



**An undenominational publication
devoted to the teachings of Jesus and
His apostles and dedicated to those
who want to know more about the Bible**

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Spirituality or Organized Religion?

Reading through the gospel of Matthew I am impressed with how much Jesus chose a spiritual relationship with God over “Organized Religion” of His time.

The Hebrew “establishment” consisted of sects called the “Pharisees” and “Sadducees”. Both groups claimed to teach the word of God, but both were heavily influenced by man-made religious laws and traditions; both failed to give proper place to the word of God; both totally rejected Jesus and His message of God’s love, His grace and forgiveness; both robbed hearers of lasting peace and joy.

“Organized Religion” of Jesus’ day was counterfeit religion, like much of what we see today. It did not meet the real needs of people searching for God. Man-made teachings still lead people away from a healthy relationship with God, placing heavy burdens, requiring meaningless rituals, distorting the truth, financial greed, hypocrisy of church leaders, deception that closes hearts to God’s true kingdom.

You may be frustrated by both Catholicism and Protestantism. You may have

said: “I am spiritual, but not religious.” It’s not that you no longer believe in God, it’s just that “denominations” get in the way of finding God.

If you are confused, disheartened, unfulfilled and longing for a closer relationship with God don’t despair! You can find what you seek in a relationship with Jesus Christ built on His pure and simple principles. You can be an “undenominational” Christian. The place to start is by reading the Scriptures for yourself. An up to date English version will be helpful (See offer for a free copy of the *Easy to Read Bible* on the back page). Begin a Bible correspondence course (see page 9). Look for a group of Christians that teaches only what the Bible teaches (see page 6). Ask God to guide you. Seek the truth. Test everything you hear by what you read in the Scriptures.

You deserve more than what most “Organized Religion” has to offer. You need the truth, to turn from things that are contrary to God’s will, to have an opportunity to grow spiritually. Let us help you make the right choice.

—David Tarbet, Editor
New Milford, Connecticut

JESUS IS THE LAMB OF GOD

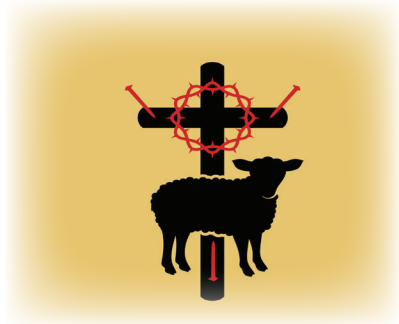
*“The Lamb of God takes away the sin of the world!”
(John 1:29)*

Being “Spiritual” begins with believing in Jesus as the “Lamb of God.” Here’s why:

In the book of Genesis we learn that God accepted the worship of Abel who brought *“the firstborn of his flock and their fat portions”* as a sacrifice (Genesis 4:4). The blood of a lamb became a substitute for the life of the sinner. God said *“Life is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls”* (Leviticus 17:11). Later, God provided a ram in place of Abraham’s son, Isaac (Genesis 22:1-14). Still later, the Israelites applied the blood of a lamb to their doorposts and lintels so the life of every firstborn would be spared (Exodus 12:1-13). God said: *“When I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt.”*

The Scripture declares: *“The wages of sin is death”* (Romans 6:23). The good news is that Jesus, “the Lamb of God,” surrendered His own personal life, taking the penalty we deserve because of our sins. He died in our place, so that we could be spared eternal separation from God and experience the joy of divine forgiveness. Jesus died that we might live!

Scripture says: *“We have redemption through His blood”* (Ephesians 1:7); we are *“brought near by the blood of Christ”* (Ephesians 2:13); God made *“peace by the blood of His cross”* (Colossians 1:20).



Christians rejoice that we have a Savior and been redeemed by Jesus’ blood.

Just as Abel, Abraham and the nation of Israel obeyed the Lord’s commands and received forgiveness by His grace, we must commit ourselves to obey God’s will in order to be covered by the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ. He is the *“source of eternal salvation to all who obey Him”* (Hebrews 9:27). Obedience includes *faith* in Jesus as the Son of God, *repentance* of our sinful ways, a *confession of Jesus* as Lord and *baptism by immersion* in the name of Jesus Christ *“for the forgiveness of sins.”*

My wife, Suzanne, of 52 years passed to be with the Lord a few weeks ago. She was ready to go. She knew the Lord and committed her life to him. She lived for Jesus and Jesus lived in her. This is the hope and joy I have for my life and that I will live with for the rest of my days.

What about you? Are you ready to meet the Lord? We are here to help you.

— Gary Babcock,
Sermon presented May 19, 2023
Church of Christ, Sterling, Connecticut

JESUS TAUGHT ME HOW TO PRAY



The disciples of Jesus asked Him to teach them to pray (Luke 11:1). Praying is not a matter of reciting words out of a prayer-book or eloquence. Prayer is a *conversation* with the Lord, expressing heart-felt needs. It is letting Him know what He means to us. Jesus taught His disciples not to seek to impress others, but to pray sincerely and personally (Matthew 6:5-15). Learning to pray can feel overwhelming, but one model I have found useful in learning how to pray is the **ACTS** model. Each letter of the word stands for a type of prayer.

“A” stands for **Adoration** or **Praise**. I am going to say we often spend little time on this in prayer. Read Psalm 100. It is a Psalm that is all about praising God for who He is and what He has done. Many of the songs we sing in worship are songs of praise. We might consider spending time adoring God for who He is more often than we do.

“C” stands for **Confession**. Confession is less about telling God what we did, He knows all about us. It is an act of humble transparency and penitence. Once we recognize where we are or what we have done, we can strive to do better. The verses in 1 John 1:5-10 are helpful in understanding this. It is worthwhile to read David’s prayer in Psalm 51 as well.

“T” stands for **Thanksgiving**. This is about all those things we have to be thankful for. If you start with the fact you woke up breathing and start counting what God does for you each day, you will never get any work done. Paul through his words in Philippians 4:5-6 said we should bathe everything in prayer with thanksgiving. That word *“everything”* is all inclusive. It does not matter if what we are praying about is good or bad; easy or hard. We are to pray thanking God that He will hear us and that He will answer.

“S” stands for **Supplication**. Supplication is another word for plea. It is what we are asking God for. This is where we let God know the concerns on our heart, including what we are praying for on behalf of others.

— Jay Repecko
Trumbull, Connecticut Church of Christ

THE GREATEST COMMANDMENTS

LOVE GOD | LOVE THY NEIGHBOR
— MATTHEW 22:36-40

The essence of Christian spirituality lies in our relationship with God. Jesus said the first and greatest commandment is to ***“love God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.”*** The command is to love God with our entire being – heart, soul, and mind – a wholehearted devotion to the Creator. It is complete surrender to His will in our lives. This love and dedication for God becomes the very foundation of a truly spiritual journey.

This is where our Savior, Jesus Christ enters the picture. Perfect in every conceivable way, His example in all things is the pattern for us to follow. Jesus’ life and actions exemplified the deep, intimate connection He had with the Father. He would approach the Father in solitude so nothing would interrupt His communication with God *“And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, He departed and went out to a desolate place, and there He prayed”* (Mark 1:35). Doing so allowed the Savior to align His will with that of the Father.

His actions and teachings were driven not by His agenda, but that of God. *“He who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to Him”* (John 8:29). This allowed Jesus, when He came to the end of His days on earth, to be confident that His purpose had been fulfilled: *“I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do”* (John 17:4).

But what about the second command: ***“Love your neighbor as yourself”***? When we truly love God we will look upon our fellowman as made in the image of God; we will consider our neighbor as God considers him. There will be no racism, hatred, prejudice, conflict, animosity or feeling of superiority. All of these divisive and negative attitudes will vanish as we focus our lives around loving God and being like Him. In place of these destructive things we will be kind, patient, controlled in our speech, showing grace to others.

When we follow the example of Christ we follow God’s agenda to drive our actions instead of our own. Spirituality should mirror that of Christ so that when we reach the end of our time here on earth, we too can confidently say, *“I have glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do.”*

— Cleve Stafford
Berkshire County Church of Christ
Pittsfield, Massachusetts

WORD OF GOD VS. TRADITIONS OF MEN



Jesus calls us back to God's word. In fact, Jesus is the "Word" of God. *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us"* (John 1:1-14) Jesus reveals God's divine nature: *"No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known"* (John 1:18). Jesus calls us back to the pure and simple essence of who God is and what He wants from us.. He reconnects us with God.

Unfortunately, ancient scribes, teachers and Pharisees had lost connection to what was truly important. They substituted man-made religion for the pure spiritual essence of God.

The Pharisees were concerned about traditions and practices they created. They were offended when Jesus exposed their hypocrisy, disregarded their man-made laws, and reminded them of the pure holiness and love of God. Outward ceremonies and Sabbath Day regulations should not have been allowed to distract people from personal holiness, godliness and a reverent fear of God. Pomp and ceremony ought never to be an excuse for neglecting humble obedience to God's commands. This loss of primary purpose is given voice in Jesus' indictment of the Pharisees:

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others" (Matthew 23:23-24).

Each of us is being called back to the heart of God. We seek to make Jesus our spiritual guide and to be led only by the words of the Bible – to get away from man-made traditions and practices. These have turned people away from God's desires and words. God's pure love brings hope, strength, truth, joy and encouragement. Our Father in heaven cares about people who are spiritually frustrated, confused and empty – people who need to find God.

— Nathaniel Hios
Church of Christ, Kittery, Maine

We Are Made to Worship

My perspective on the value of worship and fellowship has changed quite a bit during the course of my 41 year Christian walk. Early on in my Christian walk I admittedly viewed “going to church” as something that was good to do yet seemed to often take a backseat to other activities and initiatives. Worship was like an item on an *ala carte* menu, I could take it or leave it or go once in a while. As time passed I couldn’t help but notice how many Christians that I had known had fallen away from their relationship with God and from attending church.

Some of these people had been affected by formidable influences of cultural distractions, temptations and self-absorbed interests and pursuits. This scared me because despite my immaturity in Christ I was well aware of my need for God’s mercy and grace made available only through Christ’s sacrifice for all mankind. As I matured in Christ I began to better understand the need to prioritize those things that would help keep me in the “light”, help me draw closer to God Almighty, and help me better honor God. I began to realize nothing was more important than successfully embedding these priorities into the fabric of my life.

Attending worship regularly and participating meaningfully became something that I not only looked forward to taking part in each and every week but something I needed to help keep me centered and grounded so I would not drift away from God. I also realized that a huge additional benefit to attending worship regularly is the encouragement that comes from gathering with other brothers and sisters in Christ. I grew to understand that coming together with other individuals who love God and who want to honor Him through worship and by learning important lessons from His word pleases God while simultaneously promoting vitally important growth and benefit to the participator. .

In a sense I came to see myself much like a ship’s captain who plots a course for his ship. If the captain is off just a couple of “minutes” in his calculations the ship can end up hundreds of miles off course. I want to end my spiritual journey exactly where I am supposed to be which is standing before God and hearing Him say, “Well done good and faithful servant.”

WHAT DO THESE BIBLE WORDS MEAN?



Here are words you may have read in your Bible, along with definitions. These definitions appear in the “Word Lists” of the *Easy to Read Version* of the Bible. Reprinted by permission of *Bible League International*.

ALTAR A raised area, pile of stones, or table that people used to offer sacrifices on an important altar was the one in front of the temple in Jerusalem.

AMEN A Hebrew word meaning “That’s right,” “True,” or “Yes.” It is used to express strong agreement with what has been said.

ANOINT To pour a special oil on people or things to show that they have been chosen by God and set apart for a special work or purpose.

APOSTLE A follower of Jesus chosen to represent him in a special way. During his earthly ministry, Jesus named twelve men as apostles. They had the specific responsibility and authority to represent him and proclaim his message throughout the world. Later, he appeared to Paul and gave him a similar commission, especially to non-Jewish people. Barnabas, Paul’s missionary companion, and James, the brother of Jesus, are also called apostles, as well as several others in the New Testament. Some of these occurrences of the word, however, have the more general sense of “messenger” or “representative”.

ARCHANGEL The leader among God’s angels.

BAPTISM A Greek word usually referring to the act of dipping or “burying” a person briefly in water, connected with their decision to change their life and turn to God, trusting him to forgive their sins. For people coming to faith in Jesus Christ it was an expression of their trust in his death as the sacrifice God accepted to pay for their sins. Described as a sharing in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, it marked the beginning of their new life in Christ as part of God’s people. See Acts 2:38; Rom. 6:3,4; Gal. 3:26-28; Col. 2:12,13.

CHRIST Literally, “Anointed,” a title that comes from the Old Testament ceremony in which perfumed oil was poured or rubbed on someone being appointed to a high office, especially that of prophet, priest, or king, to show that this person was chosen by God for that role. The Hebrew word is “Messiah,” a title used for Old Testament kings and for the one God would send as prophet, priest, and king to bring people back to a good relationship with him.

CHURCH Literally “assembly” or “community” the people who have been brought together as God’s family through their common faith in Jesus Christ. The word often refers to a group of believers who meet together or who live in the same area, but it is also used to mean the worldwide community of all believers.

MORE DEFINITIONS OF BIBLE WORDS IN THE NEXT ISSUE OF 'CHRIST FOR TODAY'

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GOD'S PLAN FOR ME

Part One: "God and Man"

- 1:1 **Genesis 1:1.** "In the beginning God _____ the heavens and the earth."
- 1:2 **Genesis 1:26, 27** True-False: God made man in His own image.
- 1:3 **Genesis 2:16, 17** Yes - No: Did God give mankind instructions to live by in the beginning?
- 1:4 **Genesis 3:1-7** Yes-No: Did man choose to disobey God?
- 1:5 **Genesis 6:5, 6** Yes-No: Did mankind become wicked early in history?
- 1:6 **1 John 3:4-8** Sin is _____. Those who continue in sin are of _____.
- 1:7 **Romans 6:23; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Isaiah 59:2** Yes-No: Does God let our sins separate us from Him?
- 1:8 **Romans 3:23; 1 John 1:8** True-False: Very few people sin.
- 1:9 **Matthew 25:41-46** What will happen to unforgiven sinners? _____
- 1:10 **Jeremiah 10:23; Proverbs 14:12** True-False: Man doesn't need help in living a godly life.
- 1:11 **John 3:16; 1 John 2:2; 1 Peter 2:24** Yes-No: Did God love us enough to provide a way for our salvation? What did God do? _____

The remaining parts of this study will tell you about God's plan for us and what He expects from us as His children.

SEND YOUR FIRST LESSON FOR GRADING TO:
Christ for Today, P.O. Box 755, New Milford, Connecticut 06776,
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