

## **“Spiritual or Religious? Is there a difference?”**

**John 16:5-15**

[www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=john+16:5-15](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=john+16:5-15)

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June 6, 2010

**“It’s ok to get angry with God. God can take it.”**

### **Spiritual or Religious: Either can Dishonor Christ**

For some years now we seem to be going through a resurgence of interest in the Spirit. Someone said to me the other day. “Americans are becoming more spiritual.” “I’m not very religious, I’ll admit,” said someone else, “but I am very spiritual.” By this artificial distinction I think they mean that they believe in god, but do not want to be connected with a Christian Church.

The question we need to pose in this situation is this: “Does being spiritual actually connect a person to God’s truth?” It is good that people are more open to talking about and even considering living with an understanding of the world of the spiritual. However, the discussion of the spiritual opens up more than 2000 spiritual organizations in America alone. Most of us know that a Buddhist Shrine is in Ann Arbor, a Hindu Temple is in Grosse Pointe, and numerous Mosques are located in Dearborn. There is even a church that provides multiple self-help groups and a weekly television program with the only formal reference to God being as a Higher Power.

Surely growing more spiritual is a good thing, you might say. In many ways I do think having people be open to the life of the spirit is good. However, with so many choices people have a tendency to choose what affirms them. The peril of spirituality is that it becomes another consumer-oriented choice between competing gods. In this atmosphere of confusion the question very quickly emerges, “What is true?”

We live in a situation not unlike that when the Apostle John lived in Ephesus and wrote his Gospel. There were many competing spiritualities. All of them were proclaiming to make life better. The question was, “What is true?”

John shared with them that when Jesus prepared to leave planet Earth, he promised to send the Spirit of Truth to be their friend, teacher, and guide. We need to recover the confidence in Jesus Christ that John proclaimed to the Ephesians.

- The Risen Jesus Christ is the Word of God who became flesh and lived among us.
- The Risen Jesus Christ is Emanuel God with us now and forever.
- The Risen Jesus Christ is the only One who can promise you that the Spirit of Truth will be with you.
- The Risen Jesus Christ is the only One who can promise you a living relationship with God that can include being supported, being angry, being frustrated, and most of all being loved. A living relationship with God includes all of the aspects of a relationship so that God takes all our feelings and thoughts and helps us grow into full maturity.

### **We must forthrightly lift up The Risen Jesus Christ now as the early Christians did!**

Fifty years ago before we began to play the word game about spiritual and religious, C.S. Lewis foresaw the coming of a time when we must proclaim the Risen Jesus Christ as Lord of all the earth. Lewis challenged people to choose wisely whom they would serve as God.

“I am trying here to prevent anyone from saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him, ‘I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept His claim to be God.’ That is the one thing we must not say. A man who is merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic – on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg – or else He would be the devil of hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse.” (C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity, pp 40-41”

Jesus is either who he says he is, or he is a madman! Who do you say that he is? Today I challenge you to face the truth of your own belief. Is Jesus the Lord of your life? Do you believe you will meet Jesus face to face the moment of your death? Face the truth today. How is Jesus teaching you, guiding you, challenging you to live God’s kind of life?

## Listen to the Spirit of Truth

I want to ask you to listen to the inner voice of the Spirit of Truth whom Jesus promised. Do not be like Harold and Mildred who had been married 65 years. Harold had become quite hard of hearing. One evening, as they sat holding hands on the couch, Mildred leaned over and said, "Harold, I'm proud of you."

"What's that you say, Mildred?" Harold asked.

Mildred leaned toward him and repeated a little louder, "I'm proud of you, Harold."

"Still can't hear you, Mildred."

Mildred leaned over closer still, and yelled, "HAROLD, I'M REALLY PROUD OF YOU!"

"WELL I'M TIRED OF YOU, TOO!" Harold shouted. (Thomas R. Padberg, *Rotarian Plymouth, Ind., USA*)

The Spirit of Truth sometimes has to yell loud at us and we still do not hear the message. Our ears are clogged with our own assumptions. We think we know what is right and what is wrong, but we can be deceived. The Evil One is called the "Great Deceiver"! We can be assured that the Evil One is at work in our world.

We must learn to listen to the Spirit of Truth. We must learn to share with the Spirit of Truth even the angry, difficult, or struggling thoughts that we have. We can decide each day to open our minds and hearts to hear the truth from God.

- We can hear the Spirit through Holy Scripture.
- We can hear the Spirit in the midst of Worship.
- We can hear the Spirit through the voice of a trusted friend.
- We can hear the Spirit as we gather in Lifegroups or Ministry Teams.

The Spirit of Truth will communicate with us. Don't worry about what you say to God. God can handle it! The real question for you is, "Are you listening"?

**The Spirit will "expose the error of the godless world's view of sin, righteousness, and judgment..." (John 16:8) ([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=john+16:8](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=john+16:8))**

One clear way you can know the Spirit of Truth is communicating with you is challenging your assumptions. We do live in a fallen world. Our instincts are developed through generations to move down the negative, life-denying path. Why else do you remember one negative statement in the midst of fifty positive ones? Why else do psychologists tell us that we need to give ten affirmations for every one negative comment we make? We can think we are doing right, we can think our habits are good, we can think we are on the right track with our career, marriage, and family, only to find out that we completely missed the mark. One meaning of sin is missing the mark. Living without the Spirit of Truth in our lives means that we will miss the mark. And, coming up short, missing the mark can be deadly!

Paul Harvey tells an incredible story describing how Eskimos kill a wolf simply by coating several layers of frozen blood on a sharp knife sticking out of the frozen tundra. Apparently the wolf picks up the scent, and after circling the knife warily begins licking the frozen blood. He begins to lick faster and faster as the desire for blood literally drives the wolf wild. So great becomes his craving that the wolf never notices the sting of the sharp blade on his tongue as the blood being consumed gradually becomes his own. Morning finds the wolf lying dead in the snow.

Temptation lures each of us just as the bloody knife attracts the unsuspecting wolf. We may warily respond at first, but we soon become consumed by the desire of the moment, never noticing the deadly sting of the sharp blade of "sin" as the blood consumed eventually becomes our own. (Larry E. Davies, "Turning points: A bloody knife and growing hair," [Sowseeds@hovac.com](mailto:Sowseeds@hovac.com)) The bloody knife of internet pornography, drug addictions, sex addictions, food addictions, rage addictions, gossip, or much more negative behavior can consume us and ultimately kill us.

The clearest way to know that the Spirit of Truth is communicating with you is that your habits and thoughts are being challenged. Are the ways you are coming up short with your life being exposed? If your spirituality is always making you feel good, then you are not listening to the Spirit of Truth! You probably are licking a sharp knife and not even knowing it!

Open your ears! Open your mind! Open your heart! Let the Spirit of Truth challenge you, expose you, teach you the importance of God's truth! Share with God even your favorite sin? Is it gossip? Share it with God! Is it a negative attitude? Share that with God. Are you constantly lusting after someone or something you cannot have? Share that with God. Are you angry with God? Share that with God. The Spirit of Truth can take it. If you are worshipping a god other than the Spirit of Truth, then you are living within a fantasy of your own making. Are you allowing the Spirit of Truth to work in your life to challenge your sin and free you from its grips? You can be free! The Spirit of Truth will set you free once you choose to be vulnerable and teachable. What about right now?

**The Spirit will “take you by the hand and guide you into all the truth there is.”**

**(John 16: 13)** ([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=john+16:13](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=john+16:13))

The exciting and luminous Japanese Christian, Toyohiko Kagawa, poet and servant of the poor in Kobe's slums wrote a poem, “Discovery” which strikes a fire in our hearts when the Spirit of Truth is allowed to enter. Open your mind, heart, and hands, then listen.

*That a secret plan  
Is hid in my hand;  
That my hand is big.  
Big, because of this plan.  
That God,  
Who dwells in my hand,  
Knows this secret plan  
Of things He will do  
For the world  
Using my hand!      (Songs from the Slums)*

Jesus' promise is that the Spirit of Truth will “take you by the hand and guide you into all the truth there is.” You do not have to worry about how you will live, what you need to know, what you might say, or where you will be next year. The Spirit of Truth is holding onto your hand! You are free to trust the Living God with your life. Jesus' promise is clear. You are not alone! Holy Scripture promises that nothing can separate you from Jesus Christ, your Lord and Savior! **(Romans 8)** ([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=romans+8](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=romans+8))

**The Spirit will “honor Jesus Christ...” (John 16:14)** ([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=john+16:14](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=john+16:14))

You can trust that the Spirit of Truth is leading you in the path of truth because the Spirit will bring honor and glory to Jesus Christ. When St. Irenaeus in the Second Century was asked what new thing Christ brought us that others do not give us, he responded: “He brought himself.” (Irenaeus, Against Heresies IV, 34.1 ) Holy Scripture tells us that Jesus left his heavenly power and glory in order to suffer life on this fallen planet. He was willing to empty himself completely and die a cruel death upon the cross. God then lifted the name of Jesus above all other names on heaven or earth. **(Philippians 2)** ([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=philippians+2](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=philippians+2)) Jesus was raised from the dead! We are Easter people. We celebrate a risen Lord and Savior!

“Presumably [Jesus] could have had any resurrected body he wanted, and yet he chose one identifiable mainly by scars that could be seen and touched. Why? I believe the story of Easter would be incomplete without those scars on the hands, and the feet, and the side of Jesus. When human beings fantasize, we dream of pearly straight teeth and wrinkle-free skin and sexy ideal shapes. We dream of an unnatural state: the perfect body. But for Jesus, being confined in a skeleton and human skin WAS the unnatural state. The scars are, to him, an emblem of life on our planet, a permanent reminder of those days of confinement and suffering.

I take hope in Jesus' scars. From the perspective of heaven, they represent the most horrible event that has ever happened in the history of the universe – the crucifixion – Easter turned into a memory. Because of Easter, I can hope that the tears we shed, the blows we receive, the emotional pain, the heartache over lost friends and loved ones, all these will become memories, like Jesus' scars. Scars never completely go away, but neither do they hurt any longer. We will have re-created bodies, a re-created heaven and earth. We will have a new start, an Easter start.” {Philip Yancey, *The Jesus I Never Knew* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995)}

The Spirit of Truth honors Jesus. We are called to glorify and praise Jesus in all we say and do. But, we get jaded as modern adults. We get a little embarrassed by giving glory to someone else. Truthfully, we often want the glory for ourselves. We do not want to do what changing the Spirit of Truth will require if we are really going to give Jesus glory with our lives, our habits, our money, and our time. It takes a child to teach us again and again. The Spirit of Truth can come through a child because the child is open and willing to give glory to Jesus.

Dwight A. Moody, a Pennsylvania pastor, describes the time his family was gathered around the table playing a homemade version of the game “Pictionary.” It was Christmas, so they had created some holiday themes and phrases that the players would try to demonstrate through their own drawings.

Dwight’s nine-year-old daughter, Sarah, drew the difficult phrase, “Glory to God in the highest.” How would you draw “glory” or “highest” or “God”? As Dwight recalls:

“The first two stumped her, but not ‘God.’ Without a moment’s hesitation, she drew a human form – with face, arms, legs – and then large hands...with nail prints. It was Jesus she had drawn to convey to us ‘God’.”

That’s what the Gospel is all about. In Jesus, we are able to see God. (Moody is Pastor of North Park Baptist Church, Allison Park, PA)

The Spirit of Truth can break through any addiction, overcome any disaster, free you from any burden because the Spirit of Truth honors and glorifies Jesus Christ.

Each one of us is called to allow the Spirit of Truth to work within us in such a clear way that our lives give glory to Jesus! Today you can decide to deepen your vulnerability, grow your openness, and allow the Spirit of Truth to take you by the hand and celebrate Jesus who is alive and living with you today!