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Presentation Transcript
True Spirituality 09 – Attuning to God’s Plan
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December 7, 2006

Well today we’re going to continue our series on *True Spirituality*. This is the ninth installment. The title is *Attuning to God’s Plan*. Surely God could not consider us spiritually minded unless we were attuned to and in accord with His will for us. Wouldn’t you think? I mean, how could you say that you were a spiritually minded person if God wanted to reveal His plan about you to you and you didn’t know what it was? To even speak the words seems so ridiculously obvious it almost goes without saying. And yet, there is incredible confusion and darkness surrounding even this fundamental truth.

Let’s turn to 1 Timothy 3, verse 14, and see something that the Apostle Paul said. He said:

1Tim. 3:14 – *These things I write to you, though I hope to come to you shortly. But I am delayed. I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness. It was predicted, wasn’t it, that it would be mysterious to people. We don’t know what God is doing unless He tells us. God was manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the Gentiles, believed on in the world, and received up in glory.*

So that plan, that he’s talking about there, has been a mystery. It can only be revealed to us by God. And it’s only revealed by God to those who are willing to follow Him. It’s not about your IQ. It’s not about your wealth. It’s not about your power. A lot of people can read the words in the Bible, but there’s something missing if we don’t *do* what it says.

1 Cor. 2:7 – *But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery – there’s that word again – the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the ages for our glory – for our glory! – which none of the rulers of this age knew. For if they had known, they wouldn’t have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written, “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.”*

So, God is preparing something for us. What is it? Nobody's ever guessed. What's He doing? How will He do it? Only those people that are willing to listen and to follow God get to understand that. It says that God is preparing this mysterious good thing for those who *love* Him.

How do we show love to God? Let's go to John 14:13. Jesus said:

Jn. 14:13 – *Whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it. If you love Me, keep my commandments.*

So obedience to the Law of God, following Christ, walking worthy, these things all mean the same thing. They mean to keep the commandments.

Have you ever read the book of Proverbs all the way through. Somebody was telling me the other day that they saw somebody on television who was wealthy. And he said that the way he got wealthy was he read the Proverbs every day – one chapter a day (there's thirty-one chapters). He read a chapter a day for two years. So he read the Proverbs twenty-four times. And the things that he learned by reading that over and over again caused him to become wealthy.

What is the central message of the Proverbs? It's pay attention to what God tells you to do. And if you do, you're going to be a wise person. It just all fits together. You can't simply read the Bible and understand it. You have to *do* it. You have to use it. Use it or lose it. Do it or never get it. You know, it only works if you work it. How many more clichés can I add on there to make it live for you? That's just how it works.

Proverbs 6:20. Let's look at a couple of them.

Prov. 6:20 – *My son, keep your father's command, and do not forsake the law of your mother.*

I was talking to my wife's sister. She mentioned that she committed herself to Jesus Christ when she was a small child actually. She said that when she was eleven, she and her twin sister were the only people in school wearing socks. That's because her mother made her. She said any other kid would have gone into the bathroom first thing, taken them off, gone to school the rest of the day, put them on when they went home. But to her, it was a matter of obeying her mother and her father.

V-21 – *Bind them continually, verse 21, upon your heart. Tie them around your neck. When you roam, they will lead you. When you sleep, they will keep you. When you awake, they will speak with you. For the commandment is a lamp, and the law a light. Reproofs of instruction are the way of life.*

So God's Law is a lamp to our feet. It illuminates the way of blessings and the way to be safe. So it's not just about learning, but also about *doing*. Keeping the Law of God is how we learn what God has in store for us.

I was listening to Billy Graham on the radio recently, and he was reading from the Old Testament, where God was promising to bless His people if they followed His ways. And he asked, "What ways is He talking about?" And he said, "He's talking about the Ten Commandments." That's pretty interesting. I guess he's always said that, though. But not many do. It's very sad, because when many people come to the fourth commandment, they find an insurmountable stumblingblock there – not willing to keep the Sabbath or the other holy days that God gave to Israel and to the church.

Despite what anyone else says, the Sabbath and the holy days are firmly entrenched in, not only the Old Testament, but the New Testament as well. And you might ask, "If that's true, why don't people keep them today?" I can explain it.

In New Testament times the Romans worshipped Saturn. Guess which day was his? Well, it was Saturn Day. Right? When Jesus was walking the earth, that's who they worshipped. So that meant that the Romans and the Jews were worshipping on the same day. So it was pretty easy to be a Jew or a Christian, if you were in Rome, and not be noticed too much, because you'd just be walking to church along with everybody else – you to church and them to the temple. Right?

But as Christianity grew, the Roman government began to persecute it more and more. And at the same time a new god was coming into vogue in Rome. They had fads in religion, just like we have fads in clothes or things like that. So this new god, Mithra, he was the sun god. Guess which day was his? Well, it was Sun Day. As the Roman population began to switch days, it became easier to spot Christians as a result, because they were now going to church on a different day. So it became more dangerous to be a Christian.

After John, who was the last living apostle died, the early church fathers, understanding that there was great *power* in Jesus Christ – that it was a very compelling religion – and seeing the *money* that was there, worked to change the day of worship to Sunday so that it would fit in more with Roman culture. They wanted to make it easier to be a Christian. That's not true because I said it. Don't believe me. The book you can read to document this change is titled, *From Sabbath to Sunday*, by Samuel Bacchiocchi.

Now, the church of Peter, and James, and John, and Paul, those people all kept the Sabbath. That includes the *Gentile* people that went to church with them. It wasn't until later that all that got changed – after everything that was written in the New Testament – all that changed.

Have you ever noticed how things come and go with us? We talked about it earlier – our clothing styles, decorating styles. We even have fad diagnoses in the mental health field. Twenty years ago you might have been diagnosed with one thing, and today you can

show up with the same symptoms, and they call it something else. Well, there's been a long train of different explanations to explain why Christians should worship on Sunday, instead of the Sabbath. It's amazing! But history records that the first argument that the church fathers used for this change was the idea that since Jesus was called the *Son* of God of righteousness, that it was okay to worship on the day of the sun, which was Sunday.

The second was that it was changed from Saturday to Sunday because that's when Christ was resurrected – the Lord's Day now is what we keep. There were a number of problems with that one. The first was they couldn't prove that the resurrection was on Sunday. The second one was, and probably the biggest one, there's no instruction in the Bible to switch – or no example of anybody switching! That was just somebody's idea – “the Sabbath is Jewish but we have the Lord's Day.” Sorry, the Sabbath is *not* Jewish. It was invented a long time before there were any Jews. There were just peoples – given to humankind.

The third argument was – and this came much later – that Sunday *was* the Sabbath. They couldn't get away with that at first, because everybody knew it wasn't. So they had to have a good reason to change. But then later, as time went by, and people forgot the history of what happened in the first hundred years after Christ, they started calling Sunday the Sabbath. As late as the 1950s you would see church literature talk about keeping the Sabbath holy, but they were talking about the first day of the week – Sunday. The problem there is, it's so easy to prove that the Sabbath of the church was the same day that the Jews kept.

The fourth and most recent argument is that the Sabbath is just an allegory for closeness to God. Now that we have the Holy Spirit with us, every day is holy. So we're keeping the Sabbath in our heart all the time. That way you can play golf on Sunday – or Saturday or whatever. Every day is alike. We keep the Sabbath in our hearts. But we don't have to do what God said. And that really is where that argument goes. You don't have to spend one day a week centering yourself on Christ, learning about our destiny with God like God told us to, but we can say every day is the same.

Let's go to Jude, verses 3 and 4.

Jude :3 – *Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you, exhorting you to contend earnestly – to contend earnestly – for the faith, which was once for all delivered to the saints.* So that would have been the things that are in the Bible, right? That was what was delivered – not the stuff that came after that. *For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turned the grace of our God into luteness, and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ.* So, these people were telling the brethren that they didn't have to *do* what Jude said, and what he did, because of all things – grace. You know, we're forgiven, so we can go do what we want. Since you're saved from your sins, you can sin all you want to.

But you know, when we just do what they did back then – when we observe the Sabbath like they did in the New Testament church – there’s no need for shifting explanations anymore, is there? When we come into line with exactly what Jude said, all we have to do is do what they did – simply following Jesus Christ’s instructions exactly as He gave them – perfect and without need of human reasoning. Solves a huge problem.

Now, I’m not trying to judge another man’s servant or make anybody feel judged. And I’m not insisting that anybody else believe like I believe or do what I do. We all get to choose. I’m just explaining to you why I do what I do. I’m going to do what I do because I’m responsible for what I know before God.

Let’s go to Hebrews 4. This is a very interesting scripture. Hebrew 4, verse 4.

Heb. 4:4 – Paul said, *Somewhere he had spoken about the seventh day in these words, “And on the seventh day God rested from all His work.” And again, in the passage above, he says, “They shall never enter My rest.”* So he’s connecting the phrase, “They shall never enter My rest” with the seventh day, when God rested from all His work. So he’s saying that what happened to Israel when they came out of Egypt – going into the promised land – was like keeping the Sabbath.

So there *is* an allegory there – or a symbolic meaning – for the Sabbath day. And we know that what happened to ancient Israel was also an allegory for what’s going to happen to us in the future, don’t we? Going into the promised land is metaphorical for entering the Kingdom of God. We tie those three things together – the Sabbath, going into the promised land, and entering the Kingdom – all mean the same thing. The Sabbath is an allegory for entering the Kingdom, and so also is entering the promised land.

It says in verse 6:

V-6 – *It still remains that some will enter that rest. And those who formerly had the gospel preached to them did not go in because of their disobedience. Therefore, God again set a certain day, calling it, “Today,” when a long time later, He spoke through David. As it was said, “Today, if you will hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.” For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day. So the Kingdom of God was not that promised land they went into. And he says – because of this – there remains then a sabbath rest for the people of God. For anyone who enters God’s rest, also rests from his own work, just as God did from His. Get it? Pretty clear to me.... Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest. Which rest is He talking about now? He’s talking about the Kingdom of God, isn’t he? So that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience.*

V-12 – *For the word of God is living, and active, and sharper than any double-edged sword. It penetrates even to the dividing of soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of Him, to whom we must give an account.*

So there are several things to be learned here. One is that the Sabbath is symbolic for something. It symbolizes our eternal salvation through Jesus Christ.

The second thing we can learn is, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. The literal translation of that is “a Sabbath observance.” That’s what that word, *sabatismos*, means. Now the theologians of years past reasoned that since the Sabbath was symbolic for rest, that that’s all it was – a symbol that need not be observed literally. The only problem with that is, when Paul wrote that he was still observing it. He was still teaching Gentiles to observe it. And so were all the other apostles. People say, “Well, he did that because he was a Jew.” No, he was a Christian. He’d been a Christian for thirty years, and he was teaching Gentiles to keep it. I’m just reading what’s there. We’re supposed to keep it. And if we do, we will learn something about our destiny. You have to *do* to get it.

Let’s look at these days that God wants us to observe. The Sabbath – the one God rested on after He created the earth – pictures a time of rest for the earth. Let’s go to Revelation 21:4.

Rev. 21:4 – *God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.* Every Sabbath we’re to stop our work, and we’re to focus ourselves, during that time, on that great event that’s going to occur in the future. It’s like keeping our eye on the goal – weekly, guided, imagery sessions for us – to help us remember what’s coming for us in the Kingdom of God.

Now here’s something else that’s astounding. In Leviticus 23 God lists not only the Sabbath, but all seven of the holy days of Israel – what they were supposed to observe – the Sabbath first, and then the seven other festivals. And they were harvest festivals for Israel, so they could remember where they came from and who takes care of them. In the New Testament we see all these festivals observed by the church, but with added meaning for Christians. We even see Paul teaching *Gentiles* to keep those days, and explaining why we should.

Let’s look at one of those events in Colossians 2, verse 16. Paul says, here, to this Colossian church – this church of Gentile people:

Col. 2:16 – *So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival, or a new moon, or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.* So it sounds to some folks, looking at this translation – which is the New King James – like we’re not supposed to let other people judge us, because the sabbath and the holy days are shadows of things to come, but really, what’s really important – you know, the substance is of Christ.

Well, I believe that that’s a dishonest translation there, actually. Because that phrase – *the substance is of Christ* – that phrase is used four times in the Bible. In all the other three places, it’s translated *the body of Christ*. It talks about, in one case, the church, which is the body of Christ. That’s the same phrase. And it talks about the body of Christ – His

body that hung on the cross. And so, if you read it in the King James, I believe it says, *...but the body is of Christ.* And you'll notice that the *is* is in italics. So it means, *the body of Christ.*

So how do we make sense of that then? Well, you'll notice these two verses are one sentence. And you'll notice that "which are a shadow of things to come" is parenthetical. So, if we took that out for minute to see what this means, it says, "Let nobody judge you – and we'll just say – in the things you do as a Christian, but the body of Christ." Who should be telling you how to live your life? Your neighbors that drink swine's blood at the altar? Or the church? I think that's a much more honest way to translate that.

But what I really wanted to focus on here is that parenthetical phrase that we left out, where he says, "The sabbaths and festivals are shadows of things to come" – not things that have already been done, but things to come. That's interesting, isn't it? Why would you jettison something that hasn't happened yet in the analogy? So this scripture also tells us that Gentiles are observing the holy days and catching heat for it from their Gentile neighbors.

What events do these things foreshadow? Well, the Passover foreshadowed Christ's death. We know that. It teaches us about the significance of His death for each of us. That's been twisted to where people take wine and a wafer every whenever. But that isn't what Jesus said to do. He tells us clearly that we're to do this. He told his disciples to take those symbols in remembrance of Him as He did it, which was on Passover – which happens once a year.

The next one that comes along is the Days of Unleavened Bread. Paul said that we should keep this feast with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. So, there's a new meaning added to it. It's a week where we're to consider what it means to walk the walk and to live a sin-free life in Jesus Christ – foreshadows the grace of Jesus Christ.

Pentecost. Well, that's when the church was founded, wasn't it? Christ sent the Holy Spirit on that day. So Pentecost is obviously about the place of the church in God's plan for our salvation. Well, now all of those things hadn't happened – well, I guess they had when Paul preached, but the progression continues, doesn't it?

What about the Feast of Trumpets, which is the next one? Well, this festival, in ancient Israel, fell on the first day of the seventh month on the sacred calendar. And the first day of every month was called the new moon. And they celebrated that by blowing a trumpet in a ceremony to mark the beginning of each lunar month. The Feast of Trumpets, back in those days, was the seventh trumpet of the year. What happens in the New Testament when the seventh trumpet is blown? The symbolism is unmistakable. That's connected with Christ's return and the saints being resurrected to eternal life.

Now in Hebrews, there's no such allegory that's needed. Paul just straight out explains the New Testament meaning of the Day of Atonement. He recalls how in ancient Israel the priest went into Holy of Holies once a year with blood to atone for the sins of the

people so they could remain in relationship with God. In the New Testament sequence of prophetic events, this happens almost immediately after Christ returns – He sets up His Kingdom. So Paul was telling us that that ancient ceremony that the Jews kept actually pictured what Jesus is doing for us today. So, there, right out of the great apostle’s mouth, is the significance of that day for Christians.

The sixth one is the Feast of Tabernacles. It’s a seven day festival. After Christ returns, we learn in Revelation that Satan is going to be put away for the first time since the Garden of Eden. And people will have a chance to be at one with God without interference. The scripture tells us in Revelation 20 that, after Christ returns, He’s going to reign on the earth for a thousand years. And during that time, all who have never heard of Jesus Christ, nor had a fair chance to commit to Him, are going to be resurrected to judgment.

I heard somebody say once that they knew God was fair, but they just didn’t know how. Well, if we keep these days, we learn how He’s going to be fair to all those people that never heard the name of Jesus Christ. They’re not going to go to hell. They’re going to have a chance. It’s right there.

And then there is one additional festival – the last day that occurs immediately after the Feast of Tabernacles. That’s a holy day. And it tells us that it’s a separate festival. God always saves the best for last. So the last holy day, logically, would be about the last part of the plan. Revelation 21 shows us what’s going to happen last. It’s really interesting how it all fits together.

Now, did you know – this is very important for us – did you know that you can keep these days and still miss the point if you don’t keep them for the right reason. Keeping these days does not save us. Jesus Christ does. The holy days are not an instrument of salvation. Jesus Christ is the one who saves us. We had some sermons about this early on in this series, didn’t we? *Christ Is For Salvation, and the Law Is For Blessings*. If we keep the Sabbath and holy days, which are a part of the Law to be saved, then it just becomes a restriction that we have to comply with. But if you keep it to be close to God, and to be blessed with knowledge about what God is going to do with you – about your purpose that God intends for you, about your destiny with God – then it’s a whole different thing.

Part of our confusion about this issue is that we have never used the Biblical language to talk about what God is doing with it. We have never distinguished between salvation and sanctification. Christ is for salvation, and the Law is for blessings – the greatest of which is to be close to God, and part of which is to become like Him – that is sanctified, or made holy. So the Law of God is an instrument, not of salvation, but of sanctification. We’re saved by Jesus Christ, and we’re made godly by observance of the Law of God. For us Christians, that happens by the impetus of the Holy Spirit. God is One who sanctifies us. Specifically, the observance of the fourth commandment is what we’re focusing on.

There are so many people in the Sabbatarian tradition who are so weak. I heard someone that I'm close to say that they were going to stop observing the holy days because they were not essential for salvation. Children, children. Where has the ability to reason gone? That's like saying, "It's okay to murder people because the Law doesn't save us." It doesn't mean that we're free to kill people because the Law doesn't save us. When we talk that way we've forgotten all about our responsibility to walk worthy of what Christ has done for us. And we've forgotten about hungering and thirsting for righteousness. And in the case of the holy days, how important is it to remain focused on what God is doing to us – with us? If we think that way, we're keeping the Law for the wrong reason.

Let's go to Matthew 20, verse 17. We read this in our Bible study from Mark.

Mt. 20:17 – *Now Jesus going up to Jerusalem took the twelve disciples aside on the road, and said to them, "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes. And they will condemn Him to death, and they will deliver Him to the Gentiles to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify, and the third day He will rise again."* Whew!! Right over their heads. Didn't get it at all.

V-20 – *Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Him with her sons, kneeling down and asking something from Him. And He said to her, "What do you wish?" And she said to Him, "Grant that these two sons of mine may sit one on your right hand, and the other on your left in your kingdom."*

"Oh, we don't want much. We just want a complete advantage over all these other guys. We think we're better than they are. We don't mind politicking to get ourselves ahead."

V-22 – *And Jesus said, "You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I'm about to drink, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" And they said to Him, "We are able." And He said to them, "You will indeed drink my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with, but to sit on my right hand and on my left is not mine to give, but it is for those for whom it is prepared by My Father."*

What can we learn from this that pertains to the Sabbath? We hear all about the blessings of obeying God. And in some quarters we hear about a prosperity gospel that is preached. And we saw the early church fathers earlier in this presentation trying to make being a Christian easier by changing the day from Sabbath to Sunday. But the plain fact of the matter is, that being a Christian was never supposed to be easy. Being spiritually minded is the hardest thing for a human to accomplish. We can't accomplish it. There's only one way it can happen. And that's surrendering ourselves to Jesus Christ.

Rom. 12:1 – *I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God that you present your bodies a living sacrifice – holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.*

So that's what being a Christian is all about. And that's what being spiritually minded is about.

Let's go to Acts 4, verse 11.

Acts 4:11 – *This is the stone which was rejected by you builders, which is become the chief cornerstone. Nor is there salvation in any other. For there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved. It's the only way.*

That same Jesus Christ, through whom we have to go to receive salvation, created the Sabbath. He said He was Lord of the Sabbath in the New Testament. He inhabits the Sabbath. And the holy days bear His mark. Each one of them – every last one of them – bear His mark as well. And He tells us through Paul that there is great meaning for us in observing all of those days today, and that they are a part of the walk that we walk to walk worthy of Jesus Christ, and to become like Him. And through their observance He gives us spiritual insight about our destiny with Him. And through them He attunes us to His will.