

What spiritual means, and who is the Holy Spirit, can lead to much confusion. Things of the spirit take on so many different meanings to different people, as to conceal the essential nature of the Bible's Holy Spirit. People may associate spiritual or supernatural matters with astrology and zodiac signs, crystals, vortices, and elemental powers, seances calling up the dead, fortunetelling from palm reading or tarot cards, voodoo, curses, or other black magic, reincarnation in higher or lower life forms, merging one's soul with the universe, the future-creating power of positive thinking, the self-striving reach toward higher states, even nirvana, or simply good and bad luck or some kind of universal alignment like karma.

The Holy Spirit implies none of these things. The Spirit is above all God, equal of Father and Son because in and of Father and Son, God in full and essential nature. The Spirit is also indomitably a person, as the God of the Bible is personal, individual. The Spirit is not the supreme force but the supreme being. The Spirit is also pure, set apart, uncorrupted and incorruptible, so far from the tawdry arts and endeavors listed just above as to regard them as abominations. The Spirit is also real, authentic, present, potent, and all-powerful, not a wisp or vapor but a fire that lights the soul, word that calms the storm, touch that heals the sick, ripple that defeats an army, and mercy that raises the dead. Indeed, God's Spirit is so vital that Jesus warned not to cross, affront, or profane the Spirit, for which forgiveness is unavailable. A section below deals with that extraordinary sin.

Consider, though, what the Bible means by spiritual. The Bible is a spiritual text, indeed the spiritual text, as the God who speaks to us through it is Spirit. Spiritual, or supernatural, first means other than natural, in contrast to unimbued organic life in the flesh. The Bible serves as an outstanding training manual for the physical body and natural mind. Nebuchadnezzar found the Jew Daniel and his young Israelite companions, whom God favored, to be most physically and mentally fit for the king's service. But natural training is not the Bible's point. The Bible involves spiritual discernment. Spirit implies essence, life, or breath. So, when Christianity speaks of God's Spirit, the sense is of God's essential quality, his very life or very breath, as the resurrected Jesus breathed on the disciples when giving them the Spirit.

The whole of the Bible points us to God's spiritual realm. God's spiritual realm is tangible, just not something we access in our natural bodies. Yet we can readily access Christ's spiritual blessings and exercise Christ's spiritual authority here, now, through our own spirits. Through embrace of God's word, we can also let the Spirit mature us in our spirit, so that we grow in spiritual knowledge and gifts. Those spiritual gifts include knowledge of things of the Spirit, wisdom in that knowledge's use, faith in things of God, and then extraordinary power over circumstances, including the ability to see events to come. We do not take on a full spiritual body, though, until we pass from our natural body, as a dying seed gives transformed life.

Another gift that the Spirit gives us is the ability to distinguish the Spirit of Christ from the world's spirit. The world certainly has its own spirit, described in part with the list that opens this section. In Colossians 2:8, the apostle Paul calls them elemental spiritual forces, not of Christ. The world's elemental spiritual forces do not mature and strengthen but instead weaken and deceive. The mature Christian thus discerns and resists those forces in spiritual struggle. Christians concern themselves with that spiritual struggle, instead of the natural and material competitions and strivings of the world, perhaps for a more-glamorous job or larger house.

That spiritual struggle for the things of God, to pursue his will and spiritual kingdom while still in this natural and material world, is in part why Christians regard the Holy Spirit as essential. Christians love and embrace the Holy Spirit because he is God. His standing as God is wholly enough for Christians to devote their full being to him. Yet Christians also live lives of holiness in submission to God and reliance on Christ, to receive and hear the Holy Spirit. The Spirit gives us power, discernment, and authority to prevail in spiritual struggle.

Spiritual struggle and victory do affect the natural and material, although that alone is not the reason, nor the primary reason, why Christians engage in spiritual struggle to pursue spiritual victory. The indwelling Spirit can certainly help one gain good health, physical fitness, mental acuity, helpful insight, protective discernment, emotional control, honesty, integrity, and discipline, calming patience, productive perseverance, and other fruitful attitudes and characteristics. Employers, employees,

public officials, neighbors, leaders, followers, and others love solid Christians for all those and many other characteristics. Good character earns natural rewards.

Yet Christians know that they may lose everything natural and material, and still gain ever greater spiritual reward. How do they know so? That's exactly what Christ did, relinquishing every natural honor and asset, including his last ignominious, cross-borne, gasping breath, solely to gain his Father's honor. As Isaiah 50:7 recites, Christ knew that his spiritual reward, his Father's honor, would so far exceed the value of anything natural, that he set his face like flint toward that end. May we, too, pursue our spiritual struggle with like resolve, knowing our joyful reward, transformed in spiritual body, to dwell eternally with Christ in heaven.