

Everyone seems to be interested in spirituality these days, but no one seems to agree on what it means. **In the contemporary marketplace of ideas, spirituality sells. The bookstores are loaded with titles about angels, near-death experiences, and ancient pagan religions.** The Internet is full of Web sites set up by New Age gurus and operated by strange cults. Covens and spirit shops proliferate.

One of the strange things about this new fascination with the spiritual life is that many people want to become spiritual without getting religious. For them, spirituality is something private and spontaneous, whereas religion is public and rigid. The reason spirituality sells is that people can make it whatever they want it to be.

According to sociologist Robert Wuthnow, “Growing numbers of Americans piece together their faith like a patchwork quilt. Spirituality has become a vastly complex quest in which each person seeks in his or her own way.”

Unfortunately, the same may be said of the church, where there is widespread confusion about the meaning of true spirituality. Some Christians find their spirituality in acts of private devotion. Having one’s quiet time, fasting, and going to a retreat center are the basic acts of spiritual life. The way to become more spiritual is to find a spiritual director and begin to practice the spiritual disciplines.

For others, the spiritual life begins at church, in the context of public worship. True spirituality comes from reciting an ancient liturgy, lighting candles, and waving incense. Or it comes from playing the right music on the right instrument, or from not using instruments at all.

Still other Christians crave an exciting spiritual



experience. They want to be miraculously healed or delivered through a “power encounter” with the Holy Spirit. They divide the church between those who have had a particular experience and those who haven’t, or between those who exercise a special gift and those who don’t.

Galatians offers an entirely different way of thinking about the spiritual life. Over against the pluralism of this age, **Christian spirituality is based on a relationship with a personal God who has spoken an eternal word. The spiritual life is not, therefore, something that one defines for oneself.**

Rather, it is a life defined by the existence and character of the one true God.

Contrary to what some Christians seem to think, this spiritual life is not something that we produce within us through some ritual or method. To put it very simply, spiritual life flows from the third person of the Trinity. The life of the Holy Spirit can be nurtured by using the means of grace—reading Scripture, attending public worship, and so on—but the life itself comes from God. Only his Spirit can produce the fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

The life of the Spirit flourishes for the sake of others. It is not experienced in private, primarily, but exercised in public. Therefore, it does not grow in isolation, but within the community of faith. **Spiritual life is meant to be shared. It is less like a fruit tree hidden away somewhere in a secret garden, and more like one that grows in a public park.** [Ryken, P. G. (2005). *Galatians*. (R. D. Phillips, P. G. Ryken, & D. M. Doriani, Eds.) (pp. 243–244). Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing.]

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