

## ***SPIRITUAL MEN FOR A SPIRITUAL WORK***

With all praise to God, we have come to yet another very special day for this congregation. Today, two good men—brother Keith Chesser and brother George Barnhart—will take their place among those who have served as elders with this congregation. If I understand Acts 20:28 correctly, we know the Holy Spirit has had a hand in all of this so each one of us need to humble ourselves before the Lord and praise His name. I want to personally commend both of these men for the honor that has come to them, and also for the responsibility that they are taking upon themselves. In just a little while, the present elders will come and install these new bishops.

This is a very appropriate time for all of us to be reminded of the importance of having spiritual men to lead and oversee this church. The need for spiritual men, not just in the church, but in our homes, in our schools, in business and in the workplace as well as in our government is surely one of the most critical needs there is. What I want to do this morning, before we proceed with the installation of our new elders is to look at what we mean by the expression, “spiritual man.” And then I want to spend most of my time thinking about the difference spiritual men can make to who we are and what we do as a congregation of God’s people.

What do we mean by the phrase, “spiritual man?” The word spiritual is used a number of times in the NT, but it isn’t always used with the same meaning.

One way the word is used is as a reference to that which is not physical or material in nature. For example, in Romans 15:27, Paul contrasts the spiritual blessings which the Gentiles had received from the saints in Judea from the material blessings, or contributions that were being taken up for the saints in Judea. The spiritual blessings in that context was a reference to the gospel they had received. In **1 Peter 2:5**, Peter talks about Christians as being “*living stones*” that are used to build up “*a spiritual house, for a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices.*” The stones he referred to were not real, of course, but were the individual Christians. Together they were building a spiritual house, not a physical building of course, but what Paul calls in **1 Timothy 3:15**, the “*household of God.*” Spiritual sacrifices were not bulls and goats, and turtle doves, but things such as good works, holy lives and praising God. So, one meaning of “spiritual” is with reference to something that is non-material in nature.

In other places, the word “spiritual” is used with reference to something miraculous made possible by the Holy Spirit. For example, in Romans 1:11, 1 Corinthians 12:1, and 1 Timothy 4:14, we read about spiritual gifts. These were virtues or miraculous abilities some Christians received from the Holy Spirit. You can read about a number of those in 1 Corinthians 12.

Sometime, however, the word “spiritual” is used with a third meaning. It is used to refer to something that is holy or godly or divine in nature. That is how Paul uses the word in **Romans 7:14**, when he says that “*we know that the Law is spiritual.*” In **Ephesians 1:3**, we learn that

those who are in Christ have been blessed with *every spiritual blessing*, and in **5:19** Paul speaks about *spiritual songs*. This is what should be understood when we use the phrase, “spiritual men.” In **1 Corinthians 3:1**, Paul tells the Corinthian Christians, “*I could not speak to you as spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ.*”

So a spiritual man is that person whose nature is oriented towards God. He is one who values most those things that are true and right, holy and godly. His number one priority in life is to seek and know God, to serve and worship Him, and please him in every way possible. He is one who strives to love God with all of his heart, soul, mind and strength. He strives to be like God’s Son, Christ the savior. He walks by the Spirit and bears the fruit of the Spirit. He loves and makes it a goal in his life to study and know the Word of God. He loves God’s people, and loves God’s work and aspires to hear God say one day, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” In every facet of his life, whether privately or publicly, the spiritual man is one who seeks to know and do the will of God and fulfill God’s purpose for his life. A spiritual man is like that man described in **Psalm 1**, where the Psalmist says:

*Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; 2) but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.*

The spiritual man is a friend of sinners, who loves the brotherhood, and has a servant spirit. The spiritual man has his eye on the sky, and clearly understands that this world is not our home. The kingdom of God and His righteousness is his number one priority and it shapes how he deals with everyone and everything. The spiritual man is that man whose heart longs to please God, and hates every false way, especially in himself.

Now let me make it clear, when I speak of the spiritual man as I have done here, most of us immediately recognize that we fall far short of being that kind of man. So perhaps I should say, the spiritual man is one who is making a whole hearted effort to be a spiritual man.

Hopefully, that gives you some idea of the Biblical picture of a spiritual man. We should not find it a great surprise, then, that when we think about elders and anyone who attempts to provide any kind of leadership in the Lord’s church, that they should be spiritual men. Let’s think about some specific reasons why that must be the case.

**First of all, spiritual men understand that God’s kingdom, which is Christ’s church, is not of this world.** God’s kingdom cannot be found on the map, but it can be found all over the map. Jesus told Pilate, “*My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight, but my kingdom is not of this world.*” (John 18:33-36).

It is a great mistake to think of and try to deal with the church like it is of this world. Jesus made that clear when He had to correct the thinking of the twelve who were vying with one another to sit at Christ’s right and left hand. He said that kind of thinking may have a place in

the world, but not in His kingdom. True leadership, he said, is not about having authority, it is about having a servant's heart and spirit.

Spiritual men understand that buildings and budgets, carpets and parking lots are important only because those things facilitate the true work of the church. I don't know how many times I have heard people talking about their father or grandfather, saying, "Yes, he helped build that church," when what they mean is, he went out there with a hammer and a saw and he helped build a building in which the church began to meet. Spiritual men understand God's kingdom is not of this world; that the church is a spiritual organization with a spiritual mission. They understand therefore, that the values and priorities of the world have little application to what the church is and does. They understand that the church is guided by spiritual principles that are to be found in God's word. They also understand that God is the one who gives the increase; that the church's job is not to succeed but to be faithful.

To John and Ed and Art and George and Keith, it is so, so important that you five have a clear understanding about all of this. It is easy for elders to find themselves consumed with concerns about physical, material things, and in so doing, begin to neglect their spiritual work.

**Secondly, spiritual men understand that God's kingdom is going to be constantly attacked by Satan** and that they must be alert and vigilant to every teaching and way that might weaken or destroy the church. Never far from their mind are the words of Paul, first spoken to the Ephesian elders when they met him at Miletus. In **Acts 20:18-32** we read:

*"Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. 29) I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; 30) and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. 31) Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish everyone with tears. 32) And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.*

There are times when elders must take decisive action and courageous stands. Paul knew that only men with strong faith would be able to do this kind of work. In his letter to **Titus, chapter 1, beginning in verse 9**, he wrote these words:

*He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it. 10) For there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party. 11) They must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach. 12) One of the Cretans, a prophet of their own, said, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons." 13)*

*This testimony is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith,*

Elders must also understand that if some member of the flock goes astray, as spiritual men, they are to go to them and do everything they can, in the spirit of Christ to win them back to the Lord. That is what the apostle Paul directed there in Galatians 6:1. Just as friends do not let friends drive drunk, spiritual men do not let members of the church fall away or even slip away without putting forth a whole hearted effort to reclaim those souls.

**A third thing that I want to stress is that spiritual men understand that they must be an example to the flock.** The apostle Peter, who saw himself like an elder had the following to say to those who would take on this great work. In **1 Peter 5:1-4**, He wrote:

*So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: 2) shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; 3) not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. 4) And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.*

Spiritual men realize that part of their work is in being a model to the members over whom they have been appointed as overseers. They understand that it isn't just what they do in a classroom, or in an elder's meeting, but how they go about their daily lives. They understand that it isn't just their knowledge that people need, they need their friendship and fellowship. They need their personal counsel and sometimes they just need their presence. Spiritual men are not afraid to open up their hearts to people, to ache and cry with them, as well as to enjoy the happier moments in life. They understand that if they hope to lead the church in the right way, they must set the right kind of example themselves.

If they want a church that is faithful, are they faithful? If they want a church that is evangelistic, are they evangelistic. If they want a church that is into the Word, are they into the Word? If they want a praying church, are they men of prayer? If they want a church that is generous and sacrificial in their giving, are they generous and sacrificial? If they want a church that is loving and gracious, helpful and hospitable, are they loving and gracious, helpful and hospitable? If they want a church that has a loving, encouraging, ministering fellowship, are they loving, encouraging and ministering?

Let me close by just reminding everyone, that spiritual men may not always be right, but spiritual men who work together as an eldership, praying together and depending on God and His word for guidance will come nearer to being right more times than those who choose to be critical and ignore their leadership.

Keith, George, you have been given a great honor, and along with brother Summers, and Ed and Art, you are taking on a great responsibility. One day, according to Hebrews 13:17, you will

have to give an account of this stewardship that is being entrusted to you. I know that can be a sobering thought, but understand this, we are not asking you to be something that you are not, or to do something you cannot do. We are simply asking you to be spiritual men. Do not depend on your own wisdom or on your own strength. Instead, keep looking to God. As spiritual men, spend more time in His Word and more time on your knees. Trust in the hope that as a part of the eldership, you have the help of other spiritual men and together you can and will succeed in the work you are taking on this day.

At this time, I will call on the current elders to come and complete this service.