

Preparing Souls To Serve The Lord

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Serving with Distinction

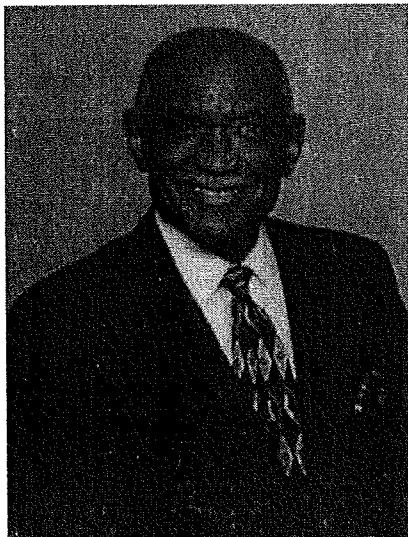
By

Jackie Stearsman

The Florida School of Preaching is indebted to a number of faithful preachers and elders who have served on the Board of Directors. As Jesus states, "And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all" (Mark 10:44 KJV). In a society that is saturated with demanding others serve "us," "my wants," it is not always easy to find those who will spend time and energy, without compensation, to promote a cause. Such individuals are distinct, and these include those who serve the Florida School of Preaching as Board members.

Brother Samuel Roney has served the church both as preacher and elder.

He attended the Florida School of Preaching following retirement. Brother Roney served on the Board from 1995 until June 2003. I recall with fond memories brother Roney's trip with the group from school to



Samuel Roney, Sr
1995-2003

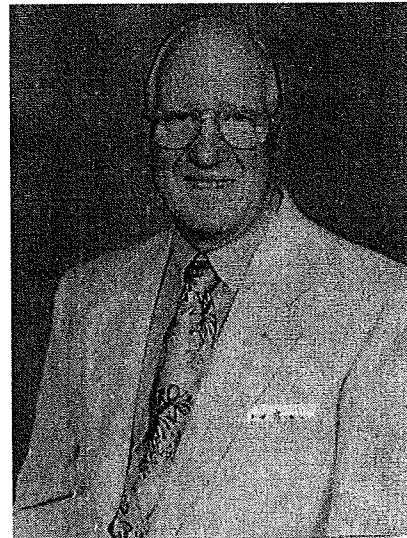
Jamaica. He, in his quiet and unassuming manner was an encouragement to the brethren in the campaign. He has been a loyal supporter of the Florida School of Preaching. While preaching for the church in Plant City, he encouraged the students to come to the

congregation twice a year, and he permitted them to speak and the congregation always prepared a delicious meal for the day. For some it was likely the first compensation they were ever given for speaking. The Laura Street congregation continues this practice.

Brother Roney's years of experience and wisdom was always appreciated. We shall miss him on the Board, but hope to see him often.

*

Brother Dale Spung has served churches in the central Florida area for a number of years both as a



Dale L Spung
1985-2003

gospel preacher and an elder of the church. He began serving on the Board in 1985 and served until June 2003. He asked to be relieved of these duties.

Before Dale or I was connected with the school, we developed a close friendship in the faith. At that time, Dale was preaching for the North Florida Avenue church of Christ in Tampa, and

I was preaching in Clearwater.

Dale will be missed. We always were encouraged by his input into our meetings. His wisdom will be missed, but will always be appreciated.

♥

SPIRITUALITY

By
Hugo McCord

I. Misconceptions About Spirituality

1. Monasticism.

A monk or a nun retiring "from the world under religious vows" is pursuing spirituality by privacy for concentration and fervency in personal praying.

But retirement "from the world" is not what Jesus taught or practiced. He taught his disciples that, though they were "not of the world" (John 17:14), "yet they themselves" were "in the world" (John 17:11) with orders to "shine as lights in the world" (Phil. 2:15). Pointedly he told them "you are the light of the world" (Matt. 5:14), and "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). Jesus did not seclude himself in a monastery.

2. Asceticism.

An ascetic, living alone away from all human beings, believes that he "can reach a higher spiritual state by rigorous self-discipline and self-denial." But the One who reached the highest spiritual state did not do so by abandoning all human contact. With him self-denial meant to meet as many people as possible, to go "about doing good" (Acts 10:38), "to seek and save" the lost (Luke 19:10). One of Jesus' grandfathers wrote, "A loner is self-centered, and rages against all sound wisdom" (Prov. 18:1).

3. Celibacy.

Jesus was celibate for a special reason, but he did not ask others to follow his example. Instead, he approved of marriage as being ordained by his Father in heaven (Matt. 19:4-5). Moreover, he walked some 20 miles to attend a wedding in Cana (John 2:1-12). Further, his apostle taught that to forbid marriage is to "fall away from the faith" (1 Tim. 4:1-3). In addition, another inspired man wrote that "marriage is honorable in all, and the bed is unstained" (Heb. 13:4). Celibacy,

therefore, is not the biblical road to spirituality.

4. Tongue-talking.

At the beginning of the New Testament church, direct gifts from the Holy Spirit were imparted by the laying on of the hands of an apostle (Acts 8:18). One of those gift was the ability to speak in foreign languages (1 Cor. 12:8-10). The ability to speak in a foreign language naturally had to come to an end when the last person died on whom an apostle had laid his hands.

As important as was speaking in tongues (as an evidence that God was prompting the speaker), that gift could not confer spirituality to Christians. Sincere people today in worship services who shout, jump, roll on the floor, giggle and laugh uproariously, thinking that the Holy Spirit activates them internally, have not learned that, when the last person died on whom an apostle had laid his hands, all miracles ceased.

On the contrary, some say, until a Christian talks in tongues he is non-spiritual and legalistic. But even if a Christian today could talk in a language he has not learned, such an accomplishment has nothing to do with that person's becoming spiritual. What that person does mechanically with his tongue has no effect on his inner spiritual nature. Balaam's donkey spoke in a tongue she had never learned (Numb. 22:28), but she was no more spiritual than a talking doll would be in our day.

5. The "House Church."

Many congregations have started in somebody's house (Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:19; Col. 4:15; Philem. 2), but their place of assembly had no relation to their spirituality. The church at Corinth was large enough that, when they assembled "as a church," they had left their "houses" (1 Cor. 11:18, 22; 14:35), but their place of assembly had no relation to their spirituality.

Unfortunately and sadly, some have misconstrued spirituality as being impossible in large gatherings, and have retreated to "house churches." This doctrine is a revival of the 17th century Pietism advocated by Phillip Jackson Spencer: small private meetings in homes for meditation, chain prayers, and a sharing of emotional experiences. That same false approach to spirituality is in a modern quotation:

I would like an anti-establishment group, maybe a group that has no pews (we can sit on the floor), perhaps not even a church house. We want a small group where the closeness is felt and emotions are radiated.

Certainly "closeness is felt and emotions are radiated" in a small or large congregation of spiritual people, but "closeness is felt and emotions are radiated" in family reunions, and even in sexual orgies. Clearly, biblical criteria identifying spirituality are not "closeness" and "emotions."

II. Biblical Spirituality

An invisible, unweighable, intangible, immortal entity called a "spirit" (Zech. 12:1; Matt. 22:32;

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TRAINING PREACHERS SINCE 1969

Luke 23:46), made in God's image who is "spirit" (Gen. 1:26-27; John 4:24), "not flesh and bones" (Luke 24:39), is sent from heaven into a womb when a human being is conceived (Eccl. 12:7; Heb. 12:9). That reality, a spirit is then embodied in flesh as long as that human being lives on the earth, and then "returns to God who gave it" (Eccl. 12:7).

People who live "after the flesh mind the things of the flesh," but flesh itself, though often used in sin (Gal. 5:19-21) is itself not sinful. Some translations leave the impression that flesh itself is sinful (Rom. 8:3, "sinful flesh," KJV, ASV, NAS, NRS), but the literal Greek is sarkos hamartias, the "flesh of sin," flesh that is used in sinning. But to say that flesh itself is sinful makes God look bad "by sending his own Son in the likeness of the flesh of sin" (Rom. 8:3). Jesus "became flesh" (John 1:14; Heb. 5:7).

Flesh itself (sarx, "the material that covers the bones of a human or animal body" (B-G-D, p. 743), is amoral. If we say that flesh itself is sinful we make God look bad, for, after he had created humans and animals with flesh covering their bones (Gen. 1:25-27), then he "looked upon everything that he had made, and, indeed, it was very good" (Genesis 1:31).

Every baby is born into a world "of iniquity," his mother already a sinner (Rom. 3:9, 23), but the baby is born sinless (Matt. 19:14). Only a person's own sins separate him from God (Isa. 59:1-2). Each one must make his own decision whether he sets his mind "on fleshly things" or "on spiritual things" (Rom. 8:5):

Each one is tempted when he is lured by his own desires, and enticed. When desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and when sin is full-grown, it bears death. Be not deceived, my beloved brothers (Jam. 1:14-16).

As a person rises from the water of baptism, his physical "body" (that with which he could commit fornication) is transformed into a

"temple of the Holy Spirit" who "is in" him "from God" (Acts 2:38; 5:32; 1 Cor. 6:18-19). The new Christian rejoices that he is a host to a heavenly Guest (Gal. 4:6).

The presence of the Guest is a precious certification that the newly baptized person is now a child of God, and his presence is a guaranty (if he behaves himself, Ephesians 4:30) that heaven awaits (Gal. 4:6; Eph. 1:13-14). Thereafter he is "led" by the Spirit (Rom. 8:14), but not by his internal dwelling. The Guest is non-communicative and quiet. He cannot be felt. The host would not even know that the Spirit is in him if he did not learn it from the Bible.

The leading of the Spirit, to make him a spiritual person, is not from the inside of the Christian. His leading is external, by his written "counsel," a "lamp" for his "feet, and a light" for his "path" (Psalm 73:24; 119:105).

His "counsel" is that a Christian must put "to death the deeds of the body" (Rom. 8:13), but the Spirit does not do the killing. Neither does he lead Christians directly from his indwelling position, else no Christian would ever sin or even make a mistake. It is up to the individual Christian himself to "buffet" his "body and make it" a "slave" in order to grow spiritually (1 Cor. 9:27). Some Christians at Corinth, although indwelt by the Spirit, were "weak and sick, and a large number" was "asleep" (1 Cor. 6:19-20; 11:30).

Instead of Christians at Corinth or in Ephesus being "weak and sick," they could "be strengthened mightily in the inner person by his Spirit" (Eph. 3:16). However, if they waited for the Spirit directly to infuse strength by his indwelling, they would remain "weak and sick."

On the other hand, if they obeyed the words of the Spirit that they equip themselves with seven pieces of "God's armor" (namely, truth, uprightness, peaceableness, faith, salvation, "the sword of the Spirit, which is God's word," and

prayer (Eph. 6:13-18), they would "be strengthened mightily in the inner person by the Spirit" (Eph. 3:16).

Unfortunately, the Christians at Ephesus paid no attention to the Spirit's admonition to equip themselves with God's armor, with the sad result that they left their "first love," and received a threat from Jesus that, unless they repented, he would "remove" their "lampstand out of its place" (Rev. 2:4-5).

If a Christian does not behave as he should, he grieves the indwelling Guest, a Guest who wants to stay within "until the day of redemption" (Eph. 1:14; 4:30). If he does not behave, if he does not grow spiritually, cultivating the fruit of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, Gal. 5:22-23), the Spirit will leave the backslider (Jude 19). However, the Spirit still stands "at the door" of the heart of that failed Christian, hoping he would repent and open "the door," so that the Spirit "will come in to him" again, and will renew his indwelling, saying, "I will dine with him, and he with me!" (Rom. 8:9; Rev. 3:20).

The Spirit exercises no compulsion. It is up to each Christian whether or not the Spirit stays within him the rest of his life. In the Spirit's "counsel" he gives a command to all Christians: "Keep yourselves filled with the Spirit" (plerousthe in Greek grammar, imperative mood, middle voice, Eph. 5:18). The loving God has done all he can do. If a Christian does not keep the heavenly Guest within himself, the Guest is grieved (Eph. 4:30).

All of the Christians in the "seven congregations in Asia" (Rev. 1:4) received the Spirit when they were baptized, but they had no leading by him until they had received the book of Revelation. When that book arrived, they had the words of the Spirit telling them how He was going to strengthen them mightily in their inner persons: "Let him, who has an ear, hear what the Spirit says to the congregations (Rev.

2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22).

A person given to "spiritual things" (Rom. 8:5) learns that he must be reborn of "water and of Spirit" in becoming a "new creature" (John 3:5; 2 Cor. 5:17). He knows that his fleshly nature is not reborn, only his spirit inside of him (John 3:6).

With his spirit regenerated (Matt. 19:28; Tit. 3:5), he is ready "to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 2:5). Immediately after his "bath of the new birth" he volunteers eagerly to make his whole body and spirit a "living sacrifice" for the rest of his life as a "spiritual service" (Rom. 12:1; Tit. 3:5).

However, if he sets his mind on "fleshly things" (Rom. 8:5), as did Amnon (2 Sam. 13:1-17), and as did a church member at Corinth (1 Cor. 5:1), he is not spiritual. On the other hand, if he sets his mind "on spiritual things" (Rom. 8:5), as did Joseph (Gen. 39:9), and as did a black man from Ethiopia (Acts 8:26-40), he is a

spiritual man.

A spiritual man saves time for daily Bible reading (Psalm 1:1-2; 119:97-105; Colossians 3:16) and for daily praying (1 Thess. 5:17). Occasionally he feels the need to miss a meal to undergird his praying with fasting (Matt. 9:15). He enjoys fellowship with other Christians (Acts 2:42). He is cheerful and a liberal contributor, not only to the church, but to "every good work" (2 Cor. 9:6-7; Tit. 3:1).

He loves to sing praises to his great God, both when he is alone (Jam. 5:13) and when he is in the church assembly (Eph. 5:19; Heb. 2:12). It is his delight to tell all who will listen what Jesus has done for him (Mark 5:19), and to "proclaim the excellencies of him who" has called him "out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Pet. 2:9).

A spiritual exercise of his every Lord's Day is to discern the Lord's bleeding body as he partakes of a tiny piece of bread and swallows

a sip of the fruit of the vine (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 11:29). The spiritual man loves to meditate, not on "fleshly things," but on "the things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God" (Col. 3:1).

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Things

To Remember

1. August 18–Fall Semester begins. For catalogue or assistance, contact the office.
 2. January 19-22, 2004, The Annual Florida School of Preaching Lectureship.
 3. Lectureship Theme: "Do You Understand the Grace of God?"
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