

Three Marks of a Spiritual Man

Zac Poonen:

"I could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh" (1Co. 3:1).

We read in 1Co. 1:5,7 that the Corinthian Christians excelled in three areas - knowledge of the Scriptures, preaching and the gifts of the Spirit. Yet in spite of having all these, they were not spiritual. It is rare indeed to find believers who have the discernment to recognise that a gifted, eloquent preacher whose knowledge of the Bible is extensive and who in addition, has miraculous gifts of the Spirit as well, need not be a spiritual man at all. He could be thoroughly carnal.

Unfortunately, we live in a day when most believers think that a man is spiritual if he is a good 'Master of Ceremonies' who can conduct meetings in a lively way, put people at ease with his many jokes and preach eloquently as well.

Preachers today are respected, unfortunately, for their gifts and not for the fruit of Christlikeness in their lives - in spite of the fact that Jesus clearly taught that false prophets would be identified by the lack of Divine fruit in their character (Mt. 7:15-20).

Jesus also said that in the day of judgment many would come before Him and say that they had prophesied and done miracles in His Name. But He would reply that He never knew them (Mt 7:22,23). They called Jesus "Lord" and had supernatural powers. But there was sin in their lives. This shows us clearly that much "Christian" activity and even supernatural gifts do not make a man spiritual. In fact, they are not even an indication that a man is born again, for the Lord told these people that He NEVER knew them at any time!!

To understand what makes a man spiritual, we could first of all make a list of all the abilities that Satan possesses. That would show us clearly the things that are NOT the marks of true spirituality.

Consider activity, for example: Satan is a full- time worker who is active day and night (Re. 12:9,10). He never takes a holiday. He is always seeking for people whom he can accuse - and he has many helpers too!! He also has plenty of Bible- knowledge, for he quoted the Scriptures even to Jesus. He has supernatural gifts, zeal, many co- workers, a great following and authority over many people. But he is not spiritual!!

What makes a man truly spiritual could be summed up in three statements: An upward look, an inward look and an outward look.

A spiritual man looks in these three directions constantly:

1. Upward - in worship and devotion to God and Christ.
2. Inward - in acknowledging and repenting of his unChristlikeness.
3. Outward - in seeking to help and bless other people.

A Spiritual Man Looks Upward

God has called us first of all to be His worshippers - to hunger and thirst after Him. A spiritual man worships God. His one desire is God. He does not desire anything or anyone other than God in earth or in heaven (Ps. 73:25) . Money does not mean more to him than God. As the deer pants after the waterbrooks, so the spiritual man longs after God. He longs for God more than a thirsty man longs for water.

A spiritual man longs for fellowship with God more than he does for ease or comfort. He longs to hear God speak to him daily.

Those who worship money, ease and their own convenience, will always find something or the other to complain about. But the spiritual man never has any complaints, because he desires only God and he always has Him. He is never disappointed with the circumstances of his life, because he sees the mighty hand of God in all those circumstances and he humbles himself underneath that hand joyfully at all times. Because a spiritual man is in touch with God he does not need any laws or rules to regulate his life. He has found the tree of life (God Himself) and so he has no interest in the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Because he is taken up with simple and pure devotion to Christ, he is not sidetracked by secondary issues. Looking at Jesus, the spiritual man becomes increasingly like his Lord year by year.

A spiritual man humbles himself constantly. And so God exalts him constantly. He is exalted higher and higher

- into a closer and closer relationship with God. Such a man having seen the realities of the heavenly life will always seek to do his good deeds hidden from man's eyes.

A Spiritual Man Looks Inward

The upward look leads on to an inward look. As soon as Isaiah saw the glory of the Lord, he immediately became aware of his own sinfulness (Is. 6:1-5) . It was the same with Job, Peter and John (Job 42:5,6; Lk. 5:8; Re. 1:17). When we live in God's presence, we become aware of many areas of unChristlikeness in our lives. The spiritual man is thus constantly getting light over the hidden sins in his life.

We are commanded to worship the Lord "in holy array (dress)" (Ps. 29:2) . Without the clothing of holiness, we are naked before the Lord. So the spiritual man "does his best" at all times to keep his conscience clear before God and before men (Acts 24:16). Just as the businessman does his best to make more money, and the research scientist does his best to make new discoveries, even so the spiritual man does his best to keep his conscience clear at all times.

A spiritual man judges himself constantly, because he discovers many things in his life that need to be cleansed away - things that other believers may not be disturbed by, in their own lives.

A spiritual man realises that he has to die inwardly every day, to many things that hinder him from being effective for God. So his lifestyle becomes one of taking up the cross and "always bearing about in his body the dying of Jesus" (2Co. 4:10).

The spiritual man has no problem in humbling himself before anyone or in asking for forgiveness from anyone - whether that person be older than him or younger than him. He realises that his prayers and his service will never be accepted by God, if he has hurt even one other person - whether wife, brother or neighbour - in any way. And so, as soon as he realises that he has hurt someone, he "leaves his gift at the altar and goes and settles matters with that person first, and then returns to offer his gifts to God" (Mt. 5:23,24).

A Spiritual Man Looks Outward

The upward and inward look lead on to the outward look.

A spiritual man is one who realises that God has blessed him only in order that he might be a blessing to others. Since God has forgiven him so much, he gladly and readily forgives all who have harmed him. Since God has been so good to him, he is good to others too. He has received freely from God and he gives freely to others.

A spiritual man is genuinely concerned for the welfare of others. He is filled with compassion for lost and suffering humanity and can never ignore a brother whom he sees in any need - like the Levite and the priest did, in the parable of the good Samaritan (Lk. 10:30-37).

God is concerned for fallen man - to help him, to bless him, to lift him up and deliver him from Satan's bondage. The spiritual man's concern is the same. Like his Master, the spiritual man seeks to serve others and not to be served. Jesus went around doing good and delivering people who were bound by Satan (Acts 10:38) . The spiritual man does the same.

A spiritual man does not seek to gain anything from others through his service for them - neither money nor honour. Like God, he only seeks to bless others through his life and his labours. He will NEVER expect any gifts from anyone - for he trusts in God alone for his every need. A little booklet that has come down to us from the second century titled "The Teaching of The Twelve Apostles" tells us that the early apostles taught all believers in their time to beware of any preacher who asked them for money, for such a person was a false prophet. If only we understood this, we would be saved from many false prophets today!!

A spiritual man looks upward, inward and outward. If he looked only upward, he would be unrealistic - "so heavenly-minded as to be of no earthly use". If he looked only inward, he would be depressed and discouraged most of the time. If he looked only outward, his work would be shallow. But a spiritual man looks in all three directions constantly. May God help us to be balanced - and spiritual.