***The Technique of Spirituality, No. 1

Techniques of the Christian Life

TL08-01***

As we have been studying this series of the techniques of the Christian life, we have learned that the Christian life involves certain practices or techniques for living the Christian life. All of these are essential to spiritual growth and the capacity for life and service. As a matter of fact, you cannot make any progress in the Christian life apart from the use of these techniques. It is important that you, as a believer, should be able to think your way through these techniques.

**Confession of Sin**

We have first of all studied the technique of confessing sins. This means the practice of naming our wrongdoings to God, and to God alone, for our sin is always against Him, and forgiveness is always the result of our confession to Him. It is instantly given and it restores us to our temporal fellowship relationship, our relationship of walking with the Lord in time. It has nothing to do with our salvation but it has everything to do with our day-by-day practical usefulness and happiness.

**Faith Rest**

The second technique was the faith rest technique which in effect declares to us that the battle is the Lord's. We are constantly coming to a variety of crises in our lives, of difficulties, and of problems. It is necessary to know how to faith rest--how to take the problem and to leave it with the Lord who is going to solve it. If you don't know this technique, if you don't understand it, and if you don't practice it, you will then be tempted to run around talking to people about things that you should keep to yourself, and talking about things that you should be sharing instead with the Lord.

**Bible Study**

The third technique was the technique of living in the Word. This is the technique of learning Bible doctrine. This is related of course to what we find in the Christian's armor as the belt of truth. It is this technique which enables us to move in the direction of preparing our lives on all accounts to know what God thinks and how to operate on His principles.

**Spirituality**

Now we're going to begin a new technique and this is the technique of spirituality. Christian circles everywhere are filled with some true spirituality and a lot of false pseudo spirituality. As a matter of fact, I have to conclude that genuine spirituality is so rare among Christians that when anybody sees it, they suspect it. They actually resist the real thing because it is so rare. They are suspicious that this is something offbeat and not something that they should accept. It is not the common experience of Christians to enter into genuine spirituality.

As we approached Washington D.C. on our vacation, we saw these spires glistening white on the horizon as we came up over a hill. Later when I asked the park attendant what that was, he said it was the Mormon temple. He added immediately, "And you really have to be spiritual to go in there. No smoking. No drinking. No use of tea. No coffee." He said, "Nothing worldly." It was obvious that he had a very definitive concept of what constitutes spirituality.

This issue of what is a spiritual Christian is not even clear among preachers. You find that there are various attempts by which even ministers are struggling to try to convey to people what is spiritual. They'll talk about the crucified life. Has anybody told you to be crucified? Recently? A man not so long ago talked to me about a problem that had arisen in his family. He concluded that the way he was going to solve it was that he was going to go home and he was going to be crucified. He says, "I've got to go home and I've got a lot of self-crucifixion to go through." What he meant was, "I need to be walking with the Lord. To be spiritual. To have His guidance in this matter." He's not going to get it that way.

Have you heard about somebody telling you to be broken--to be a broken vessel? If somebody told you that, how would you do it? This is the problem with Christians. You hear these things and then you say, "Now how am I going to do it." So you run around and say, "How will I be broken?" Well, you go home you lie down on the floor and you ask your wife to walk over on you. Depending upon how big a girl she is, she can do a pretty good job of breaking you. And that's not too nonsensical because we can come up with all kinds of weird ways of being broken.

One of the ways perhaps is that we always keep our eyes downcast. When people talk to us, we shuffle our feet around in order to show that we are humble and that we are going to be broken. Well, what does that mean? Another expression is "yielding." You want to be blessed by the Lord? You should "yield." You can get into a lot of trouble yielding. Some things you better not yield on. What does it mean to yield? Or, to be "seeking the deeper life." That's what you need. You've got problems? What you need to do is get into the deeper life. What does the deeper life mean? Wear two scuba tanks so you can go lower? What does it mean? The deeper life? It's meaningless.

Self-denial--that's a good one. You want to go on in your life, start denying yourself. You people who smoke three packs of cigarettes a day--one-and-a-half packs. Just deny yourself. Those of you who booze it up with a fifth, make it just a fourth. That doesn't seem to be right. Whatever it is, you're going to deny yourself. Just wait until Lent, when this is big stuff. Lent is the big self-denial time. This is the time when we really go ahead. Why do we do this? Because we are seeking to be spiritual. This is all done in sincerity. I'm not making fun of people's sincerity in this. They really are genuinely looking for a relationship that reflects their love for the Lord and they're walking with the Lord, their commitment to Him, and their loyalty to him. They want his blessing. That's what they're trying to find. But these things are procedures that are human inventions.

The Bible has a very definitive way of how to be spiritual. It does make worlds of difference in your life when you are spiritual and when you are carnal. It has the quality of transforming you from an animal level into the level of a full-fledged human being--a prince and princess of God, which is what you are. You're royalty. Royalty should act according to its status.

However, it is not unusual for preachers, particularly privately, to observe to one another that they do not have a really clear idea of what constitutes a spiritual Christian life. It is no wonder that the flock itself is bewildered on the subject.

So first of all we should start by clarifying, if necessary, a relationship between two concepts that are often confused. First of all, there is this thing called spirituality. Spirituality is one thing. It is an absolute. That is, you are either, at any moment, spiritual or you are not spiritual. To be spiritual means to be controlled by God the Holy Spirit in your life. To be non-spiritual means to be controlled by the old sin nature. At any particular point in your life, there cannot be half-and-half. You cannot be partly controlled by God the Holy Spirit, and partly controlled by the old sin nature. There is only one throne in your life. Either God the Holy Spirit is in charge on that throne, or his majesty the devil through your old sin nature is in charge of that throne. There's room for only one person on it. If God the Holy Spirit is not on it, then the devil is on it. If the devil is off of it, it's because God the Holy Spirit has been permitted, through your volition, to take that place of rule in your life. If He rules, you are a spiritual person. If he does not, you are a carnal person. There are no degrees of spirituality. It is a state of being.

Therefore you cannot say that somebody is more spiritual than somebody else. You cannot speak about a person being a spiritual giant. There is no such thing. It is extremely deceptive to talk in terms like that--more spiritual or spiritual giants. It's a state of walking by means of God the Holy Spirit. In Galatians 5:16, Paul declares that for us: "This I say then, walk in the Spirit (or walk by means of the Spirit) and you shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh." The lust of the flesh is the expression of the old sin nature. It as a contrast--either / or. If you are walking by means of God the Holy Spirit running your life, you're a spiritual Christian, as 1 Corinthians 3 describes for us. If you are walking by means of the flesh, the old sin nature, you are a carnal Christian. One or the other is in charge, so it's an absolute state.

Just to avoid certain sins does not make you a spiritual Christian. As a matter of fact, people who believe that they are spiritual because they avoid certain sins usually do not bother to concern themselves with the worst sins which are sins of the mind which find such gross expression outwardly. They ignore the mental sins. Christians who are spiritual, in other words then, are all on the same plane. It's a status. It's a level. Anyplace where Christians are gathered, there is any number of spiritual Christians and every one of them are equally spiritual. There is not one person more spiritual than another. They're all equally spiritual. That should be some comfort in itself.

**Spiritual Growth**

Then there is another thing that we often confuse this with, and that's spiritual growth. Spiritual growth is relative. Spiritual growth is not the same for every believer. The Bible recognizes that there are degrees of spiritual maturity. This is a process. It is not a status. In 1 John 2:12-14, we have three degrees of spiritual maturity outlined: the baby, the adolescent, and the adult. Christians all progress through those levels. Everybody starts off as a baby, and he can move on to adulthood with adolescent in-between. Where you are on this scale is determined by your own elected progress in the Word of God and in the use of the techniques of the Christian life. This is an inclined plain. It would be wrong to represent this with a horizontal line because it is not that. The progress toward spiritual maturity is always an inclined plane because you're either going up or down. You are never in a stated situation. You come from down at babyhood and you go up to adulthood, and the ultimate in that is the spiritual maturity structure fully developed in your soul.

Therefore, a Christian who is moving ahead in the Christian life will be at various stages of spiritual maturity. If two Christians each have all of their known sins confessed, they are equally spiritual. However, they are not all necessarily equally mature in the things of the Lord. There is a point of conflict often between Christians. It is a problem for Christians who have gone on quite a ways up this slope, and consequently, to have had the vision and the perspective that moving up to a higher level gives you. Meanwhile, somebody is back down someplace with a lesser perspective. That Christian is tough to deal with. It brings conflict between these two believers simply because one believer is so far ahead of the other. It is necessary for the advanced believer to take that into account, and thus, the Bible tells us, to exercise a certain compassion and understanding for believers that cause you to shake your head and say, "I can't believe it. It's impossible. I can't conceive that anybody would be acting like that--that anybody would make these choices." The really tough part comes when the person that you are dealing with in that respect was once way further up as a mature believer. Then they began to enter a status of reversionism, and they began to go backwards down towards spiritual immaturity.

Therefore, these two concepts must be separated. If you understand this, it will help you a great deal to understand what the Bible teaches about how to be a spiritual Christian. Spirituality is absolute. Spiritual maturity is relative. I don't want to give the impression that these are absolutely separated. Spirituality and spiritual growth, or maturity, are related. In other words, the Christian who spends the maximum time in the spiritual status is obviously going to be the Christian who makes the most spiritual growth. The more time you are in the spiritual status, the more progress you will make as a believer, and the more rapidly you will grow. The Bible makes this distinction and makes it very clear that God calls upon us to do both. He calls upon us to be spiritual, and he calls upon us to progress.

Ephesians 5:18 calls upon us to be spiritual, where Paul says, "And be not drunk with wine, in which is excess, but be filled with the Spirit." "Filled with the Spirit" is one of those expressions for spirituality. "Walking by means of the Spirit" is another expression. "Walking in the light" is another expression for spirituality. However, the Bible also tells us, for example, in 2 Peter 3:18, that we are to grow up as Christians. Peter says, "But grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." So both of these things are commanded to us. It is up to you as a believer to see to it that you are in a status of spirituality, and it thereby opens the door for you to fulfill the other commandment--to grow in your spiritual life.

**Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit**

There are certain sins which very definitively strike against spiritual growth because they are sins which very definitely destroy your spirituality. Two of these sins are open to unbelievers. Number one is the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. We read this in Matthew 12:31-32. In that situation the Lord Jesus Christ was here on this earth. He was operating in the Dispensation of the Law. Unbelievers were watching His miracles. As a result of what they saw Him do, they made a decision, and they said that what He was doing was under the power of Satan. They were attributing his miraculous works to the working of Satan. Now it was true that Satan can perform miracles. The Bible very clearly declares that. It was not true that the Lord Jesus Christ was operating within his own deity. His works were the works of God the Holy Spirit who was working through the humanity of Christ. This accusation by these unbelievers was a very grievous sin. It was a blasphemy of such a nature that the Bible tells us that this is a sin which would not be forgiven to those who were guilty of it. Any individual who accused Christ of doing these miracles by the power of Satan had closed the doors to heaven forever upon himself. That is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. It is called the unpardonable or unforgivable sin. This cannot be committed today by anybody because Jesus Christ is not here performing these miracles so that a person can actually look upon this man, see what he does, and thereby be able to make the decision to credit Satan with what he was doing.

**Resistance**

There is a second sin also relative to the Holy Spirit. This one is resistance. We have this in Acts 7:51. This is the rejection of Jesus Christ by unbelievers. They will not receive him as Savior. This rejection is sealed when physical death takes place. When physical death takes place, and an unbeliever is in the status of having rejected Christ as Savior, he seals his fate for the lake of fire forever. This closes the door for unbelievers to even begin to be spiritual, let alone to begin to make any progress in spiritual maturity.

**Lying to the Holy Spirit**

There are three other sins which may be committed against God the Holy Spirit by believers. These are more pertinent to us because we can be guilty of these three. Number one is lying to the Holy Spirit. You have this in Acts 5:3 in the incident of Ananias and Sapphira. Today we lie to God the Holy Spirit in the form of false inner motivation which is, in effect, what they did too. They came along and they said, "We have sold a piece of property, and we are going to give all the money to the church." They gave only part of it. Their motivation within was false. It was their motivation which was the lie that they were giving to the church. But when they gave that lie, they were also lying to God the Holy Spirit. In other words, they were doing a thing for a false motivation. There's a lot of Christian service which is done out of false motivation. Why do you serve the Lord? Why do you carry a certain job? Why do you perform a certain service? A lot of it is because you want the praise. A great deal of it is because you feel there's a structure of power that you'd like to be in within the local church, so you like to move in the realm where the officials and the deciding mechanism are, and you want to be up there with that power structure. All of these are false motivation.

However, what you do, God may use, which he often does. For example, a person may give money, but he does not give it on a grace basis. God will use that money, but there's no reward or blessing for the giver. The person who serves with false motives is lying to God the Holy Spirit. The consequences are not always instant death today. The consequences may be death. The consequences are varied. But it is still possible for a believer to lie to God the Holy Spirit. This will destroy your status of spirituality and prevent progress and spiritual maturity.

**Quenching the Spirit**

A second sin is that of quenching the Holy Spirit. This is found in 1 Thessalonians 5:19. This has to do with sins of omission. These are things that you should have done which you did not do. These are things which God the Holy Spirit called upon you to do, which He laid upon your thinking, and which He moved your emotions to desire to do. And you rejected. You balked. You refused. Perhaps it was an area of service. Perhaps it was an area of giving. Perhaps it was an area of loyalty to some aspect of the Lord's work which should have been forthcoming from you, and you refused to give it. Perhaps it was some area of consistency. There was something that God has called upon you to do, and you omitted to do it. The result of this is that God the Holy Spirit is quenched.

This is disobedience which does not involve an ethical issue. There is not something moral or ethical about the decision. It's like God says, "Pray without ceasing." You fail to pray without ceasing. Prayer is not a constant pattern of your life--several times a day, meeting the situation through prayer. That is a sin of omission. In that moment, when you should be praying and you have failed to pray, you have quenched God the Holy Spirit. It's like throwing a bucket of water on Him. That's the image. Then He can no longer minister through you, but He must now start dealing with this problem that has arisen because you have shoved Him off the throne.

**Grieving the Spirit**

A third sin of which believers are capable is the sin of grieving the Holy Spirit. This we have in Ephesians 4:30. These are the sins of commission. These are sins which do include a moral or ethical value, like adultery. This is a deliberate violation of something that God has forbidden us to do. This is not just saying, "No" to the Holy Spirit, as sins of omission are. This is saying, "Yes" to that which is evil. Of course, this is a very easy sin because of the fact that the old sin nature does exist within us, and unless you recognize that it does exist, you will be exposing yourself to the lion of the old sin nature that lies within you. You as a Christian must constantly be aware of the fact that you can do anything. I don't care what it is. You can be guilty of saying "Yes" to any sin, and in that moment grieving the Holy Spirit. The result again is that spirituality is lost and spiritual progress is stopped. And if it's not corrected through confession of sin, then your spiritual status begins to go backward. Now these are sins against the Holy Spirit which work against spirituality and against our spiritual progress.

**Feelings (Emotions)**

Now the thing that spirituality is often confused with, that we should also clarify, is the thing that we call feelings. There are certain circles among Christians who are very disoriented to the Word of God where feeling is a big thing. Things are estimated and judged on the basis of how a person feels about something. One does not feel the presence of God the Holy Spirit. It is not an emotional matter. Over two decades ago when I came as a Dallas Seminary graduate to this church, one of the first conflicts that confronted me was a bench that sat on the very spot where I'm now standing. Over this bench was a brown army blanket. It was the altar. For my predecessor, there had been the practice of people coming forward to pray through at the altar. Of course, he was one of these men that had a very useful gift along that line. He could play a guitar, and he sat up here and strummed along the guitar and we'd sing songs and the emotions were played along. Pretty soon, people were smiling and you could supposedly tell that spirituality was rising. Then people were called forward to make their decisions and their commitments for various things.

I remember one meeting when things really had gotten hot. After one Sunday morning service, one lady came up to me and said, "Couldn't you just feel the spirit here?" What was she saying? She was thinking that you can feel the matter of spirituality, and that when God the Holy Spirit is working through your life you can feel it. Now that is a very satanic delusion. You cannot feel God the Holy Spirit. Pseudo spirituality is always summed up in emotional terms. A false spirituality is always presented as having some kind of a big kick ecstatic feeling. But the truth of the matter is that you may be in a thorough state of spirituality and be experiencing pain, troubles, and the worst kind of depression. A totally spiritual Christian may be suffering pain, agonies, conflicts, and depression. You are not spiritual because you have some external exuberance. You are not spiritual because you run around grinning like a baboon, clapping your hands, and dancing in the aisles. You may have some other problem because of those things but that is not spirituality.

This is what's so irritating when song leaders get up and they're leading the song, and they get to about the third verse and they say, "All of you look so grim tonight. You just don't look like you love the Lord. We're going to sing the fourth verse. I want all of you to smile." So everybody goes to the fourth verse and they start singing, "I'm so happy, and here's the reason why..." Now you've had a tired day. You had a terrible time at work. You thought you'd be nice when you came home to your wife. So you stopped by and you brought her a bouquet of roses and a box of candy. You thought you'd give this to her just before you went to the special evening service. So you came home and you gave her the flowers. You said. "Welcome, loved one," and gave her the candy, "Sweets to the sweet." You know you thought you'd say something really original. And she looks at you and sits down and starts crying, and she says, "The baby spilled his milk all over the rug this morning. The dog bit the mailman. I just burnt the supper. And now you come home drunk." It's enough to really wreck your spirituality. And now you've gone to church and you're sitting there and this guy wants you to smile after all that. There may be times when you may want to sit in church and not smile. Some people feel that they're not really spiritual if they're not nodding their heads all the time as the pastor speaks, in order to prove that they're right in there with him. Some of them, as a matter of fact, rather than fall asleep, they are tired. I can just see them looking. Their eyes are glazed and I know they've either had a stroke or they're sleeping with their eyes open, but they've got to hang in there like a serpent who has no eyelids and he has to stare at you.

Well, this business of spirituality being reflected by something happy, by something emotional, is a bunch of rot. This is not in the Word of God. Any kind of personality can be spiritual. Some of you are the type that likes to look pleasant. Some of you are the type that do not like to look pleasant, and probably could not. But you can be just as spiritual either way. That is not a criteria.

Now spirituality is not therefore human capacity in action, and that's my point. There is always the delusion that there is something that you can do to be spiritual. That always devolves into performing some kind of little function, some kind of a little trick, in order to demonstrate that you're spiritual. It has nothing to do with that. Spirituality is not a human capacity in action. For that reason 2 Corinthians 10:3 says "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh." While we are in these physical bodies, we do not participate in the angelic warfare in the capacities of our physical bodies nor in the capacity of our soul alone. Our warfare, and of course that's what these techniques are about--to prepare us for the warfare that we're engaged in, is conducted on a totally different basis. It is entirely apart from the flesh.

Therefore the spiritual person is not somebody who has a great talent. There are always churches that are looking upon somebody who's got a great talent. He can play a beautiful trumpet. He's looked at as one of the spiritual people around the place. Or we've got some lady in the church who can sing alto and soprano at the same time--a duet by herself. This person has great talent, and she is viewed as a spiritual person. Or there may be a hustler in the church, the person that is hustling for the Lord. That must be a very spiritual person because he's working his head off for the Lord. However, his motivations may be a lie to God the Holy Spirit. He may be hustling for very base reasons--reasons that perhaps he has not even admitted to himself. Your great abilities do not mean that you are a spiritual person, or because you have a meek temperament, or because you have a winsome personality. There is a way that Christians in local churches are constantly deluding themselves with this and equating it with spirituality. The spiritual Christian is the result of something that God the Holy Spirit alone can do through the Word of God. You're not going to do it by reading the biographies of some Christian and then trying to emulate his experiences. That comes out fake every time.

It is not some system of self-humiliation. It's not practicing the presence of the Lord. It's not positive thinking. It's not taking a course in how to win friends and influence people. None of that is going to produce spirituality. Spirituality is not in the flesh and all of those things are things you can produce in the energy of the flesh. It's not your drive. It's not your capacity. None of that ever impresses God. It only impresses people who are dumb enough, Christians who are uninformed enough, to be impressed because you happen to be a talented person; because you do happen to have a scintillating personality; or, because you happen to be a real hustler around the church who is in everything where the power structure and the decisions are being made.

Christians, consequently, often constitute mutual admiration societies in churches because they want to encourage each other in the illusion that they are spiritual. They admired one another and they put on many fronts with one another, and they consider themselves to be the epitome of God's children. Legalisms are often viewed as an expression of spirituality, and that's a phony front.

The Christian life is entirely something that God produces within us, and that's a great relief. If you want to be a spiritual Christian, you must relate yourself to God the Holy Spirit in the right way. He takes over and He produces the spiritual status within you. The only thing that God blesses and that He values is that which is done as the result of the spirituality which God the Holy Spirit has placed in us. Romans 8:8 and Zechariah 4:6 make it very clear that God honors nothing else.

**1 Kings 19**

Now we have an excellent example of the relationship between spirituality and spiritual maturity, and the progress in both of them in 1 Kings 19. This incident is the story of Elijah and his conflict with Jezebel and King Ahab. The background of this is in 1 Kings 18. Elijah in Chapter 18 has had a great spiritual victory in his confrontation with the prophets and the priests of Baal who were sponsored by Jezebel the wife of Ahab king of Israel. When a believer is controlled by God the Holy Spirit, he can be a very blessed object in his own life, the life of his family, and the life of his friends. But when a believer is out of fellowship, when he is not spiritual, he can be a very sorry sight indeed. We have both of these here in 1 Kings 19.

**Elijah**

"And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done (that is, to her prophets) and how he had slain all the prophets with the sword." Ahab tells Jezebel about the defeat of her false prophets, the prophets who are serving the god Baal. "Then Jezebel sent a messenger unto Elijah saying, 'So let the gods do to me and more so if I make not your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time.'" Jezebel sends a messenger to Elijah and says, "I'm going to knock you off before tomorrow. I'm going to put you in the same condition that you put my prophets in. After the prophets of Baal could not bring fire down upon that altar and Elijah did, the next thing Elijah just said to the people was, "Now you know the difference. You know who is of God and who is of Satan. Now get rid of these prophets." The people went through and they gathered them up, and Elijah killed every one of the prophets of Baal. Now this is what Jezebel says, "I'm going to do the same thing to you.

Now mind you. Here's this man. The worship of Baal is a big thing in Israel. The people themselves are uncertain. The people are standing by and looking. They're not sure that this altar that he has soaked in water is going to really catch on fire from heaven. They're watching their prophets of Baal, and they really fully expect Baal to be able to perform this miracle and ignite their sacrifice. Elijah is confronted with that kind of political national power. God gives him a great victory. Elijah is a spiritual man at this point, and Elijah is a mature believer at this point.

Now he gets this threat from Isabel. How should he react? Verse 3 says, "And when he saw that, he rose and went for his life and came to Beersheba, which belonged to Judah, and left his servant there. Beersheba happened to be 200 miles south of where he was. He just tore off like a dog with a bunch of cans tied to his tail. He just went wild south to escape Jezebel. At this point it is obvious that something has happened to Elijah, God's great prophet. While he is still a spiritually mature man, he could not lose that, he is not functioning upon his understanding of the Word of God. He has become a carnal man. He has entered the status of non-spirituality.

Verse 4: "And he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness and came down under a juniper tree, and he requested for himself that he might die and said instead, 'It is enough. Now Lord, take my life, for I am not better than my fathers.'" One of the signs of a Christian who is not spiritual is self-pity. That's one of the best signs. When you are in a status lacking spirituality, you'll start really feeling sorry for yourself, for your lot in life, and for the situation that's around you. That's exactly what this man is doing. He is bemoaning what has happened to him. So, he says, "God just take my life."

Verse 5: "And as he lay and slept under a juniper tree, behold an angel touched him and said unto him, "Arise and eat." Now that's grace. Here's God's prophet humiliating, in effect, God--shaming God by turning and running in the face of God's great enemy Jezebel. Jezebel was the woman whom God later destroyed so horribly. That's what God thought of Jezebel. Here his man, his representative, is hightailing it out in fear from her, sitting in the desert with self-pity. And God treats this man in grace and brings him food.

"And he looked and behold there was a cake baked on the coals and a cruise of water at his head. And he did eat and drink and lay down again. And the angel of the Lord came again the second time and touched him and said, 'Arise and eat because the journey is too great for you.' And he arose and did eat and drink, and went in the strength of that food, forty days and forty nights unto Horeb the mount of God."

Now verse 9:"And he came there unto a cave and lodged there. Behold the word of the Lord came to him and he said unto him, "What are you doing here Elijah?" Now he's in the desert and he's hiding in a cave and God speaks to him and says, "Elijah, my man, what in the world are you doing here cowering like a scared rabbit in this cave."

His answer is in verse 10. God is going to ask him this question again, in just a few verses. "And he said 'I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts, for the children of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and slain your prophets with a sword; and I, even I only, am left and they seek my life to take it away.'" Now this man says, "I have stood by you, God. I have put myself on the line for you. Your people have been a bunch of fools and they have turned against you. They've turned on your altars and they've killed your prophets, your spokesmen. I'm the only one left, and now they're out to get me. And I don't anticipate, Lord, that anything different was going to happen to me than to the other prophets that they got." Now he was wrong about this. He didn't know how many there were who yet had not bowed to Baal, as the Lord was going to point out to him. But this is a characteristic attitude of a person who is out of fellowship, who is non-spiritual, who is not in a status of spirituality. He thinks he's having a rough time and that he is the only one left carrying on for the Lord. Now remember that, any time you think that all others have deserted you. And how are you going to be able to go on and continue by yourself. That's the first sign that you have stepped out of fellowship, and that's the first sign of lack of spirituality. God is not going to desert you if you are doing what He has called you to do.

Verse 11: "And he said Go forth and stand upon the mount before the Lord. Behold the Lord passed by and a great and strong wind rent the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks before the Lord." The Lord said, "Elijah, I'm going to show you something." He put them on the mount. A huge wind came by and tore up the mountain and broke the rocks in pieces--it just popped them like firecrackers. "But the Lord was not in the wind." This did not represent the real power of God. That is the point. "And after the wind came an earthquake. But the Lord was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake a fire. But the Lord was not in the fire." Now these were fantastic natural phenomena that were popping all around Elijah. The point to him was that God was not in any of these things. These did not represent the power that Elijah was denying.

At the end of verse 12, it says, "And after the fire a still small voice." A still small voice--a voice almost that could not be heard. A gentle blowing which illustrated indeed the power of God. God's power was not the earthquake, the fire, or all of this that so represented human capacity, but God's power was in the form of a gentle blowing breeze. It was more powerful than all the other things that Elijah had seen. "And it was so when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle and he went out and he stood in the entrance of the cave. He knew he was in the presence of God. He knew where the real power lay as represented by that soft gentle blowing, not by the tremendous things that he had seen take place.

"And behold there came a voice onto him. The second time, the same question, "What are you doing here, Elijah." Now again I'm asking you, my man, what are you doing here cowering in fear? Verse 14 is identical to his answer before, and he said, "I've been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts because the children of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and slain your prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life to take it away." Same thing. Has he learned anything? No. When you are not spiritual, your spiritual maturity takes a jag and it becomes so out of focus that you cannot think your way through clearly to spiritual conclusions. Your spiritual maturity will not help you, in other words, when you are out of fellowship. When you are not spiritual, your spiritual maturity will not help you. It's just on dead center and sliding backward.

Verse 15: "And the Lord said unto him, 'Go return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus, and when you come, anoint Hazael to be king over Syria." I want you to notice now that Elijah is being dismissed. Elijah, because he could not confess and return to the spiritual condition commensurate with his maturity, God is now removing him from action and He's replacing him with three men: "Anoint Hazael to be king over Syria; Jehu the son of Nimshi shall you anoint to be king over Israel; and, Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abelmeholah shall you anoint to be prophet in your stead." Three men to replace him. "And it shall come to pass that him that escapes the sword of Hazael shall Jehu slay; and him that escapes the sword of Jehu shall Elisha slay."

Now God gives him the punch line. "Yet, I have left me 7,000 in Israel, all them these which have not bowed unto Baal, every mouth which have not kissed him." God says, "Elijah you're wrong. There are 7,000 men like you who have not yielded to this false god, and yet you could not trust in me. You could not stay in fellowship so that you had the courage commensurate to meeting the kind of threat that Jezebel was directing against you.

Before Elijah was miraculously transferred to heaven, it is evident that he did return to a spiritual status because Elisha asked that he be given twice the spirit of Elijah--twice the human spirit capacity expression of Elijah. Elijah is an example of what we're talking about. The relationship between being spiritual, which is being related to God the Holy Spirit where He is on the throne of your life over again spiritual maturity which is growth in the spiritual life.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1973

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