

Everything is not Spiritual

A Critique of Rob Bell's Pan-Spiritual Worldview.

Some have wandered away from . . . a sincere faith and turned to meaningless talk. They want to be teachers of the law, but they do not know what they are talking about or what they so confidently affirm. (1 Timothy 1:5-7, NIV)

Among emergent church leaders there exists a growing trend to merge the secular with the sacred, the unspiritual with the spiritual. By emergent evangelicals, reality (*Everything that Is*) is increasingly becoming viewed to *Be* one gargantuan and monistic whole. For example, Rob Bell has stated that "everyone is spiritual." He says,

Maybe you've heard somebody say, "I'm just not into spiritual things." Are you . . . are you a human being? Yea! Too late! The issue is not whether you're a spiritual being, or you have a spirituality. The issue is whether your eyes are open and you're aware of it. You cannot deny what is central to your make-up as a human being. In the Hebrew language there is no word for spiritual. If you would have said to Jesus, "Jesus, how's your spiritual life?" What? What do you mean? Because to label one area spiritual is to label areas not spiritual. It's absolutely foreign to the world of the Scriptures. It's absolutely foreign to the worldview of Jesus. The assumption is that you are a fusion of two realms. And a human being occupies a totally unique place in the universe . . . Everything we do, we do as an integrated being--one-hundred percent physical, one-hundred percent spiritual.

To prove his everyone/everything-is-spiritual templet, Bell quotes Colossians 3:17 where Paul states, "**And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus . . .**" He then concludes,

What were they saying? Every act is a spiritual act. It's whether or not you're aware of the implications of what you're doing. **[1]**

Bell's sweeping generalizations, especially from the perspective of the New Testament, are not true. Everything is not spiritual! Disavowing a monistic pan-spiritual worldview, Jesus told Nicodemus, "**That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit**" (John 3:6). In his words to Nicodemus, Jesus affirmed the existence of two distinct realities. At the time Jesus spoke to him, Nicodemus belonged to one reality (the flesh) but had no part in the other (Spirit). The apostle Paul also distinguished between a "**natural man**" and a "**spiritual man**," between persons who have the Spirit of Christ dwelling in them, and those who do not (1 Corinthians 2:14; Romans 8:9). Therefore, he told the Corinthians that, "**a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised**" (1 Corinthians 2:14).

Paul contrasted the natural person to the spiritual individual who "**appraises all things**" (1 Corinthians 2:15). Paul also states that "**the carnal mind is enmity against God**" (Romans 8:7; Read 8:5-9; Compare Romans 7:14.). He contrasted "**the deeds of the flesh**" with "**the fruit of the Spirit**" (Galatians 5:16-24). Obviously, from the perspective of the New Testament, everyone is not spiritual. But neither was everyone and everything spiritual in the Old Testament.

Are we prepared to say that like Abraham and David, Saul and other of Israel's and Judah's wicked kings were spiritual, but just didn't know it? Are we to think that the idolatrous Israelites were spiritual in a Godward way and just didn't know it? (See Exodus 32:1-35.) Though unlike the Greek language (Greek *pneumatikos*) there is no Hebrew word designating *spiritual*, that does not mean that the concept of spirituality it is foreign to the Old Testament. Of the Exodus Israelites Paul wrote:

Moreover brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; And did all eat the same *spiritual* meat; And did all drink the same *spiritual* drink: for they drank of that *spiritual* Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ. But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness. (Emphasis Added, 1 Corinthians 10:1-5, KJV)

Though ancient Israel participated in "spirituality" in some way, their participation did not mean that the God who is Spirit (John 4:24) was pleased with them! In contrast to what Bell confidently affirms, pan-spirituality is not the worldview of the Old Testament either.

So if Bell's basic assumption--everything/everyone is spiritual--is scripturally and spiritually inaccurate, then so too are the interpretations and applications that arise out of it. Everything is not spiritual. This is why John admonished believers, "**believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world**" (1 John 4:1).

FOOTNOTE

[1] Transcribed from "Rob Bell: Everything is Spiritual," *YouTube*, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Poi3imQkQsQ>.