

SPIRITUAL, NOT RELIGIOUS
Matthew 16: 21-28 --April 29, 2012
The Church of the Covenant

"I am spiritual but I am not religious." I wish I had a nickel for every time a purely secular person has said that to me. I would be a wealthy man. Interestingly, I just flew back from vacation (and boy are my arms tired!) and someone was sitting next to me who engaged me in conversation and then found out I am a Presbyterian minister, so started to come up with all the reasons –attended scouts when they were 12, was baptized when they were an infant, are a truly good person in their own heart and according to their own opinion—all the reasons why they were essentially SPIRITUAL but were not in any way active in a church. *"Spiritual, not religious"* is the mantra of the modern world seeking to excuse itself from participation in the life of the church; it is the self justification for not showing up and being where God is; it is a horrible act of self-delusion and self-deception.

Young people, saying you're *"spiritual, not religious"* is like telling a soccer coach you want to play first string on the team, but you're not going to come to any of the practices. What do you think your coach would say to that? Exactly –spiritual, not religious. Its like, you know, we men when we watch the Penguins, really think we're out there on the ice and, you know, like we could really go up against Sydney Crosby on the ice, even though we've never played hockey, haven't ice skated in 35 years, weigh over 200 pounds, are out of shape and flabby and couldn't even stand up on a pair of ice skates. *"Spiritual, not religious"*. Its like going to Carnegie Hall (Ask the cab driver –Sir, how do I get to Carnegie Hall? And he says –Practice, practice, practice) Its like sitting down at a Steinway Grand Piano in Carnegie Hall and thinking we can play a Rachmaninoff Concerto event thought we've never had a piano lesson. Because I'm *"Spiritual, not religious."*

No, may I say that a person cannot be spiritual without also being religious; one cannot think one is spiritual if one never acts upon it. Church is the practice soccer field of faith. Church is the ice rink where one becomes the Sydney Crosby of the Holy Spirit. Church is the piano lesson of life and faith where one becomes Rachmaninoff where God is concerned. Why would we ever think it would be otherwise?

Some people think you can be spiritual, without being religious. And some people think you can be religious without being spiritual. But I say to you that you must be BOTH spiritual AND religious and you must practice your spirituality and your religion in the context of the church of Jesus Christ --following Jesus on the playing field of the church is the only way we can be both Spiritual AND Religious...

Let me pick off the easy error first –being religious but not being spiritual. In Jesus' day these were the Pharisees; these were the people who kept the law perfectly. Outwardly, they did everything right. They went to Temple; they paid their tithes; they kept the Sabbath. They were perfectionistically religious. They outwardly judged everyone else; did this person meet their impeccable standards? Did they strain on a gnat? They were outwardly religious, going through the motions, but their heart was far from God. Their actions were right; their heart was wrong. Outwardly legalistic they were inwardly far from God. They had the form of religiosity but they lacked the substance. They were religious but they were not spiritual. How do we know that? They didn't recognize Jesus. When He healed or delivered or saved or spoke words of power and life, they criticized Him, they said what He was doing wasn't from God, they blasphemed the Holy Spirit, saying that what Jesus was doing in and through the Holy Spirit was indeed not the Holy Spirit but was an evil spirit. I guess maybe there are still some Pharisees around, people who hold to a form of religion without its spiritual substance, people who want to look

good on the outside, but don't want to be good on the inside, people who want to follow a religious program rather than a living and spiritual Savior, but I have to say Phareiseism, in my opinion, is not the problem of the modern world. The opposite of it is.

Being "spiritual, but not religious" I call being a REVERSE PHARISEE. These are people who say they are spiritual on the inside but do nothing outwardly to follow what they say is their faith in their heart. They are the opposite of a biblical Pharisee. Outwardly, they do not go to church, do not keep the Sabbath day nor keep it holy, do not read the Word of God, do not pay anything to what they would dismiss as a mere human institution, the Church of Jesus Christ. I have no need for the Church, they suggest. I am above all that. Somehow sitting in my living room on my own I have come to perfect spiritual enlightenment. Yeah sure; you're Buddha. You're Sydney Crosby, who can't ice skate. You're Rachmaninoff, who never took a piano lesson. Modern Day Reverse Pharisee may even admit that their external actions are wrong and flawed, but at least I'm not a hypocrite like all those church folks. That's not what its about, they think. They think it is purely about their heart being right, about them being "spiritual", Do they believe in God? Sure, why not? Whereas the Pharisee believes (incorrectly) that their actions are correct, the Reverse Pharisee believes (also incorrectly) that their heart is correct. No, no. Our spirit is correct when it is in synch with right actions. And our actions are correct when they are in synch with a right heart. And our spirit and our heart and our actions are correct when they are in synch with the Lord Jesus and we seek to follow Him in our life. Jesus IS the mediator of the Holy Spirit; anything that thinks it is spiritual apart from Him has not the Holy Spirit, it is some other spirit masquerading as God. Friend, no spirituality apart from Jesus.

82% of Americans say they believe in God but less that 40% are actually in the presence of God in church on any given Sunday being religious. Do the math –that means 42% of all Americans think they're spiritual but don't need to be religious.

So let me repeat again –we cannot be spiritual, without also being religious. And we cannot be religious, without also being spiritual. Ah, but you cannot be BOTH spiritual AND religious without following the Lord Jesus Christ and HIM alone in the context of His Church. Nobody here is so spiritually enlightened that we do not need one another and we do not need to work out our faith with fear and trembling as the Bible says and in the context of Christ's Church. Nobody is spiritual, not religious.

Jesus weighed in on the subject this way. Jesus said: *"If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."* (Matthew 16: 24) We have to be spiritual because we have to FOLLOW Jesus and the only way to follow Him daily is being led by the Spirit of the living God and the only way to be led by the Holy Spirit is to receive Jesus and receive the Spirit. Jesus alive in our heart. That's what makes us SPIRITUAL. But then Jesus says, if we are indeed following Him, if indeed He lives within, then we will "deny ourselves" and "take up our cross". We have to actually DO SOMETHING; we do something consonant and consistent with who Jesus is; we must actively follow HIM but we follow Him in the context of His Church. Being an active disciple, placing ourselves in the context of where Jesus is and where His people are makes us RELIGIOUS. SPIRITUAL AND RELIGIOUS –if anyone would come after me, says Jesus...they must be BOTH Spiritual AND Religious; they must follow me.

How can you possibly follow Christ apart from the Body of Christ, His Church???? Amen.

*By: The Reverend Dr. Stuart D. Broberg, The Church of the Covenant, Washington, PA
IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!*