

# *Spiritual But Not Repentant*



By Philip E. Busby

Jesus told us, the way to eternal life was a strait and narrow way. (Matt. 7:13-14) The word strait in this scripture is not the word straight, like a straight line with no bends or curves; it is strait as in a narrow passage. The word strait as an adjective means strict, rigid, or right. It also means "archaic." When most of us hear the word "archaic," we think of old and out-of-date. This actually makes it a very good word in understanding what Jesus was talking about! The "strait gate and narrow way" is an old way. In fact, it is as old as time itself. It's also an out-of-date way. The problem is, when we think of something as being out-of-date, we think of something as being of no use anymore. Here is where our way of thinking gets us into trouble so much of the time! We are always looking for the next big thing, but the plan of God is the only thing of real importance. It may be "out-of-date" in the sense no one really believes that way anymore, but that doesn't change the fact the "strait gate" is still the right way. Jesus was trying to make a point which so many people confessing Christianity seem to miss - God is unchanging!

The way to heaven is by grace through faith. (Eph. 2:8) That did not become the way after Jesus came. It has always been the way, and it will always be the way. Even before the fall, Adam and Eve had the simple choice of whether to follow that narrow way or some other path. It was not their innocence which kept them from death, it was their continual belief God knew best and they should follow Him. Man was still saved by the grace of God. God was not going to kill them the first time they made a mistake. God was not going to force them to be a certain way. God was going to direct them in the path they should go. As long as they chose not to take on the knowledge of good and evil for themselves, God's grace would reach down, teach them and correct them when they did wrong. Under this process, man would have moved further from a childlike innocence and grown continually in the knowledge of righteousness. The narrow way or - to say it a different way - the way of righteousness, would have been the only way man knew. However, this was not the choice man made.

The way to life everlasting, is one which is not broad like the ways of destruction. Simply put, there is a right way and everything else is wrong! We need to recognize this "strait gate and narrow way" is a path we follow. This means there is a right-hand side and a left-hand side. The path of right is not simply one which lies against the outer edge of our ability, and we can choose to hug the wall. The right path is in the middle of it all. We must carefully and with attention to detail, navigate the path. We should think about the fact the word strait, many times, is a reference to a narrow passage of water leading between two larger bodies of water. If you're in a boat going through a strait, not only is your path narrow and fixed, but to get out of the strait, you have to change your mode of travel, from water to land. So, we should recognize this path is not one of compromise and flexibility. Those are the ways which seem right to man, and those ways lead to destruction, not life eternal! You see, on most issues man is so far out of the strait, he can not even see the middle ground. Thus, he has no real understanding of what walking in the right is, or even what it might look like.

Mostly, we get very confused about issues because we do not look at the basic facts. When we

compromise, it usually doesn't mean we have drawn closer to the truth. More times than not, it only means we have accepted one thing, some person or persons want, which is far to one side, in exchange for accepting something else, a person or persons want, which is on the other side. In the end, compromise does not put us on ground that is closer to the middle. It simply lays out terms which try to give everyone enough of what they want, so everyone is satisfied to an extent in which they will stop arguing about everything!

A good example of this issue is the abortion debate. For years politicians have argued, courts have ruled, groups have formed, and individuals have dueled. This issue has come to blows at times, and then people argue about what is right and wrong in defense of their actions, connected with the issue; but politicians give us the clearest example of what I'm talking about. In the United States, everyone is concerned for one reason or the other about whether a candidate running for office is pro-life or an abortion advocate. Many politicians, not wanting to lose anymore votes than they have to, came up with "compromises." Usually, these politicians still try to define themselves as pro-life or pro-abortion. Ironically, most who "compromise" will tell you they're pro-life, but their compromise puts them clearly outside the range of this title! What they will tell you is, (A) they do not believe the government should get involved, or (B) they believe abortion should be outlawed except in the case of rape, incest, or if the mother's life is in danger. Neither of these positions bring people closer to the truth. They simply give options, politicians hope people will live with.

In truth, the issue is simple! The question? Is a baby inside the mother's womb a living human or just a grouping of tissue? If it is nothing more than a bundle of tissue which is a part of the mother's body, then there is no debate; the woman can choose to remove it in the same way she is allowed to make any other medical decision for her life and health. On the other hand, if the baby in the womb is a life, then there is no reason to allow abortion for any reason!

If the baby is a life, then why would you allow abortion for those times of rape and incest? How stupid can we be? The rape or incest is not the baby's crime. The baby will suffer enough in those cases. At best, the baby is not going to have a mother and father bound together in a loving marriage in which to raise him or her. At the worst end of the spectrum, the baby will suffer things like physical defects and possible disease. Please, whatever you do, don't tell me that is why you would allow the baby to be killed. Most people are not comfortable with giving the death penalty to criminals; how can we be so comfortable making the decision to take the life of a child?

If abortion is killing a child, why would we allow it when the pregnancy threatens a mother's life? Any good parent would have no hesitation giving their life to save their child's! Even in the cases where the doctors tell you neither mother or child will survive, doctors are often wrong! Taking the child's life is probably the most selfish thing anyone can do. For the chance of extending your own life, you will end your child's?

As to the idea of saying it is not the government's place to get involved, all I can say is, if it is not in the government's job description to protect the life of the innocent and weak, then what are we paying them for?

Anyone who knows their Bible, knows life begins at conception. The Bible tells us, God knows us from our mother's womb, and He formed us there! (Jer. 1:5, Deu. 32:16-18, Isa. 44:2 & 24) However, even among those who do not believe the Bible, it is unbelievable to me, as a fellow human, that anyone can feel comfortable with having an abortion! That any society can make it legal, when the question of whether it is or isn't a life, at best, is one they can not answer! Whatever happened to erring on the side of caution?

This issue shows us man can "compromise," but it doesn't necessarily bring us closer to the truth. In the case of abortion, restricting it may save some lives, but it is not really lifting up the shield of faith! (Eph. 6:16) Agreeing to a compromise which only

"restricts" something like abortion, is not walking through the "strait gate"; and that brings us to the real point of this article.

There is a lot of talk these days about being spiritual. The saying, I'm spiritual but I'm not religious, is becoming a growing theme. However, we need to be cautious of what these terms really mean. There are a growing number of people who believe, to be spiritual but not religious, is a good thing, but why do they think this? Near the first of this article, I made the statement that there is a right way and everything else is wrong. You can not yield to the desire to go to the right or to the left, you must choose to stay in the strait if you want heaven!

At first glance, it may seem being spiritual but not religious has great value to some, but this is many times a mirage. We need to understand why we have religion in the first place. We like to talk about what we call "false religion." However, for the non-Jew there is not a clear-cut line as to what is a Godly religion and what is a false religion. Religion is ceremony. The only reason we can talk about "false religion," is because God, through His grace, has been willing to begin His work in us wherever we are, even if that is in a religious setting. However, in the beginning, God did not create religion. Religion is mostly something man created. The fact men have created ceremonies we believe are "of God," is only because God accepts our worship, if that worship is truly directed toward Him, and does not, knowingly, contain sinful practices. (James 4:17) However, what God created in the beginning was a relationship, and far too much of the time people stumble by replacing their relationship with God, with the ceremony of a religion. That is once again, not following in the strait way. It is not much, if any, better than following any pagan religion. Being lulled to sleep by a religion will be just as hurtful in the end as any religion which worships a false god.

God did lay out many ceremonies for the Jewish nation, in what we Gentiles most often call, the "law of Moses." The Hebrew word is "Torah," which is the common word for "law" when speaking of God's law. These ceremonies are laid out for the Jewish

nation so they might give the rest of the world a view of what serving God might look like. There are many stark contrasts to the pagan ways of worship and what God wants! Through the Torah's examples, we are shown the truth that God wants a relationship, not a religion. Not only were non-Jews not asked to follow many of these laws of ceremony, but much of the law restricts the ritual to only those of the house of Israel. This is because it was never intended to be a religion for the whole world. God wanted a people who would exemplify the things of God in practices which the world might understand. However, what God wants is a relationship with each individual, not a religious experience for all. This is pointed out by the fact that even the Jews themselves were not justified by the things of the law. At times, when the Jews had forgotten God, God no longer even wanted them to continue those representative things. (Rom. 3:20, Micah 6:6-8, Isa. 1:1-20)

So you can say your spiritual but not religious, but what does that really mean? Well, let's take a look at how man is built. Man is made in the image of God. (Gen. 1:26) God is a Triune Being consisting of The Father, The Son, and The Holy Ghost. Man, being made in the image of God, mirrors this composition. Man is body, mind, and spirit. Some will say man is body, soul, and spirit; but I believe, in our time, the word soul is not as descriptive as saying mind. When we talk about the part that is not body or spirit, it really is that control center faculty which we are talking about. However, it should be clarified that when we talk about the mind, we are not talking about the physical glob of gray matter in your head. The body part we call the brain is nothing more than the connective point where the physical meets the mental.

Now, further, we should look at the model of God to understand ourselves. Jesus, who is the part our physical mirrors, did not talk directly to The Holy Ghost, which is the part our spirit is an image of. Jesus told us He would pray to The Father and ask Him to send The Holy Ghost. (John 14:15-17) The Father is the part our mind is an image of. The connection to the spirit is not direct to the body, but through the mind, just as Jesus and The Holy Ghost

are connected through The Father. This is the reason people talk about "opening your mind," when they are trying to grasp things. Everything must flow through the mind. That is where the true decisions are made, but what are these decisions about?

Mostly, our decisions simply have to do with what the physical or spiritual wants! It really is a pretty simple concept. Think about it! When our body wants something, it tells the mind. When your stomach wants food, it tells the mind that it's hungry. We even point out these facts by saying things like, "If my stomach had its way I would stop and eat lunch." However, just because your stomach is hungry and telling you it needs or wants food, does not mean we jump up and get something. We all make decisions as to when to give the stomach what it wants and how much. This fact is why people can have jobs and go to school, eating lunch only when the break is provided. We can choose to give the body what it wants, or not to give it. We, for the most part, are not forced to simply do whatever the body tells us.

When Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane, the night He was to be arrested, He wanted His disciples to pray with Him. When Jesus came back a couple of times to check on the disciples, He found them sleeping. Their bodies wanted to sleep and the mind allowed them to do it. Jesus had told them "the spirit is truly ready, but the flesh is weak." (Matt. 26:36-46, Mark 14:32-41) Jesus understood, they were with Him in spirit, but the body's desire to get some rest had won the fight. We do not know the condition of the disciples that night, but it is true, at times, the flesh can literally give out; but another point is the fact, even in sleep, the mind is still at work!

This is why Biblical fasting is not just a religious exercise, it is a strengthening of the will. The will that says, I will not just give my flesh whatever it wants. I will take the time to hear what the spirit wants, or use the time for God. We do not seem to listen to our spirit much, and that probably explains why we do not listen to the Holy Ghost much either. This fact is why so many people want God to appear to them in a physical form. We don't have much understanding in the spirit, so communication is

difficult. There is wisdom in understanding the spirit has needs just as the flesh, but many do not see these needs as being as important as the flesh's needs. Why? Well, the biggest reason is the fact the spirit is not mortal. It is much easier to simply ignore the spirit, because if we do not feed it, it will not die like the flesh will; and we often do not recognize when an ailment of the spirit is the cause of something negative in our lives. So, it boils down to that simple old saying, no one has time for those who can only stand and wait!

Though we do not always see it, we need to understand we are in a fight for our time, and the sinful flesh is always wanting more than its fair share. It knows its days are numbered, and all it cares about is getting what it can! This is why the Bible tells us, we should walk in the spirit. Now, this is a very important point and we need to be careful not to miss it! The Bible does not tell us to live in the spirit because walking in the spirit always puts us in the right. The Bible tells us to live in the spirit because the spirit is not where sin resides, and it is the part which will go on into eternity. This means, working with the spirit has great value, whereas pleasing the flesh is very temporal with no long-term benefits.

Let's go over that again. We are three parts; body, mind, and spirit. The mind is the part which makes the decisions about how the body and spirit function. The mind makes choices about what to do with the desires of the body and the spirit. The body, because of sin, will die. (Romans 6) However, the spirit will go on with the mind into eternity. Jesus came and died to provide us with new bodies, which we will need, to have eternal life. These new bodies will be incorruptible by sin, (I Cor. 15:51-57) but that does not change the fact that these present bodies will return to the ground from which they came! Therefore, if we are going to spend our time living for God, we should focus on the spirit's training. We should focus on training our spirit in the way it should go. We should not focus on giving the flesh what it wants, but demanding, to the best of our ability, that the flesh be an instrument of the work of God. This is why we should not just talk like a believer in God, we should also act and look

like a believer! So, what does all this have to do with being spiritual but not religious? Well, I say all that to say this, we can try to be as spiritual as we want but that still won't make us right!

The reason it is becoming so popular for people to say they are spiritual but not religious, is because they believe they are exercising a formula which automatically makes them something better. People feel the emptiness of many of our churches, and they see there is nothing spiritual to be had. It is sad, but this fact is, for the most part, true, and becoming truer each passing year. Many churches have turned so far into giving people what they want in the flesh, they are not addressing spiritual needs at all. Churches have done this because they want the majority, and the majority of people desire to give the flesh just about anything it wants. At the very least, they give the flesh anything they can afford. So, if you design a church around what people want in the flesh, more times than not, you will have a greater number of people than if you design a church around meeting spiritual needs.

Now, there are those people who do concern themselves with, or come to be concerned about their spiritual needs, at least more than some others. It is really hard to say if their numbers are growing, or if the fact so many churches fail to give anything spiritual, it's causing them to be more visible. In any case, there is a rise in the number of people turning away from what we can call "formal religion," for what they feel is a more "spiritual" life. However, the question we want to answer here is, is this a good thing?

The answer to this question is not straight forward. You see, it all comes down to what "so easily beset us." (Heb. 12:1) I started out this article by talking about the strait way, and the fact there is a right and left-hand side. We've talked about the fact we have a flesh and a spirit vying for our time, and we just talked about the fact there are those who do concern themselves with the spirit, not just the flesh. The point we need to look at here is, what does the spirit want?

Before we answer that question, we do have to touch on one point of bad doctrine. I know, I talk about this point a lot, but I have to go over it at least quickly here. Many people believe and teach that before we come to God we are spiritually dead. Some take this idea so literally, they get it all wrong! When we talk about spiritual death, we are not talking about the same thing as physical death. When the physical dies, the body ceases to function. Eventually, the body ceases to exist. "...for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." Genesis 3:19 When we talk about spiritual death, we are not talking about the nonexistence of the spirit. We are not even talking about the nonfunctioning of the spirit, but this is what many people have come to interpret spiritual death as meaning. The spirit needs God, but if we choose not to let God into our lives, the spirit does not get what it needs. This does not mean the spirit is nonexistent. However, there is that feeling that you haven't felt alive until you yield yourself to God, and that is what the New Testament is talking about. (Rom. 8:11)

One may ask why the spirit needs God but the flesh doesn't? This would be a misstatement! The flesh does need God, but the flesh can not have God. Because sin resides in the flesh, there shall be no flesh stand before God. (Rom. 7:14-25) That is why the flesh must die, and why we must be given a new body if we are going to be fully with God once again.

So, the spirit needs God, but this does not mean that is what we want. You see, we have to go back to the fact the mind makes choices. That day in the Garden of Eden, when Eve chose to take of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, it was not just her flesh acting alone. It was a fleshly action of taking the fruit; but as we talked about before, the mind had to agree the action was something it was going to allow. The action, once taken, brought forth grave consequences, and the mind had trouble dealing with them. Immediately, Adam and Eve knew they were naked but did not do a very good job doing anything about it. From then on, humans would be responsible for actions of the flesh; and they would fail miserably at just about every turn. God knew this would happen, and could not allowed it to continue. So, God removed man from

the source of their flesh's immortality, the Tree of Life!

As long as our bodies live and breathe, we are faced with a choice. Do we want God or not? Do we want God to be Lord in our lives, or do we just want the benefits we think God can give us? Only through God's direction can we hope to get anything right. We are but children. Isaiah compared us to sheep led astray. (Isa. 53:6) We can concern ourselves with the things of our spirit, but that does not mean we will choose to give it what it really needs. We can go around picking out the things we find interesting in every religion across the globe. We may even find some things which seem to soothe the spirit in doing this. However, we can find ways to soothe or feed our spirit without caring about the things of God. God didn't say there was nothing for the spirit in this life. There are many things which uplift the spirit, and many of these things are very good works. One of the greatest things for our spirit is helping others. There is nothing like giving food to the hungry, clothing to the needy, or a helping hand to a friend. When we reach out to others, we reach out to God. (Matt. 25:31-40) We do something pure and good - something which the spirit has great pleasure in! There is realness in the spirit; it's not just a dream or imaginary friend. When we take time to even recognize it exists, we, many times, find great joy just in that fact alone. Oddly, this is where many people have trouble. We may recognize the hunger pains of our spirit, but that does not mean we will choose to give it God!

One day, Jesus was sitting next to a well in Samaria; and a woman came out to draw water from the well. Jesus knew this woman had many fleshly experiences. Jesus knew her entire life, she had wanted more than she seemed to be able to find. So, Jesus told the woman if she knew who she was talking to, she would have asked of Him a drink and He would have given her living water. The woman was confused, and pointed out, Jesus had nothing to draw water with; and the well was deep. Jesus explained to her, He was talking about something other than that which feeds the flesh. After the woman was convinced she had found The Messiah, she ran into town and told others. While she was

gone, the disciples, having come to the well near the end of Jesus' conversation with the woman, asks Jesus to eat. Jesus told them He has meat they know not of. Then He pointed out that spiritual food is doing the will of God, and that will is to preach the gospel. (John 4:5-42) The Samaritan woman had found emptiness in trying to find satisfaction for the flesh; but without God, she would never satisfy the spirit as well. That is why it was such good news to hear the Messiah had come!

The bottom line is this: we can view organized religion as being too fleshly. We can jump out and choose to be more "spiritual," but simply seeking to satisfy our spirit can not save us from outer darkness anymore than satisfying the flesh can. (Matt. 8:12) Only the shed blood of Jesus Christ can save us from the death which awaits everyone of us. We don't need formal religion; we don't need informal religion. We can choose to be very fleshly. We can choose to be very spiritual, but we need to choose God! Your spirit certainly knows better than your flesh that the life God has prepared for us is far better than anything we will find in the here and now, fleshly or spiritually. However, even when people say they choose to be more spiritual, they, many times, never truly listen to the spirit and its desire for God. People get into things like meditation, but what are they meditating on? There may be some temporary peace in clearing your mind, but what are you going to fill it with?

The psalmist tells us, the believer meditates on the Words of God. (Ps. 1:1-3) Romans 12 tells us not to be conformed to this world but to be transformed by the renewing of your mind! Different people say different things. Some want to be religious but not spiritual. Some want to be spiritual but not religious. Some want their religion to be spiritual, but who wants the will of God? God tells us He is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to a place of repentance. (II Peter 3:9) Many paths, both fleshly and/or spiritual, can give you just this short-lived, low-level existence which is continually hampered by the sin of our flesh; but in a true relationship with God, you can find out what you were created to be. So, the question is, what do you want?