

# "Spiritual, Religious, Christian"

Text: 1 Corinthians 2:6-13

**"May the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you. To Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen."** - 1 Peter 5:10-11

Dear Fellow Christians, most of you have heard the phrase, and without actually evaluating it you may have even considered it to be good and commendable: *"I'm not really religious, but I am spiritual."* Dig into that phrase a bit with those who use it and you will likely unearth several common denominators. First, they use "spiritual" as more or less synonymous with "deeply emotional." Second, they are expressing a certain arrogance. Third, they are desperately in need of help, especially in the form of instruction from God's Word. The reality is that, consciously or not, those who use that phrase are A) articulating a disdain for those who practice "organized religion," B) indicating that they consider themselves better than those who actually go to church on Sunday, and, C) thereby demonstrate that they are in desperate need of the very thing they claim to possess: spiritual understanding.

For the most part, those who claim to be "spiritual but not religious" are confusing the occasional deep thought or emotional experience with divine revelation or understanding. How can we make such a broad assertion? Because being truly spiritual, as God defines it, is simply not possible apart from faith in Jesus Christ. Nor is there spiritual growth apart from God's Word. There is, as our text for this morning points out, a **"spirit of the world,"** but that's nothing like the spirit that comes only from God.

We understand the intent, of course, when Christians pit "spiritual" against "religious." They are trying to distance themselves from superficial observances and mindless recitations. Yet that's an extraordinarily cynical view of "religious." Our goal this morning then, on the basis of our text, is to examine in greater detail what it means to be truly spiritual, and how that is absolutely compatible with both true religion, and, more to the point, Christianity. The text that will form the basis of our study is found in Paul's first recorded Letter to the Corinthians, the Second Chapter:

**ESV 1 Corinthians 2:6-13 Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. <sup>7</sup> But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. <sup>8</sup> None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they**

**would not have crucified the Lord of glory. <sup>9</sup> But, as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him"-- <sup>10</sup> these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. <sup>11</sup> For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. <sup>12</sup> Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. <sup>13</sup> And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.**

So far the verbally inspired words of our God. It was God the Holy Spirit who first authored and then preserved these words. God the Holy Spirit has also delivered them to each one of us and caused us both to comprehend and believe them. It is by the faith that has been given to us that we are aware that these words represent divine truth, so we begin this morning with this simple, powerful prayer: **"Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth."** Amen.

Picture this scene in your mind. A man with a very stressful job gets off of work, loads his kayak, and drives to a nearby lake. With the lake all to himself, he launches the kayak onto a mirror smooth surface just as the sun is beginning to set. He paddles for just a few strokes and then simply lets the momentum of the sleek little craft carry him along, the only ripples on the surface of the water are those he himself is creating. Almost on cue the setting sun lights the sky with spectacular color – and something inexplicable comes over the man. He is filled with a calm, a happiness that seems to drive away all stress and animosity and frustration. He feels oddly in tune with his surroundings, with nature, and even with his fellow man. He is suddenly at peace with himself.

So, explain that. What was happening to the man? What was he experiencing? What was going on? The world, of course, has a quick and certain answer, no doubt about it: *the man was experiencing a deeply spiritual moment. He may even have been on the very cusp of a total spiritual awakening.*

Was that it? *Could* that be it? Before you answer, there is one other bit of information you need: the man was, and remains, an avowed agnostic. That means that he believes that there may well be a God or gods that exist, but that he/she/they are unknowable.

Make no mistake here. This is the sort of thing that passes for "spiritual" in our present society. It's why you hear things like, *"I feel much closer to God in the woods or at the lake than I do in church."* The rising star among the gods of our society is emotion. Many would go so far as to affirm that where there is no emotion, there can be no presence of God, and there can be no faith.

Could it nonetheless have been possible that that man was actually experiencing some divine intervention or encounter – that he actually was feeling the presence of God?

Not according to God. In his Word God made several things clear. First, that he doesn't visit man through nature; he visits man through his Word. That means that in the absence of his Word, we can have no expectation of *anything* divine. Second, the very tenets or basic core beliefs of the "spiritual awakening" proponents make it clear that whatever is happening, it is most definitely not from God. Some of those basic beliefs include: 1. the willingness to know and accept yourself as you are, 2. Increased intuition and the desire to connect with yourself, together with an increased trust in the wisdom of your own intuition, 3. The refusal to negatively judge yourself or others, 4. The feeling of being connected to everyone and everything – man, animals, plants, the universe, 5. The realization that both plants and animals also have feelings, 6. An awareness of, and connection to, extra-terrestrials.

Understand that as surreal and absurd as this sounds to you, it is anything but new. The devil is a firm believer in recycling. What we just described is pretty much a spot-on definition of pagan deism, and it is more ancient than the druids. Periodically such nonsense has, in the course of human history, been beaten back into the shadows, only to be dusted off, cleaned up, and presented centuries later by Satan as "something exciting, new, and different." Step back and examine the trends of our day, and then plug them into the description of "spiritual awakening" that we just heard and it all begins to make sense. It becomes painfully obvious that Satan has again reintroduced man to the latest version of pagan deism. The obsession with animals and animal rights, the fascination with extra-terrestrials, the refusal to condemn anyone or anything, the bizarre fixation on gender identification, the rabid adherence to the nonsense that every feeling is good and right, and the fanatical emphasis on and preoccupation with emotions – all are just recycled pagan ideas that the devil has been selling to gullible mankind since the fall into sin.

But then you don't have any trouble at all seeing that, recognizing that, do you? Why is that? Our text provides answers both as to why you see it so clearly and why the godless world does not: ***"Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. <sup>7</sup> But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. <sup>8</sup> None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. <sup>9</sup> But, as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him"-- <sup>10</sup> these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit."***

Our text makes clear that the fact that we now see the truth so clearly is evidence only of God's grace. You and I serve only as recipients. That clarity, that understanding, is simply a gift that has been given to us by God the Holy Spirit. In the words of our text: ***"these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit."*** In fact had not God blessed each of us with this revelation, this divine wisdom, you and I would most certainly also be wandering about in the spiritual fog that envelops the rest of the world. Far then from a source of pride, here again we find yet another reason to thank and praise the God who gives such excellent gifts to the likes of us.

Understand also that when our text says that these truths or mysteries were hidden from the wise of this age, that does not mean that God refused to reveal it to them. It is man's own rejection that blinds him to God's truth.

Interestingly enough, though they tend to identify as "progressive," pagans now seem to be taking a certain amount of pride in the fact that their pagan deism is actually an ancient religion. They are amazingly adept at moving seamlessly from "new and exciting" to "tried and true." Yet it is Christianity that conveys a wisdom that not only has God as its source, but that stretches from eternity to eternity. Our text says of this wisdom: ***"We impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages."*** Stop and consider for a moment what an amazing statement that truly is. God himself is the source of the wisdom that he has delivered to us, and it actually predates the creation of the universe. Who can understand such things? Who can fathom the mind of the God who formed his wisdom, his plan, in eternity, carried it out in time (which he also created) and then will carry it on to completion into eternity?

*Here*, here is where we touch God. Here is where we come into contact with the divine, for he made us a part of the plan when he revealed it to us. What is that plan, that wisdom? That God himself would pay man's sin debt; that God would not only sacrifice his own sinless Son for the sins of every human being, he would also then require no payment of any kind from man to receive his gift. There is more in our text, for there we also read, **"We impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory."** God's plan not only called for his rescue of fallen man, it included his intention that we should exist for all eternity with him in his glory – his glory forever enveloping us in heaven.

Who would, who could, ever imagine such a thing – God sacrificing himself for his rebellious creation? The answer, according to our text, is no one: **"What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him" these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit.** Since man could never, would never, guess at God's plan for our salvation, that plan existed as what our text calls **"a secret and hidden wisdom of God."** Nor is the thought of man never coming up with this on his own just a speculative theory. Throughout the history of mankind, natural man has tried to discern the path, and failed. Every religion created by man since the fall into sin has called upon man himself to earn the right to enter God's heaven. Only Christianity teaches that God the Son himself earned our passage for us.

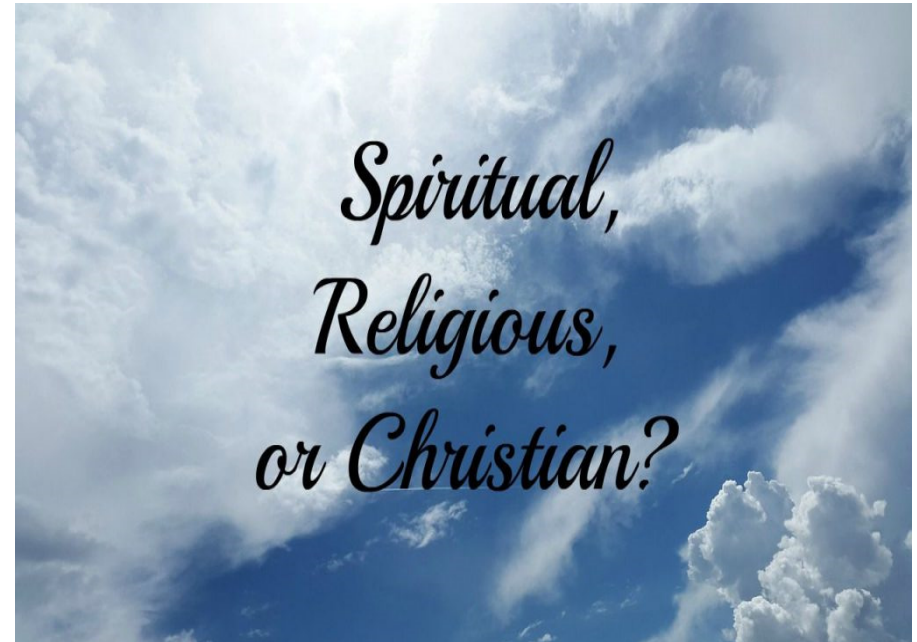
The end result, again according to our text: **Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God.** This, in the end, is what it means to be spiritual. It can (and rightly should) involve our emotions, but it is never based on those emotions. True spirituality is found in exposure to, and reliance upon, the absolute truth of God's Word. It is believing what that Word of God tells us whether it "feels" right to us or not, whether it agrees with how things on this earth seem to work or not, whether it condemns our prior beliefs and convictions or not. To be truly spiritual is to be Christian – the only *religion* that God himself established. We meet this God only *in his Holy Word*. There he reveals himself; there he speaks to us; there alone he reveals his wisdom and truth, and there he comforts us.

Humbly then thank your God this morning for revealing to you, here in time, his timeless eternal wisdom. Thrill to the fact that that mystery is that his Son, Jesus Christ, has paid for every single one of your sins. Amen.

ESV **Deuteronomy 30:15-20** "See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil. <sup>16</sup> If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God that I command you today, by loving the LORD your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his rules, then you shall live and multiply, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to take possession of it. <sup>17</sup> But if your heart turns away, and you will not hear, but are drawn away to worship other gods and serve them, <sup>18</sup> I declare to you today, that you shall surely perish. You shall not live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to enter and possess. <sup>19</sup> I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live, <sup>20</sup> loving the LORD your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days, that you may dwell in the land that the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them."

ESV **Matthew 5:21-37** "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' <sup>22</sup> But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire. <sup>23</sup> So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, <sup>24</sup> leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. <sup>25</sup> Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison. <sup>26</sup> Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny. <sup>27</sup> ¶ "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' <sup>28</sup> But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. <sup>29</sup> If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. <sup>30</sup> And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell. <sup>31</sup> ¶ "It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' <sup>32</sup> But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery. <sup>33</sup> ¶ "Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.' <sup>34</sup> But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, <sup>35</sup> or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. <sup>36</sup> And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. <sup>37</sup> Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil.

ESV **1 Corinthians 2:6-13** Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. <sup>7</sup> But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. <sup>8</sup> None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. <sup>9</sup> But, as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him"--<sup>10</sup> these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. <sup>11</sup> For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. <sup>12</sup> Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. <sup>13</sup> And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.



# ST PAUL LUTHERAN CHURCH

BISMARCK, NORTH DAKOTA

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Mick Johnson, President Angela Pfennig, Organist

Michael Roehl, Pastor

**The Sixth Sunday after Epiphany – February 12, 2023**

## The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

## The Opening Hymn – 276 (Red Hymnal)

"Come Unto Me, Ye Weary"

## The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

## The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

**The First Lesson:** (Deuteronomy 30:15-20) There were different kinds of covenants in the Old Testament, both one and two sided. God is here talking about the two-sided covenant that he was establishing with Israel. This was a secular (earthly) covenant where God said that he would prosper Israel in the Promised Land as long as they fulfilled their part of the covenant, which was to honor him alone as God. This is not to be confused with the one-sided "New Covenant," where God alone acted to pay man's sin debt.

## Psalm 121 (Supplement page 42) (Brown Hymnal)

**The Second Lesson:** (Matthew 5:21-37) We continue our Gospel readings from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Note again how firm and unyielding God's Law really is. Mankind has no right to diminish God's law or to try to soften the pronouncement of punishment that is promised for all who disobey. Sin begins in the heart, and since our hearts are thoroughly corrupt, we could never hope to earn our own salvation. What a comfort then to know that Jesus won our battle for us by satisfying the demands of the Law in our place.

## The Confession of Faith -

The Nicene Creed – (Projected on screens)

## The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 762 (Brown Hymnal)

"This Is He"

## The Sermon – Text: 1 Corinthians 2:6-13 (Printed on the back page)

**"Spiritual, Religious, Christian"**

## The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

## The Prayers

## The Pre-Communion Hymn – 305 (Stanza 7) (Red Hymnal)

"Soul, Adorn Thyself with Gladness"

## The Preparation for Holy Communion (Brown Hymnal page 17)

## The Distribution

## The Nunc Dimittis and Thanksgiving (Brown Hymnal page 20)

## The Benediction

## The Closing Hymn – 655 (Red Hymnal)

"I Pray Thee, Dear Lord Jesus"

## Silent Prayer

**Welcome!** - We warmly welcome any visitors worshipping with us this morning and invite you to join us each Sunday at this time. We are glad you are here! **To our Visitors seeking Holy Communion** – In obedience to God's Word, we practice "Close Communion." This practice stresses both our concern for others, not wanting anyone to receive the sacrament to their harm (1 Cor. 11:27-30) and the importance of unity in confession and faith (1 Cor. 10:16-17). For this reason we ask that anyone who has not established this unity through membership in a CLC congregation please meet with the pastor to discuss this Scriptural doctrine before communing. This is a practice that we follow out of love and concern for you, and out of obedience to God's Word, not in judgment of anyone's Christian faith.

## Attendance – Sunday (30) Average (38)

### This Week at St. Paul:

<b>Today</b>	<b>-9:00 a.m.</b>	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Worship Service w/Holy Communion
	<b>-11:15 a.m.</b>	– Fellowship Hour
<b>Monday</b>	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Study Conference in Bowdle
<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>-6:00 p.m.</b>	– Confirmation Class
	<b>-7:00 p.m.</b>	– Midweek Bible Study
<b>Next Sunday</b>	<b>-9:00 a.m.</b>	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Worship Service
	<b>-11:00 a.m.</b>	– Fellowship Hour

**CLC News** – Pastor Wayne Eichstadt has returned the call to Messiah of Eau Claire. That congregation has now called Pastor Neal Radichel as their fulltime pastor and Pastor Emeritus Mark Bernthal as parttime vacancy pastor. Pastor Bernthal has accepted that call.

**Lent** – Ash Wednesday, which marks the beginning of the Lenten season, is February 22 (one week from this Wednesday). As is our custom, we commemorate the season with midweek services through Holy Week. Please make plans now to attend as many of these special services as possible.

**Easter Flower Order** – With the approach of Lent, it is time for our annual Easter Flower order. Please consult the sheet on the mailbox table or see Sandy Roehl for more information.