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The Sign of Spirituality

By Harold Turner

In the past few years we have seen what seems to be an effort to find a more spiritual side to religion. Today's religion is accused of being cold and little more than an outward ritual. Because of this many, and especially the younger generation, are turning their search to a religion with more spiritual involvement that brings a deep emotional experience. This deep emotional experience is to involve a spiritual contact with God, which may either include seeing visions, or the speaking in spiritual unknown tongues. The sad thing about this search is that it involves a rejection to any set pattern for spiritual guidance, including the pattern that Jesus gives us in the gospel.

The idea of spirituality, as taught in the Bible, does not support the idea of becoming so deeply emotional and spiritually involved that one loses contact with reality, or loses control of himself. Jesus is the most spiritual man who ever lived. He is never pictured as getting so deeply emotional that he lost control of himself, shouting or speaking words that none could understand. He is pictured as a meek and quiet person, deeply concerned about the things that pertained to His Father. He is the pattern for each of our lives. His word teaches us that we should adorn ourselves with "the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which in the sight of God is of great price" (1 Pet. 3:4). Christ is both the source and pattern for the spiritual life, to seek for some experience apart from the study and pattern of His life, is to seek for something that is not true spirituality.

The word 'spiritual', when related to the characteristic of the Christian life, carries the meaning of being mature as a child of God. This is seen in Paul's statement in 1 Cor. 2:1-2 "And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able." It is clear from his contrast of the word 'spiritual' and 'babes in Christ' that to be spiritual is to be mature in Christ, as opposed to being babes or immature in Christ. Too, notice and compare Paul's statements in Rom. 15:1

and Gal. 6:1, "We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves." "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness." Here again to be spiritual is to be strong in Christ as opposed to being weak and overcome in faults. Hence, our spirituality is not determined by how deeply emotional we become, but by the depth of spiritual understanding in God's word, and to the development of our character after the pattern of Christ.

In Col. 3:1-25 Paul gives instructions for the development of spirituality. In 3:1-2 he wrote, "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth." Paul then instructs them of the things that are worldly, which must be ridded from our life, and the things that must be developed in our new life. In 3:9-10 he said, "that ye put off the old man with his deeds; And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him;" Spirituality is directly related to the knowledge of the pattern that Christ has given us, rather than a release of all control and common sense.

It is true that some in the early church were empowered with spiritual gifts, but they were not overpowered by these to the point of uncontrol. In respect to the speaking in tongues, Paul instructed control of this in 1 Cor. 14:27-28, "If any man speak in an unknown tongue, let it be by two, or at the most by three, and that by course; and let one interpret. But if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church." This gift could be, and was to be kept in control. Too, in 1 Cor. 14:32 regarding the gift of prophecy, Paul wrote, "And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets." The person empowered with these gifts were in control of their use. And the purpose of these gifts were to instruct and to edify the church, not to put on a show of uncontrollable emotionalism.

Jesus had instructed His apostles to preach the gospel to every creature (Mark 16:15). These men knew only the

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Which Church Is Right?

By W. F. Cawyer

It is not difficult to understand why men are confused when it comes to selecting a church, since there are so many denominations in the world, some two hundred or more are registered in Washington D. C. I deeply sympathize with those who are trying to find the right church from among so many denominations. If men could but understand that God has given us the Bible to lead, guard, and direct us in life's way, this problem would not be so great.

When we turn to the Bible we learn that Christ did not establish a denominational organization. In Mat. 16:18, he said, "I will build my church." At the time Jesus made this statement there were several religious groups - The Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, Stoics, and Epicureans. Jesus selected none of these, but announced that he would build his own.

"I", the personal pronoun, identifies him as the builder. "Will build" is future, showing that the Lord's church was not built prior to, or at that time. The pronoun "my" shows ownership, and "my church" shows that the one he built was his. You will notice the expression "my church" is singular. He did not say, "I will build my churches" plural. So we can expect to find one church. And to this agrees the words of inspiration. In Eph. 4:4, "There is one body". This body is the church, Col. 1:24 "For his body's sake, which is the church. Also in 1 Cor. 12:20, "But now are there many members, yet but one body."

Sometimes we hear people say that the denominations are the branches of the true vine in John 15:1-8. If this is true, I want to believe it. So let's look at John 15:5-6, "I am the vine, ye are the branches; He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned." "He" is a masculine term, and is never used to refer to the church. The church is referred to in the

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SIGN OF SPIRITUALITY (Cont.)

language of the Galileans (Acts 2:7). Yet they spoke in the tongues of many other nations when empowered by the Spirit. A brief reading of Acts 2:1-11 will clearly show that speaking in tongues was speaking in languages other than that known by the speaker.

Christianity is a religion of intelligence and emotion, but the emotion is that of love, faith, and hope. The emotions grow more profound as we grow in love, faith, and hope. The sign of spirituality is that of spiritual understanding, which is derived from the study of God's word, and the expression of the emotional maturity of love, faith, and hope. No person is spiritual who lacks in knowledge and understanding of the Bible, and who lacks maturity in love, faith, and hope.

If we are seeking spirituality, let us spend more time in the study and meditation of God's word, and in the practice of its teachings through our daily lives. In this way we will find the rich experience of the Christian life. Not by what we get, but by what we are and what we give in serving others.

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"People don't always believe everything they hear, but they often repeat it just to be on the safe side."

Christians Are Blessed

By Lavern Stewart

If non-Christians could be persuaded how blessed they would be after becoming a Christian, surely they would be baptized the same hour of the day or night. Seeing that there is a certain amount of self-concern about all men, evidently the reason more men have not obeyed the Gospel is that they have not been convinced that they would be better off being children of God.

The Bible speaks of all spiritual blessings being in Christ. (Eph. 1:3). The apostle Peter speaks of this as "exceeding great and precious promises" being given us (2 Pet. 1:4). Some of the blessings of the Christian life are briefly discussed in the following paragraphs.

Forgiveness of Sins: Promises were made to lost men of the days when they could be released from the burden of their sins - "For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more" (Jer. 31:34). This promise was fulfilled in the death of Christ, "But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour: that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man." (Heb. 2:9). To make this blessing available to all, God designed a simple plan wherein the believer through repentance and baptism should receive the forgiveness of sins through the blood of Christ (Acts 2:38, Rom. 6:3). He also provided for the Christian who needs forgiveness 1 John 1:7-9.

The right to pray: Prayer is a spiritual blessing, 1 Cor. 14:15, and therefore it is for the person "in" Christ. God's ears are open to the righteous (1 Pet. 3:12), and one is righteous only when he is "in" Christ (2 Cor. 5:21).

Help from Christ when tempted: Jesus has promised to help the faithful child of God at all times: "for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me." (Heb. 13:5-6). In 1 Cor. 10:13 we are assured; "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." This shows us that we have help in living the Christian life, and cannot fail if we try and trust and follow Jesus. In Rom. 8:28 we learn, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose." Our Lord will be such a

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Teenagers and Temptations

By Coy Walters

It is certain that we will be tempted in our Christian lives to indulge in sinful practices. This seems to be especially true with teenagers. Concerning temptation, James said, "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience." He later said, "But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death."

According to James, temptation is not sin, but it is the precursor of sin. If teenagers, as well as every Christian, can learn to conquer their lusts and temptations, then sin can be defeated and endurance in our Christian living will be strengthened (James 1:3).

In 2 Tim. 2:22, Paul gives a very practical way to defeat our temptations, "Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart." Let us consider the gold mine of instructions to the youth in this passage.

The first point of Paul's instructions is to flee from youthful lusts. Everyone in fighting temptation must learn the art of fleeing. The wisdom of Paul shows in this statement. The older, more mature Christian might resist and rebuke a situation, when it would be better for the young to simply remove themselves from the situation. This would even seem to be especially true when one considers the nature of youthful lusts.

We are to flee fornication (1 Cor. 6:18), idolatry (1 Cor. 10:14), from the love of money, evil surmisings, railings, strife, envy, disputes of words, questionings, evil doctrine (1 Tim. 6:11). To be even more practical for our Christian teenagers, we could list R and X rated movies, on or off the TV, parking, dancing, and etc. It is these things that cause lust and temptation to run wild. The best thing to do to avoid the pains of sin is to abstain from all appearance of evil (1 Thess. 5:22). But, if Christian teenagers find themselves in these situations, whether by ignorance, pressure from friends, or for some other reason, the best thing to do is to flee or to remove yourselves as did Joseph (Gen. 39:7-12).

The second point of Paul's instruction is to follow the right things rather than youthful lusts. The teenager must strive to do what he knows is required of him as a child of the heavenly Father. By doing this he becomes an example before other

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Watch for Their Souls V

By W. R. Smith

"The church is on the march" where the shepherds are watching their flock as well as praying for them. The more scrutinizing and diligent they are the purer and more effective the church will be. If the watching is consistent and thorough the number of delinquents will decline steadily and decidedly. Strictness in administering the divine plan of watching will cut to a minimum the number of chronic transgressors in the church. This will result because:

(1). Divine power (Rom. 1:16) applied in the right way purifies.

(2). A forthright and consistent assault on sin among the members serves as a potent warning to others whose conduct might fall into the pattern of the free and careless ways of the world.

(3). Non-members who are potential weaklings will consider the church a very unhealthful place for their type.

When the Holy Spirit had finished His work with Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-10) it had a sobering effect on saints and sinners alike (v. 11). If there were any liars thinking in terms of church membership, they were either scared away or were impressed with the need to put this practice aside. In either case, it resulted in less "doctoring" to be administered by the shepherds. If there were members of the church in Jerusalem who were careless in speaking the truth, their great fear resulting from what they had seen and heard caused them either to straighten up - crucify the flesh (Gal. 5:24) - or to withdraw from the group altogether. In either case it meant less work for the leaders.

The church, then, that administers faithfully God's love - chastening - (Heb. 12:6) will learn to their great surprise and entire satisfaction that the benefits extend much further than to the chastened. "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump" (1 Cor. 5:6). For the leaders, then, to proceed boldly and unhesitatingly to stamp out spiritual infections as they arise is to save the body from moral rot. On the other hand, the spineless leadership which had rather follow the path of least resistance and maintain a soul destroying peace is going to turn its back away from and refuse to deal sternly with sin in the church. If this is the practice, and no doubt this "do-nothing" policy is the rule and not the exception, it is positively in defiance of a plain directive from Heaven, Heb. 12:6-11.

To follow divine instructions is to be obedient and fruitful and to create conditions by which others in the church may also serve and be saved. In Eph. 5:5

Paul states that no unclean person nor covetous man hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Church members who are thusly afflicted are lost! How can any Christian, not to mention the overseers, ignore the frightful spectacle of lost brethren? And yet, this sort of inertia characterizes many congregations. When asked by a visitor, "What does Brother X do for a living?" one of the elders of the congregation where Brother "X" was a member replied, "He is a racketeer." This meant to the visitor that this brother gains his livelihood and makes his money by dishonest practices. Was anything being done to save this lost man? None at all! Is this failure to help the fallen very common among churches? Yes, sad to say, it is.

In the example just cited the sin was known by the leaders, and possibly by everybody else, including non-members. If such a condition is allowed to continue indefinitely, without offering aid, both the sinner and the church are under condemnation. Why? "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump." As discipline administered to the sickly has its wholesome effects on the entire group, in like manner, the evils of iniquity, if unchecked, will stimulate others to walk carelessly in their chosen fields of indulgences. The strong members who are immune to the degrading influences of their ungodly brethren will stand guilty by reason of apathy or indifference.

It is incumbent upon the leaders to do even better than admonish and try to save the known transgressors in the fold which they oversee. Their watching must be so thorough as to bring to light the concealed sinners also. Iniquitous operations under cover are as devastating to the sinner and the church as open violations of God's will. What would happen to a church if the bishops should suddenly adopt a positive plan to ferret out and do something with the fornicators, covetous, extortioners, railers, and such like? In most places the conditioning and indoctrination of the membership is so inadequate that this procedure which is so plainly set forth in 1 Cor. 5 would not succeed at all. First, to be successful, the plan would have to be sold to the congregation. Second, it would have to be inaugurated very gradually. Likely, a period of ten years would be required for a few congregations to operate fully and successfully on such a scriptural basis.

There is no challenge which faces the church today more serious than that of watching for the souls of church members (Heb. 13:17).

Teenagers and Temptation (Cont.)

Christian teenagers, and before his or her non-Christian friends. The Christian teenager strengthens himself by following the right things and encourages his weaker friends who are struggling with youthful lusts. Paul said, "Let no one despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity."

To be able to follow the right things and to help others will cause a great deal of satisfaction in Christian living. But, if teenagers let temptations and lusts become a regular part of their lives it will bring about a very frustrated life.

The third point of Paul's instruction is to follow the right things, "with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart." In 1 Cor. 15:33, Paul said, "Be not deceived, evil communications corrupt good manners." Paul realized the influence that others have upon us and he wanted us to have fellowship with Christians. Don't try to tackle temptations alone. Choose wise friends who will help with your fight against temptation instead of encourage temptation. Date Christians. Dating pressures seem to be hard enough as they are, so date Christians who will help you to stay pure. Two Christian consciences are better than one. Marry a Christian who can share with you the joys of the greatest life on earth, the Christian life.

If our Christian youth will do these things, they will avoid the frustrations that many of us witnessed in our lives and in the lives of other Christian teenagers. Christian teenagers can put joy, not only in their lives, but in the lives of their parents, the church, and their heavenly Father, when they keep their heart, mind, and body pure.

"No man has a right to look with contempt upon himself when God has shown such an interest in him."

"Prayer is a shield to the soul, a sacrifice to God, and a scourge to Satan."

Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of the sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on HIS law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, that yields its fruit in due season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.

WHICH CHURCH IS RIGHT (Cont.)

feminine gender, for we are married to Christ (Rom. 7:4). The church is the bride of Christ. Hence, it is the individual Christian, not church organizations, that are branches in the vine.

As the bride of Christ, we are to wear his name. "If any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God in this name" 1 Pet. 4:16. What would you think of a wife who would prefer wearing another man's name in preference to that of her husband? I don't believe that any man would put up with that kind of foolishness. But religiously, this is being done every day, people who profess to belong to Christ, yet who prefer to wear a man-made name. We glorify God in this name (Christian), it is God given (Acts 11:26).

Now let us be serious and find the church that Jesus built. It had its beginning on the day of Pentecost (Acts 11:15). The apostles received the baptism of the Holy Spirit on that day and for the first time the gospel was preached in its fullness, that Christ died, was buried, rose again, ascended to Heaven, and sent the Holy Spirit to guide the apostles (John 16:13). By this message, the apostles guided men in the way of salvation, and on that day three thousand were added to the church (Acts 2:41, 47). Now let us turn back in this chapter and see what they did. Acts 2:36-37. They heard the gospel preached, and asked the question; "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Now look at the answer the apostles gave them. "Repent and be baptized, every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and he shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." Is this the way that you were brought into the organization to which you belong? If not, you need to investigate; and if you did just that, you are thereby a member of the Lord's church, the body of Christ.

If you are a member of the church, which is the family of God (Eph. 3:15), you must now live as the Bible directs. In Titus 2:11-12 Paul said, "The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world."

If we fail to pattern our lives by the Bible, we will be cast off as the unfruitful branches, which were gathered, cast into the fire, and burned (John 15:6). Some may teach you that once you are saved, you cannot be lost, but that teaching will not stand the test. Listen to the word of God "For if we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which

shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses; of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace." (Heb. 10:26-29). Jesus said, "And they are burned" (John 15:6).

Jesus prayed that we all might be one in both faith and in practice; "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou Father art in me and I in thee, that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that thou hast sent me." (John 17:20-21).

We can all be one today if we both believe and obey only the gospel. "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment (1 Cor. 1:10).

Christians Are Blessed (Cont.)

help to us, he can turn even the seeming trials, or other things that happen to us, into that which will help us.

Joy Unspeakable: The word joy means a very glad feeling, happiness, and pleasure. The Ethiopian Eunuch felt this joy as he went homeward, after being baptized, Acts 8:35-39. The Bible states that "he went on his way rejoicing." The same happy condition prevailed in the Jailor's household after they had been baptized Acts 16:34. The apostle Peter describes the joy of the Christian life, saying, "Jesus Christ: Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory" 1 Pet. 1:8.

Hope of Eternal Life: Though I have named this last, it is by no means the least of the Christian's blessings. This hope will keep one going when the world around him seems quite dark. Paul said, that God, who cannot lie, promised eternal life (Titus 1:2). Jesus promised in John 14:1-3, that He would come to receive the saved into the place that He was going to prepare. John tells us that the hope of eternal life will cause one to purify himself (1 John 3:3).

Reader, if you are not rejoicing in the blessings of the Christian life, you are robbing yourself! Could you write down the true "reason" for not being a Christian?

"Speak well of your enemies — you made them."

"The tips of the roots of trees are so sensitive that, almost as if by instinct, they turn away from spots where there is no nourishment and spread themselves in places where they can gather sap and life. Men of prayer have also this power of discernment. By unerring intuition, they turn away from fraud and illusion and find the reality on which all life depends."

"A real friend is like the inside pocket of our vest, we may not often need them, but we know they are there."

"The best way to ease our own burden is to bear the burden of another."

"When you get to the end of your rope, tie a knot in it and hang on."

"Before you find fault with the house another has built, build a better one."

"A wayward child is sometimes straightened out by being bent over."

"Sympathy is for the one who tried and failed; pity is for the one who failed to try."

"Christians who hunger and thirst after righteousness do not have to be begged to attend all services of the church, they want to attend."

"Life is action and reaction. You speak today; tomorrow you hear the echo of your voice."

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