

Extrinsic, Intrinsic, and Seeker Spirituality: Navigating the Old and New Testaments

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First Questions

Questions around how to reconcile the Biblical Old Testament with the New Testament come up so frequently — and prompts such varied answers — that I’ve decided to summarize my own take on an in-depth way to approach them. Hopefully, this can begin some conversations around resolving perceived tensions between the Old Testament canon of scripture and the New Testament canon, at least from one Christian’s perspective.

How we can best interpret and apply New Testament scripture in modern times is something I’ve written about before, and I’d like to rely on those principles to arrive at how that scripture instructs Christians on approaching the Old Testament — also referred to as the Hebrew Scriptures. Along with these interpretive tools, we’ll be exploring how different modes of spirituality are reflected in scripture, and how a deeper context of interpretation can be synthesized through those orientations. The aim is to discover fruitful reconciliations between what at first glance seem to be prominent revisions or contradictions between the two canons. It should be noted, however, that this will be a Christ-centric exploration of the Hebrew Scriptures, with recognition that there is a separate, rich, and enduring Jewish tradition of interpretation for those texts as well.

A more detailed overview of a recommended method of interpretation — with some resources I have found helpful — is included in *Appendix A*. For now, listed below is an initial set of practices that can be combined together to arrive at a rigorous and spiritually grounded reading and understanding of the text. These steps constitute my underlying *hermeneutic* for all scripture, and although we won’t be exploring these practices in detail here, they can at least offer a launching point for many of the principles and themes we will discuss. Of course, I would also encourage everyone to use these methods to take a deeper dive into all of the questions we will be attempting to answer.

1. A **comparative** approach: choose some **well-regarded translations** to compare and contrast the same passage
2. An **analytical** approach, which explores
 - a. The author’s **intent**
 - b. The historical, cultural, and situational **context** of the writings
 - c. Hints revealed by the original **languages** (Hebrew and Koine Greek)
 - d. A survey of **other biblical references** to the same topic
 - e. Early Christian **acceptance and application** of scriptural principles
3. **Experiential** methods, which consult
 - a. Discernment through **practicing biblical principles**
 - b. What we learn through our **discipleship relationship** with Jesus and fellow Christians

4. Guidance from **holy spirit**
 - a. Insight through the still, neutral openness of **contemplative prayer**
 - b. Prayerful **supplication** for Divine guidance about the *meaning and application* of scripture
5. **Participatory** methods, such as
 - a. **Dialogue** with other Christians (informally, in Bible study, etc.)
 - b. **Communal experience** — how this scripture and its principles have manifested in our spiritual community

Fulfillment of Prophecy and Jesus as Messiah

To begin, among [Orthodox Christians](#), [Catholics](#), and [Evangelicals](#), one of the most general and pervasively accepted principles in Christian exegesis of the Hebrew Scriptures is that they foretell the story of Jesus himself — that is, the coming of the Messiah and the salvation of the Jews — as well as other events occurring at the time of Jesus. This is based in several passages in the New Testament, a few of which I’ve listed below. I’ve organized them into themes, who is identified with that theme in the New Testament, its New Testament references, and its correlations in the Old Testament. The overarching principle that guides our view here is what Jesus said in Matthew 5:17 (ESV): “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.”

Theme (and Identity in NT)	NT References	OT Correlations
The virgin (Mary) birth of Emmanuel, “God with us,” in Bethlehem, who would then come out of Egypt	Matthew 1:18-25, Matthew 2:1-14, Luke 1:26-38, Luke 2:1-7, John 7:42	Isaiah 7:14, Isaiah 9:6-7, Hosea 11:1, Jeremiah 31:15, Micah 5:2, Numbers 24:8
A prophet (John the Baptist) preparing the way for salvation	Matthew 3:1-3, Matthew 11:9-10, Mark 1:1-8, Luke 3:1-6, Luke 1:17, Luke 7:26-27, John 1:19-23, Acts 13:24-25, Acts 19:4	Isaiah 40:3-5, Isaiah 52:7, Malachi 3:1
God’s servant (Jesus) ministering to the Gentiles	Matthew 12:15-21, Luke 2:32, Luke 4:25-27, Acts 13:47, Romans 15:8-12	Isaiah 42:1-6, Isaiah 49:6, Isaiah 60:3
Understanding — and not understanding — the veiled mysteries of God	Matthew 13:10-17, Matthew 10:34-35, Mark 4:10-12, Luke 8:9-10, John 12:36-41, Acts 28:23-28, Romans 11:7-10, 1 Corinthians 2:7-10, 2 Corinthians 3:14-16	Psalms 77:2, Isaiah 6:9-10, Isaiah 29:10-14, Deuteronomy 29:4

The predicted failings of the religious leaders of the time (Pharisees and scribes)	Matthew 15:1-9, Matthew 23:1-36, Mark 7:5-8, Luke 11:37-52, John 9:39-41	Isaiah 29:13, Jeremiah 5:31, Ezekiel 34:1-10, Micah 3:11
The King (Jesus) arriving on a donkey	Matthew 21:1-11, Mark 11:1-10, Luke 19:28-40, John 12:12-16	Genesis 49:10-11, Zechariah 9:9-10
Money changers in the temple	Matthew 21:12-13, Mark 11:15-17, Luke 19:45-46, John 2:13-17	Isaiah 56:7, Jeremiah 7:11, Malachi 3:1-3, Psalm 69:9
The rejection of the truth (the word of Jesus) by those in power (scribes, rulers, Sadducees, Pharisees) and people in general	Matthew 21:41-44, Mark 12:1-11, Luke 20:9-18, John 1:10-11, John 15:18-25, Acts 4:5-12, Acts 7:51-53, Romans 9:30-33, 1 Peter 2:4-8	Psalm 118:22-23, Isaiah 8:14, Isaiah 28:16, Isaiah 53:3, Jeremiah 6:10
Events at the crucifixion	Matthew 27:35-45, Mark 15:24-39, Luke 22:37, Luke 23:46, John 19:23-37, Hebrews 9:11-14, Philippians 2:8	Exodus 12:46, Psalm 22:1-18, Psalm 31:5, Psalm 34:20, Zechariah 12:10, Isaiah 50:6, Isaiah 53:12
Events of the end times and the role of the “Son of Man” (Jesus)	Matthew 24, Matthew 25:31-46, Mark 13, John 5:25-28, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, 2 Peter 3, Hebrews 8, Revelation	Isaiah 24-27, Daniel 7, 11, and 12, Zechariah 14, Joel 2:30-32, Psalm 69:21, Malachi 4:1-6
The principle of forgiveness and God’s new covenant with us (through Christ’s blameless sacrifice)	Mark 14:22-25, Luke 22:14-20, Acts 8:30-33, Romans 4:25, Romans 5:6-11, 1 Corinthians 15:1-58, 2 Corinthians 5:17-21, Ephesians 1:7-10, Colossians 1:13-14, Hebrews 8:6-13, Hebrews 9:1-28, 1 Peter 2:22-24, Titus 2:14	Ezekiel 36:25-27, Isaiah 44:22, Psalm 32:1-5, Psalm 103:10-12, Isaiah 25:8-9, Isaiah 53:5-9, Jeremiah 31:31-34
The God of resurrection (in Jesus)	Acts 2:24-32, Romans 1:4, 1 Corinthians 15:3-8, 1 Peter 1:3	Isaiah 53:10-11, Psalm 16:8-11, Hosea 6:2, Jonah 1:17 / 2:10
God’s holy spirit descending upon the people	John 14:16-17, 26, John 16:7-15, Acts 2:1-21, Acts 10:44-46, Acts 19:6	Isaiah 32:15, Isaiah 44:3, Ezekiel 36:27, Ezekiel 39:29, Numbers 11:29, Joel 2:28-32
The son of God (Jesus)	Acts 13:33, Romans 1:3-4, Colossians 1:15-20, Hebrews 1:5, Hebrews 5:5, John 1:14, 18, John 3:16-18	2 Samuel 7:14, Proverbs 30:4, Psalm 2:7

Nearly all New Testament authors used such references from Hebrew Scriptures to bolster Jesus' credentials as the prophesied Messiah. Although there isn't consensus on the topic, for many researchers¹ there is plentiful historical evidence that suggests imminent fulfillment of messianic prophecies was an expectation in Jesus' time. Thus, in the framing of New Testament authors, it would have been important that the Hebrew Scriptures be rich with references to the life, mission, and sacrifice of Jesus as they define his messianic narrative. For them, the fulfillment of prophecies found in the Old Testament seemed essential to validating Jesus's message, ministry, and new covenant — certainly where Jews were the primary audience of the good news. Such prophecy fulfillment and public association with an ancient and well-established Judaism is also something that differentiated early Christianity from [popular mystery religions](#) of that time, which seemed instead to rely more on secretive, personal spiritual experiences. As the Apostle Paul pointedly reminds the early Church, it was the Hebrew Scriptures that described the Messiah's death, burial, and resurrection as the atonement for human sinfulness (see 1 Corinthians 15 in its entirety for an eloquent example) — and Paul of course asserts Jesus to be that Messiah.

In addition to Matthew 5:17, Jesus himself pointed out passages of the Hebrew Scriptures that contextualized his status and mission. For example, consider Luke 4:16-21 (NASB):

“And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up; and as was His custom, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, and stood up to read. And the scroll of Isaiah the prophet was handed to Him. And He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me,
Because He anointed Me to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent Me to proclaim release to captives,
And recovery of sight to the blind,
To set free those who are oppressed,
To proclaim the favorable year of the Lord.’

And He rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down; and the eyes of all the people in the synagogue were intently directed at Him. Now He began to say to them, ‘Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.’”

I think that last verse, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing,” sets the stage for Jesus' relationship with Old Testament prophecy.

¹ Banwell, B. O. (1996). “King, Kingship.” In (D. R. W. Wood, I. H. Marshall, A. R. Millard, J. I. Packer, & D. J. Wiseman, Eds.) *New Bible Dictionary*. Leicester, England, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press; Charlesworth, J. H. (1998). Introduction: Messianic ideas in early Judaism. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck; Collins, J. J. (2010). *The Scepter and the Star, Messianism in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls*. Cambridge: Erdmans; Gardner, R. B. (1991). *Matthew*. Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press; Neusner, J., Avery-Peck, A. J., & Green, W. S. (Eds.) (2000). *The Encyclopedia of Judaism*; Leiden; Boston, Köln: Brill; Stern, D. H. (1996). *Jewish New Testament Commentary: A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament*. Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

Mutual Reinforcement of Spiritual Principles

Jesus and his Apostles also frequently invoke the Hebrew Scriptures to bolster spiritual principles that continued to be relevant under Christ's "new covenant." This was such a common practice that at one point Paul writes: "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." (2 Timothy 3:16-17, NIV) To that end, in the table below, I've attempted to capture a few of those principles and their supportive correlations in the New Testament and the Old.

Spiritual Principle	New Testament	Old Testament
Love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength; and love your neighbor as yourself	Matthew 7:12, Matthew 22:37-40, Mark 12:30-31, Luke 10:27, John 13:34, Romans 13:9, Galatians 5:14, James 2:8, 1 John 4:20-21	Deuteronomy 6:4-7, Deuteronomy 10:12-13, Leviticus 19:9-18, 34, Micah 6:8
Do not be overly concerned with material things, or envious of others, and be willing to share because God will provide for you; learn to be content in all situations, and focus on doing good	Matthew 5:42, Matthew 6:24-34, Matthew 19:21-24, Luke 12:13-32, Luke 16:9-13, Acts 2:44-45, Acts 4:32-35, 2 Corinthians 8:13-15, 2 Corinthians 9:6-9, Philippians 4:6-13, Hebrews 13:5-6, 1 Timothy 6:7-10, 1 Peter 3:8-12, James 5:1-6, 1 John 2:15-17	Exodus 16:18, Deuteronomy 31:6, Psalm 62:10, Psalm 34:12-16, Proverbs 11:4,28, Proverbs 15:16, Proverbs 21:6, Proverbs 23:4-5, Proverbs 30:7-9, Ecclesiastes 2:10-11, Ecclesiastes 4:4, Ecclesiastes 5:10-17
Be generous to those in need, and do so unconditionally	Luke 3:10-11, Luke 6:30-36, Luke 14:12-14, Matthew 25:35-40, Matthew 19:21, Acts 2:44-45, Acts 4:34-35, 2 Corinthians 8:1-5, 9:6-11, Galatians 2:10, 2:15-17, 1 John 3:17	Deuteronomy 15:7-11, Deuteronomy 24:19-21, Leviticus 19:9-10, Proverbs 19:17, Proverbs 14:31, Proverbs 22:9, Proverbs 28:27, Psalm 41:1-3, Isaiah 58:6-10, Ezekiel 16:49, Amos 2:6-7, Amos 8:4-6, Zechariah 7:9-10
Our primary task is loving and forgiving all others unconditionally — including foreigners and strangers	Matthew 5:44, Matthew 6:7-14, Matthew 18:21-22, Mark 11:25, Luke 17:3-4, John 15:12, Romans 12:9-13, Romans 13:8-10, Romans 14:1-4, 1 Corinthians 13:1-13, Ephesians 4:31-32, Colossians 3:13-14, 1 Thessalonians 3:12, 1 Peter 4:8, 1 John 3:11, 1 John 4:7-21	Genesis 50:19-21, Leviticus 19:18 & 34, Deuteronomy 10:19, Psalm 86:5, Proverbs 10:12, Proverbs 17:9, Zechariah 7:10, Micah 7:18-19,
The importance of our heart's faith to our own salvation	John 3:16-18, Acts 16:30-31, Romans 3:21-26, Romans 10:6-11, Ephesians 2:8-9, Hebrews 11:1, 6	Genesis 15:6, Deuteronomy 30:12-14, Habakkuk 2:4, Psalm 78:22

Sincere faith and love lead to actions that reflect those intentions	Matthew 7:16-20, Romans 2:6-8, Galatians 5:6, Philippians 2:12-13, Hebrews 11:4-31, 1 John 4:19-21, 1 John 5:1-5, James 2:14-20, Titus 2:14	Isaiah 1:16-17, Isaiah 58:6-10, Micah 6:6-8, Proverbs 3:1-8, Proverbs 21:21, Psalm 37:3, Amos 5:21-24, Jeremiah 22:3
Cultivate the qualities of patience, gentleness, self-control, humility, and acceptance	1 Corinthians 13:4-6, Colossians 3:12, Philippians 4:5, Galatians 5:22-23, Ephesians 4:2, James 4:6, 1 Peter 5:5, 2 Timothy 2:24-25, Titus 3:2, 2 Peter 1:5-8	Proverbs 3:34, Proverbs 14:29, Proverbs 15:1, Proverbs 16:32, Proverbs 22:4, Proverbs 25:28, Psalm 37:7-9, Ecclesiastes 7:8-9
Avoid hypocrisy, arrogance, and self-importance	Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18, Matthew 23:5-12, Mark 10:42-45, Luke 14:7-11, Luke 18:9-14, Romans 12:3, Philippians 2:3-4, 1 Peter 5:5, James 4:6, 10	Proverbs 8:13, Proverbs 11:2, Proverbs 16:18, Proverbs 27:2, Isaiah 2:11-12, Isaiah 5:21, Micah 6:8
The sharing of good news is a beautiful thing	Acts 13:47, Romans 10:15, 2 Timothy 4:2	Isaiah 40:9, Isaiah 52:7, Nahum 1:15, Psalm 96:2-3
Love and be kind to your enemies; do not avenge yourself, as vengeance belongs to God; instead seek reconciliation and peace	Matthew 5:43-48, Luke 6:27-36, Luke 23:34, Romans 12:14-21, 1 Thessalonians 5:15, Hebrews 10:30, 1 Peter 3:9	Leviticus 19:9-18, Deuteronomy 32:35, Proverbs 20:22, Proverbs 24:17-18, Proverbs 25:21-22, Exodus 23:4-5, 2 Kings 6:21-23
Submit to established secular authorities	Romans 13:1-7, 1 Peter 2:13-14, 1 Timothy 2:1-2, Titus 3:1, 1 Peter 2:17	Exodus 22:28, Proverbs 8:15-16, Proverbs 24:21, Jeremiah 29:7, Ecclesiastes 8:2-5,
God's wisdom exceeds human wisdom and understanding	Romans 11:33-36, 1 Corinthians 1:18-25, 1 Corinthians 2:6-10, 1 Corinthians 3:19-20, Colossians 2:2-3	Job 5:13, Proverbs 2:6, Proverbs 21:30, Psalm 94:11, Isaiah 29:14, Isaiah 55:8-9, Ecclesiastes 8:17, Job 28:12-28, Job 38-41
Avoid being too closely bound to nonbelievers	1 Corinthians 7:39, 2 Corinthians 6:14-18	Isaiah 52:11, Jeremiah 31:9, Deuteronomy 7:3-4, Ezra 9:1-2, 10:10-12, Exodus 34:12-16
Don't lie; live an honest, moral, honorable, upright life	Ephesians 4:25, Philippians 4:8, Colossians 3:9-10, 1 Peter 3:10-12, Titus 2:7-8, Revelation 21:8	Exodus 20:16, Zechariah 8:16, Proverbs 4:24, Proverbs 6:16-19, Proverbs 12:22, Psalm 15:1-5, Leviticus 19:11
Be angry, but don't sin; don't let the sun go down on your anger	Matthew 5:22, Ephesians 4:26, Colossians 3:8, James 1:19-20,	Psalm 4:4, Psalm 37:8, Proverbs 14:29, Proverbs 19:11, Proverbs 29:11
Don't harden your heart against God, but seek out God's will and be obedient to it	Matthew 6:10, Luke 22:42, Romans 12:2, Ephesians 4:17-24, Hebrews 3:7-15, James 1:5, 1 John 2:17	Proverbs 3:5-6, Proverbs 19:21, Proverbs 28:14, Psalm 81:11-14, Psalm 95:7-11, Jeremiah 29:11-13, 1 Samuel 15:22, Ezekiel 36:26
Speak truth to power and aid the oppressed rather than oppressing them	Matthew 23, Luke 4:18-19, Luke 1:52-53, John 8:1-11, Acts 4:8-12,	Proverbs 17:15, Proverbs 21:22, Proverbs 31:8-9, Psalm 9:9, Psalm

	Ephesians 5:11, James 2:1-9, James 5:1-6	82:3-4, Isaiah 1:17, Isaiah 10:1-2, Amos 2:6-7, Amos 5:11-15, Zechariah 7:9-10, Ezekiel 22:29
God is a consuming fire	Acts 2:3, 2 Thessalonians 1:7-8, Hebrews 10:26-27, Hebrews 12:29, Revelation 1:14	Exodus 3:2-6, Exodus 19:18, Deuteronomy 4:24, Deuteronomy 9:3, Isaiah 33:14, Malachi 3:2-3
Worship only God, and avoid the veneration of, and trust in, money	Matthew 4:10, Matthew 6:24, Matthew 6:19-21, Luke 4:8, Luke 16:13, John 4:23-24, Acts 10:25-26, Acts 14:14-15, Colossians 3:5, Ephesians 5:5, 1 Timothy 6:9-10, 17, Revelation 3:15-17, Revelation 19:10, Revelation 22:8-9	Exodus 20:3-5, Exodus 32:1-8, 1 Kings 18:21, Deuteronomy 5:7-9, Deuteronomy 6:13-14, Isaiah 42:8, Isaiah 44:6-8, Psalm 49:6-9, 16-17, Psalm 52:7, Psalm 81:9, Judges 6:25-32, Ezekiel 7:19-20
Knowledge is not as important as <i>agape</i>, doing good works, and obedience to God	Matthew 7:21-23, Luke 10:25-37, John 13:17, John 14:15, 21, Romans 2:13, 1 Corinthians 8:1, 1 Corinthians 13:1-3, 1 Corinthians 13:8-10, Colossians 1:9-10, Philippians 1:9-11, James 1:22-25, James 3:13-14, 1 John 2:3-6, 1 John 3:18, Titus 1:16, 2 Peter 1:5-8	Proverbs 1:1-7, Proverbs 9:10, Proverbs 21:3, Psalm 40:6-8, Isaiah 1:11-17, Ecclesiastes 12:11-13, Hosea 6:6, 1 Samuel 15:22, Micah 6:6-8, Jeremiah 22:15-16, Deuteronomy 10:12-13
Care for creation and be a good steward	Colossians 1:16-17, 1 Timothy 4:4, Revelations 11:18	Genesis 2:15, Deuteronomy 20:19-20, Proverbs 12:10, Job 12:7-10, Jeremiah 2:7

Where Does the New Testament “Override” the Hebrew Scriptures?

This second perspective is an important consideration for Christians, and I think a thoughtful approach will help insulate believers from serious errors in their spiritual understanding and priorities, and greatly enhance the skillfulness of our faith.

A central theme is described in Matthew 9:16-17, Mark 2:21-22, and Luke 5:36-39. The passage in Luke reads (NIV):

“He told them this parable: ‘No one tears a piece out of a new garment to patch an old one. Otherwise, they will have torn the new garment, and the patch from the new will not match the old. And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the new wine will burst the skins; the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, new wine must be poured into new wineskins. And no one after drinking old wine wants the new, for they say, ‘The old is better.’”

This was Jesus' response to the question of why his disciples did not fast and pray frequently, as the Pharisees did, but instead went on eating and drinking. Jesus further elaborates: "How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn when he is with them?" This is a new marriage — and a new celebration — where at least some of the old traditions no longer apply.

So how do we differentiate the new wine from the old? Well, sometimes the contrasting spiritual instructions are obvious. What follow are what appear to be clear examples of Jesus revising Old Testament law.

1. All food is good — and is no longer divided into "clean" and "unclean"

In the Hebrew Scriptures, the people of Israel were instructed not to eat certain foods (see Leviticus 11, Deuteronomy 14). But in the New Testament, there are no longer restrictions on the food believers can eat — and no longer a distinction between "clean" and "unclean" foods (see Matthew 15:10-20, Acts 10:9-16, 1 Timothy 4:1-5). As Jesus says in Matthew 15:11 (NASB): "It is not what enters the mouth that defiles the person, but what comes out of the mouth, this defiles the person." And as the Apostle Paul elaborates later in 1 Timothy 4:4 (ESV): "Everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude."

2. Adherence to the many spiritual laws of the Hebrew Scriptures has been replaced with a new covenant — and a new commandment

In John 13:34-35 (ESV), Jesus says:

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

This is layered on top of Jesus' earlier answer to the Pharisees and Sadducees questioning about the greatest commandment of the Law in Matthew 22:37-40 (ESV):

"And he said to him, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.'"

That last line is key: "*On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.*" The Law and the Prophets is the central body of Hebrew Scripture called the [Tanakh](#) — which corresponds to the 24 of the 39 books of the Protestant version of the Old Testament (Catholic Bibles contain 46, and Orthodox Bibles 49). These are the primary, foundational texts of Judaism. It is also notable that, according to the parallel passage in Mark 12, the interaction concludes with no one daring to ask Jesus any more questions.

The “[new covenant](#),” on the other hand, is named by Jesus at the Last Supper, captured here in Luke 22:19-20 (NRSVUE):

“Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks he broke it and gave it to them, saying, ‘his is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’ And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, ‘This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.’”

And what is that new covenant? This is summarized succinctly in John 3:16-17 (NASB):

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but so that the world might be saved through Him.”

This new covenant of salvation through Jesus Christ is further elaborated upon throughout the New Testament, which then describes its chief benefits and characteristics:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The gift of indwelling holy spirit, which is the evidence and seal of our salvation, ongoing helper to our faith and wisdom, and source of spiritual fruits and gifts. 	<p>John 14:26, John 20:22, Acts 1:4-8, Acts 2:1-4, Romans 8:26, 1 Corinthians 12:11, Ephesians 1:11-14, Galatians 5:22-23</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A new righteousness and holiness apart from the Law, through faith in Jesus Christ. 	<p>Romans 3:21-26, 2 Corinthians 5:16-21, Galatians 2:15-16, Ephesians 2:8-9, Philippians 3:7-11</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A final sacrifice for complete and ongoing forgiveness of sins, as testified to by the Prophets. 	<p>Jeremiah 31:31-34, Acts 10:43, Ephesians 2:1-10, Hebrews 10:1-18</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citizenship the Kingdom of God — both here and now on Earth, and for eternity in Heaven. 	<p>Matthew 6:10&33, Matthew 10:7, Mark 1:14-15, Luke 17:20-21, John 3:1-8, John 16:16, Romans 14:17, Philippians 3:20-21, Colossians 1:13-14, 1 Corinthians 15:50-57</p>

Thus, the gift of God’s grace through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ nullifies the Old Testament law of sin and death. That is, the perpetual personal and collective striving to fulfill the legalistic requirements of God’s spiritual laws that we find in much of the

Hebrew Scriptures (i.e. aiming to conform to “the letter of the law”) — along with the requirement of routine ritual sacrifice — is no longer in play in Christ’s kingdom. Instead, particular adherence to Old Testament commandments is subsumed by one primary inclusive commandment: the law of *agape*, the Greek word for our conscious choice to demonstrate unconditional, self-sacrificing love-in-action. In the New Testament, the concept of “obedience to God” now primarily becomes the consequence of an *internal* transformation that conforms to “the spirit of the law,” rather than an *external* conformance to rigid religious precepts.

In my view, this reflects a more pronounced shift from “*extrinsic* spirituality” to “*intrinsic* spirituality,” which we will explore further in a bit, and which I believe has in some form occupied much debate within Christendom from its earliest decades into modern times. For now, these two terms can be summarized as a spirituality that fulfills outward expectations mainly as an expression of an internal, ongoing transformation (*intrinsic* spirituality), in contrast with an outward conformance to fulfill a more performative, rules-based spirituality (*extrinsic* spirituality) that is less reliant on internal transformation taking place. There is also a third dimension, “*seeker* spirituality,” which adds an additional cofactor to these first two, and we will explore that as well.

3. God’s new covenant is available to all

The new covenant of God is not restricted to the Jewish people, but is available to all who believe (Matthew 28:18-20, John 4:21-24, Acts 10:34-48, Acts 11:17-18, Romans 1:16, Romans 3:29-30, Romans 10:12-13, Galatians 3:26-29, Ephesians 2:11-22, Ephesians 3:6, Colossians 3:11, 1 Timothy 2:3-6, 1 Peter 2:10, 2 Peter 3:9, Revelation 7:9).

4. Marriage and children are now a different — and potentially less desirable — spiritual priority than remaining single

In the Hebrew Scriptures, God wanted people to get married, and to “be fruitful and multiply” (see: Genesis 1:27-28, Genesis 22:17, Deuteronomy 7:13-14, Proverbs 17:6, Proverbs 18:22, Psalm 127:3-5, Ecclesiastes 9:9, Malachi 2:15). Marriage and children became a central component of the Jewish religious tradition. But Jesus reframed this imperative, saying that “Not all men can accept this statement, but only those to whom it has been given. For there are eunuchs who were born that way from their mother’s womb; and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men; and there are also eunuchs who made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. He who is able to accept this, let him accept it.” (Matthew 19:10-12, NASB) This is further reinforced by Paul’s missives later on, where he discusses remaining unmarried at length in 1 Corinthians chapter 7 (which I recommend reading in full), focusing not on the rightness or wrongness of marriage itself, but on the spiritual benefits of remaining single. Most concisely, Paul says: “But I want you to be free from concern. One who is unmarried is concerned about the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord; but

one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how he may please his wife, and his interests are divided. The woman who is unmarried, and the virgin, is concerned about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and spirit; but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how she may please her husband. This I say for your own benefit; not to put a restraint upon you, but to promote what is appropriate and to secure undistracted devotion to the Lord.” (1 Corinthians 7:32-35, NASB)

Paul’s preference here is clear: for Christians to choose lifelong celibacy over starting a family in order to maximize their devotion to God and their focus on doing His work in the world. This may reflect Paul’s belief at the time that Christ’s return was imminent, and is also moderated by other passages that celebrate marriage (Ephesians 5:22-33) or warn against forbidding marriage (1 Timothy 4), so these are important points to consider. And this caveat remains as well: “To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain unmarried as I am. But if they are not practicing self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion.” (1 Corinthians 7:8-9, NRSVUE) But for many Christians throughout history, celibacy has been a central consideration for their life planning and choices, and I think it remains a legitimate vocation for those called to it today.

5. Working on the Sabbath is fine — if it’s for a good reason

The Hebrew Scriptures have strict prohibitions against working on the Sabbath for any reason (see: Exodus 20:8-11, Deuteronomy 5:12-15), the violation of which was punishable by death (Exodus 21:14-15, Exodus 35:2, Numbers 15:32-36). In Jesus’ message, that prohibition is softened considerably — speaking more to the intent of the Sabbath than a tradition of legalistic conformance. As Jesus says in Matthew 12:11-12 (my emphasis in **bold**): “Which one of you who has a sheep, if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not take hold of it and lift it out? Of how much more value is a man than a sheep! **So it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.**” (ESV) We find similar examples and instruction in the rest of Matthew 12, as well as parallel passages in Mark 2, Mark 3, Luke 6, Luke 13, and John 5, 7, and 9. Whether healing someone’s chronic physical ailments, or restoring sight to the blind, or watering a donkey, or saving a child who has fallen into a well, Jesus asserts plainly as in John 5:17 that, on the Sabbath, “My Father is still at work, so I will work as well.”

That said, there is still scriptural support for keeping the Sabbath, but it seems to become more of a personal choice: “Some judge one day to be better than another, while others judge all days to be alike. **Let all be fully convinced in their own minds.** Those who observe the day, observe it for the Lord.” (Romans 14:5-6, NRSVUE)

6. Thoughts, desires, and intentions become as important as actions — and sometimes even more so

This is perhaps the most important shift between the Old Testament and the New. As we will discuss in the next section, the state of our heart has always been of paramount importance to God, and there are plentiful passages throughout all of scripture that confirm this. But in Jesus' message and example, the prioritization of our intentions frequently takes a front seat to almost everything else — and that was new. Jesus asserts that not only murder, but just being angry with someone incurs God's judgement (Matthew 5:21-22); that looking at someone with lust is equivalent to adultery (Matthew 5:27-28); that what issues from our own heart is what defiles us (Matthew 15:17-20, Mark 7:20-23); and that our interiority supersedes any outward appearances of righteousness (Matthew 23:25-28, Luke 16:15).

Paul continues with this same theme in his missives as well, saying that “circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit” (Romans 2:28-29, NRSVUE); and that the Lord “will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of the heart.” (1 Corinthians 4:5, NIV). Similar sentiments are echoed throughout the rest of the New Testament, in Hebrews 4:12-13, 1 John 3:15, James 4:12-13, and elsewhere. The Christian faith inherently centers around our inner landscape to a profound degree, and argues that *this is where the chief battle between good and evil is waged*. It further encourages us to express those inner victories in our actions towards each other and in the world. This is a major reorientation from any perceived importance of more performative, external displays of purity, obedience, and faith — regardless of the religious denomination or era being discussed.

Here are some additional, potent passages around this theme (my emphasis in **bold**):

“Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable — if anything is excellent or praiseworthy — **think about such things**. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me — **put it into practice**. And the God of peace will be with you.” (Philippians 4: 8-9, NIV)

“For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does.” (James 1:23-24, NASB)

“But now is the time to get rid of anger, rage, malicious behavior, slander, and dirty language. Don't lie to each other, for you have stripped off your old sinful nature and all its wicked deeds. **Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him.**” (Colossians 3:8-10, NLT)

“And He sat down opposite the treasury, and began observing how the people were putting money into the treasury; and many rich people were putting in large sums. A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which amount to a cent. Calling His disciples to Him, He said to them, “Truly I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all the contributors to the treasury; for they all put in out of their surplus, but she, out of her poverty, put in all she owned, all she had to live on.” (Mark 12:41-44, NASB)

“What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.” (James 2:14-17, ESV)

This is not an all-inclusive list, but provides a flavor of the shifting emphasis in Jesus’ teachings when it came to some of the “old wine” in the Hebrew Scriptures. There is of course much more that I have explored in previous writing; the most prominent example being Jesus’ distinctly feminist, liberating attitudes and actions towards women (you can read a summary of my thoughts about that [here](#)). And there are themes so prominent that literate folks in Western culture already know about them — the vengeful God of the Old Testament becomes a forgiving God in the New Testament; Jesus encourages his followers to love their enemies and pray for those who persecute them, whereas the Old Testament promotes “eye for an eye” retribution and holy wars; the Hebrew Scriptures spend a great deal of time on rules around remaining pure (regarding food, contact with the dead, bodily emissions, etc.), whereas the New Testament dispenses with nearly all of these. But, as you will see, the shifts in importance we’ve covered so far all point to a unifying principle of the “new wine” Jesus is promoting. This is what we’ll be exploring next.

Is There Any Underlying Principle That Unites All Such New Testament Revisions to the Old Testament?

I believe there is, and that is the contrast alluded to earlier: *intrinsic* spirituality versus *extrinsic* spirituality — with a sprinkling of *seeker* spirituality added to the mix as well. To preface this discussion, I tip my hat to Gordon Allport’s [conceptions](#) of intrinsic and extrinsic religion from the 1950s and 60s. In his view, intrinsic religion was an end-in-itself, a fully internalized conviction of faith that drove all other aspects of one’s life. In contrast, extrinsic religion was merely a means to other ends — a tool for achieving social acceptance and status, finding comfort in crisis, justifying preexisting beliefs, or what he framed as other “non-religious” benefits. There is some very interesting [academic research and debate](#) around Allport’s definitions of these terms, and how they have been updated, empirically tested, and so on. If desired, you can read more about that in [this article](#). But a main takeaway from that ongoing discussion is that most people don’t plot neatly into two-dimensional categories, and that being

motivated by a personal or social focus weaves additional complexity into these orientations, softening them into “general dispositions” instead of opposing extremes.

For now, however, what I’d like to focus on is how the New Testament itself explores *intrinsic* versus *extrinsic* spiritual orientations as I’ll attempt to redefine them here, and how these orientations coexist and interrelate. First, how can we best describe and differentiate *intrinsic* versus *extrinsic* spirituality? Here is a how I would summarize each:

Intrinsic spirituality begins as an essential, pre-existing condition in all human beings — grounded in the nature of our being, the longings of our heart, and our innate disposition — which is then refined and expanded in how we exercise mind, heart, and spirit over time through our convictions of spiritual belief. For a Christian, this condition is also augmented and transformed by the promised aid of indwelling holy spirit, by focused engagement with scripture and its disciplined application, and by the mutual support of Christian fellowship. Ultimately, *intrinsic* spirituality is how our spiritual self — our innate spiritual identity — develops, strengthens, and then expresses itself in the world as a spiritual force for the common good. Further, this expression is not performative or self-conscious — although self-examination is an important ongoing component in terms of refining our spiritual skill and effectiveness in the world — and it does not seek personal advantage. It is not self-serving or transactional, but desires to serve others through devoted, generous, and compassionate relationship. Ideally, who we are and how we act because of our *intrinsic* spiritual development is also not conditional, *it just is*, and is firmly and deeply anchored in the most charitable and unconditional form of love and humility that flows forth from within. That said, it is also possible for intrinsic spirituality to become overly self-absorbed and individualistic.

Extrinsic spirituality, in contrast, is an external garment of spiritually-informed behaviors that we display for others — usually in response to conformative expectations of our faith community, or perceived social benefits we can receive there — and is not necessarily derived from innate spiritual proclivities, interior disciplines, or even genuine faith. It also tends to be conditional; that is, it is substantially dependent on social transactions resulting in some sort of personal advantage — such as attaining perceived orthodoxy or righteousness, cultural status and privilege, social influence and power, or material security — for one or more of the parties involved. In other words, *extrinsic* spirituality is primarily a performative exercise that seeks personal or group advantage, and need not be connected to deeply held beliefs or a particular state of the heart. It may still be inspired or guided by study of scripture, strengthened by Christian fellowship, and indeed may even be enhanced by holy spirit’s influence in our lives. But, fundamentally, *extrinsic* spirituality is not reliably an outward sign of inward change. It can be motivated by loving kindness and faith, to be sure, but it can also be motivated by duty, guilt, acquisitiveness, insecurity, arrogance, egotism, or self-righteous pride.

Echoing critiques of many previous attempts at such categorization, it is important to recognize that any person’s spirituality can fall anywhere along a spectrum between the *intrinsic* and

extrinsic definitions I've just provided at any given time — and indeed that position can change over the course of their spiritual practice, and even weave elements of both of these orientations together. So these definitions are not static pigeon holes that we inhabit, but elements of a dynamic and complex process of human motivations and impulses; these are ways we can appreciate and evaluate the currents of spirit within us and around us. Again, borrowing the “general disposition” framing can be helpful here.

Briefly, I'd like to offer some scripture that I feel points to the innate, pre-existing condition of *intrinsic* spirituality. Consider these verses (my emphasis in **bold**):

“When gentiles, who do not possess the law, by nature do what the law requires, these, though not having the law, are a law to themselves. **They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts**, as their own conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts will accuse or perhaps excuse them on the day when, according to my gospel, God through Christ Jesus judges the secret thoughts of all.” Romans 2:14-16 (NRSVUE)

“For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. ²¹ **But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God.**” John 3:20-21 (NASB)

“For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit, for each tree is known by its own fruit. For figs are not gathered from thornbushes, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. **The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.**” Luke 6:43-45 (ESV)

“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.” Ephesians 2:10 (NASB)

Consider also that, when Jesus is asked about the greatest commandment (see Matthew 22:34-40), he responds: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” If we let that settle for a bit, the irresistible conclusion is that an act of human will to turn itself toward God in love lies at the center of our spiritual experience as Christians. The intentional act of loving our Creator with everything we have — that is, with the faculties and energies that are *intrinsic* to our being — is the quintessential substance of our spiritual experience and focus. Here again, we find the word Jesus uses is *agape*.

Let's take a moment to delve into the concept of *agape* as differentiated from other forms of love. In classical Greek, there were four primary words for love:

- *Philia* — a brotherly love grounded in camaraderie; a deeply committed **friendship-driven affection**.

- *Storge* — a natural bond, as what a parent has for their child; a **family-driven affection**.
- *Eros* — a romantic, passionate, sexually oriented desire and attraction; what we might call **physically-driven affection**.
- *Agape* — a fondness and preference that is a choice, but doesn't necessarily have a specific cause; a **choice-driven affection**.

Agape seemed to gain a more spiritual dimension when it was used in the Septuagint — the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures — to represent God's love for His people. For example, Jeremiah 31:3 reads "The Lord appeared to him from afar, saying 'I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have drawn you into lovingkindness.'" It was likewise used Deuteronomy 6:5 in the commandment to love God, and in Deuteronomy 7:7-8 to explain God's willingness to keep His promises:

"It was not because you were more numerous than any other people that the Lord set his heart on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples. It was because the Lord loved you and kept the oath that he swore to your ancestors that the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt." (NRSVUE)

When Jesus then defines *agape* toward God and neighbor as the most important commandments of the Law, he is beginning a radical expansion of *agape* as a centerpiece of his ministry, covenant, and legacy. *Agape* remains a "choice-driven affection," but it now acquires a profound spiritual dimension that encompasses everything that a Christian is and does. It is through Jesus that *agape* becomes self-sacrificial and unconditional love-in-action, centered around our relationship with God, with our brothers and sisters in Christ, and with everyone in the world around us. Why? Because that is how Jesus embodied it, and what he invited those who followed him to imitate: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another." John 13:34 (NASB)

Interestingly, by the First Century A.D., we find Philo of Alexandria extolling *agape* as the more elevated and appropriate orientation to God (in contrast to fear).² Personally, I have long felt the bookends of the Judeo-Christian scriptural narrative match that of our own spiritual development, where the "fear" (as awe or dread) of God may be the beginning of wisdom and knowledge (Proverbs 1:7; Proverbs 2:5; Proverbs 9:10; Psalm 111:10; Job 28:28), but *agape* from and for God is the ultimate fulfillment of wisdom and knowledge — that is, their fullness, completion, and perfection (1 Corinthians 13; 1 John 4:7-21; Ephesians 3:14-19, 1 Peter 1:5-7). Not only does perfect love cast out fear (1 John 4:18), but Christ's *agape* surpasses knowledge itself (Ephesians 3:19).

Returning to the theme of *intrinsic* spirituality, another scriptural example illustrating this principle is the story in Acts 10 of the Roman Centurion Cornelius, described as "a devout man

² *On the Unchangeableness of God*, XIV:69

who feared God with all his household, gave alms generously to the people, and prayed continually to God,” whose prayers were heard by God despite his being neither Jew nor Christian. This seems to further illustrate that the state of our heart is more important — to God, at least — than the orthodoxy of our beliefs or our religious membership and status. The same principle is reflected in the actions of the good Samaritan in Jesus’s parable of Luke 10:30-37 — here again, this man’s neighborliness is not derived from his membership in any group, or because he follows a particular religious tradition, but because of who he innately is. Of course, I think it is particularly meaningful that this parable follows Jesus declaring that *loving your neighbor as yourself* is the second most important commandment. Circling back on the earlier reference in Luke 6: “The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good.” Again, Jesus seems intent upon fully restoring us to our inherent purpose and capacity to do the good works which God prepared for us in advance.

As we will see, a survey of New Testament scripture also reveals that an *intrinsic*, internally-focused spiritual orientation is essential to a purposeful, thriving, and maturing Christian praxis — what I’ll be referring to as Christian faith’s *teleios*. Once again, however, it is likely that most of us will embody elements of both *intrinsic* and *extrinsic* spirituality to varying degrees, and that where we inhabit the intrinsic-extrinsic spectrum as a general disposition is in constant flux. Adding to this mix, there is an additional category of *seeker* spirituality, which energizes additional dynamism and synthesis over time. None of this is black-and-white, so we must resist a tendency to think in absolutes.

To begin, how can we know that our Christian faith is supposed to “mature” at all? Isn’t repenting and accepting Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior enough? Well, we have a few helpful passages in the New Testament that inform this topic. For example (my emphasis in **bold**):

“Be **perfect**, therefore, even as your heavenly Father is **perfect**.” Matthew 5:48 (NRSVUE)

“The seed which fell among the thorns, these are the ones who have heard, and as they go on their way they are choked with worries and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to maturity. But the seed in the good soil, these are the ones who have heard the word in an honest and good heart, and hold it fast, and bear fruit with perseverance.” Luke 8:14-15 (NASB)

“Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.” Acts 20:32 (NIV)

“For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” Hebrews 4:12 (NASB)

“For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. But solid food is for the **mature**, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.” Hebrews 5:12-14 (ESV)

“Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to **maturity**...” Hebrews 6:1 (NASB)

“For this very reason, you must make every effort to support your faith with excellence, and excellence with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with endurance, and endurance with godliness, and godliness with mutual affection, and mutual affection with love. For if these things are yours and are increasing among you, they keep you from being ineffective and unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.” 2 Peter 1:5-8 (NRSVUE)

“But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” 2 Peter 3:18 (NIV)

“Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its **perfect** result, so that you may be **perfect** and complete, lacking in nothing.” James 1:2-4 (NASB)

“Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.” Ephesians 4:15-16 (NIV)

“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.” 1 Corinthians 2:6-13 (ESV)

“For we know in part and prophesy in part; but when the **perfect** comes, the partial will be done away with. When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child,

reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully, just as I also have been fully known.” 1 Cor 13:9-12 (NASB)

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.” Galatians 5:22-23 (NASB)

“He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully **mature** in Christ. To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me.” Colossians 1:28-29 (NIV)

“But now you must get rid of all such things: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have stripped off the old self with its practices and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator.” Colossians 3:8-10 (NRSVUE)

“And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.” Philippians 1:9-11 (ESV)

“So we have the prophetic message more fully confirmed. You will do well to be attentive to this 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 (NRSVUE)

I think our takeaway from these verses becomes increasingly obvious, especially upon thoughtfully and prayerfully examining them (and especially when using the hermeneutic outlined at the beginning of this essay): *Christians are supposed to grow* — in wisdom, knowledge, patience, love, faith, discipline, discernment, endurance, kindness, goodness, joy, and faithfulness. If we aren’t evolving in these psychological, emotional, relational, societal, and spiritual dimensions, then something about our faith is likely amiss, muted, or incomplete. And we should also note that these evolutions involve both internal and external characteristics — so once again we brush up against the reality that both *intrinsic* and *extrinsic* elements are involved.

This is how I arrived at using *teleios* as the relevant shorthand for both our spiritual maturation target, and the ongoing process through which we approach that goal. The original Greek means “mature, full-grown, complete, perfect, lacking nothing.” When Jesus says in Matthew 5 that we should be *perfect*, even as our heavenly father is *perfect*, this is the word used. In fact, every bolded word in the selections of scripture above is a translation of *teleios*. This is, I believe, intended to be our fundamental aspiration as Christians — **not something to achieve on our own, but as an inherent feature of our ongoing spiritual growth, as a synthesis of**

grace, faith, love, and holy spirit as all of these are manifested and refined in us through our ongoing praxis in Christ.

The Question of Growth versus Transformation versus Perfection

A question inevitably arises as to whether there is some culmination of Christian purification — some turning point at which a faithful believer has “arrived” at a more complete spiritual maturity, one that more readily expresses the fruits of the spirit and freedom from sin. That is, what constitutes the type of sanctified transformation that, for example, Paul insists must occur in believers? What is the Divine “perfection” that Jesus exhorts us to imitate? And are these conditions purely aspirational, intermittent evidence of ongoing growth, or an ultimate end-state of Christian faith?

One influential concept offered by John Wesley, which he describes as [entire sanctification](#) or “Christian perfection,” attempts to address this question head-on, and here Wesley is also working with the scriptural references to *teleios*. Wesley believed that entire sanctification was the ultimate intersection of a Christian’s faith and the grace of God in this life — tangible evidence of holy spirit at work in believers. In his reflections on the topic, chronicled in *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, he describes its culmination this way: “At such a time I felt a change which I am not able to express; and since that time I have not felt pride, or self-will, or anger, or unbelief, nor anything but a fulness of love to God and to all mankind.” He goes on to assert that the last vestiges of human rebelliousness against God’s will have, according to his own experience, been vanquished at this particular altitude of Christian maturity. Further, even when temptations and ordinary human failings persist — indeed even if sinful pride resurfaces — the state of entire sanctification can be restored once it has manifested.

Personally, I find some of Wesley’s conceptions and language challenging — mainly in that, as a general principle, I think it can be imprudent to assess our own or anyone else’s faith as having reached a specific hallmark or phase of Christian maturity. In order to avoid the stumbling blocks of both a sense of pride or spiritual arrogance on the one hand, and a sense of inadequacy or spiritual failure on the other, acknowledging that such progressions occur is often enough in itself. There is seldom much benefit in assessing and comparing Christians to each other or to ourselves, or wrangling over the metrics of what *intrinsic* or *extrinsic* characteristics of spiritual maturity should look like for everyone. In fact, I think a shortcoming of Wesley’s musings on *teleios* is his underestimation of the variability of human capacities and experiences — that is, the reality that we cannot all conform to a single model of what a “mature Christian” looks like. We all have unique propensities, levels of education, learning and communication capacities and styles, levels of moral development and self-awareness, and so on (you can read my thoughts about some of these differences [here](#)) — just as we all offer unique contributions to the body of Christ. In addition, I think Wesley is too insistent that all sinfulness must aggressively attenuate, if not be fully vanquished, in the spiritually mature. That said, his writings on Christian perfection are well worth studying for anyone wrangling with these concepts; much of his musing itself reads like scripture. So, rather than getting too far

into the weeds on such a potentially divisive topic, I'll instead offer what I believe to be a more productive view — and one that is not too different from what Wesley's own later, self-corrective writings seemed to indicate.

I see Christian “perfection” (again, invoking *teleios* as our placeholder for this completeness and maturity) as an asymptotic journey; that is, we can come closer and closer to fully and consistently manifesting fruits of holy spirit on Earth, but we can never achieve objectively fixed wholeness or completion — in fact it would not be helpful to do so, as our growth would then cease. Our journey of completeness is not intended to be a steady state — even if we do glimpse perfection internally and experience it episodically throughout our Christian walk. We can inhabit the Divine — and indeed sense the contours of perfection in our lives — but God's grace is always required to bridge the gap between our humanity and “when the perfect comes;” that ultimate dawn when the morning star has risen permanently and immutably in our hearts.

At the same time, this completion and wholeness is nevertheless a fully manifested experience in those moments of deepest spiritual alignment and harmony with holy spirit, and in our profound acquiescence to God's will in the love of Christ. I do believe, however, that we will continue to encounter sin in ourselves; although it may become more clearly recognizable, and its root causes more manageable, with the result that it seems to exert less power over us, sin does appear to persist in most followers of Jesus. Consequently, the true depth and breadth of God's limitless mercy is amplified in our own enduring imperfections, rather than muted or disregarded by them in any way. At least this has been my observation of the past forty years.

Further, in keeping with [The Dark Night of the Soul](#) by St. John of the Cross, I also intuit that most Christians should anticipate major disruptions to a felt sense of both sanctification by, and connection with, our God, recognizing these as indications not of setbacks to our faith or a withdrawal of God's grace, but of the potential deepening and broadening of both. It's just that such experiences may feel more like Divine abandonment or some perverse form of temptation than workings of holy spirit — but, in my experience and observation, they are in fact essential to our spiritual growth. They are an echo in our lives of a moment when Jesus himself encountered a similarly acute sense of disconnection and isolation: “*Eli, Eli, lema sabaktanei?*” that is, “*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*” (Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34) And it is such moments, I believe, that are foundational to our faith's ongoing endurance and proven character (Romans 5:3-5).

I would further characterize these dark nights as a facilitative step in our journey into *spiritual adulthood*, like a fledgling being nudged out of the nest, or the training wheels being removed from a child's bicycle. Such periods stimulate maturity — if we can just relinquish our struggle against them, and let go of our need for spiritual comfort and security. Sometimes, as we will see, our faith will benefit from simply being obedient to what we do not yet fully feel or understand — what is not yet *intrinsic* to our being. In my own walk, when I have encountered periods of strong spiritual dissonance like St. John's dark night, I eventually emerged from them with renewed devotion to God and clarified insight into the grace of Christ, but only because I

did not abandon interior and exterior spiritual disciplines. Sometimes seemingly empty rituals can eventually return us to felt experiences of connection and conviction. Again, though, each person's spiritual journey is unique, and what one person may require for their faith and love in Christ to flourish may be wholly unnecessary for someone else.

There also seem to be many other indications of spiritual growth and maturity. Some of these can be externally displayed and externally measured, but some cannot. And again, more importantly, any preoccupation with verifying or justifying our spiritual progress (to ourselves or to anyone else) can become an unfortunate stumbling block to our faith and theirs. Which raises a difficult question: what should our focus be? And how can we navigate our actual level of maturity — or current embodiment of holy spirit, as the case may be — in order to grow? There are different ways to arrive at the same destination in terms of outward signs of inward change, after all — either via a more internally-oriented, *intrinsic* process and focus, or a more performatively-fixated, *extrinsic* orientation. At different times in our journey, we may experience both — so I don't believe there is an exclusive, universal progression. But this contrast does seem to be emphasized repeatedly in the New Testament. Here are some prominent examples (my emphasis in **bold**):

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that **everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent** has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” Matthew 5:27-28 (ESV)

“**Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them....**”
Matthew 6:1 (NASB)

“**But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person.** For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person. But to eat with unwashed hands does not defile anyone.” Matthew 15:18-20 (ESV)

“**The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good**, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.” Luke 6:45 (ESV)

“Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law. **They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts**, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them.” Romans 2:14-15 (NIV)

“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 12:2 (ESV)

“Not that we are qualified of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our qualification is from God, who has made us qualified to be ministers of a new covenant, not of letter but of spirit, **for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.**” 2 Corinthians 3:5-6 (NRSVUE)

“For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; **it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.**” Hebrews 4:12 (NIV)

“Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear— but **let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit,** which in God's sight is very precious.” 1 Peter 3:3-4 (ESV)

“But the aim of such instruction is love that comes from a pure heart, a good conscience, and sincere faith.” 1 Timothy 1:5 (NRSVUE)

And of course these sentiments are not limited to the New Testament — there is plenty in the Hebrew Scriptures that amplify the criticality of internal purification and transformation as well. For example (again, my emphasis in **bold**):

“My son, do not forget my teaching, but have your heart comply with my commandments; for length of days and years of life and peace they will add to you. **Do not let kindness and truth leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart.**” Proverbs 3:1-4 (NASB)

“Keep your heart with all vigilance, **for from it flow the springs of life.**” Proverbs 4:23 (ESV)

“As in water a face reflects the face, **so the heart of a person reflects the person.**” Proverbs 27:19 (NASB)

“**Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.**” Psalm 51:10 (ESV)

“I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. **I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.**” Ezekiel 36:25-27 (NIV)

“But the Lord said to Samuel, ‘Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, **but the Lord looks at the heart.**’” 1 Samuel 16:7 (NASB)

In summary, then, it is our heart's journey — its intentions, proclivities, longings, and reactivity — with which a maturing believer's *intrinsic* spirituality is primarily concerned, even as our external praxis mirrors that internal state. At the same time, the *extrinsic* mirror is an important component of our ongoing self-awareness, as we will see. But in this context, it seems obvious why Paul would emphasize that *faith, hope, and love* — all conditions of the heart — as such critical features of Christian consciousness. At any given time, we may too often see an enigma in our mirror of self-examination, where actions and reactions seem unaligned with holy spirit or deficient in some way. But, over time, both the possibility and reality of a deeper alignment with (and fuller expression of) holy spirit will be more evident as our practice, experience, and understanding of faith, hope, and love become more complete. This is *teleios*.

Of course, we must recognize that an emphasis on *extrinsic* spirituality is also justifiable with scripture, and it should be noted that the Hebrew Scriptures offer plentiful reinforcement of a more *extrinsically*-oriented praxis as well. Much of this seems to be found in the *Torah* (or *Pentateuch*), which is comprised of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. This is, after all, the scripture which contains the Law, which the “new wine” of Jesus' message emphasizing *intrinsic* spirituality seems intended to update and expand. At the same time, there are also passages in the New Testament that seem *extrinsically*-oriented, and it's worth examining those as well. Probably the most striking is in Matthew 25:31-46, when Jesus describes a final judgement where those who fed the hungry, clothed the naked, welcomed the stranger, and visited the sick in prison are blessed to inherit the kingdom of God and eternal life, and those who did not are cursed to dwell in eternal fire. There is no mention of internal states here, only adherence to prosocial behavioral expectations, and so this passage stands in stark contrast to much of the rest of the New Testament.

Perhaps to provide us a hint of why this contrast is necessary, we have passages like Hebrews 5:14: “But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.” (NASB) This implies that some spiritual principles cannot always be internally apprehended first, and then externally expressed, but that some behaviors need to be practiced first, explicitly so we can deepen our spiritual understanding and mature through that experience. So the “learn by doing” principle reflected here cannot be ignored — which reminds me again of the necessity of continuing disciplined practices even through disruptive periods like St. John's dark night.

That said, I think this explanation of Matthew 25 is insufficient, and that we should revisit the facilitative energies of fear and love in Christian faith that were alluded to earlier. From one perspective, we could say that *extrinsic* spirituality is a natural starting point for religious experience for many people, because it is often grounded in fear-based reasoning. As it says in Proverbs 9:10: “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One leads to understanding.” Fear is a natural recognition of our sinful position before God, our need for His forgiveness, and our desire to repent. But that should not be the end of our spiritual development. Eventually, as it says in 1 John 4:18 (ESV): “There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.” This, I believe, is one objective of a maturing faith: that we relinquish fear-

based reasoning and a primarily *extrinsic* spiritual orientation, and cultivate a deepening love-based reasoning with a more *intrinsic* spiritual center. Why would we do this? Because we acknowledge God's love and grace towards us: "For God so loved the world that he gave us his only Son...." At the same time, our natural disposition, phase of life, past trauma, and a host of other critical factors will influence how our praxis is energized in the current moment.

In this life, escaping fear-based reasoning entirely may be difficult. Wherever we are in our trajectory of belief, we will do well to remember this sermon on the final judgement was the last one Jesus delivered before his soul was "deeply grieved to the point of death" in the garden of Gethsemane, before he beseeched God repeatedly to "let this cup pass from me" in prayer, before his disciples abandoned him to their own sleep in his hour of need, and before he was finally betrayed. Fear and love, worry and elation, distress and submission, devotion and betrayal...all of these coexist, just as *intrinsic* and *extrinsic* dispositions coexist. So our time on Earth aspiring to be Christ-like will inherently reflect the dichotomy of Jesus's message and example — the human and the Divine, the grieving and the obedient, the crucified and the resurrected. The embers of our faith glow more fiercely in this perpetual tension.

One might assume another *extrinsically*-oriented example would be James 2:14-26 (Martin Luther labeled James "the epistle of straw" because of it). I think this is a misreading of the text. James explicitly concludes in verse 24: "You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone." (NRSVUE) That is not the elevation of performative conformance *above* one's interior motivations, but instead an insistence that they are inherently and inseparably tied together. James is simply asserting that a complete absence of good works in a believer's life, or "faith apart from works," is "worthless" to our identity and purpose as a Christian. "So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead." By no means does this encourage us to conform outwardly to righteous deeds without any true belief in Christ or capacity for loving kindness. This is perhaps the most useful way to synthesize the *extrinsic* and *intrinsic* aspects of our spirituality: one can reflect and contain the other, so that we may recognize the presence of both, and such instructive tension exists in all of us. As 1 John 3:18-19 expresses this dynamic: "Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth. We will know by this that we are of the truth, and will assure our heart before Him in whatever our heart condemns us; for God is greater than our heart and knows all things." (NASB)

It is probably also important to note that there are examples throughout history and into modern times of instances when Judaism has offered more *intrinsic* forms of spirituality — particularly in the Jewish mysticism I have studied. But what Jesus and later the Apostle Paul were often pointing out was the rigid legalism of the Pharisees and Sadducees in their day — that is, their disproportionate emphasis on the more legalistic, *extrinsic* elements of the Law.

Along the same lines, I think it is also essential to recognize that those New Testament admonitions are not an indictment of all Jewish people during that period or since, as we are reminded of the many positive examples of faith, obedience, and love evidenced in Jewish individuals of the New Testament narratives. Prominent among these are Joseph of Arimathea, who asked Pontius Pilate for Jesus' body in order to bury Jesus in Joseph's own tomb; the poor

widow whom Jesus observed giving all she had at temple; the “righteous and devout” Simeon who was led by holy spirit to recognize the child Jesus as Messiah; the elderly prophetess Anna, who, giving thanks to God, shared the promise of Jerusalem’s redemption through Jesus with those on the temple grounds; and of course John the Baptist. And, even in the case of the Pharisees that Jesus so frequently reprimanded (see Matthew 23), we also have the example of Nicodemus in John 3:1-21, a high-ranking Pharisee who acknowledged Jesus being sent by God, and asked what it meant to be “born again.” All of these examples demonstrate that the challenge Jesus and his followers faced wasn’t the Jewish faith or people, but a particularly legalistic, *extrinsically*-oriented flavor of religious authority.

The takeaway, then, in terms of identifying an underlying principle of New Testament revisions to the Hebrew Scriptures, is that Jesus promoted a specific style of spiritual praxis that ran counter to what the religious authorities of his day touted as righteous and holy — and that was the transformative, *intrinsic* spirituality and the manifestations of holy spirit that can inform and transform a purely *extrinsic* praxis. But what did those manifestations, and the external praxis of *intrinsic* spirituality, really look like...?

The Workings of Holy Spirit: A Fluid and Active Process, Not a Calcified Culmination

The progressive arc of *intrinsic* spirituality as we are defining it here is intended to be reflected in the workings of holy spirit in those who believe. Consider these verses, which help outline the mechanics of holy spirit’s activity in Christians:

“These things I have spoken to you while remaining with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and remind you of all that I said to you.” John 14:25-26 (NASB)

“The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit.” 1 Corinthians 2:14 (NIV)

“Now He who prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave us the Spirit as a pledge. Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord — for we walk by faith, not by sight — but we are of good courage and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord.” 2 Corinthians 5:5-8 (NASB)

“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies, but test everything; hold fast what is good.” 1 Thessalonians 5:17 (ESV)

“And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.” Romans 5:3-5 (NASB)

More specifically, within this framework we then learn about spiritual gifts, which are provided through holy spirit to Christians for the edification and building up the church. In particular, consider the nature of the following spiritual gifts as they are described in 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12 (both of which I would encourage folks read in their entirety):

- Utterance of wisdom
- Utterance of knowledge
- Prophecy
- Teaching
- Encouragement/exhortation
- Leading

These are not all of the spiritual gifts described in the New Testament — there are also speaking in various tongues, the interpretation of tongues, the working of miracles, distinguishing spirits, service, generosity, faith, and showing mercy. But the six spiritual gifts listed above all share the same quality: not only are they all something mysterious that occurs within our interiority...*in our hearts, minds, and spirit*...but they all result in skillful, insightful, and discerning words and interactions with others — and intentionally our fellow Christians. As it says in verse 7 (ESV): “To each is give the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.”

We are not to neglect these gifts, either. As Paul writes in Romans 12: 6-8 (ESV): “Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.”

So then, how do these spiritual gifts actually occur? What is the mechanism of spiritual activation? Well, I would submit that there are really only two options: either holy spirit takes over our mind, heart, and spirit forcibly, without the involvement of our consent or will, or we ourselves invite holy spirit’s activation of our own gifts as co-creators of these and other spiritual fruits. And although there is some evidence that the former may sometimes occur — such as the day of Pentecost in Acts 2 — the Apostle Paul is pretty adamant that the latter should be the norm. As he writes in 1 Corinthians 14:26-32 (NASB):

“What is the outcome then, brothers and sisters? When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. All things are to be done for edification. If anyone speaks in a tongue, it must be by two or at the most three, and each one in turn, and one is to interpret; but if there is no interpreter,

he is to keep silent in church; and have him speak to himself and to God. Have two or three prophets speak, and have the others pass judgment. But if a revelation is made to another who is seated, then the first one is to keep silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all may be exhorted; and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets; for God is not a God of confusion, but of peace.”

Clearly, Paul is encouraging edification in Christian assemblies through an orderly invocation of spiritual gifts that involves human agency. This is something Christians are to do consciously, through deliberate intention and self-control. In one way, this is a clear invocation of an *extrinsic* envelop around *intrinsic* spiritual power, and is instructive as such. But it is not a spontaneous possession by holy spirit. So this is a critical point that indicates our spiritual perception-cognition, enriched by a spiritual gift, requires engagement with our emotions and rational mind in order to be translated into edifying communication with others. This conscious, active mechanism for delivering spiritual wisdom, knowledge, prophecy, teaching, exhortation, and leadership to our fellow believers takes practice, discipline, timing, and skill. This isn't a reflexive or unconscious activity, but was something the Christians in Corinth had to be instructed to do.

There is also another, personal form of edification that Paul encourages in 1 Corinthians 14, and that is a more private invocation of holy spirit. The example Paul provides is speaking in tongues, where Paul indicates the edification can be more personal — that we edify our own spirit as we speak with God. As he writes in verse 2 (NASB): “For the one who speaks in a tongue does not speak to people, but to God; for no one understands, but in his spirit he speaks mysteries.” And then in verse 4: “The one who speaks in a tongue edifies himself.” And in verse 14: “For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unproductive.” The availability of this more personal form of edification through holy spirit — that notably should also not be neglected — is another crucial point. And this practice, too, requires conscious effort and discipline.

The ultimate objective of spiritual gifts in Paul's letter to the church in Corinth is the building up of that church — whether by demonstrating miraculous signs to outsiders, or that “all may learn and be exhorted.” Even so, Paul encourages the invocation of spiritual gifts regardless of whether this is a personal or collective practice — he just prioritizes the edification of the assembly as our primary objective.

Is there anything else that informs the practice of spiritual gifts?

In the previous chapter, 1 Corinthians 13, Paul does address a more profound priority regarding such practice. As he writes in verses 1-3 (NIV): “If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.”

And earlier in the same letter, Paul writes in chapter 8:1-3 (NASB): “Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies. If anyone supposes that he knows anything, he has not yet known as he ought to know; but if anyone loves God, he is known by Him.”

So doing everything — including practicing spiritual gifts — is to be grounded in *agape*. This is yet another principle that ties a conscious, deliberate effort on our part to the workings of holy spirit. Cultivating a loving state of heart and mind when invoking and utilizing spiritual gifts is yet another responsibility for Christians to actively, deliberately, and consciously embrace. At the same time, holy spirit’s presence also energizes us with that Divine love (Romans 5:5, Galatians 5:22, 1 John 4:12-13), so that God’s healing and transformative presence can first shine upon our minds and hearts, and then out into the world. This is our collaboration with Christ to heal what is broken and align ourselves with God’s will.

Lastly, circling back to the previous section on our faith’s *teleios*, there is one more important point to be made. Here again we find ourselves in 1 Corinthians 13, this time in verses 8-13 (ESV): “Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known. So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.”

These verses continue to reinforce the primacy of love, but they also describe the ongoing evolution of our faith. As we mature in Christ — both individually and as the entire body of Christ itself — our reasoning and comprehension around the mysteries of God continue to remain partial and incomplete. Spiritual gifts will continue to expand and enhance that reasoning and comprehension until it is maturely established — at which point they will pass away. Again, this reminds me of the felt experiences of the dark night of the soul alluded to earlier, and that this journey is fluid and episodic in nature, rather than rigid or absolute in its outcomes.

To recap, then:

1. Holy spirit is actively working within us and through us, and we should not resist or quench it.
2. We are to consciously invoke our spiritual gifts for collective edification, and not neglect this practice.
3. Spiritual gifts can also edify us personally — and we shouldn’t neglect that either.
4. Practicing spiritual gifts must be grounded in love, or they are pointless.
5. Until “the perfect comes,” we will increase in our partial spiritual understanding as guided by faith, hope, and love.

6. *Agape* is both our guiding intention when invoking the gifts of the spirit, and an all-powerful, amplifying force that holy spirit pours into our hearts to help purify and rectify our choices and actions.
7. The fruitful outcome of all such activities is the building up of the church in service to the common good.

Finally, in addition to spiritual gifts, the activity of holy spirit is also expressed in its fruits. As Paul writes: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.” Galatians 5:22-23 (NASB) We could even say that, if spiritual gifts are not accompanied by these fruitful expressions of holy spirit, then they lack authenticity or skillfulness in *agape*.

My Personal Experience of Holy Spirit

I do feel my life has been touched by holy spirit in many ways I’m sure other Christians will recognize. Over time, everything I’ve experienced has gradually become consolidated and simplified into a few persisting patterns and practices.

For example, a primary way openness to the workings of holy spirit has manifested in my life is through “praying without ceasing.” As a general spiritual disposition, this means reflexively endeavoring to remain consciously connected with God *all of the time*. Sometimes this style of prayer manifests as listening in silence for the inner promptings of holy spirit — in whatever form or gift it chooses to manifest; as it says in Psalm 62:1 (NASB), “My soul waits in silence for God alone; from Him comes my salvation.” Sometimes this feels like communion, where I remember and receive God’s grace in gratitude. Sometimes I am sharing my thoughts, or asking a question, or inviting clarity around a perplexing topic.

Praying without ceasing is also accompanied by cultivating a specific state of heart, one in which I aim to be “content in all circumstances,” and “in everything give thanks.” Here again, this is both a perpetual inclination towards gratitude, and a more focused thankfulness about specific things, but there is also a sense of both humility and awe. Throughout the ebb and flow of my faith, these spiritual and emotional disciplines have been a starting point of Christian consciousness from which *agape* flows through my life — that is, they energize habitual choices intended to harmonize with God’s will, deepen my faith, and lovingly serve the common good.

In more confined periods of singularly-focused prayer, to quiet my mind and make my heart the most receptive, I have found it useful to employ techniques like the [Jesus Prayer](#) of the Church Fathers. I also find it helpful to add [breathing techniques](#) to this practice. At other times, I have found walking through nature in quiet solitude invites a similarly receptive state. In some circumstances, I will invoke a specific spiritual gift from a place of devotional gratitude. But mainly, my practice is about an ongoing intentional connection with, and receptivity to, Divine relationship with my mind and heart — with love, contentment, and thanksgiving — adding

supplications to bear fruits of the spirit in greater abundance. It is as much an active invocation as it is a humble openness and submission, a devotional synthesis of Divine and human will, enabled by the anointing of holy spirit through Jesus Christ.

I have also experienced a kind of spiritual discernment that I would credit to holy spirit, rather than my own insight or intuition. This mostly seems to involve discernment around decisions, responses, or actions in a given moment where I am seeking guidance on how best to understand someone else's perspective, empathize with their experiences, appreciate their concerns and questions around some subject, teach them something difficult, assist them with their healing and well-being, inspire them to act in their own best interest, be helpful to them in some other way, or just be a better listener. As with more mundane intuitions, I may feel the "rightness" of how to proceed within my body, as a warming spark in the center of my upper chest to signal encouragement and affirmation, or a clenching tension just behind the eyes to signal restraint and avoidance, so that I somehow know much better than I otherwise would "what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen." (Ephesians 4:29, NIV) But there is definitely something very different about the calm certainty of this type of spiritual guidance; there is no hesitation or doubt, and there is an abundance of clarity and resolution that is otherwise inaccessible to me.

Such spiritual discernment has been a critical component of several phases of my life. As an alternative healing arts practitioner, it guided my approach across multiple modalities to facilitate healing and wellness. It also greatly informed my teaching modes and methods — and the ways I interacted with my students both in and out of class — especially during the years I taught mysticism and meditation. I relied on it heavily during the time I managed employees at a university, a school district, and then a Fortune 100 company. But I depended on it most acutely as an [Integral Lifework](#) coach, which in many ways combines all of those previous skills and modes of interaction with others that so resonate with the activity of holy spirit — the teaching, healing, helping, leading, and encouraging — which were all dependent on the guiding light of *agape*. It should be noted, however, that many of these activities were not strictly associated with my service to a specific church, which is why I hesitate to claim I was practicing spiritual gifts in these instances. But I have no doubt at all that holy spirit was involved in the underlying patterns of discernment in all of these settings.

Another way holy spirit has manifested in my life falls less on the invocation end of Christian experience, and seems to be more of an involuntary possession. This occurs in moments when I can't seem to let go of an intense and preoccupying emotion directed toward someone else — something unproductive and hurtful such as resentment, anger, or lust — which is then spontaneously transformed into a profound gentleness, kindness, caring, and compassion for that person. What begins as a circling around my own grievances or desires is abruptly switched over to caring more about that person's well-being and happiness than my own self-protective or self-indulgent impulses. Yes, this sometimes happens when I am praying about that person, and perhaps it is in response to my openness or supplication at those times, but much more often this "*agape*-possession" arrives unbidden, unexpected, and without any warning or intention on my part. It is a forceful transfiguration, if you will, in the fundamental state of my

heart. *And thanks be to God for this transformative gift.* The consistent outcome of such abrupt emotional shifts — which occur either in the midst of interacting with someone or shortly thereafter — is that there is eventually healing, harmony, and peace between us, and, if needed, I can then invoke the spiritual discernment previously described.

Interestingly, those who have known me throughout my membership at various churches as I have moved about the U.S. might view my frequent volunteer work at these congregations as reflecting a “gift of service.” And although my choices and activities might indeed mimic such a gift in superficial ways, I don’t believe they deserve this spiritual characterization. Instead, I am simply compelled to “do things that need doing,” but which otherwise would not get done. This is a reflexive habit that predates my commitment to Christ at age 19, and likely came about as a consequence of spending countless hours first with my WASP grandparents in New England, and then with my German grandparents in Frankfurt, Germany. I relished spending time with these older relatives, because they were fascinating people who had endless things to teach me...but that also meant I was expected to join in on whatever house, yard, vehicle, equipment, or garden projects they were working on — which were equally endless. There were always “things that needed doing.” Always.

What I believe this pattern may be hinting at is one of the values of *extrinsic* spirituality. In such instances I have been submitting to existing cultural values, hierarchies, and relationships that reinforce a practice of contribution and service as a moral discipline, rather than an internally inspired spiritual expression. It once again invokes Hebrews 5:14: “But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to distinguish between good and evil.” (NASB) In the context of faith, by *willingly submitting* — to expectations of my church community, to the needs of my brothers and sisters, to the requests of those in my community, to the rituals and patterns of congregational life — I am learning how to be a good Christian *from the outside in*. This is the essential and enduring value of *extrinsic* spirituality, and why it remains a necessary and important component of spiritual life as we journey through *teleios*.

But what is the point of all this? Individual spiritual growth and collective spiritual growth, to be sure, but with the explicit result of strengthening the skillfulness of service to brothers and sisters in Christ, which in turn strengthens and expands *the Church’s service to the world*. I believe this is what Christian maturity is supposed to look like both individually and collectively — as expressed through a persisting immersion in *agape*. So yes, there may be Christian practices that appear to other people as an *intrinsic* element to an evolving faith, but faith without any works that reflect it — those *extrinsically* manifested co-creations of our will and holy spirit — is surely either dormant or fading. That said, the outward expression of our *intrinsic* transformation should not be purely performative either, not some external costume we wear to signal our faith to nonbelievers or our righteousness to other Christians; it is, rather, intended as an essential, fully integrated component of our identity. I believe this distinct synthesis of spiritual modes is a fundamental aspect of what Jesus sacrificed himself to impart to humanity. If our faith is genuine, and our integrity with the Word of God is indeed living and active, then the blessings, insights, and wisdom we receive and pass on to the Church and the world emerge as a side-effect of our salvation and ongoing relationship with holy spirit. At the

same time, we practice obedience to church structures and hierarchies because that is a necessary complement of our internal journey. In this way, an unselfconscious, effortless love and wisdom become a serendipitous emergence in believers; but only God can know for certain what our individual *intrinsic-extrinsic* balance will be.

This is the unbridled power of the synthesis of *extrinsic* and *intrinsic* spirituality — and ultimately, I think, of the Old Testament and the New. Yes, religious institutions and authorities that are deeply rooted in *extrinsic* spirituality may feel antagonized by the inclusion of *intrinsic* spirituality, just as the religious rulers of Jesus' time were antagonized by his message and example. Indeed, the tension between these two orientations is still just as much in play in modern Christendom (and in fact appears evident among many other faith traditions as well) as it was when Jesus was rebuking the Sadducees and Pharisees. Institutional hierarchies do seem more interested in fostering *extrinsic* spirituality, because doctrine, tradition and sometimes even legalism energize and maintain those power structures. In contrast, *intrinsic* spirituality strengthens individual purpose, discernment, and effectiveness, freeing us from hierarchical religious systems and authorities. But my contention is that these two orientations may become that much more fragile or brittle over time if they remain separate tracks of praxis rather than a balanced combination.

For emphasis, I want to affirm that there is proven value to *extrinsic* spirituality, as well as weakness to *intrinsic* spirituality. *Extrinsic* spirituality, in being thoroughly grounded in rules, long-practiced rituals and traditions, and existing hierarchies can offer proven advantages. For the newly initiated, it provides instant structure, cohesive beneficial habits, and an avenue of ongoing continuity and accountability that *intrinsic* spirituality does not — at least not immediately or in its earliest stages. What *intrinsic* spirituality depends upon for similarly supportive structures is an interior discipline and commitment to an ever-more-refined intentionality, which are a heavy lift for new Christians. Such skills can also be challenging for folks with busy lives, large families, a myriad social and financial obligations, or delicate health. In many ways, being a devoted member of an *extrinsically* oriented spiritual community is simply easier to sustain than a more demanding *intrinsic* praxis. And I think we can speculate this may be one reason why the early churches Paul was writing to were still focused on the “milk” of the Word, rather than the “meat” as Paul encouraged them to be. Not just in terms of stages of faith development, but in enduring human propensities, shifting from *extrinsic* to *intrinsic* spirituality is not a default or easy transition.

Intrinsic spirituality also has its shortcomings. There is the real possibility of self-deception and self-flattery here, of spiritual arrogance that resists any kind of structure, mutual service, or accountability, of an inherent inclination to avoid loving submission to the community and instead withdraw into an entirely self-directed cave. In my Integral Lifework research and practice, I equate moral evolution as [widening circles of self](#), where we begin with a self-identification only with our own ego, but eventually appreciate and accept that we are intimately interconnected and interdependent with other people, a larger community, the rest of humanity, the natural world, all life, and indeed broader, ineffable spiritual realms. But if our *intrinsic* orientation becomes distorted by those earlier stages of self-identification — if we are

in fact not really growing or maturing in our moral sensibilities — then we can end up merely projecting that less evolved, egotistical self onto the world around us. Those circles of inclusion may still be getting bigger and bigger, but they no longer reflect an attenuation of “I, me, and mine” in favor of more inclusive horizons of “We, us, and ours;” instead, they collapse inclusion of everyone and everything else into our own willful solipsism. Which introduces the very real possibility that *extrinsic* structures in the Church are necessary and preservative in their investment of attention and care around exterior relationships, supportive community, and the rules, structures, and hierarchies we do not control. Even as *intrinsic* practices will be spiritually rejuvenating and stimulate growth, *extrinsic* practices can ground us in traditions and rituals that are larger than ourselves. For me personally, participating and volunteering at a traditional congregation (most recently a United Church of Christ) reminds me of the larger, less myopic, other-inclusive rhythms of spiritual community. *Intrinsic* spirituality doesn’t always lend itself as easily to the collective bonds of fellowship, community service, and coordinated effort that *extrinsic* spirituality provides. So again, there is a balancing act.

In other words, we should guard against *intrinsic* faith becoming too individualistic even as it encourages healthy independence — the purpose of *intrinsic* spiritual empowerment is still to build up the Church and serve the common good. Otherwise, the personal empowerment and inherent freedom of *intrinsic* spirituality, if taken to an extreme, can make this form of Christian praxis disruptive to fundamental unity in the body of Christ. In addition to inadvertent self-isolation, an *intrinsic* orientation can be threatening to those who find comfort in institutional hierarchy, who prefer the structure of religious doctrine, who find clarity and simplicity in rigid spiritual prescriptions, and who invest the purity of fellowship with clearly defined roles and responsibilities. *Intrinsic* and *extrinsic* spirituality can function together in harmony, but only if both are subjected to the love of Christ, able to accept and embrace what can feel like polar opposites as spiritual siblings. *We must remember that we remain members one of another.* Otherwise, the tension between *intrinsic* and *extrinsic* can become friction and discord.

Lastly, there is another consideration worth raising, and that is that we may require repeated shifts between *extrinsic* and *intrinsic* spirituality at various times in our own lives. In times of crisis or extreme stress, the demands of *intrinsic* vigilance may of necessity give way to the security of *extrinsic* structures and routine. By the same token, the disruption of a major life event may trigger desires for renewed *intrinsic* focus even for someone who has felt safe and secure in *extrinsic* routines for much of their lives. And, as alluded to earlier, it is likely we also contain *intrinsic* and *extrinsic* proclivities held in tension within ourselves; accepting and integrating both, rather than suppressing one or the other, seems the wisest course. Regardless, this is less about the perfection of our faith than the pragmatism of different modes of being, in different stages and circumstances. About the only thing we can be certain of is that we will encounter challenges in our Christian walk that require different tools and approaches than what has worked well for us in the past, as well as different aspects of ourselves that will demand additional space and patience for growth and change.

The Spiritual Seeker

This is a third spiritual mode that may not yet have a settled definition in academic research, but seems widely understood in contemporary culture. The *spiritual seeker* is often someone who is open to new spiritual experiences, curious about different spiritual traditions, able to question their own assumptions and cultural traditions, and willing to navigate unknowns and ambiguity with a high level of equanimity. They tend to question, evaluate, and then decide whether to integrate new insights, understanding, and experiences into their spirituality. This is a valuable habit of mind. That said, I tend to view folks relying heavily on this category as plotting across a broad spectrum as well. At one end of that spectrum is someone motivated by the inclination toward adventure for its own sake, and at the other end of that spectrum is a person more inclined toward establishing and maintaining security and comfort for themselves in a worldview that can't be pinned down. In spiritual terms, I suspect the risks may be roughly equivalent at both extremes. Being overly adventurous can result in reckless irresponsibility, with a tendency to reject ever becoming grounded enough in any particular tradition or belief to actually develop a deep, enduring, maturing faith. On the other hand, becoming overly attached to the security and comfort of a fluid identity is equally debilitating, in that avoidance of self-examination and personal discipline can undermine our faith's depth and maturity. However, if held in a balanced way, the *spiritual seeker* impulse can encourage necessary questions, avoid rigidity and calcification of spiritual assumptions, and help us hold all of our beliefs lightly enough that we can be both humble and confident at the same time. This is an excellent example of how moderation offers us an ideal option.

At this time, I also hold strong opinions about the nature of faith itself, viewing it as a quality of character rather than either a delicate emotion or an unquestioning trust. But that is a discussion for another time. What is relevant here is that someone with characteristics of *spiritual seeking* is able to hold doubt about their own convictions with the same lightness that they hold the convictions themselves. Which means they will usually feel less threatened when their beliefs are challenged, and can remain open to a “both, and” navigation of complex or nuanced issues in their faith and the world. In other words, a *spiritual seeker*, if they have balanced themselves carefully along the adventure/comfort continuum, will tend to integrate and synthesize new information much more carefully and thoughtfully, because that is what their interiority demands.

Like Allport's earlier theories, it is worth noting that there is an academic proposal of “questing” religious orientation offered by Daniel Batson that parallels the *spiritual seeker* concept in many ways.³ Its main components are an ability to be self-critical, be comfortable with doubt as a positive facilitator, an acceptance of ambiguity and complexity where spiritual truths are concerned, and a willingness to revise existing beliefs. And I think these are very helpful traits that coincide with the *seeker* definition being defined here. That said, Batson's “questing” definition has also been equated with a personality that is unstable, or just perpetually open,

³ Batson, Schoenrade, and Ventis, *Religion and the Individual: A Social-Psychological Perspective* (Oxford, 1993)

and that may not be a spiritual orientation in itself. Still, I believe the *spiritual seeker* is a real, useful mode whose characteristics actually benefit both *intrinsic* and *extrinsic* spirituality.

For example, consider the ongoing *seeker* habit of questioning. Not only can it introduce novel experiences and insights that awaken and strengthen our spirituality, but it can also stave off complacency, inaction, and indifference of habitual patterns. In other words, it can keep us from falling into a spiritual rut. For the *seeker*, the journey is the fundamental motivation, and the answers are the reward, offering us both the cake and the icing. But this process will also inherently disrupt any settled patterns in a spiritual journey that are too heavily grounded either in *extrinsic* conformance, or one that places too much confidence in our *intrinsic* spiritual process or identity. So now we consider an additional synthesis: adding *spiritual seeker* to our mix of *intrinsic* and *extrinsic* habits and characteristics.

In this synthesis, someone whose *spiritual seeker* characteristics dominate may still arrive at some emphasis of either *intrinsic* or *extrinsic* spirituality...embracing either one as their dominant mode-of-the-moment. In retrospect, my own early explorations of mysticism⁴ definitely orbited around a *seeker* flavor of spirituality, as the *seeker* intention is inherent to activation of mystic perception-cognition techniques: a mystic is perpetually seeking to understand what they yet do not — inviting an experience of *gnosis* rather than accepting existing received knowledge or institutional doctrine as inerrant or complete. As a mystical *seeker*, every new encounter must be held lightly, and then either let go, or carefully and thoughtfully integrated with what we already know. At some point, however, the mystical *seeker* will begin to form a cohesive view of the spiritual world and their place in it. And once the shape of that spiritual dimension begins to feel more complete and whole (invoking the concept of *teleios* again), then *intrinsic* and *extrinsic* landscapes also begin to reveal themselves, and indeed look much more appealing as waystations to dwell in...or at least rest for a good long while in our life's journey.

Lastly, I also think it is essential to recognize several elements central to Christianity — things like prayer, fruits of the spirit, gifts of the spirit, and the indwelling holy spirit itself — can all be facilitators of *seeker* spirituality. These practices and influences routinely break us open to new experiences and opportunities for growth and change. Regardless, however, having a bit of “seeker” mixed into our ongoing spiritual *teleios* will, I think, infuse a necessary energy into our faith, and help stave off any tendencies towards spiritual complacency, stagnation, or overconfidence.

Summary of Intrinsic versus Extrinsic versus Seeker Spirituality Characteristics

To summarize, then, the following table is an overview of the chief features of these interacting dimensions (or general dispositions, as the case may be) of spirituality in a Christian context. As

⁴ *Essential Mysticism, The Vital Mystic*, [“A Mystic’s Call to Action”](#)

a reminder, these are not necessarily always distinct phases or independent traits, but in fact may all be present in all of us — either at different stages of our faith, or at the same time to varying degrees. The more I explore these characteristics, the more I believe it is fruitful to incorporate all of them in some way into our spiritual journey; they provide necessary balance with each other, challenge each other with differing perspectives and flavors of vigilance, and help stave off either the complacency or the overconfidence that can emerge when only one type of spiritual praxis remains dominant for too long.

Personally, I also feel there is one additional component of our cognitive process and overall navigation that applies to all three modes of spirituality, and that is cultivating a specific approach to evaluating and integrating new information along the way that helps us manage our [confirmation bias](#). Can we resist recognizing only that information that reinforces what we already believe? Are we able to thoughtfully and fearlessly examine what is new and different, contrasting it with our existing body of experiences, beliefs, and moral valuations, before either discarding or incorporating that new information? I believe such careful examination should be our goal — most things do not deserve our immediate rejection or acceptance, even when our initial impulse is a strong revulsion or attraction. Instead, I find exposing my own settled patterns of thought to such deliberate disruptions either strengthens or revises them in necessary ways. Perhaps this is my way of becoming a “responsible” *seeker*. Take a look at [Appendix C](#) for helpful diagrams of two contrasting evaluation processes.

Features of <i>Intrinsic</i> Spirituality	Features of <i>Extrinsic</i> Spirituality	Features of <i>Seeker</i> Spirituality
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focuses on <i>the spirit of the law</i> and refining internal intentions and states of being, which then are intended to be expressed in ideas and actions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focuses on <i>the letter of the law</i> and externally-oriented legalistic adherence, which is displayed more performatively than as an expression of inner states. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focuses on the <i>nature of spiritual principles</i> independent of the law.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nuanced and conditional shades-of-grey thinking that are comfortable with moderate complexity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A tendency to simplify spiritual principles and codify a clear, easily-understood doctrine. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intuitional and emotional thought processes that tends toward the highest tolerance for complexity and abstraction.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aiming to understand the intent of scripture and how it informs our navigation of relationships and life conditions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More literal, rules-based interpretation of scripture and rigid application to life conditions and relationships. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Navigating underlying spiritual principles that inform wisdom and decision-making around relationships and life conditions.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While initially they may not conflict with spiritual praxis as much, worldly cultural norms eventually tend to be usurped by spiritually-oriented priorities over time. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While initially worldly cultural norms may be rejected or sublimated, spiritual praxis gradually admits more worldliness that subordinates spiritual priorities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concerned primarily with actualizing spiritual principles and priorities, and disregarding and rejecting worldly cultural norms altogether.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A tendency to seek out and trust interior promptings of holy spirit, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A tendency to seek out and trust exterior, situational signs from 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A tendency to seek out spiritual promptings almost exclusively,

<p>in combination with guidance from scripture, to guide and validate choices, with less reliant on external signs or existing power structures.</p>	<p>God, rely on established hierarchies and rituals, or follow literal scriptural guidance, to inform and validate choices.</p>	<p>without reliance on either external signs and structures, or scriptural teachings.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A tendency to be more flexible, conditional, and relational — especially in defining right and wrong — relying on deliberation and discernment; community is looser and broader but still connected to identity and purpose. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A tendency to be more rigid, compartmentalizing, and systematizing — especially in defining right and wrong; community is closer, tighter, and more closely correlated with identity and purpose. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A tendency to avoid rigid categorizations altogether in favor of situational assessments, less inclined to hold fixed moral categorizations; inherently more individualistic and less community-centric.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less interested in relying on Christian faith for social status, a sense of belonging, or material security. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More interested in relying on Christian faith for social status, a sense of belonging, and material security. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May not view Christian faith as a social, community, or material advantage at all.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motivations and responses are more consciously grounded in <i>agape</i>-based reasoning than rigid rules. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motivations and responses tend to be influenced more by rules-based reasoning; and sometimes fear-based reasoning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less strictly tethered to either rules, love, or fear, and tending instead toward a more detached motivation of what facilitates spiritual growth and change.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concept of “obedience” is an inwardly perceived willingness toward humility and goodness in all attitudes and actions, which then informs personal identity and relationships. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concept of “obedience” is in outwardly evident righteousness in conforming attitudes and actions, which then informs personal identity and relationships. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tendency to view concept of “obedience” as less attractive or less mandatory.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritization of action based on impact on interpersonal outcomes, deepening of relationships, and building up of spiritual community. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritization of action based on impact on transactional outcomes, personal status, and conformance to existing spiritual community’s expectations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritization of action based on furthering personal growth and spiritual understanding, with less focus on spiritual community.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A desire to grow and mature in an increasingly skillful and effective Christian faith — a faith that advances in wisdom and discernment (i.e. the “meat” of the Word), and achieves an inherent interdependent form of spiritual selfhood, independent of Church hierarchies while still able to integrate with them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A tendency toward dependency on the fundamentals of Christian faith (i.e. “milk” of the Word), which can slow growth and maturity or discourage independent spiritual selfhood, but is nonetheless able to positively support and preserve traditions, rituals, and hierarchal structures in the Church. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A desire for deepening wisdom and <i>gnosis</i> that offers more effective navigation of life decisions, relationships, and effective action, and leans toward a more assertively independent flavor of spiritual selfhood that resists integration with existing hierarchies.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A tendency to invite holy spirit’s work through personal praxis and spiritual disciplines (e.g. spiritual 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A tendency to mistrust more mystical personal approaches to holy spirit, and instead trust holy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An openness to mystical practices and engagement with the spiritual realm, including techniques and

gifts, praying without ceasing, etc.), and trusting that process and its outcomes.	spirit's work through traditional rituals, formal roles in the body of Christ, and church community.	disciplines from different religious traditions.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An openness to growth that allows some room for questioning and curiosity, and is able to hold current beliefs more tenuously, but consciously aims for continuity with <i>teleios</i>. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A less curious spiritual state that is more uncomfortable with ambiguity and doubt, and is more attached to a static, well-defined conclusion, so that <i>teleios</i> isn't always as attractive. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An inherently and continuously questioning, seeking, and curious spiritual state that sees ambiguity and doubt as inherently positive, and uncomfortable with settling on a static conclusion. <i>Teleios</i>, therefore, as a process of spiritual maturity, may or may not be attractive — or may be seen in itself as a transitive orientation.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ambivalent towards the necessity of unity and strict preservation of religious structures and community. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritizes unity and preservation of religious structures and community. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be disruptive to unity and preservation of religious structures and community.

For a sample visualization of how these thematic dimensions interact with each other over the stages of faith development, see *Appendix B*.

How Do We Reconcile Contradictions Between the OT and NT?

It would be easier to think in black-and-white, dismissing the Hebrew Scriptures as old wine we no longer should value or imbibe. But, from my own personal experiences and those of countless other Christians I have known, the Old Testament is incredibly rich spiritual food for anyone who wants to deepen their faith and broaden their understanding, and ignoring or neglecting it would be tragic. We can instead approach both the Old Testament and New Testament using the hermeneutic and resources in *Appendix A*, adding to that the *intrinsic-extrinsic-seeker* integration and harmony that has been promoted in this essay. This is one avenue through which we can reconcile the scripture available to us using analytical tools, practiced experience, topical studies, dialogue with fellow believers, prayerful consideration, insights from our particular tradition, and the three available modes of faith we've discussed. Yes, this is a long hike up a steep mountain — and it can sometimes be both arduous and exhausting — but over the course of my own struggles, doubts, and discoveries, the views along the way have often been awe-inspiring and faith-affirming.

There are of course several traditional approaches to this question — some of which have found their way into my own thinking. One is to frame God's different revelations as addressing several specific periods of human history — different "dispensations" — each with its own specific expectations and guidance for God's people.⁵ Another is typological in nature, an

⁵ Bock, Darrell L. "Dispensationalism." *St Andrews Encyclopaedia of Theology*. University of St Andrews. <https://www.saet.ac.uk/Christianity/Dispensationalism>

approach used extensively in the New Testament itself, where people, objects, and events in the Old Testament are viewed as “types” of what is revealed under Christ’s new covenant. For example, the great flood and crossing the Red Sea are *types* of baptism (1 Peter 3, 1 Corinthians 10); the Passover is a *type* of the crucifixion (1 Corinthians 5:7); the Jewish Temple is a *type* of Christ himself (Matthew 27:40, John 1:14 & 2:19, Mark 14:58); manna from heaven is a *type* for Christ as the bread of life (John 6:26-35); Jonah, David, Joseph, Moses, Adam, and Melchizedek are all used as *types* of Christ throughout the New Testament; and so on. And, as we have included in our discussion so far, there are the ideas of fulfillment of prophecy, progressive revelation, and the belief that Christ’s new covenant supersedes the old. These can all be helpful approaches in my view, and I can only hope the additional perspectives offered here will add to this already rich tapestry.

So when we do encounter contradictions, we can ask ourselves: Is this an instance where Jesus’ message and example are overriding the previous status quo of the Hebrew Scriptures? Is there a deliberate revision occurring that is evidenced repeatedly throughout the New Testament? Should we relax our desire to force old wine into new wineskins? Or is this an opportunity for a more subtle or rigorous dialectic, where literal interpretations must give way to metaphorical, rhetorical, poetic, or typological ones? Or, failing all of these, is there a way to reconcile the Old Testament with the New that we simply do not yet comprehend? We have many choices. And if we engage actively — with all of the tools of our hermeneutic, the *intrinsic*, *extrinsic*, and *seeker* modes of faith, and other methods of evaluation — it may be that a new synthesis will occur that transcends what we thought we knew, contributing to our ongoing *teleios*.

When perfection comes, the imperfect will be done away; but for now, we can only see an enigma in the mirror. That is our lot. Accepting this as part of our transformative process in *agape* becomes that much more difficult if we insist that the Word of God must be confined and reduced to an understanding that satisfies us in this moment, rather than something that evolves continuously and asymptotically. But if we instead trust that a deeper, more mature comprehension of the Word will be forthcoming through obedient practice, openness to help from holy spirit, and a willingness to revise our past conclusions, we may yet experience the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, and which guards our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Appendix A: Research Resources for Biblical Interpretation

We consider the Bible as we know it today as many things. It is the foundation of Christian religion, and Judaism before it. It is a historical document, written in Hebrew and Koine Greek, from a culture and understanding of the world that was very different from our modern perspective. It is the inspired word of God — with prophecies, practical instruction, deep wisdom, and mystery. It is also, according to scripture (Hebrews 4:12), “living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, even piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” From 2 Timothy 3:16-17, we know that “All scripture is God-breathed, beneficial for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that those of God may be complete and equipped for every good work.” And although modern scholarly research has confirmed that most of its contents were in circulation across Christendom for previous hundreds of years, the current New Testament canon was finalized between the 4th and 7th centuries A.D. The Torah, the first five books of the Hebrew Scriptures, was canonized by the 5th century B.C., but Christian acceptance of the rest of the Old Testament as we know it today did not occur until the 4th century A.D. Lastly, there are also many different translations of the Bible.

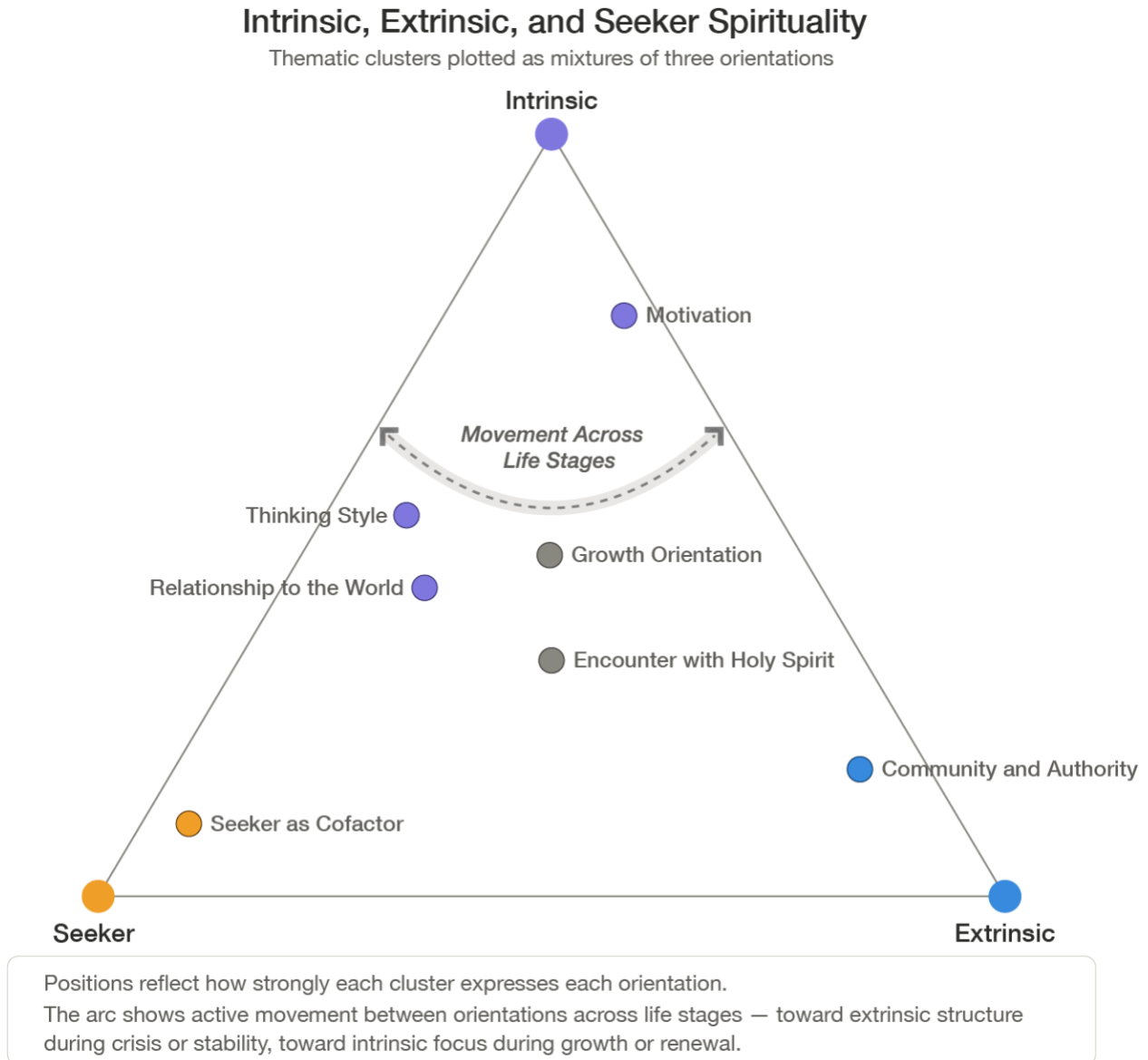
So how can we go about interpreting this critical text for Christianity? Below are the main components of a proposed method of interpretation (or “hermeneutic”) that includes several different avenues of examination. The idea here is that, by combining as many avenues as we can, we have the best chance of appreciating this rich, complex, ancient spiritual document. Here is a top-level overview of this proposed method of interpretation:

1. A **comparative** approach:
 - a. Choose some **well-regarded translations** to compare the same passage. Nearly all translations contain bias, of course, so comparing and contrasting more than one can help us see past the translators’ preferences. One website, biblegateway.com, has over sixty translations to choose from. That said, some of the most reliable scholarly translations include **The English Standard Version**, the **New American Standard Bible**, and the **New Revised Standard Version (Updated Edition)**. There are also a number of versions that are intended to offer easier, more accessible reading (such as the New International Version, The Good News Bible, and the New Living Translation); however, these more accessible versions do sometimes depart from accurate translations of the original Greek.
2. An **analytical** approach, which explores:
 - a. The author’s **intent** (as expressed in the text itself, as supported by the surrounding scripture)
 - b. The historical, cultural, and situational **context** of the writings (what [Bible commentaries](#) and [study Bibles](#) aim to provide — there are excellent online resources available at biblehub.com)

- c. Hints revealed by the original **languages**. (Examination of the original Hebrew and Koine Greek through an [interlinear](#), further exploration of word usage through a [concordance](#) in both languages, and a deeper understanding of language meaning using a lexicon. Here is a [Greek lexicon](#), and I also find it helpful to use [one that references other early Christian literature](#))
 - d. A survey of **other biblical references** to the same topic (a [topical Bible resource](#) and keyword searches on sites like [biblegateway.com](#) can be helpful here)
 - e. Early Christian **acceptance and application** of scriptural principles (for example, researching what the [Church Fathers](#) wrote on various topics)
3. **Experiential** methods, which consult:
- a. Discernment through **practicing scriptural principles** ([Hebrews 5:14](#))
 - b. What we learn through our ongoing Christian **discipleship relationship** with Jesus, and in our mutually supportive [discipleship relationships with other Christians](#)
4. Guidance from **holy spirit**
- a. Insight through the still, neutral openness of [contemplative prayer](#)
 - b. Prayerful **supplication** for Divine guidance over the *meaning and application* of scripture
5. **Participatory** methods, such as
- a. **Dialogue** with other Christians (informally, in Bible study, etc.)
 - b. **Communal experience** — how this scripture and its principles have manifested in our spiritual community

Appendix B: Visualizing Dimensions of Faith

How do the three modes of spirituality plot dynamically within our faith’s journey? The illustration below is one way we can visualize the relationship between various thematic characteristics of those modes.



The definitions for the seven “clusters” of characteristic dimensions are as follows:

- **Thinking style** — how a Christian processes complexity, interprets scripture, and holds doctrine.
 - Spirit of the law vs. letter of the law; internal states expressed in action vs. performative adherence

- Nuanced shades-of-grey thinking vs. simplified, codified doctrine vs. highest tolerance for abstraction
- Scripture as intent informing navigation vs. literal rules-based interpretation vs. underlying principles
- **Community and authority** — how a Christian relates to institutional structures, hierarchy, and moral definition.
 - Flexible and relational vs. rigid and systematizing definitions of right and wrong; looser vs. tighter community
 - Unity and preservation of religious structures and community
- **Motivation** — what energizes a Christian's choices and actions.
 - Interior promptings of holy spirit vs. exterior signs, hierarchy, and literal scripture for guidance
 - Agape-based reasoning vs. rules-based (and sometimes fear-based) reasoning vs. detached seeking
 - Obedience as inward willingness vs. outward conformance vs. less attractive or mandatory
- **Growth orientation** — how a Christian understands spiritual maturation, selfhood, and the arc toward *teleios*.
 - Meat of the Word and independent spiritual selfhood vs. milk of the Word preserving traditions and hierarchy vs. gnosis and fiercely independent selfhood
 - Openness to growth with continuity toward *teleios* vs. attachment to static conclusions vs. continuous questioning with *teleios* as transitive
 - Action prioritized by interpersonal outcomes vs. transactional outcomes vs. personal growth
- **Encounter with holy spirit** — how a Christian receives and participates in the work of holy spirit.
 - Holy spirit invited through personal praxis and spiritual disciplines vs. through traditional rituals and formal roles vs. through mystical practices across traditions
- **Relationship to the world** — how a Christian's spirituality interacts with surrounding culture, social status, and material concerns.
 - Worldly norms eventually usurped by spiritual priorities vs. gradually admitted and subordinating spiritual priorities vs. disregarded and rejected outright
 - Reliance on Christian faith for social status, belonging, or material security (less interested vs. more interested vs. not viewing faith as a social advantage at all)
- **Seeker as cofactor** — a continuous influence on the other two orientations rather than a standalone mode of praxis.
 - Habits of questioning, evaluation, and integration that enhance both intrinsic and extrinsic spirituality, staving off complacency and preventing either legalism or settled interiority from calcifying

Appendix C: Evaluation and Integration of New Information

