

What Makes Spirituality Christian?

Rich Nathan

February 28, 2010

Galatians: Free At Last Series

Galatians 3:1-9

When I was growing up in New York in the 1960's and early 1970's there were two basic worldviews that dominated life in the city and I think, by and large, in America. There was the religious approach to life that came almost entirely from a Judeo-Christian perspective. If you were religious in America in the 60's you were almost certainly a Protestant, a Catholic, or a Jew. So there was the religious approach to life with its emphasis on faith and a Supreme Creator, who made everything and who was still involved in everything. The religious view of life held sway especially in the Midwest, in the South, and in smaller communities, and especially among minorities even in New York.

The other dominant worldview was the secular rationalist worldview. People who held to this view had a high regard for science and believed that there was nothing beyond matter and energy so that when you died you simply ceased to exist. And this secular rationalist worldview was especially dominant on the east coast, in New York where I grew up. It was dominant in the elite universities. And it was the worldview of the dominant media – the *New York Times*, *Time Magazine*, *National Geographic*, and *CBS News*. The problem with the secular rationalist worldview was that it left no room for mystery. It squeezed out so many experiences that millions of people had.

What do you do with the feeling that many people had that in the midst of major crisis they suddenly found themselves by a loving presence? What do you do with the experience that many people have of unusual visitations, the belief that they've seen an angel, or a warning dream that proved prophetically true, or the experience of being suddenly, or miraculously healed? The secular rationalist view didn't really deal with the longing people have to pray; to say nothing of the experience folks have of answers to prayer. The secular rationalist view had no adequate response to the fact that 99% of the human race for 99% of history has rejected the secular rationalist perspective of life.

What strange twist occurred in our evolutionary wiring to make our brains seek for spiritual answers? So for lots and lots of reasons the secular rationalist approach to life was abandoned by millions of Americans beginning in the 1980's.

But the traditional religious approach to life was also abandoned. For many people the religious alternative felt too narrow, too conforming, too status-quo. If a person identified themselves as counter-cultural in the 60's and 70's, if they joined the environmental movement, if they were vegetarians or vegans, if they had vaguely left-wing political leanings, if they weren't interested in keeping rules, the thought of finding spiritual answers in a traditional church or synagogue felt really unappetizing.

And what occurred about 30 years ago in America is that millions of people rejected the two big worldview alternatives that were part of my growing up. Millions of people in America rejected the secular rationalist approach to life, but they didn't choose to embrace the other great alternative and that is traditional religion. So today, 30 years later, there are tens of millions of Americans who call themselves spiritual, but not religious. They aren't organized in any particular group or institution. They are religiously unaffiliated. They often believe in a high power. They may agree with Oprah Winfrey on a lot of spiritual issues. These folks love *The Da Vinci Code*.

The media covers this spiritual, but not religious group, extensively in magazines and newspaper articles, TV shows like "Lost," "Touched by an Angel," "Joan of Arcadia," and "Ghost Whisperer"; and, in movies like "Avatar," "Matrix Trilogy," "The Book of Eli," "New Moon." Go to Barnes and Noble and you will see shelf after shelf after shelf of books about spirituality that do not come from a traditional religious approach to life. There are over 125,000 books now in print about spirituality.

And, of course, America is not that interested in spirituality if there isn't a buck to be made. You can buy custom spirituality shoes. There is Chakra Meditation Shoe, the Ganesh Lace-Up Custom Shoe, the White Buddha Shoe, the Simple Happiness Shoe, the Mellow Meditation Mule Shoe, and the Love Your World Shoe. There are also spiritual dog shirts. There is the Green Tree T-Shirt, the Stonehenge Textural Dog T-Shirt, the Moodra Doggie Shirt. There are ties and aprons and t-shirts and posters and magnets, and coffee mugs and mouse mats, and hats and embroidered bags, key chains, skateboards, and bumper stickers – to say nothing of all the crystals and candles, music and videos.

Here is the question that I want to attempt to answer today. In the midst of this entire quest for spirituality that we find across the Western world, and in the midst of the aggressive marketing not only of ideas, but of products and media, what makes spirituality Christian? Is there a Christian approach to spirituality? Not the caricatured approach that you find in media; the narrow rule-keeping, conformist status quo, but the spirituality that we discover in the Bible?

I've called my message "What Makes Spirituality Christian?" We're going to continue in the series that I've been doing from the Book of Galatians as we've been going through it verse by verse. Let's pray.

Galatians 3:1-9

You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. 2 I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? 3 Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by human effort? 4 Have you experienced so much in vain—if it really was in vain? 5 Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you by your observing the law, or by your believing what you heard? 6 So also Abraham "believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." 7

Understand, then, that those who have faith are children of Abraham. 8 Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: “All nations will be blessed through you.” 9 So those who rely on faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

Let me remind you about what the Apostle Paul was dealing with in the book of Galatians. Paul was a church planter and missionary. He started churches throughout the Roman Empire. He found a particularly receptive audience among folks coming from a non-Jewish background in an area of the Roman Empire called Galatia which today would be in South Central Turkey. These Gentiles responded with great enthusiasm to Paul’s message that they could enter a saving relationship with God by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. And so they joyfully embraced the message of the grace of God and God was powerfully in their midst working miracles in the church.

After Paul left, some opponents came in, Jewish Christians from Jerusalem, who said to the Galatians, “Listen, the Apostle Paul only gave you half a message. We think you need to believe in Jesus Christ, but in addition, you men need to practice circumcision and you need to keep the Sabbath, and you need to keep the Jewish laws of kashrut, if you want to be a full member of God’s people.” The church was thrown into confusion and some of the church was saying yes, Paul did only give us half a message. And so they ran out and got circumcised. We need to start practicing the Old Testament laws, if we are going to be full members of God’s people.

And in Chapter 3 the Apostle Paul begins this way:

Galatians 3:1

You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified.

So, the first principle regarding what makes spirituality Christian would be not all spirituality is Christian.

Not all spirituality is Christian

See, Christians are deceived at this most obvious point. Just because someone is spiritual, talks about spirituality, they’ve rejected the secular rationalist worldview, they absolutely believe in some kind of higher power, they believe there is more than matter and energy, they believe that you don’t cease to exist at death – because they’ve adopted features of a spiritual worldview doesn’t mean that that spiritual worldview is Christian.

This should be obvious to any casual reader of the Bible. But there is in the Bible a range of spiritual practices that God prohibits for his people. For example, here is what we read in Deuteronomy 18:9-14:

Deuteronomy 18:9-14

When you enter the land the Lord your God is giving you, do not learn to imitate the detestable ways of the nations there. 10 Let no one be found among you who sacrifices their son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, 11 or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead. 12 Anyone who does these things is detestable to the Lord, and because of these detestable practices the Lord your God will drive out those nations before you. 13 You must be blameless before the Lord your God. 14 The nations you will dispossess listen to those who practice sorcery or divination. But as for you, the Lord your God has not permitted you to do so.

Certain spiritual practices – astrology, the occult, consulting the dead – lead us away from God. And the Apostle Paul in Galatians 3 says that there is one more thing that I class along with the occult and witchcraft and consulting the dead that will positively lead you away from God and that is legalism. If you add to my gospel message of grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, your rules, whatever they are, is a form of witchcraft.

Strong language. But he says, let's look at it again in verse 1:

Galatians 3:1

You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified.

Literally, Paul says: who has employed the evil eye against you? Who has cast a spell on you? Paul characterizes as sorcerers and practitioners of the dark arts those folks who came in and moved people away from the message of grace.

Now, in the 21st century church we would almost never say what the Apostle Paul is saying here. We would recognize that yes, the occult is really dangerous and not for Christians. There are certainly Christian people who don't read their horoscopes, they would never go to a palm reader, which by the way, if those people were so accurate, the tarot card readers and the palm readers, why do they all work out of such seedy looking stores? Just a thought...

But Paul says that along with all of that stuff, just as spiritually destructive for your soul is legalism – being in a church that weighs you down with rules; that tells you that unless you jump through five hundred hoops you can't be right with God. Paul is saying that you ought to run from legalism the way you would run from the occult. In fact, I would suggest that you ought to run from legalism faster than you run from the occult, because the occult is obvious. It doesn't parade itself as biblical. It doesn't put on a charade of holiness and serious Christianity.

So, let me ask you a question: do you view legalism as spiritually dangerous. Have you, in your mind, classed it along with witchcraft as destructive to someone's soul?

Well, what makes spirituality Christian? What are the marks of a person who is a spiritual person, but is a spiritual person in a Christian way?

Paul says, first of all:

You are a cross-shaped people

Galatians 3:1

You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified.

Whenever the Apostle Paul preached, he always preached Christ. But not only Christ, but Christ crucified.

1 Corinthians 2:2

For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

Paul didn't just preach Christ as a shining example to us of humanity as God intended it to be, although Christ is that. Christ is the perfect human; what God intended for men and women we find in Christ. Christ is our guide; Christ is our example; Christ is our teacher; Christ is our helper. But Paul could not speak about Christ without vividly portraying him as crucified, having nails pounded through his hands and feet, and dying on a cross for our sins. And what Paul is saying here to the Galatians is that if you understood my message of Christ crucified, you would have absolutely no appetite for what these opponents are bringing in with their legalism. You would have no interest in adding anything to Christ – Sabbath, or circumcision. If you understood the cross and what happened at the cross, you would never try to add anything to the cross to get right with God.

In John 19:30 we read something that Christ said when he was hanging on the cross, right before he died:

John 19:30

When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished." With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

"It is finished." The opponents of Christ thought they had rid themselves of this trouble-making Nazarene. They were done with him. No more embarrassing confrontations in public. No more challenges to their authority. They snuffed out the threat. He is finished.

From the cross we don't hear the moan of a beaten man, "I surrender." "I give up." "I am finished." Instead from the cross we hear the triumphant cry of the Victor, "My work has been completed. Everything that I set out to do has been accomplished. God's will has been completely done. It is finished."

Three English words, "It is finished," translate one Greek word, *tetelestai*. All of God's purposes, all of God's aims, all of God's goals for Messiah, it has all been accomplished. It is finished. The whole Old Testament ceremonial law system with the thousands of sacrifices and the rituals with goats, sheep and bulls being slaughtered, herds of animals being slaughtered to offer a temporary patch over the problem of sin, all of that ceremonial law is finished by the one perfect sacrifice of the Son of God.

That the ceremonial law is finished includes Sabbath-keeping and circumcision and certain dietary restrictions, or any other kind of legalism you can add in terms of trying to get right with God.

It is finished. It is finished. In the upside down kingdom of Jesus, the finished one finishes all and he finishes well. What's finished? God's wrath toward the sin of believers is finished. We read in the Bible that God is holy and that he hates sin. God has said that he will punish sin and sinners. God has said that the punishment for sin is death. God has said that a person who sins is banished from his presence forever. Before men and women can be reconciled to God, before we can know God, before we can come into his presence, before we can experience intimacy with God and the smile of God's face, the problem of our sin must be dealt with. At the cross, God set forth his Son Jesus as the atonement for sin and the substitute for men and women.

In other words, God in his mercy holds Christ responsible for our sins. He is our substitute. He stands in our place. And God deals with and punishes our sin right there at the cross. God said he would punish sin. Therefore, he must punish sin. But because our sin has been punished at the cross, God's anger towards us is finished. It is finished. *Tetelestai*. Now we can live not as objects of wrath, but as objects of mercy and objects of grace, as sons and daughters.

Do you believe this? Do you really believe that God has punished all of your sins, everything past, present, and future? Do you believe God has punished all of your sins at the cross?

Let me put it this way. How many of you are still trying to pay God off a little bit at a time because of your guilt regarding a past mistake or a past sin? Let me share with you a typical situation. You are a parent of a difficult child. The child is rebellious in elementary school, or a rebellious teen, or an unsuccessful adult. And yet, you never can bring yourself to draw the line with your difficult child. You find yourself unable to practice tough love.

Why? Because you feel guilty about your parental failures in the past. You look at your child and say, "Well, if only I had been wiser," "If only I had been more attentive," "If only

I done this or that,” “I should have,” “I could have,” “I would have...” And so, you allow yourself to continue to be used and abused by your difficult child even though others are saying, “Look, you need to toughen up.” What’s going on here?

What’s going on is that you really don’t believe in the process of the cross of Christ even though you say you do. You don’t believe that your guilt is finished at the cross. That if you confessed your prior parental failure, Christ would tear up the bill and you don’t have to keep paying him off in small increments by giving ground to your difficult child. Your parental failures can be taken to the cross. Have you done that?

Or you are in a difficult marriage, but you allow your spouse to be emotionally abusive, verbally abusive, perhaps even physically or sexually abusive. What is going on friend, that you are not able to draw a line and say, “Enough”?

So often we are weakened because we have not adequately laid hold of the finished work of Christ at the cross. Sometimes we feel like we deserve bad treatment. You can call it low self-esteem, if you will. But the Apostle Paul says that it goes deeper than that. You’ve never really taken your failures, your past shame, your mistakes; all the judgments made against you, all your sins and placed them on the cross of Christ.

Christian spirituality is cross-shaped and cross-centered. It is fundamentally rooted in the cross. And Paul says what makes a spiritual person a Christian person is:

You are a Holy Spirit-empowered people

Galatians 3:2, 5

I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? 5 Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you by your observing the law, or by your believing what you heard?

Following the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ to the right hand of God, God gave a new identity mark to his people. And it was the mark of the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit. See, the Jewish Christians were saying, “You Galatians, you need the identifying markers to tell the world that you belong to God. You need to be circumcised. You need to keep the Sabbath. You need to keep the laws of kashrut.” Paul says, “Galatians, don’t you get it? You already have the mark. The great identity badge of God’s people is the empowering experience of the Spirit.” Paul speaks about the experience of the Spirit past tense in verse 2:

Galatians 3:2

I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard?

In other words, when you entered the Christian life, if you indeed entered, did you experience the Spirit? When you crossed the line from darkness to light, when you

were born again (if you are born again), the only way you could have been born again was that you experienced the Holy Spirit. But Paul says this experience of the empowering of the Spirit is not just a past-tense experience. It is a present tense experience for the Christian.

Galatians 3:5

Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you by your observing the law, or by your believing what you heard?

That's a very weak translation. It ought to read:

Does God continually supply you with his Spirit?

See, Christians are not people, who ought to be looking around for some alternative spirituality. We are people who are being continually supplied with the Holy Spirit.

Now, there are several things I would note here. First of all, Christian spirituality involves an experience of the Spirit. To be a Christian means that you've encountered God and that God has taken up residence in your life. Like my dear friend, Don Williams put it:

You unzip; God jumps in; and you zip back up.

And if you haven't done that, whatever else you are, how spiritual you are, you are not a Christian. There are a lot of things you could say about Christians. You could say Christians are loving, or ought to be. Christians are forgiving, or ought to be. But that is not the core of what it means to be a Christian anymore than the core of what it means to be an attorney is that you carry a leather briefcase and wear a suit to court. Or that you are an Olympic ice skater and that wear a short skirt and tights when you skate.

The core of being a Christian has to do with whether you have, indeed, met God and experienced in your life his dynamic in-breaking. He makes you suddenly aware of himself and takes up residence in your life. Has that happened to you? Have you experienced the dynamic in-breaking of God? The lights have gone on. You get it. You've met him. And you know that God is at work inside of you.

That is the first thing I would note. The second thing I would note is that according to the Apostle Paul in these two verses, every Christian and every Christian church ought to be a charismatic church. It is amazing that in America we have churches that are charismatic and churches that are not charismatic. Churches that believe and practice all the biblical gifts of the Holy Spirit and welcome the presence of the Holy Spirit and churches that don't. According to the Bible, the Apostle Paul only planted charismatic churches; churches that healed the sick, cast out demons, and welcomed prophecies, and saw miracles. The Corinthian church was a charismatic church. So was the Thessalonian church. So was the church in Galatia. So was the church in Ephesus. So was the church in Jerusalem and Antioch and Rome. I don't mean charismatic in

style – people waving banners, or dancing in the aisles. I’m not talking about style. I am talking about the experience of the Spirit. I am talking about welcoming the presence of God and experiencing his dynamic in-breaking today.

Paul would not have understood a church where there was no spiritual experience of God. He would not have recognized a Christian church that did not heal the sick, or cast out demons. That is sub-Christian spirituality.

So, let me just speak to any of you who are small group leaders, women’s group leaders, men’s group leaders, co-ed group leaders, recovery group leaders. I implore you to not settle for what’s comfortable in your group. Rather, every time you meet, welcome the presence of the Spirit, welcome the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and pray for the sick in your group by laying hands on. Ask God for miracles. Ask God in your own life for his dynamic in-breaking. That is Christian spirituality.

Paul says that along with being cross-shaped and Holy Spirit-empowered:

You are a carried people

Galatians 3:3

Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by human effort?

There is a wonderful story about a famous tightrope walker named Charles Blondin, who lived back in the 1800’s. He set up a tightrope across Niagara Falls and walked across it several times. He was so confident that he walked backward as well as forward. He performed different tricks along the way. He sat on a small stool on the tightrope and ate a meal. But his most famous trick was when he asked for a volunteer to be carried over on his back. In what must be the most amazing feat of either sheer courage or sheer stupidity, one brave man stepped forward and he was carried on the back of Charles Blondin across Niagara Falls.

Suppose halfway across the tightrope with Niagara Falls rushing below them, the man said to Charles Blondin, “Look here, I appreciate you taking me this far, but I don’t trust you any more. I will take it from here. Let me down and I will walk the rest of the way without you.” Can you imagine what Charles Blondin would have said to him, much less his friends, his family, anyone watching? Are you crazy? What makes you think you can make the rest of the journey by yourself?

That’s exactly what the Apostle Paul is saying to the Galatians. Having begun the Christian life, the Christian journey, by trusting in Christ and getting on his back, what makes you think now that you can complete the journey on your own?

See, Christian spirituality is really the spirituality of always going back to the beginning. Martin Luther, the father of the Protestant Reformation, once said:

To progress in the Christian life is to always begin again.

In other words, the way into the Christian life is the way on. How did you get into this Christian life to begin with? That's what you start with every day. What made me a Christian in the first place? Well, I relied entirely on the grace of God to save me. I threw myself on Christ and him crucified as the only way that I would have right relationship with God. It is by the sheer grace of God, God carrying me that I have crossed the line from darkness to light. God has been carrying me as a Christian for 36 years. God has been carrying you as a Christian for one month, one year, ten years, or fifty years. Why should I get off now? Why would you ever get off and say, "Thanks, God, I will take it from here. I will start relying on my own smarts, my own strategies, and my own strength in order to do life successfully."

The way in is the way on. Friend, do you see that you've moved away in your life from relying on God, from leaning on, resting on God's grace and God's competence and God's care for you. Do any of you say, "My goodness, I've taken control back and I've begun again in this problem area of my life relying on me"?

The reason, by the way, that you can rely on God for the rest of the journey is because what God starts he doesn't leave uncompleted or unfinished. Reason this out in your mind. Say to yourself, "I know that God never changes. I know that the God I began with never gets bored. He never moves on to something more interesting than me. God started in my life he will bring to the end." Philippians 1:6 says:

Philippians 1:6

being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

My God will never fail. He will never give up. He will never stop working. He can always be relied on. He has carried me this far. I'm going to let him carry me the rest of the way – even past the grave – for myself or my loved one and into eternity.

What makes spirituality Christian?

Galatians 3:4

Have you experienced so much in vain—if it really was in vain?

The word "experienced", if you look at the footnote in the TNIV and in most other translations, reads:

Have you suffered so much...

Here is the mark of Christian spirituality:

You are a suffering people

You know, it is impossible to translate the Greek word *pasco* as “experienced.” It is possible that Paul is simply talking about their experience of the Spirit, but I think that suffering fits Paul’s theology better. He always links the experience of the Holy Spirit with the experience that Christians have with suffering for Christ.

1 Thessalonians 1:6

You became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit.

Romans 8:16-18

The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. 17 Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. 18 I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

Suffering for Christ has been and is the mark of Christian spirituality everywhere at all times. You say, “What separates Christian spirituality from all the other stuff in the marketplace? Christian spirituality calls upon people to suffer for Christ.” I’ve been reading through the book of Acts in my own morning devotions. I was struck this past week as I read through Acts 13-23 that in every single place that Paul preached, he faced opposition, the church faced opposition. There was no place that Paul preached whether it was in Cyprus or Pisidian Antioch, or Iconium, or Lystra, or Derbe, or Berea, or Philippi, or Thessalonica, or Corinth, or Ephesus, or Jerusalem – there was no place that he and the Christian did not suffer, did not feel pressed. Suffering is one of the distinctive marks of Christian spirituality. If you don’t suffer for Christ, you need to ask yourself, “Am I really a Christian?”

One of my favorite writers is C.S. Lewis, the writer of the famous Narnia Chronicles, several of which have been made into movies. C.S. Lewis was a brilliant professor of medieval and renaissance English teaching at Oxford University for a quarter of a century. He experienced great hostility because he openly shared his faith as a Christian. His biographer, George Sayer, made this observation:

For many years, Christians had been passively on the defensive. You might encounter a man frequently without ever knowing that he was a Christian. It was unlikely that, in ordinary conversation, he would uphold Christian principles and almost unheard-of that he would make a vigorous, logical attack on non-believers from a Christian standpoint. Skepticism, tolerance, and even indifference were commonly thought to be the proper attitude toward Christianity. But, for the time being, Jack changed all that. He expressed his views, not only at the Socratic Club, but also at dinner and in the Senior Common Room afterward. This policy made him many enemies.

Although he had transgressed in unwritten code, he persisted in behaving in a way that was intolerable and incorrect by the standards of Oxford society...Jack’s

colleagues...most especially could not forgive the fact that the man was serious in wanting to convert others.

And for that reason C.S. Lewis was denied the most senior position in his English department at Oxford and had to leave his beloved university and ended up teaching at Cambridge in the last years of his life.

There is no getting around it. If you take Jesus Christ seriously and you promote your identification with Jesus Christ in your family and in your workplace and wherever you do recreation, you are going to face opposition. The only way to dial down the opposition to Christ is to hide the fact that you are identified with him.

And here is the last thing:

You are a biblical people

Galatians 3:6-9

So also Abraham “believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.” 7 Understand, then, that those who have faith are children of Abraham. 8 Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: “All nations will be blessed through you.” 9 So those who rely on faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

Now, I’m going to look at this text much more next week. Paul is making an argument from the Old Testament scripture and I want to make just one simple point this week. To be a serious follower of Jesus Christ means that you take scripture seriously as they guide for your life. And I mean all of scripture – the parts you like and the parts you don’t like. The parts you agree with and the parts that you struggle with, or cause you tension. Christian spirituality is marked by submission to all of scripture.

So many people in the 21st century pick and choose. They say, “I like what the Bible says about love, but I don’t like what the Bible says about not having sex outside of marriage. I like what the Bible says about forgiveness, but I don’t like what the Bible says about divorce.”

But you see, to call yourself a follower of Jesus Christ means that you take Jesus’ approach to scripture. The principle upon which Jesus staked his life was his submission to Holy Scripture. I’m told that there are 1800 verses of Jesus’ actual words in the New Testament. 1800 verses. If you have a red-letter Bible you can count them up. 1800. Of these 180 are scripture quotations from the Old Testament. Jesus frequently says, “It is written.” And was pointed out by a pastor that I deeply respect, Tim Keller, at the depth of Jesus’ sorrow and suffering, he quoted scripture. While he was on the cross, we read in John 19:28:

John 19:28

Later, knowing that everything had now been finished, and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, “I am thirsty.”

Why did he say, “I am thirsty?” To fulfill scripture.

We read in Matthew 26:45-46:

Matthew 26:45-46

Then he returned to the disciples and said to them, “Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour is near, and the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners. 46 Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!”

In other words, Jesus used scripture not just to get other people to do the right thing, but that he might do the right thing. In Luke 18:31, Jesus is going to Jerusalem. What does it say?

Luke 18:31

Jesus took the Twelve aside and told them, “We are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled.

And in Luke 23:27-30 here’s Jesus carrying the cross. He sees women and quotes scripture to them.

Luke 23:27-30

A large number of people followed him, including women who mourned and wailed for him. 28 Jesus turned and said to them, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children. 29 For the time will come when you will say, ‘Blessed are the childless women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!’ 30 Then “they will say to the mountains, “Fall on us!” and to the hills, “Cover us!”

Jesus based his entire life on scripture. Christian spirituality means that you pin your entire life on scripture. And I particularly appreciate this insight of Tim Keller. That when Jesus was facing the moment of his greatest need, when he was suffering, when he was overwhelmed, when he couldn’t possibly move forward in human strength, what does Jesus rely on? He relied on scripture.

When you are at bottom, friend, when you are out of resource, when there is nothing in you to get you to be able to carry on, you’ve got nothing, you’re at the end of your rope and beyond, how can you be a spiritual Christian? You rely on scripture. And I will tell you especially in good times feed yourself with scripture so that in bad times when you are squeezed what comes out is Holy Scripture. Let’s pray.

What Makes Spirituality Christian?

Rich Nathan
February 27-28, 2010
Galatians: Free At Last Series
Galatians 3:1-9

I. Not all spirituality is Christian (Galatians 3:1)

II. The marks of spiritual Christians

- A. You are a cross-shaped people (Galatians 3:1)
- B. You are a Holy Spirit-empowered people (Galatians 3:2, 5)
- C. You are a carried people (Galatians 3:3)
- D. You are a suffering people (Galatians 3:4)
- E. You are a biblical people (Galatians 3:6-9)