

True Spirituality: Knowing and Loving God

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We want to establish a spiritual theology that is relevant to our time, that is contemporary to us, that will enable us as we live in the 21st century to live out our lives in ways that are consistent with God's Word, in response to His grace, and enable us to mature in our faith. And in order for that to happen we are wise to draw on the wisdom of our forefathers and mothers.

Here are the kinds of themes that I pick up, and I draw them to your attention to the degree that they might be helpful. For example, I'm impressed by the bipolar character of heart and mind. I use and I'm going to be using in these lectures the phrase "with heart and mind." Somehow when we speak of heart and mind united, distinct but united, we have an essential means by which we sustain an authentic, biblical, and evangelical piety. When mind is divorced from heart, it becomes rationalism. When heart is divorced from mind, it becomes sentimentalism. As I mentioned in the last lecture, my great concern with revivalism is its inability to engage the mind and to genuinely see the role of the renewal of the mind in the transformation of the individual Christian. When mysticism lost its historic moorings in thought and in scholarship, it too became a misguided mysticism, sentimentalism. When the renewal of the mind is not informed by the heart, it becomes rationalism. It becomes cold and austere. A genuinely evangelical spiritual theology will affirm both heart and mind.

Secondly, an evangelical spiritual theology will have two directions to it. It's perhaps captured best in the words of our Lord in John 17 when we are called to be in but not of the world; that when we are sanctified, when we are mature, we are in but not of the world. And as we affirm the wisdom of the centuries in this regard, what we are reminded of is this that there are always two directions to an authentic understanding of the spiritual life. Perhaps better put there are two directions to the experience of God's grace. The one direction is the direction away from the world. We withdraw to solitude and prayer. We are reminded of the call of the desert

fathers to solitude, to moving away from the crutches of society, of urban life, of a social context where we are thrust, in a sense, into the hands of God and God alone. The importance of withdrawal, of solitude, and of prayer.

But we are also regularly reminded of the importance of full engagement in the world in both word and deed, in evangelism and in social justice and concern. That is, a genuinely Christian spiritual experience includes both withdrawal from the world and full engagement in the world. And I would note, and I'll note this again in the lectures that are yet to come, we cannot be genuinely engaged in the world unless we learn to withdraw. Unless our engagement is informed by solitude and prayer, it becomes zeal without knowledge. It becomes activism that is not rooted in union with Christ. But if our prayer, our solitude, is not informed by life in the world, it becomes isolationist. It becomes sentimental. Rather, true prayer is informed by our engagement in the world. True engagement in the world is informed by prayer. Again, it's a matter of both and not one or the other.

Thirdly, I'm also impressed by this—and I don't know if I emphasized it enough in the courses of the lectures—that genuine Christian piety or spirituality is fundamentally a matter of a personal and immediate encounter with Christ. That is, as we move back and forward over the chapters of the history of Christian spirituality, we recognize the centrality of Christ Himself, the centrality of Christ in our understanding and in our experience. For this, it seems to me, we need to avoid a common error, and I'll call it for now “the error of biblicism.” Biblicism is correct, you might say, in this regard, in its emphasis on the importance of the Bible, on taking the Bible literally, on engaging the text and allowing the text to speak to the individual Christian believer. But its error could be captured in my own experience that for so much of my life my devotional life was largely an engagement with the Scriptures, a study of the Scriptures, a reading of the Scriptures, a seeking to apply the Scriptures to my life; and while all of that is legitimate, in actual fact the Scriptures are a means to an end. They are a means to something else. They're not an end in themselves. In the end, of course, is the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. We are biblicist when the Bible itself becomes an end rather than becoming a means to an end—to listening to and knowing and loving and serving Jesus. And a transformation came in my own spiritual journey when ultimately I realized that I loved Jesus, and the Word enables me to know Him and to love Him and to serve Him; that the Word is a means to an end not an

end in itself.

Fourthly, it's clear as we do an overview of the history of Christian spirituality that it's vital that we sustain a goal of personal transformation. It's clear that those who experience personal transformation, it's those . . . that those who become mature in their faith are those who set becoming a saint, growing in faith, maturing in their identity as Christians as a personal goal. That is, as we look back over the centuries, it's those individuals, those desert fathers who went to the desert so that they could be perfected by God's grace. Those monks who said together, "We will live together with one agenda: That we will together grow up in our faith and mature in perfection in Jesus Christ." Those mystics who sought to know Jesus and sought to know Him apart from all others, that's what they wanted to do more than anything else. When I think of the great passion of the Reformation—to call us to a realization that our love for God is entirely a love of response to His work for us and that we are nothing apart from His grace—they are calling us ultimately to this holiness as well.

And then each of the renewal movements—the Puritans, the Pietists, and the renewal movements of the 19th century—each called for holiness, for a genuine and thorough transformation that comes because one seeks it passionately and one seeks it with one's whole person. May we learn in an overview of Christian theology, may we have nurtured within us, perhaps better put, a passion to know God and to be transformed by His grace.

Fifthly, one of the things, one of the observations that I would make again as I look back over the history of Christian spirituality—and perhaps it's one of the features of the early 21st century—is that we are moving past an era of denominations and denominationalism. We are able, I trust, to see that now more than perhaps any other time within the last two or three centuries now we are uniquely positioned as Christian believers to draw on both Reformed and Wesleyan sources. That we can move beyond the debate between Calvinist and Armenian, Reformed and Wesleyan, and realize that there's wisdom on both sides, and we need both sides if we're going to mature in our faith. And while I wished that I knew more about other traditions, I'm going to draw on them to some degree—Mennonite, Roman Catholic, [Bartian], Pentecostal traditions—I'm going to use these two themes along the way: Reformed and Wesleyan. I'm going to bring Edwards and John Wesley side by side and say, "Let's listen to these two men together and along the way"—one Reformed and one Wesleyan" (Wesley obviously

himself a Wesleyan), to say, “Let’s listen to them together,” that the strength of an evangelical spiritual theology is probably going to be found in our capacity to be thoroughly evangelical, drawing on every stream within our own heritage as well as other streams, and to do so without hesitation, without reservation

Number six, and on this I want to spend a little more time. As we look over the history of Christian spirituality, what essentially we are giving an overview of is a history of the way in which the Spirit of God has worked in the life of believers and, more to the point, how the work of the Spirit has been understood. We are urged in I Thessalonians 5 to not quench the work of the Spirit, and indeed we should not. But at the same time in those very same verses, we are urged to be discerning; and one of the great gifts of an overview, in a sense one of the great gifts we have as Christian believers who live now 2,000 years after the closing of the biblical canon, what we have is a gift that is given to us in the history of the church; and I would call that a gift of discernment. That is, as we listen to those who have gone before us, we listen to individuals who can guide us as we seek to make sense of the life of the Spirit that we seek to live now. And when it comes to the ministry of the Holy Spirit, we must be fully Trinitarian as I stressed in the last lecture. The Pentecostals have reminded us of the need to be conscious about the gift of the Spirit in our lives and the need for us to be intentional in our response to the Holy Spirit. But now looking back over the whole of the historic spectrum, I call us to discernment. And the wisest voices, Pentecostal and otherwise, would note the following: that the work of the Spirit where it is genuine in the life of an individual or in a community will always have three distinctive characteristics. The life of the Spirit, where it is authentic—in an individual, in my life and this is what I need to watch for, but also in the community of which I’m a part—will always have three characteristics if it is authentic.

The first is that the work of the Spirit will always be sustained by the Word of God—by Holy Scripture. That is, the work of the Spirit is never in opposition to the Scripture; and the Word of God, and thus preaching and the work of the Spirit, go hand in hand. To use the older language, the sword of the Spirit is the Word of God. The Spirit sanctifies us by truth and so as we seek to examine the work of the Spirit in the life of individuals, as we seek to develop a genuinely evangelical spiritual theology, we will stress the dual character of Word and Spirit, of Spirit operating with the Word.

Secondly, any genuine spiritual theology and any genuine

experience of the Spirit of God will always be focused on the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Spirit, we read in John 14 and 15 and 16, in these three chapters of the gospel of John, Jesus Himself speaks of another Counselor who will come; and the role of that other Counselor is to glorify Christ even as Christ has glorified the Father. That is, the work of the Spirit is to draw our attention to Christ. In so much of my growing up, within my own tradition, the work of the Spirit was always spoken of as something that supplemented the work of Christ.

Well now you've become a Christian, you've come to Christ. That's good, but now you need to add to that the work of the Spirit. It's a strange notion, and unfortunately it's a false one, for the work of the Spirit will always call us back to Christ. The work of the Spirit will always enable us to know Christ. The work of the Spirit will enable us to love Christ. The work of the Spirit will enable us to serve Christ. It has a distinctly Christocentric character, the work of the Spirit. And we can test the work of the Spirit in our lives and in the lives of the communities in which we live and worship by seeing whether or not what we feel and are drawn to is Christ. Only then can it legitimately be attributed to the Spirit of God.

And thirdly, the Spirit of God will always have a church connection or a communal connection. That is, if what we are experiencing is genuinely the Spirit of God, the wisdom of the centuries would remind us that the Spirit of God always works in tandem with the community of faith. And while there have been chapters in which God led people into solitude, what we've come to see is that no Christian who walks in the Spirit lives as a spiritual hermit. That the Spirit of God who baptizes His church that is the day of Pentecost is synonymous with the birthday of the church. The arrival of the Spirit and the inauguration of the church are one in the same. The Spirit came and drew Christians together in spiritual community, and so we can only genuinely say we are walking in the Spirit if we are living in Christian community; and I'll stress this, of course, at some length when I come to the chapter, to the lectures, pardon me, on the communal character of an authentic Christian spiritual theology.

Now as we shift gears, I want to address the building blocks for a Christian theology of the spiritual life. I'm moving away now from the streams or the threads that I've picked up and no doubt you would add others to those. Those are just the ones that have come to mind for me. [There are] other things that we can learn, and I'll draw on more wisdom in the lectures to come, but now I

want to establish what I see to be the four critical building blocks to a Christian theology of the spiritual life; and I believe there are four.

The first two of these are one pair and the other two are another pair. They come together. The first pair is the theology of God and the theology of self or the human person. The first two go together in parallel, the theology of God and the theology of self. John Calvin opens his magisterial institutes with a profoundly insightful statement. Literally, this is the opening statement of the institutes, and I quote,

“Our wisdom in so far as it ought to be deemed true and solid wisdom consists almost entirely of two parts, the knowledge of God and of ourselves. But as these are connected together by many ties, it is not easy to determine which of the two precedes and gives birth to the other.”

It's an extraordinary comment. Let me summarize it briefly. He says that if we are going to be wise men and women, if it is true wisdom, our wisdom will consist of two streams, two angles you might say. The one is the knowledge of God. We will not be wise unless we know God, and the other is the knowledge of ourselves. We will not be wise unless we know ourselves. And then in an extraordinary twist, not a twist but a nuance of his words, he notes this that these two are interconnected. There are many ties between them, so much so that it's not easy to determine which of the two precedes and gives birth to the other. There's probably a sense in which we cannot study them in isolation from one another. Calvin himself goes on to then to begin an exposition of the doctrine of God. So I suppose he has put a slight bias on the doctrine of God, and that's where I'm going to go as well. That is, we need to establish the prevailing notion of God, our prevailing notion of God. How is God known? Who is God and what is He doing? Our spiritual theology will be profoundly shaped by our understanding of God, but our spiritual theology will also be profoundly shaped by our understanding of the human person or the human self. Who are we? What does it mean to be human? What does it mean to be an individual? What is the nature of the human vocation? Two critical building blocks that we study in parallel: our theology of God and our theology of the human person, the theology of self.

The other two are also in parallel. I call the first our theology of the structure, goal, and means of the spiritual life. I call this the

theological logic of the spiritual life. “Where are we going, and how do we get there?” you might say. And the fourth, which goes in parallel to that, is our theology of community, which I view to be the critical context of the Christian life.

So to summarize, I’m saying that there are four critical building blocks to a Christian theology of the spiritual life, and they come in two pairs. The first pair: our theology of God and our theology of self. And the second pair: our understanding of the theological logic of the Christian life—What is the goal and how do we get there?—and the context in which we do that. That’s our understanding of Christian community.

I begin now then with the first of these, our knowledge of God. I’ll then proceed to our theology of self. Thirdly, to the theological logic and, fourthly, to the theology of community, as it is a critical factor in our spiritual theology.

First, in our understanding of theology as to know, love, and serve the triune God, in our understanding that spiritual theology is to know God truly, to love Him with heart, soul, mind, and strength and to serve Him as obedient disciples, it’s important to stress that, first, true spirituality is knowing God. This is the goal of the human person to know God, and that in knowing God we as individuals find our identity, our integrity, or to use the language of the last lecture, we are fulfilled. We find our self-actualization. Spirituality could be defined as a relationship with God that is reflected in every aspect of life in this world. It’s a relationship with the Father through the Son by the Spirit, which means then that the defining center of a Christian spirituality is the encounter, knowledge, and experience of God. Spirituality is not just about God or about religious activities such as prayer and worship. It is about being in the world and fully engaged in the world, but it is a way of being in the world that is the fruit of a relationship with God. Consequently then, the heart, the core of a spiritual theology and of spirituality is this encounter with God. But I seek to stress right from the beginning that it’s not a knowledge of God that divorces us from the world, rather, full spirituality is an engagement in the world that is the fruit of the encounter with God.

There’s a popular chorus that is often sung within evangelical and Christian churches. It goes like this, “Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in His wonderful face, and the things of earth will grow strangely dim, in the light of His glory and grace.” Somehow it

seems to me, even though I understand the legitimate aspirations of those who wrote that song and those who sing it, that something's not quite right in that popular sing. That perhaps rather it should say this, "Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in His wonderful face, and the things of earth will grow strangely clear." That is, the world will come more fully into view, that the fruit of the encounter is that we see the world more clearly and are able to engage it more effectively.

Later, I will speak about being in but not of the world. But this is only possible if our lives are centered in and rooted in an experience of God. If we are not centered and rooted in an experience of God, we will be in and of the world. Our only hope is if God is the focus and goal of our lives. This is a basic assumption of Christian, biblical, evangelical, spiritual theology. That we can experience God in a manner that fosters, yes actually fosters and enables personal integrity and genuine engagement in the world. But further that we only find integrity and genuine engagement with the world when we are focused on God and have a life that is centered in an experience of God. And the fundamental means by which we stay centered on God is through prayer and worship, but I'm getting ahead of myself.

Having established this principle, then, that central to a genuine Christian or evangelical spiritual theology is the endeavor to know God. I now must, secondly, speak to the God whom we seek to know. J. B. Phillips is famous for his translation of the New Testament, but he's also famous for one publication in particular, aptly and brilliantly entitled *Your God Is Too Small*.

When we speak of knowing God, of experiencing God, it is imperative that we consider who it is that we seek to love and know. And is this one, is this God whom we have envisioned in our minds, hopefully informed by Scripture, is this God indeed God the God Himself, the God who is grand and glorious? For our spiritual experience will never rise above our understanding of who God is. Who God is and how God is known makes the fundamental difference in the character of a spiritual theology.

Theologians tend to use the following kinds of words to describe God. First, God is spirit. God is spirit. Though not emphasized in the Old Testament, in John 4:24 we find it explicitly stated, "God is spirit and His worshipers must worship Him in spirit and in truth." It is not a spirit, rather God is spirit, and thus it's not a reference to the Holy Spirit who is obviously spirit but even that

the Father is spirit and that the Son before His incarnation was spirit. God is spirit and that He is not composed of matter. He has no bodily existence. He has no physical nature. He is invisible. He is without limitation. Part of His grandeur and glory is that He is not limited by physical realities, and thus idolatry is horrifying especially when the idols are but dead stones. For God is spirit, and if we worship Him, we must worship Him in spirit and in truth.

Because God is spirit, God is free; and I want to stress throughout these lectures the freedom of God. He is free in that He is self-determining and self-moved. He has no limitation. He is, and God alone is self-sustaining. He does not need to create. He chose to do so. He has moral freedom. He cannot be tempted, and it is this that He is spirit and thus free that makes God categorically different from humanity. God is other than His creation.

Secondly, not only is God spirit, but God is also triune. God is triune, and any genuine spiritual theology or any genuine theology of the spiritual life must appreciate the full Trinitarian character of God in order to be consistent with the biblical witness. I want to address the matter of the Trinity from two perspectives. The first is the functional character of the Trinity, and the second is the communal character of the Trinity. By the functional character of the Trinity I mean this: that our spiritual theology must be consistent, our theology of the Christian life must be consistent with the economic or functional interrelationships between the Trinity. And it's most helpful in my mind to think of the Trinity, at least in functional terms, in this sense that all things come from the Father. All things come from the Father. All things are mediated through the Son, and all things are effected in the world by the Spirit and in our lives. So when we ask the question: Who saves us, which member of the Trinity? It is properly speaking a false question. The Father—all things originate with the Father. The Father saves us. But how does He save us? He saves us by sending us His Son. The Son saves us through His work on the cross and the resurrection. But the Spirit sends the spirit, and our actual experience of God's salvation mediated through Christ is effected in our lives by the Spirit. All things originate in the Father, are mediated through the Son, and are effected in our lives by the Spirit. Consequently, a Christian theology of the spiritual life recognizes that the deepest longing of our lives is to know the Father, the Father who is spirit, the Father who made us and is our Creator, the Father whom Jesus Himself beckons us to call Father, the Father in whom all of our deepest aspirations as individuals, as human beings, as communities is found. He is Father and He is

known through Jesus. For Jesus and the Father are one. To know Jesus is to know the Father.

This longing for the Father is captured so poignantly in John 14. Here the disciples have gathered with Jesus in the Upper Room, and Jesus explains to them, and their minds and their hearts are so confused and they struggle to understand. He explains to them that He is going to go to another place. He's going to return to the Father. He's going to go away, but He's going to come back; and so He urges them to not be troubled because He is bringing them this reassurance. And then in the midst of this wonderful teaching from our Lord, Philip asks what was on the heart and mind, the query that all of the disciples no doubt had that evening. He said, "Show us the Father, and it will be enough." That is, Philip, in that simple line captured the deep aspirations of all people, a desire to know the Father, to see the Father so that he could love the Father. Show us the Father, and that will be enough. He captured the bottom line. And Jesus' response, well His response was first of all to say, "Have you been with Me all this time, and you still don't know the answer to that?" But in His patience, He said to Philip and to the others, "If you have seen Me, you have seen the Father. To know Me is to know the Father. Come to Me all you who are heavily and wearily burdened." Why would we come to Jesus? Because in coming to Jesus, we come to the Father. We are seeking to know and experience a God who is the Father. Who is revealed in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Father we long for is the Father of Jesus whom He reveals to us so that if and when we know Jesus, we know the Father.

But how do we know Jesus? Jesus is made known and experienced in our lives through the grace of the Holy Spirit. We do not honor Christ unless we honor the Spirit whom He has sent, and we do not honor the Spirit unless we honor Christ. The longing of our hearts is to know, to love, and to serve Christ. For only then will we know the Father. But to know and love and serve Christ, I would contend, we must live an intentional responsiveness to the Spirit. Thus we seek then a genuinely Trinitarian understanding of the Christian life that enables us to walk in the Spirit, to focus our attention on Christ knowing that thereby we live to the glory of God the Father. We walk in the Spirit in submission to Christ as His followers, and thereby we live in intimate communion with the Father in heaven.

The functional character of the Trinity then is profoundly significant. All things originate in the Father, are mediated through

the Son, and are effected in our lives by the Holy Spirit. But we could also turn that around. It means then: What does genuine prayer look like? Ultimately, genuine prayer is directed to the Father. That's who we long to speak to in our prayers. That's who we long to worship as the people of God. How do we worship God? It's only true worship if it's in the name of Jesus, if it's through Christ. And thus when I come to the lecture on prayer, I will stress what it means to say and to pray in the name of Christ. But the whole New Testament witness would remind us, we only pray in the name of Jesus when we pray in the Spirit. So the Spirit enables us to pray through Christ to the Father. All prayer can properly speaking be turned Trinitarian. So the functional character of the Trinity shapes the contours, the stuff of an evangelical spiritual theology.

But there's also a sense in which we need to see the members of the Trinity functioning not just functionally when it comes to salvation or sanctification, whatever it happens to be, but also recognizing that the Trinity represents a perfect harmony, a perfect community, a perfect relationship of love. To use the language of John Zizioulas, the Eastern Orthodox theologian, he speaks of God as a being-in-communion, all one word hyphenated, a being-in-communion. God exists eternally in communion. And this speaks of something extraordinary that from all of eternity, the foundation of life God. The very essence of life is a community. God exists in a loving community perpetually, eternally. Father, Son, and Spirit in perfect harmony of will in perfect mutual submission, in perfect delight the one in the other and if, as of course is the case, the ground of being in the Trinity represents community it means that all authentic life has a communal character that for us to live authentically we must learn to love and to be love within Christian community.

First then, I stress the fact that God is spirit. Secondly, I stress that God is triune. Thirdly, we must stress that God is Creator. It is God as Creator who shapes profoundly the character of an authentic spiritual life. God created us to worship Him, and God makes Himself known through His creation and expects that in making Himself known in creation, we will worship Him in and through that very creation. God has created a world, a creation that He Himself has called good. Indeed one of the great emphases we find in the book of Genesis 1, an emphasis to which we often need to come back, is simply this, that all things came into being through God's will or through His word, synonymous there. He spoke and things came into being, and He declared them good.

And I would contend that ever since Genesis 1, any legitimate, evangelical spiritual theology will always be creation-affirming, worldliness-denying, but creation-affirming. This world is our home. We are not just passing through. God created us to live here, and ultimately He will make all things well. He will restore the vitality and strength and glory of His creation. And clearly, when we look to the Psalms, not only is there the celebration of God's redemptive work, the Psalms regularly extol the beauty and the glory of God's creation. And then we come to the grand finale, the grand finality that's captured in the words of Revelation 4 and 5. In Revelation 5, when we gather together at the marriage supper of the Lamb, we're going to celebrate One who has redeemed men and women from every tribe, language, people, and nation. But in chapter 4 we read that we're going to celebrate One and worship One who has created all things and who providentially cares for all things. God is Creator, and a genuine spiritual theology will be one that lives consistently with the fact that the creation is a reflection of His will and word and that the creation is good. This takes on even added significance when we recognize that God Himself in the second person of the Trinity took on our flesh for all of eternity; He took on our flesh and thus any spiritual theology that denies our creatureliness, that denies the fundamental goodness of creatureliness, is not consistent with the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Fourthly, the great creedal affirmation. First, I stressed God is spirit. Second, that God is triune. Third, that God is Creator. Fourthly, any genuine spiritual theology will also affirm that God is the Father Almighty. He is almighty. He is sovereign. In the Apostles' Creed, we have that simple statement, "I believe in God the Father Almighty," and somehow—and many theologians have noted that somehow all of the attributes of God are captured—are somehow summarized in those two words "Father Almighty." God is holy and merciful. The two are inseparable. God is gracious and is characterized by a fundamental goodness. God is Father. And it's reflected in His personable goodness towards us. God is incapable of anything but good, and He demonstrates love towards us. He is gracious in His love, and He is magnified when He forgives sins. We celebrate a God who is good, who is forgiving, who is merciful. We celebrate a God who is a Father to us without ever forgetting that it's a holy love, a holy goodness, not a tolerant or a sentimental goodness.

But He is the Father Almighty. And there are many directions we could go at this point, but I want to stress two in particular that

are a reflection of the fact that we worship and we serve and we seek to follow a sovereign God. The one is to stress that God is worthy of our trust. He is dependable. Because He is all powerful, He can fulfill His will and fulfill His Word in His time. We can trust Him. He is all powerful. He's not only good but all powerful, and as such He is also all wise. We can trust Him because of His sovereign power. We can trust Him because of His pervasive wisdom. He is good and wise, good and all powerful. He is sovereign in His graciousness, but the demonstration of His graciousness is one that is always characterized by wisdom, by truth, and by goodness.

Fifthly, the God whom we seek to know and love and serve is the Holy One. God is holy. The book of Isaiah echoes this again and again and again that the God whom we worship is a Holy God who is worthy of our worship because He is holy. Perhaps holiness somehow captures, summarizes everything that I have said so far. He is a holy God and, only this word . . . it's the only word that comes up, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty," Old Testament and New. God is beautiful in His holiness. It's a holiness that is pure, and it's a holiness that is terrifying. And I Peter calls us to be holy. Why? Because God is holy. This somehow captures all that God is. He is beautiful in His holiness. He is pure in His holiness. He is terrifying in His holiness, but His holiness is also demonstrated in His graciousness. For why does He forgive us? That we might be holy. Why does He demonstrate mercy towards us? That we might be holy. His mercy and His grace are not in opposition to His holiness, rather He shows us mercy that we might experience the freedom and the glory and the grace of holiness.

And finally, number six, I think it's also important to stress that the God whom we seek to know and worship is a God who suffers. We cannot speak of a spiritual theology without beginning to hear the voices that come from Latin America and Asia and Africa. But particularly the Asian theologians who have called us to a recognition that our God is profoundly engaged with our world—so engaged that He is a passionate God. He suffers with us. Captured perhaps most eloquently in St. Paul's epistle to the Romans chapter 8, when we read that the whole of creation is groaning and then that the Spirit groans with us. And when I come in a lecture that is yet to come, when I come to a theology of suffering, what I want to stress is that in our suffering we are not alone but that the Spirit groans with us. God's Son went to the cross to suffer for us, and even now He empathizes with us. He aches with us. He is one with us in the pain and predicament of

our human condition. We'll come back to this theme several times over the course of the lectures.