

Sunday: The Holy Spirit and Being Spiritual

By Bob Young

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"I love worship at that church—they are so spiritual.... Those are such spiritual men.... She is so spiritual." Spiritual. I hear the word frequently. We Christians talk about it a lot. We think we know what it is.

Spiritual: what do we mean? What makes worship or a person or a Bible class spiritual? The word "spiritual" probably appears in the Bible less than you think it does. The word spirituality is not used frequently in Scripture. Always my first question: what does the Bible say?

The New Testament book that mentions spirituality most often is First Corinthians, a book that is largely corrective. Spirituality is the opposite of carnality. Context matters. In the context of First Corinthians, spirituality, or lack of spirituality, has to do with the influences that guide or control my life. Spirituality depends on the presence of the Holy Spirit, but Paul makes that connection less often than we might expect as we read First Corinthians. What influences guide your daily life? The influences of the human nature are natural, worldly, carnal. The influences of the divine nature are spiritual.

In First Corinthians (3:2-5), the marks of the human nature are (1) lack of spiritual growth, drinks a lot of milk, (2) does not eat much meat; often cannot digest meat, (3) causes or gets involved in envy and strife, (4) generally lives like the rest of humankind, (5) is divisive; fails to be a force for uniting, accepting, and including. Spirituality is the opposite.

Of course, Paul is not talking about physical food but about spiritual food. A spiritual person digests spiritual food and is nourished by it daily. A spiritual person does not handle the Bible superficially. A spiritual person knows how to resolve conflict and be a unifying influence. A spiritual person not only deflects strife, such a person knows how to disarm strife. A spiritual person lives by a different value system, because a spiritual person walks in step with the Holy Spirit.

Let the Bible speak. What is spirituality? What does it look like when someone is spiritual? In First Corinthians, Paul's use of the word "spiritual" points to six things. (1) How others are treated, always treating others right, 3:1ff; (2) Accepting, honoring, and living under Christ's Lordship, 12:3ff; (3) Having healthy relationships with all other parts of the body, 12:14ff; (4) Demonstrating love, even in difficult moments, 13:1ff; (5) Always building up rather than tearing down, 14:19ff; (6) Respect for Scripture, so that every action is guided by God's ultimate will, 14:37ff.

The genuinely spiritual person is most easily seen and identified in the difficult moments of life. Spiritual people – treat others right and do what is right, even when it is very hard; develop healthy relationships with the difficult persons, the EGR (extra grace required) people; show love to the unlovable; always encourage, involve, include and edify, demonstrating that they are second-mile people; are guided by Scripture, applying Bible principles and honoring God's ultimate purpose, even when the lack of biblical specifics could be used to justify doing what everyone else would do.

Not a complete list, but at least a starting point! Who are the spiritual people you know? Who is the most spiritual person you know? Am I spiritual? Are you? The Bible answer may not be what we expect!