

02-18 Sermon: Discerning the Senses and Union with Christ

Sermon Summary: Discerning the Senses

Date of Sermon: February 18, 2026. Preached by Pastor Greg Henry.

Introduction: Responding to a World in Turmoil

The discussion begins with the common human experience of being pressed in upon by the world and our senses becoming overwhelmed. The initial advice given is not to look inward to our own strength or outward to the world for a solution, but to look to the Father. As we mature in our faith, this response becomes more natural and automatic. Instead of getting tangled in worry about our circumstances or feelings, we are encouraged to give our burdens to the Lord, who carries them for us.

The Challenge of Physical Senses vs. Abstract Truth

A key challenge is addressed: How can a spiritual truth comfort us when we are experiencing a physical, sensory problem?

- Our senses are physical and experiential. They feel things tangibly.
- A truth statement, while grounded in reality, can feel like an abstract thought when we are in sensory distress.
- This can create a disconnect where we hear true words but don't "feel" their help in our senses, which are currently causing us distress.

Understanding the Role of Our Senses

To bridge this gap, it's essential to understand the intended function of our senses.

- **Senses are Data Collectors:** Our senses are designed to have experiences and collect data from those experiences, developing an "experiential knowledge." They are constantly talking to us, telling us what they are experiencing. The fact that they are "talking" means they are working correctly.
- **Senses are Not Interpreters:** The crucial mistake we make is allowing our senses to *interpret* the information they gather. Their job is to report the data, not to tell us what it means or what to do about it.

- **The Double Whammy of the Fall:** After the fall of Adam, humanity experienced a twofold problem:
 - i. Our senses could now experience negative things like pain, need, and lack for the first time.
 - ii. We gained the “knowledge of good and evil” as the framework (the wisdom) through which we interpret the information from our senses. This combination is a “double whammy” that leads us astray. We now look to the world to meet the needs our senses are screaming about.

What Are Our Senses Groaning For?

When our senses feel bad—when they are groaning—they are communicating a need. The key is to discern what that need truly is.

- The world tempts us to believe the groaning is about a specific external problem (Person X, Situation Y) that we need to fix, get, or change.
- However, our senses were originally given to us so we could “feel after” God, the source of all goodness, and find Him. They are meant to lead us to an experiential knowledge of God as our source.
- Though corrupted by the fall, the fundamental purpose of our senses remains the same. They are groaning and telling you that you need something. What you truly need is God.

A Biblical Framework for Our Groaning: 2 Corinthians 5

The Apostle Paul provides the correct interpretation for the groaning of our senses. Christ, who is the embodiment of all wisdom and knowledge, gives us the lens to understand our experience.

- **Scripture:** 2 Corinthians 5:1-4
- **Context:** Paul discusses our earthly bodies (“tabernacle”) and the longing we have for our heavenly dwelling.
- **Key Verses & Application:**
 - *“For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven...” (v. 2)*
 - *“For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened; not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life.” (v. 4)*
- **Interpretation:** Our senses are not groaning for a better circumstance or for a problem to be fixed. They are groaning for **mortality to be swallowed up by**

life. They long to be “clothed upon,” not left “naked” or empty.

The Ultimate Object of Our Longing: The Resurrected Christ

The clearest picture of what our senses long for is the resurrected God-Man, Jesus Christ.

- **Who God Is:** God is the one who demonstrated the ultimate purpose of humanity in the resurrection of Jesus. In Christ, mortality was swallowed up by life; His humanity was fully united with and overlaid by His divinity.
- **Who I Am & How I Am to Live:**
 - i. **I am made for deification:** My humanity was created for more than just this earthly, mortal existence. It was made for *theosis*—for divine communion with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. My senses are longing for my humanity to be crowned in divinity.
 - ii. **I must reorient my focus:** Knowing this truth immediately takes my eyes off the external chaos and the temptation to react in fear, lack, or desperation. It prevents the thought, “What am I going to do about that?” from dominating my response.
 - iii. **I am to go to the Mercy Seat:** Theologically, the proper response to this sensory groaning is to go to the “mercy seat”—the place where we meet with God. This isn’t just a physical location but a spiritual reality. At the mercy seat, we behold the God-man, Jesus Christ, and see in Him the fulfillment of our own humanity’s deepest longing.

Our Humanity Seen in Christ

To understand our own humanity, we must look to Jesus Christ. We see our humanity reflected in Him, but with a crucial difference.

- **Our Humanity in Him is Deified:** In Jesus, we see humanity that has been “deified”—overlaid and perfected by His divine nature. Our senses are constantly longing for something more, for divinity, for our mortality to be “swallowed up in life.” When we approach God, we see Jesus, the God-Man. We see His pierced hands, confirming His true humanity—He bled, He suffered, He was beset with weakness just as we are.
- **The Ministry of His Divinity:** In the same moment we see His humanity, we see His divinity overlaying it. This sight ministers directly to our senses, satisfying the deep longing we have for God. This is the “ministry of grace”—His divinity ministering to our humanity. This was made possible because He became a man, and now as a divine Man, He is full of grace for us.

Coming to the Throne of Grace

The pastor connects this experience to the “throne of grace” or the “mercy seat.”

- **Scripture: Hebrews 4:16** - “Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”
- **Context & Application:** Our “time of need” is often when our senses are sounding an alarm, overwhelmed by life’s situations. The help we need is found at the throne of grace, where we encounter the God-Man, Jesus. We find His deified humanity, and in seeing our own humanity in Him, we receive a “river of ministry” of His divine grace. This satisfies our senses, and often, the situation causing the distress fades in importance because the root need within us has been met.

The Wisdom of the Cross and the Power of the Resurrection

- The wisdom full of power to glorify or “deify” our humanity is found at the cross. The faith is revealed at the cross.
- The resurrection of Jesus is the evidence that this faith is full of power. As the Apostle Paul argues in **1 Corinthians 15**, if Christ was not raised, our faith is in vain. We believe in Him *because* He was raised from the dead, demonstrating that only God can conquer death.
- This powerful faith, at its core, is the communion of the Father, Son, and Spirit. The resurrection is the proof that this communion has the power to raise the dead. Jesus didn’t just offer nice words; He demonstrated the way to life.

The Full Message of the Cross

The sermon concludes by correcting a deficient understanding of the gospel.

- **A Deficiency in Teaching:** We have often been taught a limited view of the cross, seeing it only as a place of punishment for our sins. This strips out its true power and meaning.
- **The Complete Message:** We must not separate the cross from the resurrection and glorification. When Paul preached “Christ and Him crucified” (**1 Corinthians 2:2**), he was speaking of the entire event: His crucifixion, death, resurrection, and glorification. The cross declares the faith that has the power to deify our humanity, revealing that in the union of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, death itself is overcome.

Introduction: From Abstraction to Tangible Reality

The pastor addresses a common struggle: the feeling that concepts like “having all things in Christ” can feel abstract and intangible, especially when our feelings contradict this truth.

- **The Problem of Abstraction:** When our feelings overwhelm us, spiritual truths can feel like mere thoughts rather than a reality we can grasp. This can lead to a frustrating cycle of trying to “feel” or “believe” our way into a truth we don’t experience.
- **The Solution in Christ:** The abstraction is resolved in the incarnation: “the Word was made flesh.” God became tangible in Jesus.
- **The Role of the Holy Spirit:** The Holy Spirit was given to guide us not into an abstract idea, but into a real, tangible connection and communion with the person of Jesus Christ, who has a body right now. If this connection feels abstract, we should ask the Holy Spirit to intercede and make the reality of our union with Christ tangible to both our soul and body.

Partakers of the Divine Nature: The Protocol for When Life is Hard

Hell can go on longer than it needs to when we fail to discern what is happening and what the solution is. We need a pre-established protocol for when our senses are overwhelmed.

- **The Protocol is Not Invented in Crisis:** A protocol is not something you invent in a crisis; it is something you have *before* the crisis begins. It should already be with you.
- **Example: Jesus’s Protocol:** Jesus Himself, when He took on human flesh, had a protocol. When He needed something, He went to commune with the Father. After fasting for 40 days, Jesus’s senses told Him He needed bread. He correctly interpreted this feeling: “Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.” He recognized His deepest need was not physical food, but the Father.
- **Scripture:** **2 Peter 1:2-4**

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“Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.”

- **Application - The Protocol:** When difficulties and anxiety come, the protocol is to call on the reality that we already possess everything we need for life and godliness through His divine nature within us. His divine power is *already in us* and has *already given us* everything we need for life and godliness. We lack nothing. This is about surrendering to our reality in Him.

- **A Simple Prayer:** A simple, yet profound prayer can be: “Have mercy on my humanity.” God understands this plea. He knows our humanity feels afflicted, and what it needs is His divinity. He became a man to minister that very thing to us, making us whole and complete in Him.

Tangible Practices for Remembering Our Union

While the encounter is spiritual, physical acts can sometimes help ground us when our senses feel overwhelmed.

- **Example: Taking Communion:** The pastor suggests that actions like taking communion can be helpful, but with a critical warning: do not make it a law or believe the power is in the physical act itself. The purpose is to aid in remembrance.
 - When taking communion, our focus should be on the mercy seat, on the God-Man, and on our union with Him. We should remember that even though we don’t yet see our glorified state, “as He is, so are we in this world” (1 John 4:17).
- **Exercising Our Senses to “Find God”:** Our senses long for goodness. Through intimacy with Christ, the *Logos* (the wisdom of God), we learn to interpret that longing correctly.
 - **Jesus Appeals to Our Senses:** Christ is not an abstraction. He said, “Touch me and see” (Luke 24:39). He was made flesh to appeal to our senses and show us what we were made for.
 - **The Holy Spirit as Guide:** If this feels too abstract, we can ask the Holy Spirit to help us “touch and handle and see the Lord’s body,” to guide us into tangible communion with Jesus.

A Way of Life: Eternal Communion

This “protocol” is meant to be more than a crisis response; it is a way of life. Christianity is a way of life, and that way is the communion between the Father, Son, and Spirit.

- **Scripture:** Revelation 22:1
 - “And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb.”
- **Application:** This river of life flowing from the throne is the same reality spoken of in Hebrews 4:16 (“Come boldly to the throne of grace”). It illustrates the eternal nature of the communion of the Trinity. The Father eternally

communicates Himself to the Son, and the Son, having become a man, eternally communicates Himself to us. As we commune at the throne, we see this river—the divinity of the Father—washing over us.

- **The Well of Everlasting Life:**

- **Scripture:** **John 4:13-14** - Jesus speaks to the woman at the well: “Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.”
- **Application:** The Spirit He has given us is this well of life. It is an everlasting source within us that we can continually draw from to experience the abundant life God has promised. This is not an abstraction, because the Word was made flesh.

Enduring Temptation and Suffering: The Example of Jesus and Moses

Jesus Himself models how to navigate the signals from our senses.

- **Jesus in Gethsemane:** When facing the cross, His senses told Him that the cross was “not good” and getting away from it was “good.” To follow that impulse would be to live by the knowledge of good and evil.
- **Enduring for the Glory:** Instead, “for the joy [glory] set before him he endured the cross” (**Hebrews 12:2**). He interpreted the longing of His body not as a desire to escape pain, but as a longing for the eternal glory He shared with the Father. He did not try to comfort His own affliction through the material world.
- **Moses’ Example:** Moses also “saw him who is invisible” (**Hebrews 11:27**). He saw the Son of God, the image humanity was made to reflect. He saw the glory we were made for. This vision caused him to have “respect for the recompense of the reward” and to esteem the “reproach of Christ” as greater than all the riches of Egypt. The vision of Christ ministered to his senses, giving him the strength to endure hardship.

The Mind of Christ: Paul’s Example

A listener’s comment on the book of Philippians reinforces the sermon’s central theme.

- **Scripture:** **Philippians 2:5-8** - “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus,” who, being God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant.
- **Application:** Paul models this mind in **Philippians 3**, where he counts everything as loss “for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my

Lord...that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings.”

- **The Fellowship of Sufferings:** This means understanding that our senses cannot be satisfied by the material world. The riches of this world cannot deify our humanity.
- **The Power of the Resurrection:** Paul encountered the *glorified* Jesus on the road to Damascus. He saw the man who was nailed to a pole now glorified, and this revelation unpacked for him the path to that glory: faith in Christ. Jesus, the wisdom of God, reveals both *what* we are longing for (deification) and the *way* to attain it (faith in Him).

Growing as a Human: Following the Pattern of Jesus

The knowledge of God comes to help us discern our life. We are to become like Jesus, who the pastor describes as the “first real human” after the fall.

- **Jesus’s Humanity:** Jesus grew in wisdom and stature (**Luke 2:52**), experiencing the full range of human feelings and encounters. As the *Logos* (the Word, the Reason), He discerned these things firsthand, making Him the “greatest lover in human history” (quoting Brennan Manning).
- **Our Application:** As we grow in our divine connection through Jesus, we also grow in our understanding of what it means to be human. This gives us favor with others because we can see past outward appearances to the brokenness and needs within their hearts and help them understand what their senses are truly longing for.

Understanding and Exercising Our Senses

The key to navigating our feelings and senses is to correctly interpret them through the knowledge of our union with God.

- **The Danger of Misplaced Sourcing:** The fall introduced evil and *need*, changing how we reason. The danger is seeking *life* from created things instead of God.
 - **Example: Social Anxiety and Alcohol.** A person with social anxiety might feel good after a drink and wrongly conclude that the alcohol is the *source* of the goodness. This leads them to seek life from alcohol instead of God, who is the true source of all goodness.
- **Connecting All Feelings to God:**
 - When we feel **good**, we enjoy it while remembering that God is the ultimate source.

- When we feel **bad** or a sense of lack, we recognize it as a signal of our deep need for God.
- **The Intercession of the Spirit and the Example of David:**
 - The Holy Spirit within us doesn't just point out evil; He intercedes by telling us what our senses truly long for: God the Father and communion with Him.
 - David, even after his sin with Bathsheba (**2 Samuel 12**), knew he was not separated from God and communed with Him. He understood his relationship was based on God's character, not his own performance.

Conclusion: Responding to a Hurting World

Understanding this truth equips us to minister to others.

- **The World's Misunderstanding:** Many people are angry at God because they believe He is the source of their pain. This wrong belief drives their senses "crazy" and sends them looking for life apart from the only One who has it.
- **The Power of the Cross:** The message of the cross exercises the senses of a hurting person. We can explain that God didn't *take* their loved one; rather, God became a man (Jesus) to enter our world, confront death, and conquer it, so that our loved ones could be "plucked out of death." This truth has the power to do a work in a person's heart.