who you are, we thank you for the incredible gift that we can celebrate in song, for the fact that you are our Lord and Savior and that you have died to set us free, that we can fly away because we are connected to you and we just praise you and thank you for that. And Father, now as we enter into that part of the service where we are opening up your book, where we're examining the gift that you've given us in your scripture, we just pray for your Holy Spirit to accompany us, guide us, assist us as we open up your book again, make it of permanent value, we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, this is part two of my report on Together for the Gospel. Last week I gave a general overview of what took place and I focused in on one message in particular by John Piper entitled "The Bondage of the Will, the Sovereignty of Grace, and the Glory of God." And Piper asked a question that many of us have asked at some point and that is how much of my belief is attributable to me or to God? Or to put it another way, are humans so sinful that God

must supply all of the energy for salvation?

Well, Piper went on to describe five different ways that the scripture describes us as being bound so severely that we have no ability whatsoever to reach out to God. We are bound first by the law because we're all under the condemnation of Adam's fall; secondly, we are bound by our love, our love of darkness; thirdly, by our hostility toward the gospel; fourthly, by our status as spiritually dead; and finally, we are bound by our spiritual blindness about who God really is. See, Piper's point was that God's love is so overwhelming and so powerful that it's able to reach through those five different barriers to open up our eyes and our hearts to the glory of Christ. What I want to share with you this morning is more just a reflection of the issues that were raised by some of the other speakers at T4G and again, the overall theme was a reflection on the Reformation that took place almost 500 years ago. The speakers addressed what caused it then, how some of the very issues that existed back then still persist today, and how we as pastors can guide our flocks in light of the Reformation.

Mark Dever was one of the speakers there and he told a story, actually it was a cautionary tale and he tells a story about a man who invents this incredible drink. Not only is this drink very low

in calories but it tastes wonderful. And to top it off, it's really, really good for you. So he starts making more and more of it because people hear about it and they want it, and through word of mouth folks hear that there's this wonderful new drink that this man has invented and he starts to sell it. Eventually the local sales start to take off and he's not able to keep up with demand, so he's approached by some venture capitalists who say, look, we can expand this and really make this thing fly. And so they agree and he agrees and they decide to market it on a large scale and soon every single store in the area is filled with displays of his new miracle beverage and it's selling like hot cakes. After a while sales begin to slow down, they begin to taper off and then they begin to become absolutely anemic. The inventor begins to wonder why it is that people are no longer interested in his wonder beverage, particularly because he knows how good it was and how good for you it was. So he goes to the grocery store and he walks up to the display and he buys one of the drinks and he steps out of the grocery store and he tastes it, and he realizes that it's nothing like his original recipe. Unbeknownst to him, somebody had figured out a way to cheapen it, had figured out a way to adulterate it to make it stretch, stretch much, much further while attempting to make it appealing to everyone. Instead of a wonder drink it had become just another type of Kool-Aid. Well, Dever suggested this is exactly what has happened to the contemporary

gospel, said people perhaps even with the very best of intentions have come in to mass market it and make it appealable. In doing so they've cheapened it. They've made it appealing by marketing an adulterated version of it and the result was predictable, lots and lots of people tried it and they found it cheap, they found it insipid and unable to deliver on its claims. Worse off there were even still thousands and thousands of people who tried the product thinking it was something really special and now had no interest whatsoever in even hearing about something that they think they had tried and found wanting.

Well, for many, that's the sad state of the gospel today. See, the gospel was sold that way because folks were convinced that the real thing was too sharp, that its flavor was too distinct for an appeal to the masses. And so over time the sharp edges of the gospel, particularly those things that have to do with the holiness and the justice of God were marginalized in order to keep it marketable. The result is a whole generation of churchgoers who know little to nothing about the holiness and justice of God. And so we have a generation who think that a relationship with Jesus Christ really means we're inviting him to be our personal butler, someone who's really just there to sweep in and clean up our messes and maybe ask his father for the grace to cover sins we have no intention of abandoning. There's a name for people like that. The name is

unbeliever. I mean no one's going to put it that starkly but if the church refuses to go places in the gospel that Jesus routinely went, places that are uncomfortable and sometimes even downright scary, well then the church has given up its role as a shepherd. Jesus didn't hesitate to say things like *Matthew 7:13*: "*Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.*" You know, from a marketing standpoint, that -- that's a disaster. But Jesus was never about marketing. I mean people were constantly flocking to Jesus and he was constantly turning them away and he did it by stating up front what following him, the cost of following him entailed. In *Luke 9:59* it says: *To another he said, "Follow me." But he said, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." And Jesus said to him, "Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God."* Yet another said, "*I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home.*" Jesus said to him, "*No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.*" So here's Jesus and he's saying heaven is a narrow gate, it's a hard pathway and those who are truly on that pathway see it as an all-consuming passion that defines their very existence. And those who see it only as a means of checking off a spiritual box, well, they might well be among those Jesus

confronted in *Matthew 7* when he said: *"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven."*

So what's Jesus saying here? I mean, what he is saying is that a passionate concern about God's will for my life marks out the key difference between real believers and those who are only deceiving themselves and that those who are self-deceived are never going to enter the kingdom of heaven. This is not the warm and fuzzy Jesus that so many have become accustomed to. And the reason why these words may seem shocking to many today is because the church doesn't want to touch these things with a 20-foot pole. I mean it is a fact that Jesus spoke far more about hell than he ever did about heaven. I mean he said in *Matthew 10:28*: *"Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell."* He's not talking about the devil here; he's talking about God. He's saying fear God. You know, warning people about the real dangers of deceiving themselves is not the hallmark of the gospel today.

I mean, not to pick on Joel Osteen again -- okay, to pick on Joel Osteen, he happens to be the leading edge of this movement and he does head up the largest evangelical church in the United States. I want you to hear his thoughts. He just said this this past

Easter. These are his thoughts on hell. The article said this, it said:

Lakewood Church Pastor Joel Osteen says he isn't cheating anyone by not talking about Hell and repentance, insisting that people feel guilty enough already, and he wants to lift up believers instead of bringing them down. When asked in an Easter Sunday interview by CBS News' "Sunday Morning" program, "Do you feel like you're cheating people by not telling them about the Hell part? Or repentance part?" Osteen answered: "No, I really don't, because it's a different approach." He continued: "You know, it's not hellfire and brimstone. But I say most people are beaten down enough by life. They already feel guilty enough. They're not doing what they should, raising their kids -- we can all find reasons. So I want them to come to Lakewood to our meetings and be lifted up, to say, 'You know what? I may not be perfect, but I'm moving forward. I'm doing better.' And I think that motivates you to do better.

I know people who are feeling guilty, I know every one of you are feeling beaten down by life and I know many of you feel stressed out and defeated as well, but I hardly think that promoting a phony version of the gospel that doesn't even jibe with Jesus's words is the solution to guilt and defeatism. Jesus Christ came to save

those who were lost and beaten down and defeated, but he did it by calling them to a life that was focused first and foremost on his kingdom. See, he promised to substitute joy for the guilt and defeatism that so many were dealing with but only by rightly understanding where this real joy came from. I mean Jesus knows we're attracted to the horizontal. I mean he knows we're attracted to that which we can see, hear, feel, touch, and taste. And so he directly addressed that in *Matthew 6:31* when he said this, he said: *"Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' Or 'What shall we drink' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."* Jesus knew exactly what it was like to be a man struggling to get by in life because he was a man, he was a man who happened to live the most difficult and stress-filled life you could have in his day, but he also knew exactly what it was like to be God, because he was God in the flesh. In fact he was the only one who could see the solution to this stress-filled life, this life that's so filled with guilt and defeatism, he saw the solution not as a matter of thinking positive thoughts and claiming a God of positive energy who wants nothing more than for us to discover our best lives yet, but instead one of choosing the best priorities. *"But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will*

be added to you." You see, it's how we choose these priorities that determines whether we're going to have guilt and defeat or joy and victory.

And here's how it happens. You see, we constantly struggle to take the gospel that Jesus offered and turn it into a series of do's and don'ts. We want it boiled down, we want it graspable. Just give me a list, tell me what I have to do, tell me what I don't do. Somehow or other we think that if we do those things then somehow we become worthy of heaven. And today's gospel, what it basically is doing is promising a minimum of do's and don'ts, but that's not what Jesus was offering us at all. Probably the best way to understand what the gospel is is to realize that Jesus himself describes himself as a shepherd. He says he's the good shepherd. He calls us his followers as sheep. He says in *John 10:27*: "*My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.*" You see, Jesus is trying to get us to see that the kingdom of heaven is not a reward for accomplishing this task, this set of do's and don'ts that he set out for us, but rather a destination for a new type of creation he is offering to make us into. I mean, it's easy and it's often times tempting to reduce Christianity down to a list of tasks you have to accomplish in order to get into heaven. What do I have to do? Well, you have

to follow him, you have to forsake all, you have to enter through the narrow gate, you have to proclaim the kingdom. That's what you have to do. Well, that kind of thinking misses the forest for the trees. See, Jesus is not saying that you have to do something to get into heaven. Rather he's stating very plainly that you have to be somebody in order to get there, and the somebody that you must be is one of his sheep. I mean, his sheep feel a certain way, they act a certain way, they respond a certain way, not because they have to but because they want to. I mean, consider the lowly sheep. I mean in order to survive, a sheep has to eat grass. But that's not why a sheep eats grass. It eats not because it has to but because it wants to. See, God designed sheep to want to eat grass. When you're one of his sheep you have a brand new set of want to's and those want to's begin to line up with the will of the shepherd. Hearing the shepherd's voice, following him, and entering through the narrow gate are things that his sheep don't feel as obligations at all but rather as joyful parts of their very makeup. It's what they want to do because they're sheep.

Let me explain it another way. Let me make a baseball reference here. I know there's some big baseball fans here. I'm not a big baseball fan, I mean, I watch the World Series, that's about as much interest as I have but I know, if you're a real Mets or Yankees fan, understand a word "fan" is just a shortened version of

"fanatic." That's what a fan is, I mean seriously, that's what it is. So if you're a real Mets or Yankees fan, you probably know every single player, you know what his position is, what his batting average is, how many errors he's made, what his position is in the rotation and all of these things. And let's say your team wins the World Series, perhaps you get up at 2:00 o'clock in the morning to go to the airport to meet them from wherever they came from, and you do that because you're a fan, "a fanatic," in quotes. Because you're a fan, it doesn't seem like work at all because you're doing something you love. Let's say I'm not a baseball fan at all but I'm a Cub reporter and I've just been hired by a newspaper who decides that my first assignment is going to be covering baseball for the sports page. And so I get approached and they tell me, okay, here's what you have to do. I want you to memorize sheets and sheets of statistics, I want you to watch every single game, I want you to keep score, I want you to take scores of notes about what's going on and perhaps if this team wins, I want you to get up at 2:00 o'clock in the morning, go meet the plane. Now for me that wouldn't be a joy, it would be a job. We have two different people here doing the very same activity. To one it's a job, it's something that he has to work at, something that he might want to take a break from, something that he might even hate. But to a fan, this isn't work at all. This is sheer joy. Well consider what Jesus is saying about his sheep. The difference

between someone coming into the kingdom as an employee doing the very least that he can in order to get by or someone coming in as a fan, as a "fanatic" -- quote, unquote -- who sees Christ and his kingdom as the source of all of his joy, is the difference between a genuine follower of Christ who has drunk in every bit of the gospel and found it incredibly thirst-quenching and nutritional and those who have drunk the Kool-Aid, not realizing that it's reduced the gospel to a series of do's and don'ts. For those who have drunk in the real gospel, following Christ, proclaiming Christ, entering into that narrow gate is as natural and as joyful as a Yankee fan watching the Yankees win the World Series. For those who have drunk the Kool-Aid, the gospel and the things of the kingdom are not what he wants to do but things that he thinks he has to do. The problem is that people seldom see the difference between seeking Christ and his kingdom as an employee doing what he has to or as a fan doing what he wants to. And Jesus tried to capture this in one of his parables saying in *Matthew 13*: "*The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.*" So let's say the person is digging in a field that he's rented as farmers often did in those days, that's what they did. Somebody had land, you'd rent a plot, you'd dig it all up and you'd plow it, and he comes across an actual buried treasure, something that people occasionally did. And so he finds

this treasure and he realizes that the only way he could ever secure that is -- secure the right to those properties is by buying the whole field. So recognizing the incredible value in that field, he joyfully sells everything that he has in order to buy it, not because he has to, nobody's forcing him, because now he's seen the value. Now he wants to. That's what Jesus is saying. You see, his sheep have a completely different set of want to's. They want to advance the kingdom of God more than anything else, they want to claim the name of Christ more than anything else, and they want to enter into that narrow gate more than anything else. But again, if you would make up a list and say in order to enter heaven, you're going to have to advance the kingdom, you got to claim the name of Christ and you must enter the narrow gate, you're just making up a work list for an employee.

So here's the question: How do I know whether I'm approaching the kingdom as an employee, just going through the motions, doing what I know I have to, filling in the boxes, checking in the do's and don'ts, doing what I have to in order to get in or as a fan, that is, someone who is a fanatic for Christ, someone who's doing those very things because I'm one of his sheep. Well, Kevin DeYoung made the case that God gives us some very clear and some very obvious signs that point out whether or not we're one of Christ's sheep. But he first pointed to a church that's mired in the very same

issues that have plagued the church for centuries that obscure those signs. He started out with this historical quote: "For they having rejected and being unable to understand the Ten Commandments, preach much about the grace of Christ. Yet they strengthen and comfort only those who remain in their sins telling them not to fear and be terrified by sins since they're all removed by Christ. They see and yet they let the people go on in their public sins without any renewal or reformation of their lives. Thus it becomes quite evident that they truly fail to understand the faith and Christ and thereby abrogate (or deny) both when they preach about it."

Our speaker asked: Who's this legalist demanding that pastors literally scare the hell out of their flocks? Well, that legalist was Martin Luther, and the year was 1539, and he was speaking on the councils of the church. See, Mr. DeYoung made the case that the gospel is always being adulterated and it's always having its hard and fast truths removed. And so he asked this kind of loaded theological question at the start of his message, he said, "Can we be glorified without being sanctified?" Now that's kind of pastor talk I think. It's -- let me just unpack that a little bit. And what he meant by that is glorification is something that happens when you get to heaven, something that happens in the presence of God himself. And there in *1 John 3:2* God says this, he says:

Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And so we cannot be glorified without being sanctified which is Kevin DeYoung's way of saying unless you are in the process of growing in Christ's likeness which is what sanctification is all about, unless you're being sanctified, then you're not one of Christ's sheep, you'll never get to heaven and therefore you never will be glorified. That's a shocking statement to someone who's used to a diet of Kool-Aid. Where does that fit? Well, he went on to make the case that doing good works and conquering sin and growing in sanctification are not at all opposed to a gospel of grace but are instead solid evidence that we are one of his sheep. We do it because we want to.

He started out by saying that the scripture contains multiple references to the absolute necessity of sanctification, and he said you can start with what he called the vice list. The first one is in *Mark 7*. This is Jesus, he says: *"For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person."* See, Jesus is pointing out areas of sin, that if they are habitual, will defile a person, and clearly such a person who is defiled is not fit for heaven. *Galatians 5:19* says:

Now the works of the flesh are evident: Sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. Now to some that is shocking. Kevin DeYoung suggested that we have a generation that is so upset with the church's stand on homosexuality because they have grown so used to a church making no stand whatsoever on any form of sexual aberration that they're shocked that they would say something about homosexuality. And because the church has been silent on things like fornication and lust and pornography, it looks like they're just picking on the homosexual community. Add to that a whole list of sins that the church no longer views as sins, things like greed or gluttony or gossip and yet we have another example of the effect of having drunk the Kool-Aid. That is sanctification which is becoming more and more like Christ every day is no longer considered crucial in the life of a believer. Think about it. Is growing more and more Christ-like now optional, something only for the super saints? He pointed out that we have in scripture lots of references to man's weakness. We know that. And Paul himself describes himself as one of the greatest of sinners. And he says in *Romans 7:24*: *Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?* Paul readily admits to his weakness, but

understand what Kevin DeYoung pointed out, it was never in relation to his sinfulness. It was always in relation to his resources. In *2 Corinthians 12:10* it says: *For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.* See, it's easy to make the mistake of equating weakness with sinfulness, but the point is the scripture often speaks of weakness but never, never of capitulation to weakness when it comes to sin. See, there's a huge difference between falling down and sinning and making capitulation to sin a lifestyle decision. That's what drinking the Kool-Aid is all about. Listen to *1 Corinthians 6:9*, it says: *Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.* Now understand, there's a difference between committing a sin of sexual immorality and being a sexually immoral person; between committing a sin of adultery and becoming an adulterer; between the sin of homosexuality and becoming "men who practice homosexuality," and the same applies to all of those sins in that list. As individual sins, they are forgivable. As lifestyle choices, they mark out people whose understanding of their salvation is sorely lacking. They've drunk the Kool-Aid. They drunk the Kool-Aid that Jesus is simply here to clean up their

messes and not to make them into new creatures. They've capitulated to sin as a lifestyle.

He went on to say Jesus repeatedly said in *Revelation 2* that it is those who conquer who will be rewarded with the kingdom, not because their works earned them anything but because their works demonstrate that they truly are new creatures in Christ. Listen to what Jesus said in *Revelation*. This is *Revelation 2:7-29*, Jesus speaking to the churches but he's also speaking to individuals, he says: *He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God. The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death. To the one who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna. The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations.* I mean, every single Christian, we all know, we all understand that sin is something we all do, and confession and repentance should be a daily activity. But clearly what DeYoung is insisting here is that the one who truly belongs to Christ is the one who conquers. God says in *Hebrews 12:14*: *Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.* And scripture here is not talking about the holiness of Christ that we get by his imputed righteousness. This is not something that we get by faith in Christ. Instead God's talking

about the progressive unfolding of Christ's likeness in the life of every one of Christ's sheep. That's what we're striving for. I mean, the verses right before verse 14 point out that God here is talking about striving for personal holiness. Listen to what he says in *Hebrews 12:12-13*. He says: *Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed.* This is us working at it, this is us striving. *Philippians 2:12*: *Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.*

Okay. So how do I know if I'm truly a believer or if I'm merely someone who's bought and drunk the Kool-Aid that an unchanged life, a life without striving towards holiness is somehow acceptable to God? Well, Mr. DeYoung introduced the situation that he was in. He introduced this whole idea of how we decide this and how we can understand this by describing what happened to him recently. He said he was taking -- driving down the road that he had traveled down many, many times before and he wasn't paying any particular attention, there was a single lane that he was going down and he said he had to make a left-hand turn on to a four-lane highway, it was actually an eight-lane highway but he happened to take the turn that had him going the wrong way against four ongoing -- oncoming

lanes of traffic. He said you know, he said that it made him really stop and think about how many times he's complained about stupid drivers, him being incredibly stupid one to make this mistake but he said the thing that was really shouting out at him as he was in this awful situation were the signs that were saying, "Hey, what are you doing here?" "You don't belong here!" He said they were huge. They were jumping out at him. He suggested that the scripture has similar signs and they point out how we can know whether or not we are on the right path or merely drinking the Kool-Aid. So he lays out three signs that we are on the right road. There's a theological sign, there's a moral sign, and there's the social or relational sign. He said we can know we are his if we love Jesus, if we love his commands, and we love his people. And again you need to understand, this is not a demand that God is laying down, this is a characteristic, this is not what believers must do, this is what saved, spirit-filled believers by nature automatically do. It is as natural to them as breathing. I've said this many, many times, breathing is not looked on by anyone as an obligation even though it's something we all know you have to do. I mean, you don't live your life constantly thinking about the fact you're obligated to breathe, you know, breathing is something that every breathing mammal by their very nature do, they breathe. And instead, it's agreed on by everyone that breathing is merely a sign that you're alive. And that's why scripture

describes these actions not as obligations that we need to fulfill to earn heaven but as parts of our very being that are so completely normative for spirit-filled believers that they, too, serve as a sign of life. What he's saying is if as a believer you don't exhibit these signs, the chances are good you're not a believer.

Well, the first is the theological sign, it's the sign of belief. You believe what the scriptures say about Christ. *1 John 5:10: Whoever believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself. Whoever does not believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has borne concerning his Son. And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life.* In *1 John 4:2*, it says: *By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God.* *1 John 4:14: And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.* I think that's pretty straight forward. That's clearly a sign, you believe in Jesus Christ.

The second sign is the moral sign. And what he's saying is if you are truly one of Christ's sheep, then you will not capitulate to sin by making it an ongoing life-style choice. Listen to how he puts this in 1 John 3:6-9, he says: *No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God.* See, the scripture points specifically towards the difference between sin as an ongoing struggle that may have many, many failures and many victories, as opposed to sin as a capitulation to a lifestyle choice. And where the Kool-Aid becomes truly poisonous is when individuals think that the blood of Christ is there to cover and pay for sins that they have no intention of struggling against. Now I've said this many, many times, God's grace to cover our sins is conditioned on our willingness to see them as sins. 1 John 1:9 says: *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* I pointed this out many times, that Greek word of "confess" there is made up of two words. It means "same speak." And what God is saying is

that if we same speak the same language as he does when it comes to sin, then he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanses us from all unrighteousness. The second sign post is that we are never willing to capitulate with sin and that we are always seeking to conquer it.

So the first sign is theological, it's the simple one, it's belief in Jesus Christ is the son of God. The second sign is moral, it's a commitment to keep fighting the good fight against sin, and the third sign is social or relational. This is *1 John 3:14*, it says: *We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death.* Now many, many times I have had people question me about the value of what we're doing this morning. What's the point of this? Well, what is the point of the church, I mean, with the Internet and other venues, now you can get the best teachers not of this generation but of generations before us, so you don't have to rely on the church at all for good teaching, and when it comes to worship, you can make the exact same case, I mean, today you have access to any kind of worship, you can have classical, you can have jazz, you can have rap and it's all available at the touch of a key stroke. So if all the worship that you need and all the teaching you need is available from other sources, then what do you really need this for? Well, my answer is for actually putting into practice Jesus's

command that we love one another. You see, I've said it many, many times, Jesus planned for the church to take people from every tribe and tongue and nation, from every socioeconomic background and he put them all in this big salt shaker and he shakes them all out and he pours them out in the middle of a thousand different neighborhoods and then he states to the world, while everyone is watching you and for the glory of God, I want you to love one another. That's not an easy task. I once had someone tell me that they seldom came to church because they had such a strong dislike for so many people in the church. That's exactly the reason why you need to come. See, we are so used to having to love only those whom we consider likeable. Just imagine where we would be if Jesus felt that way towards us. *God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.* And we know that Jesus is singularly unimpressed with our loving the likeable. He says in *Matthew 5:46: "If you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?"*

Now here's the scary part to part three of these signs. This is *1 John 3:10*, it says: *By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not*

love his brother. For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. And again, let me point out, this is not a demand. This is a characteristic. This is not what believers must do. This is what saved spirit-filled believers automatically do. It's the difference between an employee and a fan, and followers of Jesus are by the world's standards fanatics. This is supernatural stuff and to his sheep, it all comes naturally.

So what if I look back at my own life and I see that the signs, well, they're really not there. My belief in Jesus is almost nonexistent, my struggle with sin is complete capitulation, and my love for my brother is almost nonexistent, what do I do now? First, you thank God. You thank God that he loves you enough to move your conscience and your spirit to the point of conviction. Secondly, you realize that the strength and the power to have those signs in your life, that doesn't come from human flesh, it doesn't come from scrunching up your forehead and trying harder. It comes from the indwelling Spirit of God. And thirdly, you cry out to God in the very same way that David did in *Psalm 51* where he said:
Hide your face from my sins, and blot out my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a

willing spirit. See, if God is speaking to you right now, he is telling you it's time to stop drinking the Kool-Aid that's been offered by the contemporary gospel.

You know, I started off this message reflecting on John Piper's question: Are humans so sinful that God must supply all of the energy for salvation? I can answer that question with one word. Yup. It's that simple. The answer is yes and the good news is that God is willing to supply you with all of the energy you need. He's telling you he has the power to transform your life, to create in you a clean heart and to renew a right spirit within you, and here's the best news of all. All you have to do is ask. Let's pray.

Father, I just thank you on behalf of each and every person that is sitting here, if there's some that you have touched, if there's some that you are speaking to right now, I pray that they would ask, I pray that they would ask that you would give them the grace and the strength and the power of your indwelling Holy Spirit so that they might also come to know what it is like to be a fan, a fanatic, someone who is passionate about his love for you rather than an employee, someone who is checking off a box of do's and don'ts. Lord, give that grace we pray this day, in Jesus' name. Amen.