

SEED & BREAD

FOR THE SOWER ISA. 55:10 FOR THE EATER
BRIEF BIBLICAL MESSAGES FROM

THE WORD OF TRUTH MINISTRY

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WHAT DOES "SPIRITUAL" MEAN?

It is a well-known fact that certain Greek words were selected by the Spirit of God and used in a special and restricted way in the New Testament. This meaning of the word is established by God's usage of it. This is not at all strange since men constantly do this with words, and they have every right to do it. When it becomes apparent that the Spirit of God has done this with a Greek word, its meaning must then be determined by the way in which it is used by New Testament writers. The Greek word *pneumatikos*, which is always translated "spiritual," is one of these.

The English word "spiritual" is one that is in very common use; and it is my conviction that there is no word in the Christian vocabulary that is as misused, abused, and misunderstood as this one. Most of the time it is used as a ritualistic word, having no meaning and carrying no information to those who hear it.

The incorrect use and the abuse of this word have given rise to a flood of errors that have done great harm by creating misunderstandings of God's revealed Truth. If we purpose to "walk in the Truth," then we will need to be in harmony with the Spirit of God, both in our understanding and use of this word.

As a teacher of the Word of God, and as one who permits his hearers to ask questions at the close of each class, I know quite well how many Biblical problems have been created due to misunderstandings of the meaning of the word "spiritual." Over and over the same questions are asked that would never need to be asked if the questioner had any conception of the Biblical

usage and meaning of this word.

Usually framed as objections to something I have said, some of these questions are: "But, Mr. Sellers, aren't we spiritual Israel?" "Isn't it a spiritual kingdom?" "Aren't our blessings spiritual?" "Isn't heaven a spiritual place?" or, "Won't we have spiritual bodies?"

In attempting to deal honestly with such questions, it is necessary to ask, "What do you mean by the word 'spiritual'?" I seldom get an answer to this; and if the questioner does attempt an answer, it always demonstrates a complete lack of understanding of the usage of this word in the Word of God. It also reveals that he has adopted, without question, the Platonic concept that the opposite of spiritual is material and that material things are never spiritual.

In the writing and thinking of the Greek philosopher Plato and all who follow him, it is evident that the word "spiritual" (*pneumatikos*) is used to describe things that are not material or physical, that is, incorporeal, having no substance. This was Plato's use of the word and these are the ideas he intended to convey; but this is not the way the Spirit of God uses it, and these are not the ideas conveyed by it.

Since dictionaries define words according to the way in which they are currently used by men, the definition based upon Plato's usage is the one we will find in them. However, it must be remembered that man's usage is not the same as that in the New Testament. What men mean when they use this word is not what the Spirit of God means when He uses it. No man can claim that he has "overcome the world" as long as he is mouthing the ideas of the world in regard to the word "spiritual." I would be doing nothing but mouthing the concept of the Mormons if I used the word "gentile" to designate a non-Mormon. That is the way they use it and that is what it means to them, but it will never mean that to me. Even so, the word "spiritual" may be used by the church and the world to designate that which is not physical or material; but I refuse to follow them in this.

The Greek word with which we must deal in considering the meaning of "spiritual" is *pneumatikos*. This is an adjective which comes from the noun *pneuma*, and it is found 26 times in the New Testament. It is translated "spiritual" in every occurrence, so the student is not troubled with discordant renderings. There is also an adverb (*pneumatikos*) that is cognate with this

adjective. It is found only two times and is translated "spiritually" in both occurrences.

As a simple Greek adjective, derived from the noun *pneuma* (spirit), it is entirely correct to define *pneumatikos* as meaning "of the spirit," or "having the qualities of spirit"; but, as already stated, this is a word which the Spirit of God has chosen, used in a specific way, and given a specific meaning. This is in harmony with Paul's declaration: "**Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Spirit teacheth**" (1 Cor. 2:13).

In determining the meaning of a word by New Testament usage alone, the proper process is to find an occurrence where the meaning is unmistakably clear, then to try out this meaning in all other occurrences. If this meaning fits, if it makes the passage clearer, if it enlightens the passage, we can then feel assured that we have the idea which the Spirit of God intended to convey when He inspired the writer to use this term.

Certain occurrences of this word in the writings of Paul are so crystal clear in meaning that it has caused some scholars to speak of the "special Pauline use of this word," inferring that Paul gave this word a sense not found in other writings. But it is right here that they miss the truth, since twenty-four of the twenty-six occurrences of this word are found in Paul's writings, as reference to a concordance will show. The two occurrences found in Peter's epistles are in complete harmony with Pauline usage.

In 1 Corinthians 10:3, 4, we find three occurrences of this word in a familiar and plain context.

And did all eat the same spiritual meat; and did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ.

In this passage we can identify three actual, material, physical things that are called "spiritual": the manna, the water, and the rock, nullifying once and for all the idea that the material cannot be spiritual.

The manna was actual food. In shape it was round, and in color it was white. It was gathered in containers, and it could be baked or boiled. It spoiled quickly, would breed worms, and give an offensive odor if kept too long. It had many of the same qualities which we attach to many foods

today. When taken into the mouth, it was chewed and swallowed the same as any other food. It filled the stomach, caused hunger to cease, and gave the digestive process something on which to work.

Thus, we have an actual, physical, and material thing that is called spiritual. And if we ask why the Spirit of God so describes it, there is only one answer. It is called spiritual because it was produced directly by God Himself without any natural instrumentality.

The water they drank was actual water, two parts hydrogen and one part oxygen in a liquid form. The people drank of it; the cattle drank of it; the women did the family washing in it; the children waded in it and gleefully splashed it on one another. It was real, literal, material water; yet, it is called "spiritual" by the Spirit of God. And again, if we ask why, there is only one answer. This water was produced directly and by the sole power of God without any intervening, natural instrumentality. There was no evaporation, no clouds, and no precipitation; yet there was water.

From Paul's threefold use of the word spiritual in 1 Cor. 10:3, 4, we are able to say that when anything is produced by God, when it comes directly from God, when it can be attributed directly to Him without any natural instrumentality, and when it is something for which He is directly responsible, then it can be called spiritual. The manna, the water, and the rock fit all these descriptions; therefore, they are called spiritual by the Spirit of God. In order to further clarify this definition, let us consider several illustrations.

Take for example an earthquake. These are usually caused by natural forces such as volcanic explosions in the earth, by the faulting of the rocks, or the movement of the earth along a fault. Any earthquake caused by these natural instrumentalities could not correctly be called "spiritual"; but one produced by the direct and sole power of God could be so designated, according to the New Testament usage of this word. Thus, the earthquake recorded in Acts 16:26 can be called a spiritual earthquake. It is not so designated in Scripture, there being no discussion as to its nature there.

In Judges 6:36 - 40, we read of Gideon, who sought evidence in regard to God's purpose to use him by asking permission to put a fleece of wool on the ground and to know that it was God's purpose to deliver Israel through him if the dew wet only the fleece and the earth around it remained dry. As

further proof the sign was reversed so that one night it was wet fleece and dry earth, and the next night it was dry fleece and wet earth.

Now, according to the inspired usage of "spiritual" in the New Testament, we have every right to say that the wetness and dryness of the fleece were spiritual conditions. It would have been a simple matter for a man to have made the fleece wet and just as easy for him to have kept it dry. But such wetness or dryness would have been human conditions. The wetness and dryness of Gideon's fleece were spiritual conditions - they were produced by God.

In 1 Corinthians 15:44, we read, "it is raised a spiritual body." The followers of the Platonic philosophy jump in quickly here and say that this means we will have "immaterial bodies," which, they say, can pass through solid objects such as doors without opening them. This is childish thinking to say the least, since the very words "immaterial bodies" are contradictory.

There cannot be a body unless there is material and substance. One may as well speak of "bodiless bodies."

I do not know how a babe is produced within its mother, but I do know it is produced there by natural processes that God has ordained and established. Truly, we are born "after the flesh"; and the body that is ours was not produced solely by an act of God without any intermediate processes. However, when we are raised from the dead and given a body as it "pleaseth Him," it will be one produced solely by God and without any human participation. It will be produced in an atom of time, and the nine months required for the natural process will be eliminated. Our bodies in resurrection will be actual, physical bodies, composed of flesh and bones, even as today; yet, they will be spiritual since they will be produced entirely and only by a direct act of God.

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