

“ESTABLISHED IN GOD’S WORD”

INTRODUCTION: In the April 2-4, 2010, *Carolina Weekly: The USA Weekend* magazine carried the cover-story: *How Spiritual Are You?*

1. *How Spiritual Are You? You may be closer to God than you realize.*
2. Focusing on the Easter weekend 2010, the article interviewed/featured four religious leaders about “spirituality,” from four faith traditions...
3. **Barbara Brown Taylor** is a female Episcopal priest who lives in Georgia.
 - a. Her book: *An Altar in the World: A Geography of Faith*
 - b. Named one of the top 10 most influential Protestant pastors in America, according to Life Way Research, in Nashville.
 - c. She lives in Georgia, raises organic vegetables, chickens, horses, guinea hens, dogs, and cats.
 - d. Here’s her advice of finding spirituality:

Start with universal human experience and go deeper than before. You need no equipment, no trainer, no expensive airplane tickets. It’s everyday life that requires your full attention. People talk about spirituality as a journey. And I always think, ‘Gosh, you’re never where you are supposed to be. What a shame. Be where you are.’
 - e. Dreams, intuitions and experiences are the keys to understanding faith.
4. **James Martin** is a Catholic Jesuit Priest.
 - a. Left a fast-paced, lucrative executive career 20 years ago to join the Jesuit religious order
 - b. He’s the culture editor of the Catholic magazine *America*, the author of several books, including *The Jesuit Guide to (Almost) Everything: A Spiritual Guide for Real People*, and the chaplain to Comedy Central TV Channel.
 - c. Father Martin’s guide to spirituality is this:

Start finding your spirituality in the relationships you have right now, says Catholic priest James Martin. He sees spirituality expressed in friendships, families and workplaces – anywhere you choose to bring loving kindness to relationships, even the annoying, crabby or painful ones.
5. **Jamie Kornfeld** is a Jewish Rabbi living in Boulder, Colorado:
 - a. She calls herself an “Adventure Rabbi” who leads groups in Jewish spiritual adventures outdoors.
 - b. She left the synagogue to commune with God outdoors.
 - c. Rabbi Kornfeld makes this observation:

We can “recalibrate our awe meters” in the Rockies or Central Park or just by looking out our office window at a tree and recalling the whisper of wind in its boughs, its rough bark and truly living colors.

6. **Anne Graham Lotz**, daughter of Evangelist Billy Graham was also consulted.
 - a. She pointed to Scripture as the only way to know God fully and deepen in our spiritual lives.
 - b. She stated to *USA Weekend*:

We can be out there and sense God’s presence in nature because we are created by God and in His image, and we have an instinctive capacity to know Him built into our DNA. But my Bible tells me we can only know God in His fullness as He reveals Himself, and He reveals Himself through Jesus.

7. *USA Weekend* summarized the pursuit of spirituality with this modern American viewpoint:

A rising number of Americans today say they’re “spiritual but not religious.” Fifteen percent say they don’t identify with any religion – twice that of about two decades ago, according to the American Religious Identification Survey, released in 2009.

8. There you have it; the state of more and more Americans’ souls: “*spiritual but not religious...not identified with any religion...*”
9. Can this be so? Can a person really be *spiritual but not religious*, and find this non-religious spirituality outside of the church?
 - a. To answer frankly, if not bluntly, No!
 - b. “Spiritual” is the Greek word *pneumatikos*
 - c. A word Paul uses as direct opposite of *sarkos* (fleshy/worldly)
 - d. According to Paul, the “spiritual” man/woman is one who is indwelt by the Holy Spirit and given the mind of Christ to understand spiritual realities.
 - e. *Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But, as it is written,*

*“What no eye has seen, nor ear heard,
nor the heart of man imagined,
what God has prepared for those who love him”—*

these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.

The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. "For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ. (1 Corinthians 2:6-16)

- f. In other words: **Only true, regenerate, converted Christians are "spiritual" people.**
 - g. The rest are merely "*mystics*" (*gnostics*): they find their faith practices in an esoteric system rather than in Christ and His religion.
 - h. For some, the simple life of nature; for others the context of interpersonal relationships; for still others, adventures in the outdoors. All spiritualities without religion.
 - i. But **Anne Graham Lotz** is correct: *Only through the Scriptures can a person come to personally and intimately know God through faith in Jesus Christ, and thus be spiritually transformed.*
10. This is what Peter the Apostle is teaching us in 2 Peter 1:1-21.
- a. Spiritual transformation only comes by grace from God, through faith in Christ, and with the development of godly virtue/character, by the Holy Spirit, all guided by the Word of God. All this is done in the church.
 - b. *Simeon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ,*
To those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ:
May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.
His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins. Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Therefore I intend always to remind you of these qualities, though you know them and are established in the truth that you have. I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to stir you up by way of reminder, since I know that the putting off of my body will be soon, as our Lord Jesus Christ made clear to me. And I will make every effort so that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things.

For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased," we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. And we have something more sure, the prophetic word, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. (2 Peter 1:1-21)

11. In 2 Peter 1:12-21, the Apostle makes it very plain that he intends to *remind* the Christians in Asia Minor (and Rome) that all genuine spirituality is rooted in the Word of God and in the Life of the Church.
 - a. Developed by Religion (1:12-15)
 - b. Developed by Revelation (1:16-21)
 - c. i.e., by *religion* in the church and *revelation* in Scripture

I. SPIRITUALITY IS DEVELOPED BY RELIGION (2 Peter 1:12-15)

Therefore I intend always to remind you of these qualities, though you know them and are established in the truth that you have. I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to stir you up by way of reminder, since I know that the putting off of my body will be soon, as our Lord Jesus Christ made clear to me. And I will make every effort so that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things. (2 Peter 1:12-15)

1. Peter reminds the Christians of Asia Minor (and us) that the goal of the Gospel is our spiritual transformation.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. (2 Corinthians 5:17)

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. (Romans 12:1-2)

But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself. (Phil. 3:20-21)

And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:18)

2. In other words: The development of virtue is not optional but essential to God's saving purposes. It is the *deepening process* of the Holy Spirit's sanctification.
3. Because we evangelicals emphasize *experience* so much, we have become shallow, worldly and ineffective as God's people in the world.
4. As **David F. Wells** has written, we have lost our virtue and with it our moral vision for life in Christ.
5. Allow me to point to four illustrations to prove this:
 - a. First: *Our Biblical illiteracy is embarrassing...*
 - i. **Christianity Today**: "*Why Johnny Can't Read the Bible.*" (May 2010)
 - ii. **Time** magazine cover story in 2007: Only half of U.S. adults could name the four Gospels. Less than half could identify Genesis as the first book in the Bible. Most cannot name the 10 commandments.
 - 37% of American teenagers could locate famous quotes in the Sermon on the Mount
 - Only 44% of "born again" teens could do so.
 - iii. *Perhaps the first step toward improved Bible literacy is admitting we have a problem. A 2005 study by the Barna Group asked American Christians to rate their spiritual maturity based on activities such as worship, service, and evangelism. Christians offered the harshest evaluation of their Bible knowledge, with 25 percent calling themselves not too mature or not at all mature.*
 - b. Second: *Christians have not transformed American society despite an "evangelical century" (20th century)*
 - i. **James Davidson Hunter**: *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (Oxford Press; May 2010).
 - ii. Professor of Religion, Culture and Social Theory at the University of Virginia. (author of *Culture Wars*)
 - iii. Despite 85 million self-professed Christians in America, our nation is in spiritual, neo-pagan decline.

How is it that American public life is so profoundly secular when 85 percent of the population professes to be Christian? If a culture were simply the sum total of beliefs, values, and ideas that ordinary individuals hold, then the United States would be a far more religious society. Looking at our entertainment, politics, economics, media, and education, we are forced to conclude that the cultural influence of Christians is negligible. By contrast, Jews, who compose 3 percent of the population, exert significant cultural influence disproportionate to their numbers, notably in literature, art, science, medicine, and technology. Gays offer another example.
 - c. Third: *There are very few evangelical Christians in our Federal Court System.*
 - i. **Dan Gilgoff**: *CNN.com*: "*A Supreme Court without Protestants*"
 - ii. A Supreme Court of Catholics and Jews

For much of the last 150 years, evangelical Christianity has stressed an emotional theology of “heart” over “head” – not a recipe for producing legal scholars with eyes fixed on the Supreme Court.

iii. **Michael Lindsay**, Professor at Rice University:

Evangelicals have put more effort into getting elected than in getting onto the bench. Electoral politics is more similar to the style of rallying around revival campaign than it is to the arduous journey of producing intellectual giants that could be eligible for the Supreme Court.

iv. Natural law, study of Scripture, academic pursuit, law school at “liberal universities,” a pain-staking process of building a life-long reputation for solid jurisprudence – all run counter to *emotional evangelicalism*.

d. Fourth: *Our young evangelicals are walking away from the faith in college at the rate of 80%!*

i. We are losing the next generation because of our lack of virtue.

ii. They are *educationally* ill-equipped to answer challenges to the faith (Why? Biblically & theologically illiterate).

iii. They are drawn to *a new liberalism* because evangelicals are reactionary, shallow and mean.

iv. They are as *worldly* and *immoral* as everyone else on campus because discipleship, ethical instruction and virtue gave way to sports, music and relationships in the Youth Ministry.

6. **My painful point?** *God has placed all around us the obvious and ugly fruits of our emotional, shallow, worldly evangelicalism and our loss of virtue.*

7. **The point Peter is making:** He is reminding us that the development of Christlike character and godly virtue is not only the aim of the Gospel but the purpose of the church.

a. Virtue *cannot* be developed on-line, by oneself and in shallow relationships and busy programs.

b. Virtue can only be developed in the *School of Christ...the local church*.

c. Look at these virtues: faith, virtue, knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, piety, brotherly affection, love...

d. *How can any of these be developed apart from a life immersed in the local church?*

8. Peter is *reminding* us of 2 Peter 1:3-11 and the part the church plays in our spiritual transformation:

a. Spiritual authority, preaching and teaching, discipleship, church discipline, means of grace, body life and mutual ministry.

b. *Spiritual gifts...spiritual fruit...spiritual virtues...*

c. Peter **is** saying, “It is impossible to be spiritual without being religious and religious without being church-ed.”

9. **Our warped idea of a high view of the Gospel and a low view of church has led to ruin:** Biblical illiteracy, worldly lives, youth lost to the church, poor personal ethics, inability to affect the culture, loss of respect by the world, politicization of Christianity and confusion in the church.
10. **C. S. Lewis** decried the growing tendency for Christians being *unable to follow a sustained and reasoned argument*.
- a. Everything must be “simple ‘n easy”
 - b. Like the 6-second sound-bites of the standard TV show aimed at a 5th-grade mentality!
 - c. Evangelical, political correctness will not sustain truth anymore than left-wing political correctness will.
 - d. **C. S. Lewis:** *The Screwtape Letters (Letter #1)*
Jargon, not argument, is your best ally in keeping him from the church. Don't waste time trying to make him think that materialism is true! Make him think it is strong or stark or courageous—that it is the philosophy of the future. That's the sort of thing he cares about. By the very act of arguing, you awaken the patient's reason; and once it is awake, who can foresee the result?
 - e. **Dallas Willard:** *Knowing Christ Today (pp. 6, 7)*
A life of steadfast discipleship to Jesus Christ can be supported only upon assured knowledge of how things are, of the realities in terms of which that life is lived.
11. We need to read, study, listen to other opinions, and explore the depths of our rich Christian Tradition, rather than ape the mindless babble of radio talk shows and the TV News “analyst.”
12. What does our *Confessions of Faith* say? What do the historic *Creeeds* profess? What is taught in our *Catechisms*?
13. **Alister McGrath** reminds us of what **James I. Packer** states: There is something rich and helpful in our Biblical Traditions:
- a. *So why is this emphasis on tradition so significant? Why does Packer need to be heard on this point? The answer to this question is complex. Packer himself points to four major reasons why a recovery of tradition is important to evangelicalism. It allows us to discover our historical roots, introduces a sense of realism concerning our own situation, provides resources for the modern church, and acts as a reminder of yesterday's successes and failures, so that the church may learn from them. Packer's intimate knowledge and experience of North American evangelicalism led him to appreciate the dangers of individualism, which seemed to him to engender a dangerously superficial and ephemeral form of Christianity. For Packer, tradition is an antidote against precisely such individualism. North American evangelicalism, steeped in individualism, often seems to have no real sense of historical 'belonging' or rootedness. As such, it is radically prone to destabilization. Too often, as Packer comments, the North American evangelical has been 'a spiritual lone ranger who has proudly or impatiently turned his back on the church and his heritage' – a development which, for Packer, is 'a surefire recipe for weirdness without end!' Rediscovering the corporate and historic nature of the Christian faith reduces the danger of*

entire communities of faith being misled by charismatic individuals, and affirms the ongoing importance of the Christian past as a stabilizing influence in potentially turbulent times.

- b. The same message that Peter states here in verse 12

Therefore I intend always to remind you of these qualities, though you know them and are established in the truth that you have. (2 Peter 1:12)

14. Peter's point is this: In order to develop as a well-rounded, godly and effective Christian, we must be "*established in the truth*" that the Apostles have passed on to us.

- a. *Our Confessions, Catechisms and Creeds* (historic Christianity)

- b. The *kerugma* (proclamation) of the Apostles

Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. (Jude 3)

- c. The **traditions** and **practices** established by the Apostles

Now I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I delivered them to you. (1 Corinthians 11:2)

So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter. (2 Thess. 2:15)

Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us. (2 Thess. 3:6)

If anyone is inclined to be contentious, we have no such practice, nor do the churches of God. (1 Corinthians 11:16)

15. Our lust for easy answers to complex problems, for conservative political correctness, for emotional experiences instead of intellectual pursuits, for something "new" to the disdain of tradition has, in fact, made Evangelicals **odious** in the site of the world.

- a. *Emotionally manipulative*

- b. *Intellectually shallow*

- c. *Socially disconnected*

- d. *Morally compromised*

16. The world does **not** so much hate us for what we are but rather for what we say we are while, in fact, we are the opposite.

17. The solution to this "*shallowing out*" of our evangelical faith is clear: The Word of God...

II. SPIRITUALITY IS DEVELOPED BY REVELATION (2 Peter 1:16-21)

For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For when he received honor and glory from

God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,” we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. And we have something more sure, the prophetic word, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. (2 Peter 1:16-21)

1. Peter reminds the saints that our religion is rooted in *revelation* from God.
2. Peter states three crucial facts about the Word of God and how it shapes our spiritual nature.
3. **First:** *The Word of God reveals the majesty of God in Jesus Christ as opposed to the myths of men.*
 - a. *For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,” we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. (2 Peter 1:16-18)*
 - b. All non-Christian spiritualities are rooted in *myth*: Superstitious falsehoods that pull us away from Christ. Like...
 - i. Finding God in nature
 - ii. Rooting your soul in relationships
 - iii. Communing with the Divine in the wilderness
 - c. Peter says, *“No! God can only be found, only be communed with, only serve as the ground of our lives in the person of Jesus Christ, as revealed in the Bible.”*
 - d. **Note well:** Not the Jesus you want but the Jesus who is.
 - e. Peter reminds his readers that he, James, and John encountered the glorious Christ in all His majesty at the transfiguration, where God actually spoke out of the sky, and Peter heard and saw these things.
 - f. *And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. And Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.” He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.” (Matthew 17:1-5)*
 - g. Peter is reminding us that the Apostles knew God personally because they knew Jesus personally.

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal

life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us— that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete. (1 John 1:1-4)

- h. **The point:** Our Christian faith is rooted in the miraculous, the mysterious and the historic that were revealed to the Apostles who were eyewitnesses to the events and message of Jesus Christ's life.
 - i. We need no *myth*. We have the mysteries of God revealed to us by the word of the Apostles.

And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the mystery of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God. (1 Corinthians 2:1-5)
4. **Second:** *The Word of God serves as a lamp that shines on our spiritual life in this world, day after day.*
- a. *And we have something more sure, the prophetic word, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts... (2 Peter 1:19)*
 - b. “*the prophetic word*” = a reference to the Old Testament Scriptures
 - c. “The Bible” for Peter, the Jews and the early church
 - d. As time progressed, the Apostles’ letters (epistles) would be added to the Old Testament as inspired New Testament Scripture.
 - e. *Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace. And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures. (2 Peter 3:14-16)*
 - f. **Note well:** “*the rest of Scripture*” (3:16)
 - g. Peter, Paul and the other Apostles *knew* they were writing down inspired revelation (Scripture)
 - h. And these Old Testament prophets and New Testament Apostles serve as a spiritual lamp for our souls
 - i. “*...a lamp shining in a dark place...*”
 - ii. *Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. (Psalm 119:105)*
 - i. **The Point:** We are not groping our way through life in some “search” for true spirituality. The Sure Word of God is shining the way forward for us.

5. **Third:** *The Word of God is carried along by God the Holy Spirit.*
 - a. ...knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. (2 Peter 1:20-21)
 - b. Fact #1: What we believe is **not** our "own interpretation." It is the expressed will and Word of the Spirit.
 - c. **Illustration:** Oftentimes people will say, "Well, that's just your interpretation," when, in fact, it is the black 'n white statement of Holy Writ.
 - d. The Spirit of God "*carries along*" The Word
 - i. *Inspiration:* breathes into men His Words & Will
 - ii. *Superintendence:* assures a reliable translation
 - iii. *Illumination:* gives understanding (interpretation)
6. The problems we discussed earlier – shallowness, illiteracy, worldliness, compromise – are **all** the result of neglecting the Word of God.
7. **George Gallup:** "*Americans revere the Bible, the only problem is they just don't read it!*"
8. A Christian who neglects his/her Bible for any length of time will soon no longer live like a Christian.
9. In fact, his assurance that he is a Christian rests not on what he did in the past (*receive Christ*) but on how he is living now (*abiding in and obedient to the Word of God*).
10. **Illustration:** Back in 1979, I was in Jackson, MS, at my in-laws house for Easter weekend...
 - a. The *Clarion-Ledger* carried an article in its religious section that Saturday.
 - b. An interview with **Charles Templeton** about how he lost his Christian faith
 - c. Templeton was an old friend and fellow evangelist with a young **Billy Graham**.
 - d. He began to doubt the historicity of the Bible, then its miracles, and finally its inspiration.
 - e. He challenged Billy Graham to forsake the old myths of the Bible and discover a "New Faith."
 - f. Later, Billy Graham took an evening walk in the hills of Southern California. He knelt down at a tree stump, put his Bible on the stump and prayed: "*Lord, I can't answer all the questions about the Bible, but I am convinced it is Your Word. I will never again question Your Word. I believe it and will preach it; You handle the rest.*"
 - g. Three decades later, Charles Templeton confessed to being "the most disillusioned and miserable soul in the world." He said: "I have no faith."
 - h. Billy Graham had become the world's most successful evangelist and a man filled with a soul-satisfying, deep and mature spirituality.

CONCLUSION: We may find this hard to believe, but we face the same four challenges to a Biblical faith and genuine spirituality that Peter spoke about 2,000 years ago...

1. **Superstition:** *The love of both the myth and the mystical*
 - a. *For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. (2 Peter 1:16)*
 - b. Preoccupation with spirits, angels, demons, visions, dreams, “miraculous” and sensational occurrences...
 - c. Things **not verifiable** as genuine
 - d. *And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. (2 Corinthians 11:14)*
 - e. The “mystic” feels very spiritual, but he is not; he is merely titillated by myth and mysticism.
 - f. We find this in today’s fascination with the *Medieval Mystics*.
2. **Sensuality:** *The worldliness that replaces a Godward life*
 - a. *But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed. And in their greed they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep. (2 Peter 2:1-3)*
 - b. The Gnostic teachers were sensual and sexually loose/immoral.
 - c. We see the same thing in the *Emergent Church*.
 - d. Approval of homosexuality; acceptance of immorality; accommodation to carnal living
3. **Scientism:** *The denial of the supernatural in the name of “science”*
 - a. *This is now the second letter that I am writing to you, beloved. In both of them I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles, knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. They will say, “Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation.” (2 Peter 3:1-4)*
 - b. What are the two most frequently challenged miracles of the Old Testament?
 - i. Creation
 - ii. The flood
 - c. *Evolution* and the denial of such things as *the flood*, and *the crossing of the Red Sea*, and *the person of Job* are now common among evangelicals.
 - d. **Bruce Waltke** and *Biologs*: Attempt to reconcile Darwinian Evolution and Genesis 1-2.
 - e. **Brian McLaren**: *A New Kind of Christianity*: accepts evolution and denies the historicity of Job.
 - f. Scientific Theory in favor of divine revelation
4. **Stupidity:** *Inability to wrestle with the difficult texts of the Bible*

- a. *Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace. And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures.* (2 Peter 3:14-16)
 - b. The bizarre ideas that undermine the credibility of Christianity in the world...
 - c. TV Evangelists, fake healers, health ‘n wealth preachers, justification of racism, preoccupation with returning to Old Testament Jewish practices, fundamentalism, etc.
 - d. *Simplistic answers that make Christianity look stupid*
 - e. The result of **unschooled laymen and unlearned clergymen** hawking their ideas on TV, the Internet, seminars and their own teaching ministries.
 - f. Question: *Who educates, certifies and examines these people?*
5. People are **easily duped** by the four “S’s” of false teaching: *superstition, sensuality, scientism and stupidity*.
 6. Peter’s call for **virtue** guarantees *inner resources*, rooted in God’s revelation (Word) and Christ’s religion (church), to offset these four pretenders of spirituality:
 - a. *Faith*: the balance to scientism
 - b. *Virtue*: a safeguard against sensuality
 - c. *Knowledge*: the answer to stupidity, scientism, superstition
 - d. *Self-control*: the safeguard against both superstition and sensuality
 - e. *Steadfastness*: the opposite of mysticism
 - f. *Piety*: the corrective to superstition
 - g. *Brotherly affection*: the corrective to sensuality
 - h. *Love*: the antidote to sensuality
 7. Peter’s bottom line is this: *“But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.”* (3:18)
 8. Rooted in the Word. Enriched by grace. Tempered by the church. Instructed by religion. Mature in virtues. Assured of salvation. Informed by knowledge – *for these people superstition, sensuality, scientism and stupidity* have no place to take root and grow.
 9. **The Golden Chain of Virtue** is the safeguard for a living, Biblical, Christ-centered spirituality.
 10. **Spiritual Transformation by grace, through faith, in virtue.**