

# Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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## A Biblical look at some of today's ideas: Spirituality

Most dictionary definitions of the word "spiritual" suggest that it's an adjective which relates to or affects the human spirit or soul as opposed to material or physical things. Often, it is linked to areas like religion, emotions, self-realisation, esteem and dignity. But the word has a far greater meaning in Biblical terms. While it picks up on the original concept presented, that is, it relates to the human spirit in contrast to natural or tangible things, it also describes things that have their source in God Himself. We read in John 4:24 "God is a spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." The first use of the word is as a noun, namely, "God is **a spirit**." God is immaterial, immortal and invisible in His being. He is also eternal. We know from other scriptures that He is all-powerful, all-knowing, unchanging and omnipresent. Furthermore, He has a loving and holy nature. He is unique!

The second use of the word "spirit" shows us the manner in which God is to be worshipped. It is worship from sincere hearts which requires no special place, no special relics and no special artefacts. However, this worship is to be in accordance to the revealed truth about God and His works. We can then leap to Philippians 3:3 where we read in Young's Literal Translation: "For we are the circumcision, who by the Spirit are serving God, and glorying in Christ Jesus, and in flesh having no trust..." Here we can see that we serve God by His Spirit - the Holy Spirit. So when we worship God, we do so in spirit (that is, our human spirits), in truth and by the prompting and power of the Holy Spirit Himself. Teaching about worship today, even in Christian circles, is confused to say the least. In order to worship God, we need to be before Him and addressing Him personally.

Just as the Godhead includes three Persons, namely, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, so we are tripartite beings. The Apostle Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians 5:23: "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." So each human being is made up of spirit, soul and body. The spirit is the highest part of our being. It is that part of us which particularly responds to God. It is to be distinguished from the spirit of an animal in that, at death, the spirit of an animal goes into the ground; but the spirit of a human goes to God (compare Ecclesiastes 3:21 and Ecclesiastes 12:7).

We have already quoted the words "in flesh having no trust". The "flesh" in this context speaks of our fallen nature. It is a nature that rebels against God because it is sinful. So, in simple terms, when we speak of the "natural" man, we are speaking about a person who is controlled by a sinful nature. Such a person does not, of himself, have the ability to understand the things of God. This is stated in 1 Corinthians 2:13-14 where we find the Apostle Paul speaking of the inspired word of God in this way: "Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." If a person is to understand the things of God, then he has to turn to God Himself for spiritual understanding. This requires faith. This is a faith that believes that God not only exists, but "is the rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6).

If we wish to listen to a specific radio programme, we have to tune in to the right radio frequency. If we wish to understand the things of God, then we must first "tune in" to the mind and will of this Perfect Being through the frequency of faith. Jesus said, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot **see** the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). Again, He said, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot **enter** into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John 3:5-6).

It is by the action of God's Spirit and His word that a person is born again. This is a spiritual birth that makes a sinner a child of God. It is a work of God that results in the generation of faith within the heart. As the scripture says: "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17) It is at this point of trusting in the living God that a person receives a new nature. It is a nature that responds positively to God. It is a nature that has spiritual understanding.

The thought is extended in John 1:10-13 where the Apostle, thinking of Jesus, writes: "He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name:

**which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”** So this spiritual birth is not by human descent, human desire or human design. It is “of God”. The Apostle John follows this up in his first epistle where he uses the phrase “born of God” several times. Those born of God have a new nature that cannot sin (1 John 3:9). It is a nature of love (1 John 4:7). It believes that Jesus is the Christ (1 John 5:1). It delights in righteousness (1 John 2:29). It is marked by a faith that overcomes the world (1 John 5:4).

In Ephesians 1:13-14, the Apostle Paul gives a summary of the conversion of the Ephesian believers: “In whom [Christ] ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.”

In like manner, all true Christians have:

- Heard the word of truth;
- Believed it;
- Trusted in Christ; and
- Been sealed with the Holy Spirit.

It is in this way that a person is empowered to be “spiritual”.

It is clear from 1 Corinthians 3:1-3 that there are degrees of spirituality. Paul reprimands the Corinthian believers, saying, “And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?”

Here we find several things of interest. Firstly, the new (spiritual) nature is at odds with the carnal (or sinful) nature in these believers. A battle rages within them and the sinful nature is dominant. This shows that Christians have to fight hard in order to be spiritual. The old nature will seek to dominate the new and prevent things like prayerful devotion. How important it is to set aside time for sustained prayer. How shall we really know the will of God without fellowship with Him?

Secondly, there is a growth in the understanding of God which comes through the regular study of His word. The Corinthians were so full of themselves and their own gifts that they had not given due attention to the truth of God. If television programmes like *Songs of Praise* are anything to go by, it is clear that a good number of those interviewed have ideas which are not supported by Scripture. They may well have trusted in Christ for salvation (for which we are thankful); but their growth in the faith is stunted. They remain babes in Christ and may quickly be overtaken by bad teaching because they are not grounded in the Scriptures. Furthermore, those who have a limited knowledge in the things of God can only digest the most basic teachings of Christianity.

Thirdly, if prayer and the study of the Bible are set aside, then place will be given to envy, strife and divisions which, in turn, destroy Christian unity and witness. Again, we live in a country today that is marked by professing or pretend Christians who have a form of godliness, but deny its power. True Christians (whether babes or not) are to avoid these people who bring shame on the name of Christ by their inconsistent conduct (2 Timothy 3:5).

Not only is a spiritual Christian devout and steeped in the word of God, but he is very aware of his own weaknesses. In Galatians 6:1 we find: “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.” Here we find someone who has fallen into a sin of some kind. The one who restores him is to do so humbly, recognising that he himself is also susceptible to sin. The fact that he was sent to restore one who has fallen into sin shows that he was respected and possessed God-given wisdom. The characteristics of this wisdom are found in James 3:17-18: “But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.” These attributes must characterise a spiritual person.

So, what is wisdom?

- Wisdom is the ability to apply knowledge in the best way possible for good. This wisdom has its source in the Father of lights. He is the One who gives “good” gifts.
- Wisdom is “pure”. That simply means, it is “clean”. It is undefiled.
- It is then described as “peaceable”. This shows that wisdom always desires peace and tries its utmost to maintain it.

- It is "gentle". Here, the word "gentle" means "mild". It does not give or take offence and acts in a tender manner.
- It is easily "intreated". This is more difficult to explain, but shows that wisdom is willing to "yield" to genuine appeals. It is approachable.
- The phrase "full of mercy" means it has abundant pity towards those in need.
- The "good fruits" (linked with the mercy) show the practical provision resulting from the pity. For example: aiding the poor; feeding the hungry; clothing the naked; visiting the widows and fatherless in their affliction; and doing all other kinds of good works to the glory of God.
- Then "without partiality" tells us it knows "no favouritism". In other words, it is righteous in its behaviour and judgments.
- The fact that it is "without hypocrisy" shows that it is "not two-faced". The Greeks used to use masks when play-acting. Wisdom shows itself as true to itself. It does not vary its opinions for the sake of the audience.

Of course, if you wish to see the most spiritual man who ever lived, then you have to look at the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God. In Him you find perfect spirituality. He is both the wisdom of God and the power of God. His body was the temple of the Holy Spirit, here on earth. All the fruit of the Spirit (see Galatians 5:22-23) was seen in Him, namely, love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance. Let's look at these in more detail.

1. Divine "love" always seeks the best for the good of its object.
2. "Joy" is the deep delight in God's Person and ways. It's often expressed in prayer and in praise. Joy is infectious, extending to others.
3. "Peace" is sweet harmony with men and with God. It's shown in a life of tranquility and trust while here.
4. "Longsuffering" shows patient endurance, especially in trying circumstances.
5. "Gentleness" is here "kindness".
6. "Goodness" would speak of a moral excellence which will freely benefit others.
7. "Faith" shows a spiritual conviction and dependence upon God.
8. "Meekness" shows a humble or lowly spirit.
9. "Temperance" speaks of self-control or self-discipline. All these were perfectly seen in Christ; yet, if we are walking in the Spirit, they will be seen in us too. After all, God's Spirit is moulding us into the likeness of Jesus.

Returning to the internal warfare between the spiritual and the carnal in the Christian, we find that even the Apostle Paul had a similar problem. He writes in Romans 7:19-20: "For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me." The Apostle finds himself failing as a Christian. There is that within him which was judged at the cross but still influences his behaviour. However, he states that because it is his desire to do what is right, then it is that alien of sin within him that drives him to do what is wrong. As Christians, we must recognise the power of this sin. The new nature ("I" in the verses) hates sin; but is so often overwhelmed by it. So much so, that a believer might even question whether he has the new nature or not. Hence, the need to wear the helmet of salvation (see Ephesians 6:17).

Paul continues in Romans 7:22-25: "For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin." Here, there are two laws or powers at work in the Christian, the one generated by sin and the other by God. Paul serves God with his mind. His will and intellect are centred in God. However, the wrong things he finds himself doing are so often generated by sin that remains within him. The Apostle cannot help himself in this matter, hence he cries "Who shall deliver me?" He needs someone else to lift from him "the body of this death". Christ has set the ground of this deliverance at the cross where His soul was made an offering for sin. In regard to our state before God, we have been cleansed once and for all from our sin. In daily practice, deliverance is gained from specific sins by committing them to the Lord completely - acknowledging that we, ourselves, are powerless to overcome them. In the future, we will have powerful and spiritual bodies which are not afflicted by sin at all. This is the full and complete deliverance.

Again, we find the following exhortation in Galatians 5:16: "This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would." The verses after these identify the works of the flesh. They include: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like. Sin reigns! Those who practise these things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. The spiritual person will do the opposite of these. When this is the case, then righteousness reigns and God is glorified.

The natural and the spiritual are, to some extent, contrasted in the book of Ecclesiastes. Arguing from the point of view of a natural man, Solomon concluded that all was vanity: "Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher; all is vanity" (Ecclesiastes 12:8). He, personally, had sought knowledge in science; experienced his heart's desires; seen the sorrow and grief of continuous toil with little benefit; observed foolishness preferred over wisdom; realised the fruitlessness of philosophy; experienced the emptiness of pleasure, mirth and lust which brought no lasting satisfaction; noted how death came upon all, regardless of station; saw the wicked prosper; and appreciated that those who loved wealth never truly benefitted from it. The whole book shows that a life without God is pointless.

However, in Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 we find these words: "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil." In the old Authorised Version the phrase "the whole duty of man" has the word "duty" in italics which means it is inserted. The phrase should read "the whole of man". A person who fears God and obeys His commandments is one who is "whole". He has a full and meaningful life here and his next life will be glorious; on the other hand, he who persists in his own will and ways here faces eternal ruin in his life to come.

There are several other things in the Bible that are said to be "spiritual". A number of these will be dealt with in future talks, if the Lord will.

In summary, the spiritual man is one who has been born again and walks in the power of the Holy Spirit. The ceiling of spirituality is seen in the example of Christ Himself. The more we grow to be like Him, the more spiritual we will become.

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