

PRACTICE TRUE SPIRITUALITY

In our quest for a more simple spirituality, it's important to define the term. I'm writing from the belief that spirituality is the pursuit of God and the things of God, through Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit, in accordance with God's self-revelation (that is, the Bible).

The words of the apostle Paul in Colossians 2:16-3:2 provide inspired guidance on true spirituality. False teachers in Colossae were saying that spirituality involved not only the pursuit of God through Jesus, but also the worship of angels and other types of mystical experiences. They taught a number of elaborate rituals and ascetic practices which anyone serious about spirituality was required to observe.

Paul admitted that while "these things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion," in reality they "are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh" (2:23). In other words, these activities may look like marks of true spirituality, but they're worthless for changing one's heart or relationship with God.

But then Paul directs us to the basics of biblical spirituality: "If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth" (3:1-2).

Unlike the common belief that many people are "spiritual" by nature, notice Paul's teaching that spirituality has a definite starting point: "If then you were raised with Christ." This is biblical language for being united by faith to Jesus Christ in His life, death, and resurrection. Until a person comes to the place where spirituality begins and where he receives the benefits that flow from this union with Christ—namely eternal life and the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit—that person has no real spirituality, regardless of his effort or desire.

Notice also that genuine spirituality seeks the things of God, or more specifically, "things which are above, where Christ is." Any spir-

ituality that does not seek things like the will and glory of God in everything, intimacy with and conformity to Christ, and love—and does not seek them above all other pursuits—is a false spirituality.

But true spirituality doesn't just propel the heart toward the right activities; it also pulls the mind in the right direction. For in verse 2 Paul continued, "Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth." True spirituality is characterized by a mind preoccupied with "things above"—and not "things above" merely as we might *imagine* them, but rather as God has *revealed* them in Scripture. This doesn't mean we shouldn't think about earthly things, for Paul himself gives lengthy counsel about such matters just a few verses later, from 3:18 to the end of the book. Rather, the spirituality that flows from Heaven causes "things above" to become a magnet for the mind, so that no matter what we think about, eventually we relate it somehow to "things above." For instance, we often find ourselves asking questions like, "What would the Lord have me do in this situation?" or "What is God's view of this?"

Don't be deceived by a complex spirituality that gives the appearance of wisdom but doesn't start with Christ, "in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Colossians 2:3). And don't become entangled in any spiritual practices that sound good but incline your mind and heart away from the "things above."

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