

Spirituality, and How to Attain it.

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TEXT: "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God."—1 Cor. 2:9, 10.

I suppose that there is as much vague speaking, and as much indefinite thinking about the thing, state or quality of spirituality as about any other thing, state or quality in the universe. The word is one of those indefinable, abstract terms, which seems to connote the entire circle of the supernatural, but which to the general mind conveys not one single distinct notion; while the thing, state or quality itself remains a quantity unknown, a country unexplored, an obscurity of the mists and thick darkness of mystery and vagueness. The first question, then, to be answered is—What is Spirituality?

SPIRITUALITY DESCRIBED.

Spirituality, for I am bold enough to attempt a definition, but only from the Christian point of view, is that state or condition of the mind in which the soul, abstracting itself from the natural, the material, the temporal, the visible, the earthly, occupies itself in the contemplation of the supernatural, the immaterial, the eternal, the invisible, the heavenly.

To be more explicit, as man is composed of two substances, mind and matter, so in the whole great outer universe there are two classes of entities, the so-called physical, or phenomenal, and the metaphysical, or real. The physical is limited to the material creation with its laws and forces; the metaphysical includes that which lies beneath and beyond; the physical, namely, the intelligent Creator and Preserver, the personal centre and source of activity, with his attributes. The self-conscious, human soul, through the medium of sense and sense perception, is made conscious of the physical. The knowledge of the metaphysical may be acquired by the use of one or all of three avenues, namely, by the achievements of the reason by the inborn, intuitive power of the moral and religious consciousness, and by revelation. Now, speaking as a Christian, when the soul is filled with the light of immortality, when it is grounded deep in the faith of God's existence, when it is bound to God by the irrefragable bonds of love, when it is rapt in the contemplation of omnipotence, omnipresence, omniscience, self-existence, eternity, truth, justice, holiness, goodness, love, which are modes of the deity's activity and qualities of his character, who, we are taught, is a Spirit, it is said to be in a state of spirituality. Thus, it appears, if what has been said be a true statement of facts, that to the soul there lie open two states, that is two distinct and separate spheres of ideas. One, the state of carnality or world-mindedness, produced by the physical, is described in Scripture as darkness, "them which are in darkness," Rom. 2:1-19; and as bondage, "bondage under the elements of the world," Gal. 4:3; and as death, "to be carnally minded is death," Rom. 8:6. The other, the state of spirituality or heavenly-mindedness, which proceeds from the metaphysical, is characterized by the sacred writers as light, for those who abide in it are called "children of the light, children of the day, not of night, nor of darkness," 1 Thes. 5:5; and as liberty, for those who have entered it are said to be "delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God," Rom. 8:21; and as life "for to be spiritually minded is life," Rom. 8:6. If the soul remain permanently in the state of carnality, it lusts against the spiritual and the works of unrighteousness which follow in consequence, as catalogued in the book of Galatians are "adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings and such like," Gal. 5:19-21. On the other hand, if the soul enter frequently the realm of the spiritual she strives against the carnal and the fruits of the spirit that follow, as catalogued in the same book are "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith meekness, temperance," Gal. 5:22, 23. Between these two states, it is hardly necessary to say, there can be neither concord nor commerce, "for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness, and what communion hath light with darkness, and what concord hath Christ with Belial, or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?" 2 Cor. 14:15.

There are many who deny the validity of spirituality, point blank, declaring it to consist of nothing save illusions, who will not allow the metaphysical to retain even the ghost of a semblance of reality. Such constitute that school of philosophy called positivism, or bald materialism. We express no wonder, however, as such a negation and willful perversion is just what we should expect, and, indeed, just what the Bible declares to take place. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: neither can he know them for they are spiritually discerned," 2 Cor. 2:14. Others there are who, regarding spirituality, remain all their lives in quiescent indifference, who never in thought are known to approach the supernatural, not even to deny

it, but who devote their energies to the exclusive pursuit of gratifying their carnal passions. These, I would have you know, are not always found among the base and ignorant. To this class of persons I would apply Socrates' rebuke to the wealthy and worldly-minded Athenian. Said he, "Are you not ashamed for being careful for riches, and glory, and honor, but care not nor take any thought for wisdom and truth, and for your soul, how it may be made more perfect." On the other hand there are those who swing to the extreme of total indifference to the earthly. These become so completely absorbed in ideality that like the character in Lytton's Pilgrims of the Rhine, they live entirely in dreamland, or else, being seized by some wild infatuation, their heads swim and they topple over into insanity. Such a fate reminds us of what is said to have happened to the philosopher Thales. Anxious to know what was going on in heaven, and forgetting to notice what was before him and at his feet, while contemplating the stars he fell into a well. It must be remembered that in religion, as in everything else, reason is the pilot, and that the soul in its endeavor to steer clear of a dead carnality and spiritless formalism, must avoid running into a heated fanaticism, and keep in the mid-channel of a practical, common-sense, earnest Christianity.

In attempting to describe spirituality I will liken it to a beautiful land designated by Paul as "the things which God hath prepared for them that love him," and which the soul of men is privileged to visit. Plato, the most ethereal of the Greeks, compared the soul to a pair of winged steeds and charioteer, which, when it is perfect and winged soars aloft and governs the world, but when it has lost its wings is borne downward and becomes an animal. I will appropriate this celebrated myth and say that when the soul visits the land of spirituality the Divine charioteer takes his seat, the winged steeds spread wide their pinions, take the ascending course, and mount the sky like eagles. How far in these flights the soul may be permitted to penetrate no one can tell. Paul declares "that he was caught up to the third heaven, where he heard unspeakable words which it is not lawful for a man to utter."

Such excursions into the land of spirituality may be made in the silence and solitude of her own chamber, when the soul breathes her way up through the night stillness which hangs over the earth like the calm of a mighty ocean; or even in the field, or shop, or office, in the very midst of the dust and din of the activity of life she may pause to drink at the crystal fountain; or when the sun is setting, when for a little the earth clouds take on the tints which most resemble heaven; or when the moon is shining, when through the silver edges of the cloud rift a veritable window seems opened into heaven.

How these visits into the land of spirituality cheer the soul! Why, they are holidays at home! What power they have to fortify the soul for the fight! Why they are food and drink, the soul's very nectar and ambrosia! What a charm they have to quell the flitting shades and tossing mists of doubt, for it is in them that the voice of the great Master is heard, which has power to banish the dark and lay both the wind and sea! And if the visits are frequent, the result will soon make itself manifest in outward action and appearance, for the manner will grow gentler, the voice will grow softer and the countenance become radiant.

It is when bathed in the hallowed light of spirituality that the soul becomes conscious of the presence of Christ. The land of spirituality is the homeland, the kingdom of Jesus, and those who visit there are privileged to abide near the person of the king. There, in the delightful companionship of the dear Lord Jesus, they walk among the bright flowers of hope; there they wander through the blissful vales of ineffable peace; there they glide on the smooth, strong current of faith; there they breathe the pure air of truth; there they behold a landscape of whose every feature is blended into beauty and touched with the softest tints of divine love, and there they see the reflection, in the sky, of the shining gates and towers of the Celestial City, and catch the enraptured breathings of its music.

That my description of the land of spirituality is most defective I am well aware. It is like an unfinished picture compared with the original of a beautiful landscape. You see but misty lights and shapeless forms and semblances. I cannot make you see the beauty, nor hear the music, nor taste the sweetness, nor smell the fragrance, nor feel the freshness. The glories of the state of spirituality must be experienced, they cannot be described. My purpose in attempting this description has been to excite in the worldly-minded a desire to seek for something higher and better, and to enthuse the Christian's soul afresh by kindling a flame of spiritual thoughts.

HOW TO ATTAIN SPIRITUALITY.

Having then offered this explanation and description of spirituality, the second question which confronts us is: How to attain it? that is, by what means, or by what way, is the land of spirituality reached? Realizing the extreme desirability of visiting as frequently as possible the land of spirituality, also the excessive rareness, delicateness and fleeting nature of spiritual thoughts and

the strong gravitation of the world, we ask, is there one or more ways thither? Can the natural man unaided find his way there, or must he have supernatural guidance, and if so who or what shall be his guide? These questions we now proceed to discuss.

Our text says that "eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." This is equivalent to saying that unaided and without a guide it is impossible for any man to attain a true spirituality. Socrates and his illustrious pupil may be said to have dived as deep and flown as high as any others outside the Christian revelation, and it is doubtful whether even they ever reached the conviction of a personal God; and quite certain that to the delights and glories, referred to by St. Paul, they ever remained strangers. Their morality was purely intellectual and their spirituality was nothing more than philosophical speculation of a highly poetic nature, Plato's idea of the good was a magnificent sweep heavenward, but it is too vague, too rarefied, too impalpable to furnish an anchor ground for the soul. During the days of the early church, and also resorted to by many misguided Roman Catholics of the present day, a means of reaching the land of spirituality was employed, which we deprecate because we consider it false, unnatural and opposed to the example of Christ. The mad desire to flee the world, as illustrated by the cases of Anthony the enchanter and Simon the pillar saint, sloped over into a wild fanaticism if not a downright insanity. Christians must remember as well as others that man is a social being, and while it is necessary to spend hours of secret prayer and meditation if he would follow his Master, his work must be done among men. If the land of spirituality must remain a *terra incognita* to the natural man and is not to be reached by self instituted and unnatural means, we inquire, who are they that reach it and what are the means employed? The answer is, such as are led by the Holy Spirit. "God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit," and several noble highways known as the means of grace over which the Spirit will lead to that blessed state all who will follow him thither.

We come first in our examination of the means to the way of the Holy Bible. Along this glorious old saint's road the Spirit will lead the soul through many changing scenes to the desired land. Written under the inspiration of the Spirit, the Bible contains the record of the preparation for the Christ, the record of the words and works of Christ, the record of the promise and coming of the Comforter, the record of the marvellous works of faith inspired prophets and apostles, the record of the revelation of God's character, man's immortality and the soul's eternal destiny, and is, therefore, pre eminently a spiritual book. In order that the book may prove a traversable way it must not be read for its historical treasures, or its sublime poetry, or its prophetic eloquence, or its profound philosophy merely, but for the spiritual activity and insight which its contents communicate. It must, moreover, be read thoroughly, not having the knowledge of it limited to a few isolated portions, and with an unprejudiced, teachable spirit, not for the sake of criticism and contention. It is only when thus read that the Bible will be found profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, 2 Tim. 3:16 and only thus will it uncover its springs of spirituality. It gives me pain to see the Bible so little prized. Have not our fathers fought great battles for it and died with it folded to their hearts! Is not every letter in the canon bathed with the blood of saints and martyrs! Have not the phalanxes of the world, the flesh, the devil, hell and death been marshalled against it! And you, dullard, allow it to lie unread and unthought of until the dust gathers on it an inch thick, and a great wall is made for the dearth of spirituality! Bah, it's an insult to God!

We come now to the pathway of Religious Thought; I mean downright, earnest, consecrated thinking. Along this rugged road the Spirit will only lead that soul which has the power to grasp a thought as in a vice and track it home; and the liberty to choose that conclusion most conformable to reason. Thought ploughs in the seed, and religious truth strikes its roots into the memory. Thought clears off the fog, and like mountains emerging from a mist, religious conceptions come forth clearly outlined and striking. Thought blasts and crushes out the quarts of religious problems and separates the gold. Religious thought is that state of mind, in which the force of sacred affinities is free to exercise itself; in which spiritual elements combine to produce strong and definite ideas; and in which the process of mental crystallization is carried on, and beautiful crystals of spiritual truth are formed. "While I was mining" sings the king, "the fire burned."

I had a boy friend whose bark has long since put out to sea. The last time I saw him he said to me, "Baker, I find it necessary to think about my religion." That was Ernest Perry's message to my soul, and I pass it on to you.

What shall you think about? Why, the universe and its God! Do not confine yourself to the thoughts of eating, drinking, dressing, and money making, but as