***False Ideas about Spirituality

RV68-02***

We continue with the study of the letter to the church in the city of Laodicea. This is segment number 21. This letter is recorded for us in Revelation 3:14-22. We are looking at verse 18, where the Lord Jesus Christ is advising the people of this congregation as to how they may correct some very serious spiritual problems that exist among them. One of the things was that they were blind spiritually. They did not think they were blind. They thought they could see. The great mass of mankind today is, as a matter of fact, aimlessly wandering about, trying to make sense out of a meaningless existence. Most people are involved with Satan's various systems of religion, but they are finding no peace or satisfaction in those systems. They follow their human viewpoint best judgments, only to find themselves frustrated and hurt in their various social relationships. Therefore, people are bewildered, and they are bewildered because they have no one to lead them into the great realities of God's revealed Word, the Bible. The condition that existed of spiritual blindness in Laodicea is a condition that is characteristic of society as a whole.

**Laborers are Needed**

The Lord Jesus Christ had great compassion as He looked out upon such masses of disoriented people which surrounded Him. We have that very tender declaration on His part in Matthew 19:36-38 that many spiritual Christians have also experienced since: "But when He saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they were faint, and were scattered abroad as sheep having no shepherd. Then He said unto his disciples, 'The harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few. Therefore, pray to the Lord of the harvest, that He will send for laborers into His harvest.'"

Sheep always need a shepherd. Sheep need a shepherd to give them leadership which brings them into green pastures. They don't muddle and wander their way into green pastures on their own. The need of people today is spiritual leadership. This need is enormous – leadership which will lead them into spiritual green pastures. What divine viewpoint American society has possessed in the past has been dissipated, by and large, today through the widespread rejection of the authority of the Bible itself. Many spiritually ignorant people want to know, but there are so few who are able and willing to inform them. There are so few laborers out there among the masses of humanity to act as shepherds to lead the sheep.

The laborers that are needed today are spiritual believers who have eyes to see where the sheep need to be led. They did not have this in Laodicea, and they were blind leading the blind. Often, even believers have a deep awareness of the need for spiritual food, and the fact that they are not receiving it. They have little satisfaction in the various church programs in which they are engaged.

I had an interesting conversation yesterday with a man who is a pastor's son. He is well into middle age. He was in association in business with one of our church members, and he came into contact with Berean tapes. This man told me that for 15 years, he has been wandering around, disgusted with what he sees and what he hears every time he goes to a church service – a service in a church which supposedly is based upon the Word of God. He said, "The result is that I just end up not going and not participating." But he said, "I didn't listen to that Berean tape for ten minutes before I knew that this was the reality I was looking for." This was ten minutes into a tape that just explained a little bit about the Bible in such a way that he could relate to it.

One of the sad things that he said was: "God gave me a valuable patent, and it made me a man of considerable wealth. It made a lot of money, and I squandered it all." Just think of what he said. He spent 15 years wandering around. Can you imagine what an enormous amount of lost reward there is to this man because he could not find somebody to lead him into the green pastures of the Word of God? Can you imagine the eternal loss to him? He was a man that had vast material resources that could accomplish great things in the Lord's work, only to dissipate it, and run it down a rat hole to nothing. This is one of the sad things that we're all going to experience out in eternity. We might as well not kid ourselves about it. I guarantee you that you're going to go out there with your memory. While no one is going to parade your sins and your human good evils out in public in heaven, your memory is going to go back to what might have been. You will, like this man, have things then in perspective. There will be cause for some sadness to realize that 15 years could have been invested in such a tremendous way, if someone had been pouring doctrine into his soul, and he was developing the capacity for the Lord to lead him and to bless him. If only he had been able to invest his material possessions such that when he checks out of his life, he took it with him.

That's the thing that the Lord had in mind here in this passage in Matthew. He was looking out upon people, and His heart was going out to them because there was no one who was able to help them. Indeed, you and I have often had that very same experience. We run into somebody, and we look at this person, and this person just reflects some very valuable qualities. Our heart goes out to them because they are wandering in spiritual ignorance and spiritual darkness. You want to reach out to help them. But only the spiritual believer can do that. Only the believer who has his eyes anointed with the quality of spirituality, which they did not in Laodicea, is going to be able to see things in such a way as to be able to reach out and help these people that the Lord lays upon our hearts. These wandering sheep are looking for something real, and just waiting for somebody to come along and lead them into God's good green pastures.

Indeed, we should follow the admonition that the Lord gives us here in this passage in Matthew. We should pray that more believers would be raised up, who are trained in Bible doctrine truth, so that they can act as laborers in the field to lead the sheep out of their darkness. Before that can happen, you need to pray that more preachers are going to get things together, and get their head screwed on straight, so that they understand what their calling is, so that people with capacity and potential do not waste their lives, but are prepared to be able to act as laborers, and are prepared to be able to act as shepherds. And every one of you has that capacity.

I remind you again that there is no one here who does not have the capacity to be a shepherd; to be a leader; and, to be a laborer. If you're not, it is to your discredit. It is because you have not risen to that which is your calling. The Word of God reveals exclusive, non-optional ways which are the ways of God. God's ways are exclusive. They are non-optional, and you cannot exempt yourself from them. But only spiritual Christians can see these things. It takes a spiritual Christian, for example, to see that there are not various ways to go to heaven. How to be saved is exclusive in the Scripture. There is one exclusive way, and there are no options to that way.

**Salvation**

Only a spiritual Christian can see that there is only one way you're going to make it. Only a spiritual Christian then can stand up and say, "Any system that includes human works is doomed, and is sending people to hell." And you're not going to think that you're some crazy religious bigot because you say that a system like Roman Catholicism, which is based on human works, is taking millions of people into hell. That's the only place it could take them. And you're not going to feel intimidated that you're some kind of spiritual bigot because you say that since Mormonism teaches salvation by works, it can take those moral people no place else but to hell. The same thing is true for all the rest of the cults. You will not hesitate to spot these systems that men have produced. The religions of the world based on human ability are all doomed.

The only way you know that is because you've got eyes that have the eye salve of spirituality on them. Therefore, you can see that there's only one way to go to heaven, and there are no options. This is even true for such biblical groups as the Church of Christ, for example. Let's face it. When they tell you that you cannot go to heaven without water baptism, they have interjected a human work. Can you imagine the shock that those people are going to experience when they find themselves out in eternity, screaming in the agonies of the lake of fire? They were thinking that they were going to heaven. Count yourself fortunate that somebody was raised up by the grace of God to lead you into the green pastures of the realization that salvation is not optional in the Word of God.

**Economic Systems**

The Bible makes it clear that there are not various economic systems under which a nation can prosper. There's only one system that the Bible lays out, and says that if a nation functions under this system, you will prosper. If you violate this system, you will regret it, and you will not prosper. The Bible is very clear that any system of socialism will cause a nation to degenerate. Only a system of freedom in economic matters will cause a nation to prosper. The Bible doesn't say: "Take one or the other; try to make them; and, work it out the best you can." The Bible never indicates that whatever your culture happens to be is the kind of a system you will function under. That's not true. There is only one system in the Bible – only one system of economics for a nation, and that is free enterprise capitalism and private ownership, and the Bible is very clear about that.

**The Origins of Life**

Only a Christian who has spiritual eyes will realize that the Bible does not give a variety of explanations for the origins of life. The origin of life is very specific. It's an exclusive declaration. There are no options as to where we all came from.

**Sex**

There are no exceptions in the Bible for the exercise of sex except within marriage. There are no alternate lifestyles. The Christian who has spiritual eyes knows that that fits only into a certain category, and no place else. Any time you exercise it outside of that category of marriage, you have come to cross purposes with the way God has designed his universe. And sooner or later, there will be grief for it.

**Marriage and Family**

There are no variations of lines of authority within marriage and within the family. The Bible makes that clear. There is no uncertainty as to who is in authority in the home. There's no uncertainty as to what the relationship of children is to their parents, and to other authorities that represent their parents outside of the home.

**Morality**

There are no exceptions to the moral code of the Bible. The Bible is very clear about that. These codes of morality that are laid out are the way it has to be.

**History**

There is not a variety of possible climaxes to the history of mankind. It was interesting recently to hear Dr. Walvoord of Dallas Seminary in a little brief interview on television, concerning the significance of current developments in the Middle East and other parts of the world, relative to Bible prophecy. It was interesting to listen to him specifically lay out where the Bible says what the world is headed for – the great catastrophic war that is ahead for all humanity, following the removal of the church from the earth, and that the end of the world is a destructive end.

Then they went over to the enlightened area of Perkins Theological Seminary at SMU, and they had a professor there, and they put him on. I wish you had seen that. It was pathetic. He said, "You know, I don't say that the world cannot get into a lot of trouble." Well, it didn't take too much insight to know that. Even I know that. And he said that things could get worse. Even I know that. But he said, "I'm optimistic. I think we have the capacity to move ahead." Then he went on with all that liberal guff. And I just wanted to get my can of eye ointment, and reach out and put it on the television before his face flickered off. That's like the charismatics do when they bless the glass of water for you to drink in order to get healed. Anyway, this was a poor pathetic guy. It was sad. They couldn't have contrasted it more – night and day, by putting those two men up against one another, one after another. Only the Christian with spiritual eyes knows where history is going, and knows the significance of what's happening in our day.

**Spiritual Maturity**

There are not alternate ways of developing spiritual maturity in one's soul. The preachers are wrong, by and large. There are not many ways to develop spiritual maturity in your soul. It only comes through the storing of doctrine in the human spirit, and nothing else is going to do it.

**Spirituality**

There are not many ways of becoming a spiritual Christian with divine viewpoint insights. There is only one way of becoming a spiritual Christian. That is to get your life under the control of God the Holy Spirit.

In the church at Laodicea, these Christians were blind to spiritual realities, but they thought that they were an enlightened, sophisticated, intellectual elite. The Lord said, "You're blind, and you need to get your eyes open." So, the Lord Jesus tells them to buy from Him the meditation of spirituality which will enable them to see divine viewpoint truth. Spirituality is the status in which a Christian is under the control of the indwelling Holy Spirit, and thus he is in temporal fellowship with God the Father. Spirituality is not an experience which some people can achieve to a greater degree than others. *There are no degrees of spirituality, and there are no spiritual giants.* There is no one who is more spiritual than anyone else. It's a status. You're either it, or you're not it.

**The Three Factors of Spirituality**

Nor is it a stimulating, emotional feeling expressed in some ecstatic manner. It is not an imitation of the lifestyle of some effective Christian that you may know. Spirituality is a state of being filled and controlled by God the Holy Spirit. It is a product of three basic factors. We have looked at these in detail. These factors are as follows: Number one is, "Quench not the Holy Spirit" (1 Thessalonians 5:19). This means saying, "No" to the Holy Spirit's leadership, and producing human good works instead of divine good works. Number two is, "Grieve not the Holy Spirit" (Ephesians 4:30). This refers to willful acts of moral violations – sins. These two elements deal with what the Bible calls "evil." There is the evil of human good, and the evil of individual acts of sin. Then the third factor is a positive declaration: "Walk by means of the Holy Spirit" (Galatians 5:16). That means to live under the guidance of the indwelling Holy Spirit as He leads through doctrine which has been stored in the human spirit.

A Christian who is not controlled by the Holy Spirit is controlled by Satan through the old sin nature. A Christian who is controlled by the Holy Spirit is spiritual. One who is controlled by the old sin nature is carnal. Thus, at any point in your life, you are either a spiritual or a carnal Christian. You are not part of each. When the sin nature controls a Christian's life, he produces only sins and human good works. The unbeliever is always in this status. The believer is in this status when he is carnal – when he is out of fellowship. He produces sins and human good. Both are evil because both come from the sin nature. When the Holy Spirit controls the Christian's life, then that believer produces only obedience to the will of God and divine good works.

This is what 1 John 3:9 refers to: "Whoever is born of God does not commit sin, for his seed remains in him, and he cannot sin because he is born of God." *A Christian cannot sin when he is in the status of being under the control of God the Holy Spirit.* You cannot grasp what that means from the English. That's one verse where you have to read it in Greek to know what on earth it is saying. The Greek language immediately clarifies for you that what verse 9 says is that anybody who is born again cannot continue in evil as a way of life. He cannot sin as a habit. Habitually, he cannot live a life of sin and evil, because when a Christian sins, God the Holy Spirit comes through, and He starts convicting; He starts alerting; and, He starts ministering to us to get that correction. If you keep on, and if you go to the extreme extent with your sin (with willfulness in evil), then you open yourself up to the sin unto death where God takes your life (like He did, for example, with Saul in the Old Testament), and takes you to heaven.

No Christian, once he is born again, can live a sinful lifestyle and get away with it. What God the Holy Spirit wants to do is to produce the character of Christ in a Christian, and that's what He does. The Holy Spirit never leads us into sins or into human good works. The Holy Spirit does not, therefore, share control of our lives with Satan, who works through the sin nature. The Holy Spirit is absolute righteousness, and He does not deal with relative righteousness.

Spirituality is not the baptism of the Holy Spirit, nor is it the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, just to mention those as we go.

A Christian who is in eternal fellowship can never leave that circle of salvation. At the point of your trusting in Christ as Savior, you come into that outer circle of eternal fellowship. But you also come into an inner circle called temporal fellowship, where you're in touch with God in your daily life. That is the position of spirituality. Sin, as per, for example, 1 Corinthians 3:3, takes us out of that inner circle of spirituality. We have lost temporal fellowship. We have not lost eternal fellowship. Confession of sin, as per 1 John 1:9, brings you back into temporal fellowship, and takes you out of the area of carnality, and back into the area of spirituality. This is what we're talking about. This is eyes that can see. When you're out in carnality, you are blind. The longer you stay out here, the blinder you get to spiritual realities. When you are in the inner circle of temporal fellowship, this is where your eyes are open to spiritual realities.

There is a relationship between spirituality and spiritual growth. Out of spirituality comes spiritual maturity. Spiritual maturity is a matter of degrees. One Christian can be more spiritually mature than another Christian. You can say that when you talk about this. You can say that this person demonstrates more spiritual maturity than this person. But do not say that this person is more spiritual than this person. That is wrong. Spirituality is a status of being in fellowship with God the Holy Spirit. You either are, or you're not. Any level of spiritual maturity can be either carnal or spiritual. A baby Christian can be a spiritual Christian, or he can be a carnal Christian. Spiritual maturity is maintained or advanced while we are filled with the Spirit; that is, controlled by the Spirit. All of this is reversed when we are controlled by the sin nature.

The Bible commands us to be both: to be spiritual (Ephesians 5:18); and, to become more mature spiritually (2 Peter 3:18). So, this is the nature of spirituality. It's very important that we understand it. There is a great deal of confusion with this, because this is an area, again, that Satan zeros in on. If Christians are spiritual people, then they become a great problem to him. They are now an impact in the angelic warfare. Spirituality is being in the light, while carnality is being in the darkness, and the two are mutually exclusive.

In 1 John 1:7 we read, "If we walk in the light as He (God) is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ, His son, cleanses us from all sin." Christians who walk in the light are reflecting their position in Christ. That is the basis of building their spiritual maturity. Christians who are walking in darkness reflect the control of the sin nature over them. They're walking like unbelievers. Therefore, 1 John 1:6 says, "If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and we do not the truth."

So, a spiritual Christian is walking in the light. Therefore, he sees. The carnal Christian is walking in darkness. Therefore, he's blind. The carnal Christian is actually simply imitating the unbeliever, as 1 Corinthians 3:3 points out.

It takes an act of your volition to get out from under the control of the Holy Spirit. You have to deliberately do it. And it takes an act of your volition to get back in. You are responsible both directions. It is important that you begin with that premise and understanding. If you are out of fellowship temporally (you're out of spirituality), it is because you chose to be so. You chose to engage in an act of human good. You chose to engage in an act of sin. You may, by the same token, choose to confess; to reject the evil; and, to come back into fellowship.

The need for spirituality is paramount in the life of the believer. None of your human ability; none of your talents; and, not any of your IQ or your personality will substitute for the capacity of God the Holy Spirit working in you. None of that can do what God the Holy Spirit alone can do. Believers cannot please God in the state of carnality. You may do many wonderful things that impress people while in the state of carnality, but you cannot please God. Christians cannot work their way to becoming spiritual. This is where preachers have caused so much trouble. Preachers have given people the impression that the way to become spiritual is to get in there and be a leader in the youth clubs of the local church program; to teach a Sunday school class; to attend prayer meeting; to go out and witness; to go out and pass out tracts; to give substantial sums of money; or, to do any number of other human works, all of which have value if God the Holy Spirit is directing and enabling and leading you to do those things. However, those things in themselves do not make you spiritual.

So, if you have the idea that there's something you can do to be spiritual, you're on the wrong track. Believers need to walk by means of the Holy Spirit – not to do something in their own capacities. That's why church programs can never substitute for a right relationship with God the Holy Spirit. Church programs often have the devastating effect of making people happy without being in fellowship with the Lord, and to make people happy without the Word of God. Usually, this is what a church program is designed to do. The average preacher does not want to sit there and study. He does not want to sit there and think things through so that he can deliver to his sheep what they need to feed their souls. Instead, he comes up with a big church program that makes everything seem like it's buzzing along, and that great things are being accomplished, and people feel that somehow they are in touch with the Lord, without realizing that they've been denied the one thing they need: the divine viewpoint of the Word of God. Beware of human dynamics substituting for spiritual dynamics. Nothing can substitute for the controlling power of the Holy Spirit. That is spirituality.

**False Ideas about Spirituality**

So, let's look at some false ideas about spirituality – to button principles down so that you will not fall into that trap, which is so commonplace among us.

1. **Prayer**

First of all, you cannot pray for spirituality. It is dumb to ask God to make you a spiritual Christian. Asking Him won't do it. You might ask Him to help you to take the steps that will make you a spiritual Christian. That would be in order. But if you think that praying for spirituality will do it, you're wrong.

1. **Confession**

The filling of the Holy Spirit is provided through the confession of known sins. 1 John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins (those that you know), He (God) is faithful and just to forgive us." He will do it faithfully. You can count on it. He is just in doing it, because Christ has paid for that sin already. Therefore, his righteousness is not compromised when He forgives what you have done: "He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us (furthermore) from all unrighteousness:" those things that you forgot you did; and, those things that are evil that maybe you are not aware of. *There are few things in the Word of God that are more important to a Christian than the technique of confessing known sins.*

You cannot get temporal forgiveness for sins by praying for it. You get it by confessing them to the Father. So, don't close your prayers by saying, "And, oh, God, forgive me all my sins." You've heard people do that in public. They're asked to lead in public prayer, and they say, "And forgive us all our sins." He's not going to do it on that basis, because that isn't the way we have sins forgiven – not by asking. It's useless to pray for God to forgive your sins. He is eager to do that. But He has a ground from which there are no alternatives on which He forgives sins. And that is naming them; admitting them; confessing them; and, citing them to Him, and leaving it when you've done that.

So, praying through to become spiritual is not the way to do it. Ephesians 6:18 tells us that prayer is indeed important, and we would not want to suggest that the praying part is not important, because great things are accomplished as the result of prayer. Prayer is, in fact, the tactic of the combat of the Christian life. Ephesians 6:18 therefore says, "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints." Effective prayer is the result of spirituality. But it is not the means to spirituality.

1. **Experience**

You can't judge spirituality by an experience. Some experiences that we have with God that are very genuine might be mislabeled as spirituality. What we are doing is misinterpreting the source of the experience. This experience may result from the fact that we are in fellowship with God the Holy Spirit, and that we are in the status of spirituality, but the experience does not determine whether we are in fellowship or not. A lot of people are going to get out into eternity, and discover that they made a terrible mistake of judging their relationship to Jesus Christ on the basis of their experience. Matthew 7:21 demonstrates this to us, when the Lord said, "Not everyone that says unto me, 'Lord, Lord' will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, but he that does the will of My Father, who is in heaven." And the will of our Father who is in heaven is that we receive Christ as personal Savior: "Many will say to me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name (and they did), and in Your name have cast out demons (and they did), and in Your name done many wonderful works (and they did perform miracles).' Then I will profess unto them, 'I never knew you. Depart from me, you that work iniquity.'" What chilling, horrible words!

That's what all these people, who are fooling around with works systems; human effort systems; and, experience systems, by which they determine their relationship to God, are going to discover to their horror that they have been rejected by the Lord Jesus Christ, because they have misinterpreted their experience. You cannot determine by your experience whether you are a spiritual Christian or not. Nor can you determine whether you are a spiritual Christian by your physical reactions. Sometimes you're tired, and you don't feel very spiritual at all. Sometimes you're ill, and you feel anything but spiritual. You can't determine by your body condition. Your body's well-being is affected by many factors, but it cannot reflect your spiritual status.

So, if you're a sad face, that doesn't mean you're a carnal Christian. If you're a smiling person who always hangs the corners of your mouth around your ears, that doesn't mean that you're a spiritual Christian. Some of you have a great capacity to flash on a mouthful-of-teeth smile. There are some people who think that you're a very spiritual Christian because you can do that. Spirituality is on the inside. It has a variety of outward expressions. You cannot determine spirituality by physical reactions. There are some who people think that if you're not the kind that wants to get up and dance in the aisle and clap hands during the song service, that you're not very spiritual. You can't determine this in that way.

1. **Emotions**

You can't evaluate spirituality by emotions. You can't say, "I'm spiritual because I feel so elated. If I'm depressed, I must be carnal. Emotions vary widely among Christians, but spirituality is a state that is the same for all. Those who are more emotional are not more spiritual. How one feels does not determine your spirituality. The order always is: facts; faith exercised toward those facts; and, then feelings about them come, as the Lord leads. That's true of salvation, and that's true of spirituality. Even unbelievers can have magnificent, ecstatic experiences. All you have to do is sometimes watch on television a rock-n-roll events where you've got all the people out on the dance floor. You can see that they're having an ecstatic emotional experience. But you can hardly equate that with spirituality. Emotions in the Christian are legitimate, but emotions are not a guide to spirituality.

1. **External Results**

You can't judge spirituality by external results. There are always Christians who think that size, for example, indicates spirituality. They think that if a church has a large congregation, that means that they are a very spiritual church. That means that the pastor is a spiritual giant. I've never seen those same people say, "If I'm fat, I'm very spiritual. If I'm skinny, I'm not so spiritual." The world's techniques build up huge organizations, and these are seen as being desirable for churches in order to develop spirituality.

Even if you could perform a miracle, that's not a sign of spirituality, because the devil is one of the best miracle workers around, and He always draws a phony crowd with his miracles.

To have enough money in a congregation does not mean that you are spiritual. To have extensive properties does not mean you're spiritual. That is extending false hopes, and it is misrepresenting the concept of spirituality. So, you can't judge it by external results.

In the professional ministry, it is understood, in the average church, that a pastor's effectiveness and his level of spirituality is determined by how many people will make a public move in that service. If he cannot willy-nilly some way to get people to do something in the service, he has had a bad Sunday. When I used to move in those particular denominational circles, and would meet the pastors who were in this particular group, many years ago, that operated that way, one of the first things they would always ask is, "How many people came forward yesterday?" Or they would use a phrase like, "Did you roll them out in the aisles?" And at first I didn't quite know what that meant – this getting out in the aisles. But they were talking about your success story: the results – or the movements that you were able to get people to make. Well, you can't judge it by these external results.

1. **Comparison to Other Christians**

You can't determine spirituality by comparison to other Christians. That's always devastating: to try to match yourself up to somebody that you think is a spiritual giant, and to follow a pattern of what you consider the victorious life. There's always somebody writing books on the victorious life. People take those books, and they try to imitate what they see in those books, instead of realizing that if there's anything recorded in those books that does demonstrate victory in the Christian life, it was the result of the status of spirituality, and the knowledge of the Word. It was not some routine; some style; or, some lifestyle that that person followed.

The idea of matching yourself to somebody else's old sin nature is not going to identify your own level of spirituality. There are some people who feel intimidated because they don't follow the religious lifestyle of other people. We're going to be coming here to Christmas. There are some people that become very emotional about Christmas, and very holy about that. A little later on comes Easter, and there's a period called Lent, a thing they picked up from the old Babylonian mystery religions, and people begin to act a certain way to show their devotion to the Lord. There are some Christians who feel intimidated by the fact that they don't go through that kind of supposedly external devotion to the Lord. You cannot establish your spirituality by matching yourself up to the do-goodism or anything else of somebody else.

1. **Traditional Procedures**

You can't secure spirituality by devotion to traditional procedures: some sacredness in the order of the service; performing of some ritual faithfully; repeating the Lord's Prayer; repeating the Apostles' Creed; or, making the sign of the cross. All of these things are again viewed in certain quarters as being signs of spirituality.

I heard of a man who was a very good teacher of the Word of God. He was asked to candidate at a quite a large church here in the Dallas area. It is a sound Bible church. The man who had been pastor always prayed before the message, and he always prayed at the end of the message. So, this man, who is an excellent Bible teacher, came to this church, and he didn't pray after the message, and they rejected him because they thought this was a sign of lack of spirituality – devotion to some traditional procedure.

1. **Observing Taboos**

You can't secure spirituality by observing taboos. This is one of the greatest misconceptions: "I am a Christian because of certain legalistic things." There are certain acts which are considered improper for Christians to do. They generally are the big six: don't drink alcoholic beverages; don't smoke; don't dance (especially with girls); don't play cards; don't go to movies; and, don't use dice. I cannot tell you how many Christians are intimidated to play a game of Monopoly. How many Christians have asked me, "Do you think it'd be alright if we just got a spinner to play Monopoly instead of the dice?" They have this crazy idea that if they throw the cubes, somehow they are unspiritual, because they picked this up – that there are certain taboos which establish spirituality. Well, again, for one moment, we're not saying that you should not avoid the booze. That's probably a smart thing to do. And it's probably smart to avoid any of these other things that in any way have an impact on God's temple, the body. It's probably smart not to engage in anything that is morally degenerative, or that has a depressive effect upon your walk with the Lord. You have to understand that the list varies in different communities. Different localities have different taboos.

I read a statement of conduct from a Christian school someplace in the south. One of the things that they said was, "We expect our students to act as spiritual people, and therefore we expect them not to participate in certain things. Then they listed the taboos. One that they had there was mixed bathing. Now, I agree, that's bad. Mixed swimming I don't mind, but that mixed bathing – I can see that that causes a problem. But they had this rule where they don't want fellows and girls to get in the same lake at the same time, or at least without putting up a screen between them.

These things, whether they're good or bad in themselves, is beside the point. You do not become a spiritual Christian by avoiding that. This is legalism. It's a sure sign that you're immature spiritually. It's a sure sign that you haven't gotten with it yet. You haven't grown up. You haven't even begun to grow up spiritually if you think that this makes a difference. This is the type of Christian who criticizes; who worries; who gripes; who complains; who slanders; and, who roots around in other people's business, because you are the keeper of everybody else's righteousness. I found that the legalists (the taboo observers) are some of the meanest Christians around. And they're the smiliest ones, too. That's why I never trust anybody who smiles.

Even the legalists can't live up to their own taboos. The best that they try, they find that they slip up. So, who's more spiritual? The thing about the legalist and the taboo-holders is that they tend to be more vocal in the local church, and if the church is full of spiritual morons, they make an impact. Whereas if the church is filled with people who are oriented to the Word of God, they won't get away with it. Of course, the implication is that the most spiritual person around is that guy who has just died. I'll tell you: a corpse just doesn't do anything wrong. But that still doesn't make him spiritual.

There are certain things in the way of taboos that we do avoid. We may avoid them, even if the Bible doesn't condemn them. We don't do certain things because it is overridden by the other biblical principle of not doing anything to hurt the weaker brother. So, out of our love for another person's spiritual well-being, we don't do certain things that we might feel in ourselves are not objectionable. Or secondly, we bypass doing certain things because of our own personal convictions, and because of our own personal status of spiritual maturity. There are certain things that you won't mind doing when you're an immature baby Christian. But as you come to spiritual adulthood, there are certain things you don't want to do. It's not because you can't do them, or they're wrong to do, but because there are other reasons that are degenerative to you. They affect your spiritual life. They work against you, and you don't want to do them.

So, somebody invites you to do something, and you might say, "I just don't care to do that. I don't do that." You don't have to rise up and act holy. But you just have to make a declaration that this is a personal choice with you. We do recognize that Christians do avoid certain things on that basis.

The filling of the Holy Spirit creates a status of spirituality. That does lead Christians to act in certain ways that are acceptable to the Lord.

1. **Self-Crucifixion**

You can't secure spirituality by self-crucifixion. This is an attempt to neutralize the old sin nature by trying harder, and by trying to cancel out yourself. The whole deception of the monastery and the convents was based upon this idea. But unfortunately, they didn't realize that these sin natures are within the individual human being, and they took it right into the convent and monastery with them. This produces a pseudo spirituality which is mistaken for the real thing by those who are spiritually untaught. You can only cancel out the sin life within you by the Spirit of God controlling your life. This is a very popular approach among little groups of Christians who gather in one way or another, and they share how they have crucified themselves. Whole denominations had been built upon this concept of attaining spirituality by some kind of self-crucifixion.

Of course, it can go to the extent of physically abusing oneself (punishing the body) in order to be spiritual. This was often done. Martin Luther used to do this. Martin Luther almost killed himself, trying to punish his body in order to attain a status of spirituality.

1. **Yieldedness**

You cannot secure spirituality by being determined to be yielded: "I'm just going to be yielded to God." ... Being yielded to God is not going to make it, because yieldedness means to be in the inner circle of temporal fellowship. There is only one way you can yield yourself to the Lord. That's 1 John 1:9. That is how you yield yourself. When the Scripture calls upon us to yield ourselves, that is what it's talking about, and it even uses the aorist tense, so it's a point action on your part. 1 John 1:9 is the only way that you can yield yourself. Yieldedness is not something a Christian does. It's an act of faith. It's not an element of works.

1. **Asceticism**

You can't secure spirituality by asceticism. This is the category of fasting; again, punishing the body; to live in miserable conditions; and, to deny yourself food, fun, friends, and anything that you think is pleasant. You've heard people say, "Boy, I enjoyed that so much. It must be awfully sinful." That's the asceticism idea – that if you enjoy it, then it must be sinful. Maybe your wife is a good cook. She's a good cook, and she just sins all the time because she makes such good meals that you enjoy so much. Asceticism says, "I want to be miserable. I want to live in misery." This is a program of extreme self-denial. But spirituality is provided by the grace of God when we meet the condition of naming our evil.

1. **Self-Discipline**

You cannot achieve spirituality by self-discipline: "I am going to discipline myself to love everyone." Well, in a way, the Word of God enables you to have a mental attitude "agape" love. That's a mental attitude that's free of bitterness. But you won't have rapport ("phileo" love) with everybody. You're going to put yourself through a lot of misery if you think that everybody in the congregation is someone that you're going to really be warm toward. There are some people in this congregation that nobody could be warm toward. But you, nevertheless, have an attitude free of mental bitterness. That is "agape" love. But the other kind – this kind of gritting-your-teeth self-discipline is not spirituality. It is nonsense. This is the idea that I'm going to do all the unpleasant tasks so I can show how humble I am, and I'm going to set up a rigid system of religious experiences and activities. All of this is nothing more than an expression of your will – how strong-willed you are. That's all that's telling. But it doesn't tell anything about how spiritual you are. Discipline is a vital factor, again, in the Christian life, but it does not make you spiritual.

So, all these ways are attempts at spirituality by human works. We can do nothing to attain spirituality. This is something that God the Holy Spirit does for us. God does not honor our sin nature by enabling it to achieve spirituality. When you try to achieve spirituality by any of these works systems, you're asking God to honor your sin nature by something that it's capable of doing that imitates spiritual reality, and He won't do it.

Get your eyes open to reality by becoming a spiritual Christian. If you succumb to the temptations of any of a variety of these ways that we've gone over, you won't make it. But if you follow the biblical principle of confession of known sins, then you are walking with the Lord. Then you are in a position of blessing. Then you are in a place where you can live the marvelous supernatural lifestyle that you've been called to live.

Ephesians 5:1-13 describe the supernatural lifestyle of the individual believer. Beginning at verse 14, we have laid out for us the amazing declaration that we can live in this way: "Wherefore, he said, 'Awake you who sleep, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light.'" He's talking to the believer who is out of temporal fellowship. He is, in effect, dead. God the Holy Spirit is the light that Jesus Christ gives to us: "Awake you who sleep." This is the Christian who is ignorant of doctrine; oblivious of the grace structure of living; and, oblivious to the temporal fellowship that he lacks. Paul says, "Wake up. You who are asleep. Get back into temporal fellowship – to the illuminating light that Christ shall give." Humanly, we can have beauty, personality, ability, and devotion, but that's not spirituality – that's human good: "Christ shall give you light" – the illumination of the character of Jesus Christ which is described in Galatians 5:22:23 as the fruit of the Spirit."

Verse 15 says, "See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise." Every one of us walks as a fool when we walk in carnality. We walk as wise when we walk in spirituality. Verse 16: "Redeeming the time, because the days are evil." That means to buy up the time that you have in order to store eternal treasures. All the time that you spend in the status of carnality is lost time for rewards. Don't forget that. You can never regain it.

That man that we mentioned earlier spent 15 years wandering around out there trying to find spiritual reality. You can count on the fact that he probably was in carnality all the time, and all of that is wasted time that he can never again recoup for storing treasures in heaven.

Verse 17 says, "Wherefore be not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is." And "the will of the Lord" is given to us in verse 18: "Be not drunk with wine, in which is excess, but be filled with the Spirit." Do not try to try to change how you feel by some external source like alcohol, but adjust your behavior to the Spirit of the Word of God – to God the Holy Spirit, working through the Word of God. This is an imperative. It's a command. Stop drinking, and start filling – that's what he is saying. It is passive. This is done to the Christian. It is done for him when he confesses. This is in the present tense. This command to be filled is a constant situation to be true of believers.

So, we all live in evil days, but the light of the Holy Spirit is in us. That light is either on, or it's off. If it's on, you have spiritual eyes to see the realities of life about you. If you are in carnality, and that light of the Spirit of God is off, then you're blind; you're going to act insane; you're going to go spiritually insane; and, you're going to act like a fool. If you don't like that language, you can just take it up with the God who wrote it, because He says that when you're out of His inner fellowship, and because of your rebellious attitude and your resistance to admit where you were wrong, you're a fool. When you're ready to go to Him and lay it out, then you're wise. He turns on the light, and He becomes a person from which blessing can flow. And don't forget that blessing from God is not only immaterial, but it is also material. Prosperity flows toward the spiritual Christian. Prosperity does not flow toward the carnal Christian. Think it over. It is a great position to have eyes that can see spiritual things. There is a way to do it, and now you know.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1977

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