

Our Journey: The Season of Formation

Foundational Text: Romans 8:29 – Mirror Translation

“For those He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the **exact image** of His Son.”

Jan. 18, 2026

Sermon Title: The Man Upstairs?

Sermon Text: Isaiah 59:2 – Amplified Classic (AMPC)

“But your iniquities have separated you from your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear.”

Introduction

Last week – I started an important series – which will clearly identify various spiritual pitfalls that can possibly derail us – on our journey towards transformation into the “exact image of His Son.” ... I began last week with what I called the pitfall of slumber ... This pitfall targets our sense of spiritual awareness ... It is a spirit of the enemy designed to cause our inner man to fall and stay asleep ... I will not re-preach this – but I will encourage you to watch the message again – which is online ... You can find it along with my sermon notes at - - DCC-NH.org ... Let me leave you with what Jesus said before we move on:

Matthew 13:13-14 Easy English Bible

The reason I use stories to talk to other people is this: ... These people look. ... But they do not really see clearly. ... They hear the words. ... But they do not really understand. ... 14 Long ago, the prophet Isaiah spoke a message from God about those people. ... Now it has become true. ... God said: “You will listen and listen. ... But you will not understand. ... You will look and look. ... But you will not see anything.

Now – here is what will typically follow spiritual slumber ... Remember – slumber attacks our awareness – and when awareness is dull or completely asleep ... Our natural reaction will be to interpret our spiritual experiences – rather than receiving revelational incite from the Holy Spirit

... This condition isn't sinful – it is a result of being asleep ... For example – if my wife gets up in the middle of the night and I'm asleep – I am unawares that she got up – right ... If my inner man has been lulled to sleep – even though the Holy Spirit is present and speaking – I will be unawares – because I'm asleep ... This sounds obvious but it is critical.

Today – I want to share with you another huge pitfall that will definitely derail our formation process ... To be honest with you – I didn't fully become aware of this pitfall – functioning in my life until a little over a year ago ... I was unawares of this issue in my life for decades – so this one is still close to home for me ... I call it the Pitfall of Separation.

I titled the message today – “The Man Upstairs?” ... This is a common phrase we hear especially when chatting with people who would admit that they are not religious ... When referring to God they will typically say – the man upstairs ... What I find interesting is – this phrase helps strengthen and fortify this common pitfall of separation ... What this phrase is stating is – “the man” – God is up there – and we are down here.

Scripture even seems to support this same idea ... Isaiah 59:2 – says that your sins have separated you from God ... Psalms 22:3 – implies that God inhabits the praise of His people ... Because of verses like these – we begin to build an image in our mind that God is the “man upstairs” ... James 4:8 clearly tell us to draw near to God and He will draw near to us ... Clearly helping to create an image of separation – that God is at some distance away from us.

But – I have a question – that I would like us all to reflect upon ... What if this conception isn't a condition that we live with – but that it is a pitfall to be avoided?

What do we Mean When we imply - - “God Is Up There?”

Acts 17:27-28 The Voice

His purpose in all this was that people of every culture and religion would search for this ultimate God, - grope for Him in the darkness, - as it were, - hoping to find Him. ... Yet, in

truth, - - **God is not far from any of us.** ... 28 For you know the saying, - - “We live in God; - - - We move in God; - - - We exist in God.” ... And still another said, - “We are indeed God’s children.”

When people talk about God – they are not typically expressing a theological position ... Many times – they are expressing a conception – a mental image – a location ... A perception of where God is – in relationship to themselves ... God is somewhere out there – He is up there in heaven – He is somewhere else – other than right there with them.

Now catch this subtlety – this perception of location – or separation – quietly shapes how people relate to God ... Because most people do not relate to God based on truth alone – or misunderstood truth in this case ... They relate to God based on their perception ... The internal image they have formed of Him.

So – separation does not begin as a belief system ... It begins as a mental framework formed through perception ... A way of picturing God that develops when our awareness dulls ... And once that framework is in place – everything flows through it ... How we pray – how we worship – how we identify with Him.

This is why Isaiah’s words hit so hard in people’s hearts - - “Your sins have separated you from your God” ... Not because most people have carefully studied this verse – but because it seems to confirm their perception – how they already feel ... You know – God is up there in heaven – and I’m down here on earth ... The verse not only creates the perception of separation – it reinforces it.

Today – my intent is not to debate theology – it is to simply identify a pitfall ... Before a true kainos being can be formed by the Spirit of God – we must identify this major hindrance and be on guard against it ... Paul clearly addressed this issue as he spoke to the Athenian in Acts 17 ... He quietly disrupts that entire image of separation when he says that God is not far from any one of us ... That in Him we live and move and have our being ... Which tells us something

extremely important ... Distance is not describing God's location ... It is actually revealing our awareness of Him – or lack thereof ... So now the question becomes – How do we respond when God feels distant.

What Do We Do When God Feels Far Away?

Galatians 3:3 Passion

"How did you begin your new life in Christ? ... Was it by working your way into God's favor – or was it by responding to the Spirit? ... Are you so foolish to think that you can bring yourself to maturity in Christ by your own strength?"

When God feels distant – something instinctive happens – we respond with effort ... We kick into "works mode" in an effort to close this perceived gap of separation ... So, we worship longer – we pray harder – we read my scripture ... All in an effort – to close a perceived gap – developed from perception – yet not based in truth.

Unfortunately – scripture seems to support our instinct ... We're told that God inhabits the praises of His people ... We're told to draw near to God and He will draw near to us ... We're told that our sin separates us from God ... And honestly – read through the lens of separation – that sounds like proper theology ... So, our only course of action becomes – we must make a concerted effort to close this gap between us and God.

But here's the subtle problem – our efforts to close the gap – only make sense – if distance is actually the issue ... And when effort becomes the means of closeness – it reinforces the idea that God was never near to us – to begin with ... **For example** – As we worship – you may begin to feel something ... And what people will natural do is equate that feeling with His presence ... So – when we stop worshipping – that feeling that you had – begins to fade ... So now – people will associate that fading feeling with – God must be leaving – or His presence is lifting ... Thus again – reinforcing our perception of separation – along with reinforcing the

verse that says He inhabits our praise ... This further fosters the notion that I must do works – in this case worship – in order for God to show up in my life – and for me to feel His presence.

Paul clearly addresses this in Galatians 3 when he asks a deep and pointed question: “Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?” ... Paul is hitting at the core of this pitfall of separation ... He is saying – when we replace awareness with effort – then our faith will become exhausting ... When our awareness of presence is based upon how much effort we put into drawing near to Him – we have entirely missed what Paul is sharing to the ekklesia in Galatia ... And when effort quietly replaces awareness – over time – something deeper begins to shift – not just how we relate to God – but how we view our identity.

What Happens to Identity when Distance Is Assumed?

Colossians 1:27 Mirror Translation

Christ in you – the hope of realizing the glorious intent of your design.

When distance is assumed – over time – it stops affecting behavior alone – it begins reshaping identity ... We no longer live as someone who participates with God through union ... We begin living as someone striving to reach Him – hoping to get His attention ... Instead of living as sons and daughters – we quietly take on the posture of outsiders ... And faith shifts from resting in His presence – to striving for engagement.

We can never be formed into the image of Jesus while believing we are separated from Him ... Formation by its very nature requires nearness – participation – a shared life ... And when separation becomes the framework – identity becomes fragile – conditional – and unstable.

Paul says it plainly – Christ in you ... Not Christ above you in heaven ... Not Christ is over there somewhere ... Not Christ is waiting for you to capture His attention by effort ... But Christ is in you – which means the issue has never been about location ... The issue is about are you aware – or have you been awakened to His presence living in you.

Paul reminds us in Hebrews when he says: “This is why it is so crucial that we give our undivided attention to what we have heard – so that we do not drift away from it” ... Drifting is not a future danger – but a present reality for all who have fallen into slumber – and lack awareness of His presence ... Let’s be honest – most people have accepted – or struggle with the concept of separation ... I’ll admit I did until I finally settled the issue ... I wasn’t rejecting the truth of “Christ in you” – but I was struggling with the tension of – I don’t sense You or feel You in my time of need ... And in that tension – I wasn’t allowing the Spirit to form and shape me into who I was truly created to be.

Take Away

Today my desire was to make you aware of this deadly pitfall ... Admittedly – one I fell into and floundered around in for most of my spiritual journey ... I feel this pitfall needs to be addressed in a deeper manner so we will probably hit it again next week and maybe the week after if the Spirit lead.

But before we end today – I want to leave you with a simple awareness practice you can refer to throughout your day ... When you are feeling distant from God and that instinct is kicking in that you need to do something to close the gap you are feeling ... Pause and ask yourself - - What image of God am I relating to right now? ... Am I picturing Him way up there in heaven somewhere? ... If you are honest – your answer will likely be yes.

Now – take a moment and refocus ... Remind yourself that He is the vine and you are the branch ... Remind yourself that you are one Spirit with Him ... Remind yourself that Jesus said – I will never leave you nor forsake you ... Your purpose isn’t to correct your theology but to refocus your awareness ... To bring your internal alignment back into kingdom alignment.