1 Cor 2:12-15 He That Is Spiritual

According to a recent Pew Research poll, almost 30% of American adults are religiously unaffiliated. We call such people "nones," indicating that they have no religious connections and don't attend church. That does not mean that they don't believe in God; many of them do. In fact, many of them would return to church if they were asked.

According to the poll, about half of the "nones" say that spirituality is very important in their lives or say they think of themselves as spiritual.

Sadly, the spirituality of some of the "nones" is not at all Christian. Many of them believe animals have spirits, and many say that parts of nature, such as mountains, rivers or trees have spirits or are part of the spiritual world.[1] The word "spiritual" can mean a lot of different things to different people.

The Bible uses the word "spiritual" to describe *some* Christians. Every believer has the capacity—the potential—for being spiritual. Saved people are indwelt by the Spirit of God and are spiritual to a degree. Every Christian should pursue greater degrees of spirituality. All of us should seek to fit the biblical description of a spiritual person.

What does it mean to be "spiritual" in the biblical, Christian sense of the word? Today I want to take a look at what the Bible says about true Christian spirituality.

1 Cor 2:12-15 *Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But **he that is spiritual** judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man.*

What does it mean to be spiritual?

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[1] www.pewresearch.org

I.   Definitions[2]

    A.   Incorrect definitions

        1.   Being spiritual is *not* the same as being saved. Once you are saved, you have spiritual life and have the ability to be "spiritual," but being spiritual goes beyond merely being saved. You can be saved but not really fit the definition of being spiritual.

        2.   Also, being spiritual is not referring to having amazing spiritual experiences beyond what normal Christians have. E.g., dreams, visions, feelings, promptings, hearing the voice of God, encounters with angels or demons, etc.

    B.   Correct definitions

        1.   The Gk. word for "spiritual" is *pneumatikos*. It's the word for *spirit* (*pneuma*) and a suffix *-ikos* meaning "pertaining to." Thus, *pneumatikos / spiritual* means *pertaining to the Spirit.*

        2.   The word conveys the sense of belonging to the realm of Holy Spirit or being under the control of the Holy Spirit. One who is led by the Spirit, filled with the Spirit, and displaying the fruit of the Spirit could be called spiritual.

        3.   In Rom 8:5-9 we find similar/synonymous expressions:

For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are **after the Spirit** *the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death; but* **to be spiritually minded** *is life and peace. … ye are not in the flesh, but* **in the Spirit***, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.*

The spiritual Christian is spiritually minded; he's living in the Spirit and after the Spirit. Being spiritual is being under the control of the HSp. Some have described being spiritual as being a fully devoted follower of Jesus Christ, i.e., a mature Christian. Essentially, spirituality is Christian maturity. Every believer has the capacity for spiritual maturity; some become mature while others don't.

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[2] Some of this material from Stanley D. Toussaint, "The Spiritual Man" *BibSac* Vol. 125 #498 (Apr-Jun 1968)

All believers should aspire to being spiritual—i.e., mature. If you are saved, you should also be spiritual, i.e., filled with the Spirit, walking in the Spirit, thinking and living under the control of the Spirit. That's what spiritual maturity is; that's what we should be pursuing.

II. Characteristics of the spiritual person

A. The spiritual person is saved.

Rom 8:9 *Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.*

1 Cor 12:13

1. You have to be saved in order to be spiritual. Once you are saved, you can be spiritual; you have the capacity—just like a child has the capacity to grow up and become an adult.

2. However, salvation and the presence of the HSp do not automatically make you spiritual.

3. If you are not saved, you cannot be spiritual in the biblical sense of the term. You don't have the spirit of Christ indwelling you and thus you have no relationship to the HSp. You have no capacity for true, Christian spirituality.

The only way to have true Christian spirituality is to repent and believe the gospel.

B. The spiritual man stands in contrast to the "natural" man.

1 Corinthians 2:14 *But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.*

1. The word *natural* is ψυχικος – ψυχή is the root for our word "soul" as in "psychology." Thus, pertaining to the human nature; opposite of spiritual; i.e., purely physical and secular in one's thinking; driven by the human nature alone.

2. All unsaved people, because they "have not the spirit," are natural, "soulish" – driven by purely human thinking.

C. The spiritual man stands in contrast to the "baby" Christian.

1 Corinthians 3:1 *And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto* **spiritual***, but as unto* **carnal***, even as unto babes in Christ.*

1. So *spiritual* contrasts with *carnal*. The spiritual man is a mature believer; the carnal man is an immature believer—or at least he's acting that way.

2. We need to define this word/concept *carnal*.

   a) It's not the same as "natural" (ψυχικος). That's an unsaved person, one without the Spirit.

   b) The word "carnal" means "fleshly." The Greek word for *flesh* is *sarx*.

   What is a carnal person like? In 1 Corinthians 3:3–4 Paul writes: *For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?*

   Note two things:

   Carnal people have certain characteristics—envy, strive, divisions. Those are marks of immaturity; you are *not* spiritual if your life is marked by envy, strife, and divisions.

   Carnal people "walk as men." I.e., they are more like unbelievers than like believers. You are behaving like unsaved people.

   A carnal person may not be a new believer, but he's still acting like one. In fact, he's acting like an unbeliever. The carnal person claims to be saved but his lifestyle is unsaved.

3. Some people think of carnality a legitimate category for Christian life and conduct. They say that you can be a Christian and continue a carnal, worldly, ungodly lifestyle. "I'm a Christian, but I'm just carnal. That's my category—carnal."

4. I don't believe that Paul is establishing a category of life here. He is certainly not saying that it's acceptable to be carnal or that carnality is somehow normal. Sometimes Christians live this way temporarily, when they are backsliding. But it's not supposed to be a permanent condition of the Christian life. We are not supposed to continue acting like unsaved people. It's certainly not an excuse for ungodliness.

It's not natural for a child to remain a child; nor it is natural for a baby Christian to remain immature.

5.   In Rom 8:6, "to be carnally minded" is the same as being "after the flesh," i.e., an indication of being unsaved ("is death"), not just backslidden. If you are living a carnal lifestyle, you are on thin ice regarding your salvation.

The true spiritual condition of a person living a carnal life is very questionable; it's doubtful whether he is truly saved. He's living like he's not saved, although he claims that he is.

6.   If you remain in carnal living, it's probably because you are unsaved. "We are not in the flesh but in the spirit" (Rom 8:9). If the old fleshly nature is still in control of you, then it's likely that you are not indwelt by the HSp. If you are living just like the unsaved world, the problem is not carnality; it's that you are unsaved.

We've seen three descriptive words so far—spiritual, natural, and carnal. The spiritual man is unlike the "natural" who is unsaved, and also unlike the "carnal" man who claims to be saved but living like an unbeliever.

D.   The spiritual person understands spiritual truth.

Rom 8:5-6 5   *… those who live according to the Spirit [set their minds on] the things of the Spirit. … to be spiritually minded is life and peace.*

1.   Spiritual people "set their minds on the things of the Spirit" and are "spiritually minded."

Col 3:2 *Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.*

2.   How do we set our minds on the things of the Spirit? We are interested in the things of the Holy Spirit has revealed in the Bible.

Quote: The Spirit-controlled Christian investigates, inquires into, and scrutinizes the Bible and comes to an appreciation and understanding of its contents.[3]

3Wuest, K. S. (1997, c1984). Wuest's word studies from the Greek New Testament : For the English reader (2 Pe 1:20). Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

3. Remember that the natural man has no capacity to recognize, acknowledge, or appreciate spiritual things. Likewise, the carnal man has very little spiritual understanding or interest. A spiritual person is different; he seeks to understand and apply biblical truth to his life.

App: Do you find the Bible interesting/compelling? Do you read it, study it, memorize it, follow it? If you've got no interest in the "things of the Spirit" as revealed in the Bible, then you'll never be spiritual.

Spiritual people have a desire to understand and know God through his word. They want to be where the Scripture is taught.

That's a good reason to come to church whenever the doors are open. Spiritual people want to grow in their knowledge and understanding of spiritual things. They have an affinity and appreciation for spiritual things.

E. The spiritual man is in a position to help others who are struggling with sin.

Galatians 6:1 *Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, **ye which are spiritual**, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.*

1. Here we see a clear contrast between those who are spiritual and those who are not. Some believers are spiritual and some are not.

2. The spiritual person is *not* living in open sin. He's *not* the one overtaken in a fault. He's *not* habitually giving in to temptation.

3. He's not above temptation, so he is careful. He recognizes his own limitations and sinful appetites and controls himself; he has good self-discipline.

4. Because he is a mature, self-disciplined Christian, he is in a position to help others who are struggling. He can help restore those who have fallen without falling into the same sin.

F. To summarize all of this, "He that is spiritual" is a mature Christian.

1. This is the primary idea of spirituality—mature Christian living. If you add up all the things we've said are true of a spiritual person, you have a good pix of spiritual maturity.

2. A spiritual person is not sinless, but he is fighting the good fight of faith. He's put on the whole armor of God and is striving to stand against the wiles of the devil. He's seeking to understand God's word and live a Christlike lifestyle. He's a fully devoted follower of IX.

III. How to become a spiritual Christian

Every Christian ought to be pursuing spiritual growth and maturity. We don't want to remain spiritually immature. We don't want to be carnal; we want to be spiritual. How?

A. Take the steps necessary to become a fully devoted follower of Jesus Christ, i.e., to become spiritually mature.

1. Get saved; trust in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior; take up your cross and follow him. Romans 10:9-10

2. Become a member of a local assembly of believers. Acts 2:42-47; 1 Tim 3:15

a. The biblical pattern is salvation, baptism, and addition to a church.

b. If you don't follow that pattern, I don't see how you become spiritually mature.

Illus.: I often think of people I know who seem in some ways to be mature believers, but who have no connection to a local church. That is a huge blind spot, a significant failure.

3. Worship the Lord regularly.

a) Worship privately—have a regular devotional life of Bible reading and prayer. We feed ourselves. We have the self-discipline to have a regular devotional life.

b) Worship corporately—assemble with other believers regularly for worship.

4. Commit yourself to the process of spiritual growth and maturity. Pursue spiritual growth intentionally.

Ephesians 4:15 *... grow up into him in all things, ...*

Colossians 1:10 *... walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God*

Php 3:14 *I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.*

2 Thessalonians 1:3 *your faith [should] grow exceedingly*

2 Pet 1:5-7 *... add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity.*

2 Peter 3:18 *but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. ...*

A spiritual person is pursuing growth and Christian maturity. He's not satisfied with his current level of spirituality.

5. Engage in gift-based ministry. Use your spiritual gifts for the glory of God and for the benefit of the church.

1 Peter 4:10 *As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.*

6. Engage in evangelism and missions. Mt 28:18-20; Jn 17:18

7. Pursue theological stability.

1Co 14:20 *Brethren, be not children in understanding...*

Eph 4:14 *... be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, ...*

2Th 2:3 *Let no man deceive you by any means: ...*

One of the marks of Christian maturity is that you are not easily led astray. You know biblical doctrine and you are not easily persuaded by false teachers. You don't change your doctrinal commitments very easily or regularly. You are like a tree planted by the rivers of water…

8. Pursue holiness and Christ-likeness in attitudes and actions.

1 Cor 10:31 – do all things for the glory of God

1 Pet 1:15-16 – be ye holy

1 John 2:6 – walk as Jesus walked

1 John 2:15-17 – love not the world

9. Exercise and use your spiritual senses.

1 Timothy 4:7 *exercise thyself rather unto godliness.*

Hebrews 5:13-14 *For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.*

Spiritually mature people live out the Christian life in public. They know the difference between right and wrong, and they choose right and avoid wrong. They stand for righteousness and against sin.

How do you gain spiritual maturity? Take these steps, engage in this process.

B. Expect maturity to take time.

How much time is required to gain a measure of Christian maturity? It's different for everyone. People grow at different rates. But we have to allow time for people to grow and mature. For some people, it takes decades. For others, it might take months. Time and experience are necessary for spiritual development.

Quote: A young Christian has not yet been confronted with many areas within the general sphere of Christian conduct; … and while he may be completely willing to let the Spirit control his life and actions, he has not yet gained the experience and maturity that comes from having faced these problems and having made Spirit-controlled decisions about them. Time to gain maturity is needed for genuine spirituality.[4]

C. Rely on God's grace.

We pursue spiritual growth and maturity, but we also rely on God's grace to help us in the process.

Php 2:13 *For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.*

1Co 15:10 *But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.*

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[4] Ryrie, "Spiritual."

I wonder if the description "he that is spiritual" applies to you? Would anyone describe you as spiritual? Or would the words "natural" or "carnal" more accurately apply to you? Do you have the qualities of a spiritual Christian? Would you say that you have a degree of spiritual maturity?

If you lack spiritual maturity, it could be that you have not taken the necessary steps to gain it. What further steps do you need to take?

"Be no more children…" "Grow in grace and in the knowledge…"

All genuine believers should be moving toward the goal of Christian maturity. We must be pressing toward that goal.