

Spirituality: What Does It All Mean?

[Acts 2:1-13](#)

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I. Why has spirituality become such a popular topic? Why all the fuss about:

Angels Meditation Goddesses Mother Earth Wicca Out of body and other mystical experiences

Why TV shows like Touched By an Angel and Seventh Heaven?

Even the techies are getting religion. MIT recently hosted a conference entitled "The Spiritual Potential of Cyberspace," which addressed such topics as "wired religion."

Something has happened to us in the last 30 years to open our eyes to the spiritual.

E.g., 1971 University of Tennessee = no mention of religion Now = can't get away from it.

Even our newest Redskin, Prime Time Neon Deion Sanders, arrayed in his burgundy and gold suit, points to himself and Darrell Green as "men of God."

What does it all mean? And how are Christians supposed to navigate this whitewater romp down the spiritual rapids?

II. "What does this mean?" is the question that the gathered crowd asked on Pentecost. They heard something strange and wanted to know what it meant. I love the Greek text here. It does not translate what does it mean but what does it wish to be, as if to suggest that something or someone is trying to communicate a purpose behind the linguistic noise.

We live in a culture of linguistic noise, of information and cultural chatter. Some decry the chatter, so-called postmodernism with its tolerant relativity and openness to all opinions. I think it is a great thing, an opportunity for disciples of Jesus Christ to speak into a charged spiritual atmosphere. For too many years we have lived in the shackles of modernistic positivism with its narrow criteria for truth: Did it happen? (a historic criterion) Or can I prove it? (a scientific criterion). Now, all of a sudden, we find ourselves living in an unpredictable, unmoored cosmos where we can map the human genome, but can't get our fingers on subatomic particles, can't begin to see the vast stretches of a what astronomers are calling a flat universe, let alone manage the flood of emails on our computers.

This kind of experience pushes us once again to ask about spirituality. What does it all mean?

Is there a purpose behind the interest in spirituality? Was there a purpose behind the phenomenon that the gathered crowd experienced?

To understand the current interest in spirituality, we have to assay developments in the latter twentieth century, in actuality since the Enlightenment of the 17th century. To understand Pentecost, we have to assay the spiritual environment into which Luke wrote his account.

Those standing at Pentecost knew something of the Spirit of God, the wind of God, literally, present at creation. God's Spirit moves across the waters and creates life, Genesis tells us. Psalm 104 and other texts tell us that God's Spirit is that which sustains the universe, grows the grass, and even feeds the animals, you and me included.

E.g., I just knew there was something spiritual about chocolate!

At a fundamental level, to be alive is to be spiritual. This is what the Bible teaches.

Secondly, those standing at Pentecost knew as well that the Spirit of God stirs the energies of people to do extraordinary tasks. God stirred the judges, Gideon for example, to throw off Midianite oppressors. God poured out his Spirit upon the kings Saul and David to enable their extraordinary deeds. God as well stirred the prophets. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me . . . to bring good news to the oppressed," Isaiah proclaims. As well the Spirit descended upon Jesus so that he might perform his extraordinary work.

E.g., STP in my old BMW

From life for all to extraordinary life for a few. This is Bible's spiritual trajectory. Life to live, and extraordinary life to give. By the time we reach the New Testament/Acts period, those gathered at Pentecost knew God's broad gift of life by the Spirit and God's narrow gift of energy for a task by the Spirit. When the Spirit came at Pentecost, God once again broadened the narrow gift of the Spirit so that all could do extraordinary tasks. No longer did one have to be a judge, a king, or even a prophet. God pours out his Spirit on all flesh, as Peter tells us, quoting the prophet Joel.

God pours out his empowering Spirit on all flesh. This is what Pentecost meant and means. This is what the speaking and hearing in other languages indicate. This is what the multicultural gathering is all about. God is broadening the spray of his Spirit to empower people of all nations for a task. And this phenomenon, by the way, is very postmodern!

That's the point of Christian Spirituality. God pours out his Spirit on all of us together so that we might do something.

III.

What is it that we're supposed to do? I want to pause here and take a look at postmodern spirituality so that you will see the vast difference between it and the Bible's teaching.

Two things characterize postmodern spirituality, its individual focus, and its private focus.

E.g., The Ten Commitments

Notice you. Currently, spirituality is about you and your (singular) relationship to God. This even colors Christian spirituality-"It's me and Jesus."

Notice, in contrast, what happens at Pentecost. The Spirit falls not upon a lone individual, but upon a group. Christian spirituality begins not with me and Jesus, but with us and Jesus.

E.g., Need for small groups, mission groups, marriage covenant

If you want to get spiritual, get a group, come to church, find fellowship.

The second characteristic of postmodern spirituality is its private focus. If postmodernism has taught us anything it has taught the relativity of ideas and beliefs. My beliefs and my lifestyle are my private affairs. So are yours as long as you don't intrude into my space.

E.g., Pecos Monastery vs. All Church Retreat (radical)

When Pentecost came, people didn't go private, they went loud and public. They spoke in the public forum about God's mighty deeds. Peter got up and started preaching. Some thought they were drunk. But nonetheless they began to engage the culture, to travel, and to show up in the agora (marketplace).

Luke begins the Book of Acts with these words from Jesus: "You (plural) will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you (plural); and you (plural), will be my witnesses (plural) in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (not in your private devotion behind closed doors refusing to upset anyone with contrary opinions)." (Acts 1:8).

IV.

OK. What does this all mean for you and me?

I know that many of you come here to find sanctuary, to get away from the rush of political opinion, the crush of the Washington work ethic, and the chatter of the culture. I have heard this mantra since coming to NPC-people come here to find sanctuary. You come to find peace. And that's good. I need sanctuary as well--if only for a moment someone would turn off the noise!

But as you enter this sanctuary you are going to find sooner or later that the Holy Spirit has blown off the doors, gathered you into groups, and sent you out into a raucous public debate about life and death matters.

How are we going to do this, you ask? How are we going to get the energy to move out of here and tell others about the great deeds of God?

E.g., Ever been excited about something? -Palm Pilot? -Grandmother with pictures? Joyce, Carol

This is a work not of your doing. The Holy Spirit must come upon you (plural) and send you (plural) out. Maybe this will be the effect of our prayer project at National. I Pray that the Holy Spirit would descend upon each of you, enable you to find fellowship, and blow the doors off this building.