

Introduction

I'd like to begin by having you suppose something. I've resigned and you're on Bethel's pastoral search committee. Also suppose a candidate submits a written testimony to the committee that includes this experience: **"As I walked toward the prison, the word of the Lord came to me saying, 'My love was always to you, and you are in My love.' And I was ravished with the sense of the love of God, and greatly strengthened in my inward man. But when I came into the prison a great power of darkness struck at me; and I sat still, having my spirit gathered into the love of God."** Suppose that's typical of the candidate's written testimony. Suppose He goes on in it to describe receiving visions from God, hearing from God, experiencing God's presence in his spirit, and having mystical interactions with the heavenly places. Question – Would that testimony of his make you more likely or less likely to hire him as Bethel's pastor? Is he spiritual or is he sick? Let's examine Colossians 3:1-4 and find out.

Spiritual

Look first of all at verse 1. Paul writes that when we apprentice ourselves to Jesus, we are **"raised up with"** Him. That means we're placed where He is, not spatially but spiritually. Where is that? Verse 1 tells us. It's at the right hand of Father God. Paul states it differently in verse 3 but the meaning is the same. Our lives are **"hidden with Christ in (Father) God."** Father God has a life and through Jesus we're brought into the flow of it.

That terminology, **"raised up with Christ"** and **"hidden with Christ in God"** reveals a striking fact of human life. Disciples of Jesus move in two worlds. One is the visible material world in which non-disciples move. The other is the invisible non-material world of God and His kingdom in which non-disciples don't move.

In 6:4-5 of his book, the unknown author of Hebrews describes the

experience of moving in the world of God and His kingdom this way and it's compelling. We are **"enlightened," "taste of the heavenly gift,"** are **"partakers of the Holy Spirit," "taste the good word of God,"** and **"taste the powers of the age to come (heaven)."** That description discloses that disciples of Jesus have an overriding **"other-worldly"** aspect to their persons and lives. They think, feel, will, perceive, interpret, decide, act, react, and experience things in transcendent ways that non-disciples can't and don't.

We use a word to designate those who have this other-worldly aspect to their persons and lives, **"spiritual."** They're spiritual people.

A Quaker named Hannah Whitall Smith authored a Christian classic titled *The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life*. She wrote in it about a woman who apprenticed herself to Jesus and the effect it had on her: **"Immediately God began to speak to her by His Spirit. She recognized His voice, and yielded to each thing He asked for. Her swift obedience was rewarded by rapid progress, and day by day she was conformed more and more to the image of Christ. And her Lord was able to reveal to her soul some of the deepest secrets of His love. Thankfulness and joy filled her soul."**

That woman illustrates what it means to be spiritual. We move in the invisible non-material world of God and His kingdom and have an overriding other-worldly aspect to our persons and lives because we do.

Non-Spiritual

The problem is that many professing Christians, as they themselves would admit, don't seem to be spiritual.

In 1971, acclaimed Christian apologist Francis Schaeffer wrote a book titled *True Spirituality*. Interestingly enough, it was his own spiritual crisis that led him to write it. He defined that crisis of his in its preface: **"A problem came to me – the problem of reality. This had two parts: First, it seemed that among many of those who held the orthodox position one saw little reality in the things that the Bible**

said should be the result of Christianity. Second, it gradually grew on me that my own reality was less than it had been in the early days after I had become a Christian." Do you grasp what he was saying? Many professing Christians, including him, weren't experiencing the other-worldly realities that Hebrews 6:4-5 says they should have been experiencing. They and he, in other words, weren't spiritual.

His words are as timely today as they were 40 years ago. Many of us can relate. We've been there and done that or are there and are doing that now. We have what he called "**the problem of reality.**" We recognize the discernible difference between two things: the transcendent person and life the Bible pictures on the one hand and our persons and lives on the other. It's clear to us. Our persons and lives aren't other-worldly. We aren't partaking of the Holy Spirit; aren't tasting the powers of the age to come. We aren't spiritual.

Think Spiritually

But the good news is that we can be and Paul teaches us how. He exhorts us to "**keep seeking the things above,**" verse 1, and to "**set our minds on the things above,**" verse 2. Those are synonymous statements that mean two things, both of which I'd like to explain.

First, we think spiritually. We believe in the invisible non-material world of God and His kingdom and perceive and interpret things in light of it. Many professing Christians don't you know.

William James was a renowned philosopher and psychologist. In 1902, he wrote a classic book in his field, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. He contended that people who realize their sinful condition and seek deliverance through religious activities and experiences are "**sick souls**" to quote him. They're abnormal - dysfunctional.

That book dramatically impacted the thinking not only of academia but eventually the masses as well, including those in the church. The result is that the American religions mind, on the whole, is biased against spirituality. Many professing Christians think that people who have

spiritual experiences and concerns are unstable or weird. They prefer the **“healthy minded”** and **“well balanced”** personality types - ones who focus on the rational and moral components of Christianity - instead.

Let’s go back to that pastoral candidate’s written testimony I mentioned earlier. The truth is it would compel most churches to reject him out of hand, without even interviewing him. Most in fact would probably conclude from it that he’s a dysfunctional or sick man.

But he isn’t or I should say **“wasn’t.”** That hypothetical candidate was the founder of our Friends denomination, George Fox. I took what I read and said about his testimony from his journal. But study Fox’s life. You’ll find this if you do. He wasn’t sick. He was spiritual. The person he was and the life he lived were other-worldly. He partook of the Holy Spirit and tasted the powers of the age to come.

My point is this. The American religious mind is biased against spirituality. It thinks secularly.

But you and I must not. We must think spiritually instead. We must believe in the invisible non-material world of God and His kingdom and perceive and interpret things in light of it. We must accept it as reality that spiritual experiences, like the ones Fox had, are a normal part of our lives with God. We must assume God can and will do the same things in our lives that He did in his - and be open to He doing so.

Act Spiritually

To **“keep seeking the things above”** and to **“set our minds on the things above”** mean a second thing. We act spiritually. We devote ourselves to activities that engage and interact with the invisible non-material world of God and His kingdom, which I’ve explained in detail before: solitude and silence, fasting, study, worship, prayer, Bible meditation, Bible memorization, lectio divina, practicing the presence of God, purposeful obedience, and more.

Many professing Christians don’t act spiritually, in those ways. They act pragmatically instead. Don’t get me wrong. They do believe in

Jesus and His gospel but don't give much time and effort to spiritual activities. Why don't they? It's because they have better things to do like developing their legal practice, getting an education, keep up the house, staying fit, improving their golf game, beautifying the lawn, and, in general, just getting ahead.

Years ago, for instance, a Christian shared with me this view of solitude and silence: **"It seems like a waste of time to me. When I spend an hour mowing the yard, I get something done. When I spend an hour in solitude and silence, I get nothing done."** He's a pragmatist in other words. He sees the value of activities that change things materially – on the outside of him. He doesn't see the value of activities that change things spiritually – on the inside of him.

Do you and I want to partake of the Holy Spirit; to taste the powers of the age to come? If so, we must reject the pragmatism of our culture and embrace the spirituality of the Bible. We must devote ourselves to spiritual activities – the ones that bring us into the flow of the Holy Spirit's work; that infuse the powers of the age to come in us.

The Life of Jesus in Us

Verse 4 reveals that something remarkable happens when we do. Jesus **"is our life."** Bible commentator Herbert Carson explains what that means, **"There is an organic spiritual unity between the believer and his Lord."** That unity has two consequences.

One is glory in our eternal lives. According to verse 4, we **"will be revealed with Him (Jesus) in glory."** At His Second Coming, we'll share in the honor and esteem that Father God gives Him.

The second consequence is transformation in our temporal lives. According to verse 10, we're **"renewed to the image"** of Jesus. That doesn't mean we become perfect, but functional or whole. People in our fast paced, helter skelter world are facing a host of mental, emotional, and relational problems. Some of those are organically caused. People have chemical imbalances, brain dysfunctions, and more. But apart from

that, most of the problems we face are spiritually caused, which means they're spiritually solved. Their solution, in other words, is true spirituality. Love, peace, and joy can be pervasive and habitual in our lives and will be – if we're spiritual.

A common phenomenon in our current culture illustrates what I mean, "**burnout.**" People get so emotionally drained that they no longer function well at whatever it is they're doing. So, they take time off from doing it, no matter how important it is.

Burnout isn't just a problem in the culture but in the church as well – not just among the people in the pews but among those in the pulpits as well. Several months ago, I received a flyer in the mail advertising a conference on "**Pastoral Burnout.**" I personally know five pastors who took so called "**sabbaticals**" because they were "**burned out.**"

But this is my opinion in that regard, with which you may disagree. Absent organic issues, burnout among pastors and other disciples of Jesus is almost always a failure of spiritual commitment. Sociologist Tony Campolo explains it this way in his book *Growing Up in America*: "**I don't doubt that those who drop out are emotionally drained; but in most cases the malady can be traced to spiritual causes rather than physical exhaustion. It sounds nobler to say that a given worker collapsed because he or she was too self-giving in Christian service than to say the person's emotional dissipation was due to failure to spend time in developing spiritual character.**" I agree.

So, if I ever come to you and ask for three months off because I'm burned out, you'll know what the truth is. I'm not as spiritual as I should and could be. You'll also know what to do – fire me. I'm not trying to be hardnosed or critical in saying that. I just believe it's true.

Conclusion

The lesson we learn, in closing, is, and I quote Francis Schaffer, "**True spirituality is the source of psychological wholeness.**" He's right. So, commit to true spirituality. You'll become whole if you do.