

Spirituality: What Is It? Part II



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In our prior session, we discussed the concept of secular spirituality, the world's way of looking at and using *spiritual, spirituality, spiritual development, spiritual formation*; and we saw that through that usage, basically, the world, when it discusses that which is spiritual, is referring to that which is immaterial. As it's applied to humanity we saw also that this is something that all humanity has and something that all people can develop so that the basic human problem is not spiritual death but spiritual sloth, and that all that needs to happen is the spiritual aspect of man and woman needs to be awakened, the spark needs to be fanned into flame.

In the latter part of our session, we began looking at the biblical concept of spiritual, spirit, and what we focused on were those Old Testament and New Testament usages of the word *spirit* that did refer to a common aspect, a common characteristic of all humanity; and there basically we saw that the Scripture talks about the life principle as well as the seat of the emotion, the intellect, and the will.

In this session, we want to move now in looking at the biblical concept of spiritual in a special sense—what the Bible is talking about that is to be developed, that can be formed, and that is the object of spiritual formation. And here we'll be focusing primarily on New Testament usages.

Most often in the New Testament, the word for spirit, *pneuma*, when it's used in this sense that we're talking about, refers to that which differentiates God from everything that is not God. The divine power that produces all divine existence, the divine element in which all divine life is carried on, the bearer of every application of the divine will. These three different types, or these three different expressions, represent three key usages in the New Testament to refer to this idea of *spirit* as separating that which is of God from all of that which is not God.

Of all the New Testament writers, Paul most deserves the title Theologian of the Spirit, especially as we talk about that which is to be formed, that which is the object of spiritual formation, so we'll focus on Paul in the remainder of our discussion as we talk about the unique aspects of spirit and spiritual in the New Testament. Paul gives the most rounded and integrated teaching on the spirit. His teaching, his writings, and his concepts are unique for any literature of his time or indeed for several centuries before or after. The word we translate *spiritual* in our New Testaments, *pneumatikos*, is for all practical purposes a Pauline word used very rarely by other New Testament writers.

As we look at Paul's usage, again realize we're not developing an exhaustive study of Paul's concepts, not an exhaustive Pauline pneumatology by any sense, but we are focusing on that which would be formed in spiritual formation, and the development we're doing is in reaction to the secular spirituality by which we're surrounded. Secular spirituality forms the world in which we live, the world in which we minister, the world of which we need to be aware.

Now as we look at Paul, we realize that one of the primary senses for Paul is that *pneuma* almost exclusively represents the heavenly sphere, the divine realm of existence. You see this in Romans 1. And, by the way, we're going to be again making several references to Scripture, so if you've not gotten your Bible or don't have that with you next to the tape recorder, now would be a good time to turn the tape off and get your Bible so that you can be following along with this.

Romans 1:3-4 illustrates for us Paul's usage of *pneuma* to represent the heavenly sphere, the divine realm of existence. Let's read the first two verses to get the context. "Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning His Son, who was born of a descendent of David according to the flesh [*kata sarks*—"according to the flesh"], who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord."

Here contrasting the declaration of the messiahship of Jesus Christ, His lineage—He was declared to be the Son of David or was born a descendent of David "according to the flesh," but declared to be the Son of God according to the Spirit of holiness—two

realms. And we see in these two realms a contrast that we see not only in Paul but other New Testament writers: the realm of the flesh versus the realm of the Spirit. And as we develop this, we're going to see this developed quite a bit in Paul—in flesh, in spirit. We'll come back to that.

We also have an example of this in 1 Timothy 3:16, dealing with a similar topic talking about the messiahship of Christ Jesus, it says, “And by common confession, great is the mystery of godliness: He who was revealed in *sarks* [“in the flesh”], was vindicated in *pneuma* [“in the Spirit”], beheld by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.”

And so we see this contrast again in Paul, and it goes back to our basic idea that we talked about at the beginning here: separating that which is of God from that which is not of God. He was revealed in the flesh, He was vindicated in the Spirit; *pneuma*, referring to the heavenly sphere, the divine realm of existence.

Now as we talk about Paul's usage of the word *pneuma*, as we see his development of spiritual and spirituality and that which is the object of spiritual formation, we need to realize from the outset that all of Paul's development is built upon and centers upon the cross and the resurrection. These are the great turning points in history. It's what Oscar Cullmann, in his book *Christ and Time*, talks about as the Christ event for everything that Paul talks about: It builds upon this Christ event. Everything from Paul's perspective before the Christ event, before the cross and the resurrection, looks towards the Christ event. Everything after the Christ event looks back to it so that it is the fulcrum of history, the focal point. Life in the Spirit for Paul is the life of the new creation, the new existence of the faith community, and all of that is based upon the Christ event: the cross and the resurrection.

One cannot talk about Paul's usage of *pneuma*—one cannot talk about Paul's concepts of spirituality and spiritual formation—apart from understanding that very basic fact: to come to Christ is to come into the sphere of the Spirit. For Paul the term “Spirit of the Lord” denotes Christ's mode of existence and the power with which He encounters the believing community. Union with this Christ ensures believers of spiritual life and that is life in the community. And in a little bit, as we get into the course a bit more, we want to develop that whole concept more fully. In fact, the bulk of the remainder of the course will be dealing with that life in the community: the corporate dimensions of what we're

talking about.

But let's go back for Paul and look some more now at his usage. Understanding that Paul's usage, Paul's understanding, Paul's concept of *pneuma*, of *spirit*, *spiritual*, *spirituality*, and *spiritual formation*, rests firmly upon the Christ event: the cross, the resurrection.

Now for Paul, the Christian is different from all other men because he possesses the divine *pneuma*, and this distinction is a critical point in Paul's theology. It's a critical point for us to understand as we deal with those who have been caught up in the secular concepts of spirituality, as we deal with those who are brought into our communities of faith from this context of spiritual, a secular spirituality. We need to realize, they need to realize, that the Scripture teaches very clearly, very plainly that the Christian is different from all other men because he possesses the divine *pneuma*. He is distinct. He has something which is not a common, innate characteristic of all humanity, which is not something that everyone has to be developed at will.

The Spirit is the power that mediates the understanding of the gospel of Christ. We see this in the fact of the distinction from all other men clearly illustrated in 1 Corinthians 2:6 and following. Paul in speaking to the church at Corinth says, "Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away; but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God predestined before the ages to our glory; the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory." (Now we need to understand there as we're working through this, he is distinguishing all of those who are in the world from those who are in the faith community, from those who have the divine Spirit). Going on in verse 9, he says,

But just as it is written, "Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love Him." For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so, the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is

from God, so that we might know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words.

Now it's very obvious here, very clear as Paul uses *pneumatikos* ("spiritual"), that he is talking about something that a select few have, those who have a special relationship; and he is not talking about something which is an innate characteristic of all of humanity. Going on, in verse 14 he says, "But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolish to him"; (and here Paul draws a contrast between the spiritual and the natural), he says, "and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no man."

Paul draws a very clear distinction, a very clear contrast here between the spiritual and the natural, between those who are in a special relationship and those who don't have that relationship. This is clearly not discussing or talking about something which is innate, intrinsic, or inherent to all of humanity, to be developed through some self-help type of procedure referring to something quite distinct.

As we go on talking and looking at Paul's usage, we see also that, for Paul, no human merit secures the Spirit; rather the work of the Spirit from beginning to end rests in an initial as well as an ongoing thing. And we won't take the time here to look up the host of scriptural references to this aspect, but anyone that has even a cursory knowledge of the New Testament is aware of Paul's emphasis on faith and the grace of God, and how this relationship with the Spirit, the spiritual aspect, the spiritual relationship does not depend in any way whatsoever upon human merit, but rather rests from beginning to end in the initial faith, as well as the ongoing faith that is to characterize the Christian's life.

So to live in the Spirit, then, is to rely on God's power and not upon one's own strength. We see this illustrated for us in Galatians 3:2. Paul says, "This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?" And then down in verse 5: "Does He who provides you with the Spirit and works miracles among you, do it by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?"

Again the central role of faith is dependent totally upon God's power and not upon one's own strength, not upon some internal fanning to flame the divine spark within, not awakening from spiritual sloth to become involved in the development of one's own spiritual capacity. Rather from the beginning throughout until the end, this rests totally and solely upon God's power and is appropriated through our faith in Christ Jesus.

We see this also in Philippians 3. In Philippians 3:1, Paul says, "Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord! To write the same things again is no trouble to me, and it is a safeguard for you. Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision; for we are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh." No confidence in that which we would do ourselves, resting totally upon God and His power.

Now that is not to say in Paul's theology that there is no role that we play, that there is nothing that we do in the development of this relationship that we have. Galatians 6 makes that very clear. Galatians 6, if we look at verse 6 and following, he says, "And let the one who is taught the word share all good things with him who teaches him. Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh shall from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit shall from the Spirit reap eternal life."

Now notice here Paul's contrasting use of Spirit and flesh. It demonstrates a very distinct contrast. The flesh to which one sows is clearly one's own, so that to which you can develop, that which you can work, and which all humanity has in common is the flesh; and he says, "For the one who sows to that shall from the flesh reap corruption." That's what any kind of self-help development program, for that "which all humanity has," the flesh is clearly our flesh.

But notice then, he says, "But the one who sows to the Spirit shall from the Spirit reap eternal life." The Spirit which he discusses here is a divinely given possibility and not something that is an innate part of our being which we just need to develop. No, that's the flesh, and the only thing that will lead to is corruption. The Spirit is this divinely given possibility. The Spirit is given and the spiritual relationship and existence enjoined only through the grace of God because of the work of Jesus Christ in our hearts and lives.

We see that further illustrated in Romans 8:9. Following on with the same idea, Paul says, “However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him. And if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who indwells you.”

The Spirit has been given. We have this spiritual relationship in existence through the grace of God. And notice in those verses, there again this is pictured as an invasion from without, not the fanning to flame of a spark from within but the invasion of a divinely given possibility from without as God’s Spirit indwells us—the Spirit of Christ being in us—and that is what gives us life.

So as we look at the antithesis that Paul develops, the antithesis between spirit and flesh, we see that the antithesis between spirit and flesh is not the result of some great cosmological duality which is part of all humanity; and so that the idea is that all humanity has the responsibility to develop the good part, the spiritual part. No, the antithesis between spirit and flesh arises in Paul’s theology because of God’s act in Christ, especially as that act is accepted by the spirit in faith or rejected.

Now as we study further Paul’s usage of the word *pneuma*, we need to realize that Paul also, like the gospel writers, does use the word *pneuma* in that broader semantic domain that we discussed earlier; and he does use the word in ways that are consistent with the broader anthropological use to describe functions of the human existence that would be common to all of humanity. However, you need to realize that even then, for the most part, when Paul uses that, he does so with the idea that the Holy Spirit affects the whole person and that effect cannot be explained only psychologically. So Paul uses popular anthropological ideas related to *pneuma* quite freely. That is, he will use the word *pneuma*—in addition now to his special development to this special theological usage that Paul has developed—he will also use the word in a manner consistent with the anthropological ideas of his time. For example, he will use it to describe psychological functions in general.

As you look at 1 Corinthians 7:34, as he’s talking here about being married and being unmarried, he says, “and his interests are divided, and the woman who is unmarried, and the virgin, is

concerned about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and spirit. But one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how she may please her husband.” Here he’s talking in general, using the word *spirit* to refer to psychological functions in general. This person is holy both in body and in spirit. We might say body and mind.

In fact, Paul does use the word in a parallel way to *psuché* as we see over in Philippians 1:27. Paul says, “Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. So that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one Spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.” And I believe here as we look at this passage that Paul is using the word *spirit* in a parallelism almost with the word *mind* and talking about their general agreement; and this would be consistent with secular anthropological usage of the word in Greek literature of the time. He also uses it to talk about the whole person, uses the word *pneuma* to refer to the entirety of one’s person.

In 2 Corinthians 2:13, he said, “I had no rest for my spirit, not finding Titus my brother. But taking my leave of them, I went on to Macedonia.” And I think here Paul was talking about his entire being. There was no rest. He was upset; he was concerned about this particular situation. In fact, Paul will also use the word *pneuma* as an equivalent to our English word *you* in closing benedictions and salutations in some of his letters.

We see that over in Galatians 6:18. Paul says, “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brethren. Amen.” “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you brethren” would be a good parallel or a good synonym there. However, we need to realize that even in those anthropological usages that are consistent with the secular usage of the day—that are consistent with usages which refer to aspects of the totality of the human experience, aspects that are part of that which all human beings have—that even there this *pneuma* for the Christian is something special as well. Something that is alien to us. Something that is God-given so that Paul here puts his special twist on it as he’s talking to Christians.

You can see that illustrated. Over in 1 Corinthians 14:14, he says, “For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful.” And so here now you see him making the distinction between *pneuma* and mind.

Also, over the in the book of Romans 1:9, Paul says, “For God, whom I serve in my spirit in the preaching of the gospel of His Son, is my witness as to how unceasingly I make mention of you.” And so here talking about the inner man, but talking about the inner man in a special sense and in a special ministry, a special relationship to God. The *pneuma*, in an anthropological sense, for Paul is often used specifically for the Christian to refer to the new eye of faith which has been saved as purifying judgment, is exercised on the flesh, and again you see this illustrated over in 1 Corinthians 5:3. Paul says,

For I, on my part, though absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged him who has so committed this, as though I were present. In the name of our Lord Jesus, when you are assembled, and I with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus, I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough?

So here he’s not talking about the human spirit as merely soul or an aspect of humanity being perfected by the Holy Spirit. For even this human spirit is given by God. Romans 8:15 again illustrates this, “For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, ‘Abba! Father!’ ” So even here, this is not referring to some innate aspect of our being that the Holy Spirit will develop, but something which is a divinely given potential, something which God has given in a special sense.

The secret of Paul’s usage even in these anthropological usages—even in taking the word *pneuma* and using it in ways somewhat consistent to, somewhat similar to the common Greek anthropological usages—even here the secret of his usage lies in the priority of the work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit manifests Christ’s saving work. The Spirit makes responsible acceptance of that word possible so the word denotes the innermost being of those who no longer live by the self but by God’s being for them.

Now to conclude our discussion of Paul as we have looked at his usage of the word *pneuma*, his very special usage of the word *pneuma*, and the aspects of this for the Christian. We want to move now to the word *pneumatikos*, the word *spiritual* that we have translated in the New Testament, and we need to realize

that his usage of that word is very much in line with the rest of his theology of spiritual formation, the rest of his theology of the spirit. And again we start by realizing that like his usage of the word *pneuma*, this centers upon and is based upon the Christ event. Everything springs from Christ and what He has done for us in the cross and the resurrection.

The word *pneumatikos*, the word that we translate *spiritual* is, as I indicated earlier, Paul's word. Of the 26 times that it occurs in the New Testament, 23 of them are Paul's. Generally, this adjective in Paul's usage refers to those things which are caused by or filled with the Divine Spirit. We might say, "pertaining to" or "corresponding to" the Divine Spirit.

For example, in Ephesians 5:19 (we'll read 18 to get the context), "And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord." It's very clear here that, in the context, that these spiritual songs have something to do with the Holy Spirit and are related to our relationship to God through Jesus Christ. The spiritual songs that one sings are the result of the filling of the Spirit, perhaps, and then the object is that one is singing and making melody to the Lord so the relationship to God with God through Jesus Christ is centered, is central, in this passage here. We need to realize that. This surfaces a very basic idea of what the Bible is talking about when we talk about that which is spiritual.

When we talk about that which is spiritual, everything that we discussed thus far leads up to this. We are talking about a relationship with the living God through Jesus Christ and so spiritual formation is dealing with the development and the forming of that relationship with God, with the living God through Jesus Christ, and there can be no spirituality, there can be no spiritual formation, there can be nothing that is spiritual in this biblical sense, apart from that relationship with God through Jesus Christ. That is crucial. That is why the Christ event is so focal to Paul's argument.

Look at Colossians 1:9. Let's go up to verse 6 talking about the gospel in verse 5 "which has come to you, just as in all the world also it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing, even as it has been doing in you also since the day you heard of it and understood the grace of God in truth; just as you learned it from a Epaphras, our beloved fellow servant, who is a faithful servant of Christ on

our behalf, and he also informed us of your love in the Spirit.”

Now we read those verses to get that context, to get the emphasis that Paul is making here upon the relationship with God that these people have through the gospel of Jesus Christ; and then verse 9, Paul’s prayer for them: “For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding.”

Notice that “spiritual wisdom and understanding” refers to the knowledge of His will and is clearly based upon the relationship with the living God through Jesus Christ. That is what is developing. That is what is being formed. That is what we’re talking about when we talk about spiritual formation, not just the immaterial aspects of our being, not the feelings or subjective experiences we have through some type of New Age experience. But when the Bible talks about spiritual, when we talk about spiritual formation within the context of the faith community, we are talking about developing that relationship with God that we have by His grace alone through Jesus Christ.

As we continue, look at 1 Peter 2:5. Peter, in one of the non-Pauline usages of this word, verse 4 says, “And coming to Him as to a living stone rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God, you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” Why are we being built up as a spiritual house? What is the purpose of this priesthood? To offer up sacrifices to God through Jesus Christ, again speaking about the relationship that we have with the living God through Jesus Christ.

Finally, 1 Corinthians 15:42: “So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown a perishable body, it is raised an imperishable body; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.”

Now this verse has been misapplied by many—both within Christianity and outside of Christianity. The spiritual body here is not talking about an immaterial body; it’s talking about a body of flesh and bones. It is a spiritual body because it is the body that follows the resurrection in which we will enter into a more direct

relationship with the living God. It is the body that will be ours as we enjoy that existence in the realm and the sphere of God. So it's not a spiritual body because it's immaterial. It's a spiritual body because it directly relates to that relationship that we have with God.

The spiritual man, according to Paul then, is the one who knows God's saving work by the spirit and possesses the divine *pneuma*. We looked at 1 Corinthians 2:13-15 earlier. I'll just remind you that Paul there says, "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God." And then down in verse 14, "But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God," and then verse 15, "But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no man." It is very clearly stated there that the one who is spiritual in a biblical sense, the one who can develop spiritually, who can be formed spiritually, is only the individual who has a relationship with the living God through Jesus Christ.

It's interesting as an illustration of this idea of *pneumatikos*, this idea of that which is spiritual as referring to the divine realm, the divine sphere, and the relationship to that is Paul's usage of the word to describe the law. The law too is seen as spiritual because it is the law of God deriving from the divine world and not the human world.

You see this illustrated in Romans 7:14. Paul says, "For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am a flesh, sold into bondage to sin." Down in verse 22, "For I joyfully concur with the Law of God in the inner man." And then in verse 25, "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin." You see, the law is spiritual. Why is the law spiritual? Because it is the law of God. It has to do with God, and so therefore when we talk about *spirit*, *spirituality*, *spiritual formation*, we're talking about that relationship with God that we have through Jesus Christ. We are not talking about an innate, inherent, intrinsic characteristic of all of humanity that can be developed through self-effort, through a variety of means of which Christianity is only one.

John, in his writings, I think provides a good summary for the biblical view of *spirit* and *spirituality* in his own usage of *pneuma* as a sphere or realm of existence in antithesis to *sarks*. In John's

writing then, we have a summary of what we've seen in Paul. For John also sees it very clearly that *pneuma* represents the sphere of God while *sarks* (or "flesh") represents the sphere of the world.

In John 3:6, John says, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." And as you read all of John's writings and as you look at this passage, even in its context, you become aware that for John the common human experience is to be born of the flesh. That which is unique, however, is to be born of the Spirit, and that is limited to the Christian, to the one who has a relationship with the living God through Jesus Christ.

John also illustrates that over in chapter 6 of his gospel, verse 63. He said, "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life." Why are they spirit? Why are they life? As you look at the context again, they are spirit, they are life because they have to do with the relationship to the living God, the relationship with the living God through Jesus Christ; and that is life, and that is spiritual life, a spiritual maturity, spiritual formation referring to that.

The true God has entered the world in Christ. To worship God in spirit is not to worship in one's own spirituality, but to worship in the world of God and hence in true reality. John says this in 1 John 5:20, "And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding in order that we might know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life." Thus no worship, no religious exercise is in spirit unless it is based upon the divine act in Christ. *Spiritual formation, spirituality, spiritual* refers to our relationship with the living God through Jesus Christ.