

# I'm Spiritual but Not Religious, the New Gnosticism

by Michael Flowers

---

*Michael Flowers explores the tension between spirituality and organized religion, emphasizing love and community as the essence of Christianity.*

**Duration:** 22:48

**Scripture:** Genesis 15:5, Matthew 22:37-39, Matthew 25:36, Luke 9:23, Philippians 1:6, 1 John 3:16, Jude 1:24

**Topics:** "Gnosticism"

---

## Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the power of grace and how it can keep us from falling and present us faultless before God. He references the book of Jude and emphasizes the amazing ability of God to present us faultless before His glory. The preacher also mentions Matthew 25, where Jesus teaches about the importance of visiting and caring for those who are in prison or in need. He highlights the idea that we will be judged based on how we treat those who break the rules. The sermon concludes with a discussion on the significance of the church as a community and family, emphasizing the importance of coming together and supporting one another.

---

## Transcript

We're going to start just a short little series before we get into Advent called Why? And so today it's going to be why the church? Why the church? Why do we have to come to church? I mean, do we have to? Talk to me. All right, good, good, good. That's that's job security or something.

I don't know what that is. All these passages that we heard today are just amazing identifiers of who we are in Jesus as the church, the royal priesthood, a chosen race, a holy nation, all of these beautiful identifiers that describe who we are in Christ and because of the big Christ event. But, you know, there's a generation out there, there's a generation out there called the nuns, and it's not the N-U-N-S, right? It's the N-O-N-E-S.

Have you ever heard about the nuns? Yeah, the nuns, the N-O-N-E-S, and it's a demographic identifier of those who disaffiliate with any kind of religious affiliation or religious identification. I don't go to church. I'm spiritual, but not religious.

You heard that? I'm spiritual, but not religious. And so what we want to do is just kind of think through just a small portion of that phrase today and what might be wrong with that phrase. I'm spiritual, but not religious.

Behind all of this, we're asking ourselves, why be an Anglican? Why go to church? Why be connected to a body of people who have historically laid down traditions that we have carried on? Why not just make up our own spirituality? Why not just do a designer religion? We see this all over the globe, designer spirituality. And yet here we are, we're exhibiting life in the midst of an ancient tradition with albs and stoles and crosses and icons. Why do we do all this? What's the big deal? A little bit on the nuns.

Overall, religiously, they are unaffiliated people and they're more concentrated among young adults than other age groups. Thirty five percent of millennials, those born 1981 to 1996, are nuns. Thirty five percent of millennials.

In addition, the unaffiliated as a whole are getting even younger. The median age of unaffiliated adults is now thirty six, down from thirty eight in 2007. There's a whole generation out there that says.

I'm spiritual, but not religious. Now, what we have to ask is what are some of the problems that the nuns bring up about organized religion, especially Christianity? And one of the top things that they say is that Christianity is all about rules about going to heaven when I die. That's what it's all about.

It's just give me the rules so that we can go to heaven when we die. That's the caricature of the faith. Is that why you're here this morning? Are you so intimidated that you have to show up and you have to be here because you know there's this there's this angry God lurking somewhere and he's going to zap you.

Right. If you don't love him and walk with him and and at least come to church once a month. Right.

But what we have to do, even though many of us at St. Aidens have. Have escaped that caricature, we have to be able to hear it, you know, we have to be able to identify with it and really to be quick to listen. Slow to speak.

Slow to become angry. When we're in the midst of those. Possibly hostile attitudes towards Christianity, not always, sometimes indifference can make us angry, too.

It doesn't take direct shots coming at us, just the sense of indifference or lack of respect for our faith can set us on edge and we can become overly defensive and really not in a listening posture. And so I think it's very important as we as we work through this today. What do we have to do with that caricature? If Christianity is not all about keeping the rules so that we can go to heaven when we die, then really.

How are we going to find the essence of what Christianity is about? What is the essence of our faith? What would that be? And I think some of the keys are in the confessional prayer that we pray every Sunday. And it deals with the issue of love. Most merciful God, I confess I have sinned against you and thought word and deed.

And then here's how that happens. I have not loved you with a whole heart and I have not loved my neighbor. Those next to me this morning and those who are real neighbors in my neighborhood, I have not loved my neighbor as myself.

Jesus says that this sums up the law and the prophets. The great commandment to love God and to love neighbor. He said, hey, if you get that down, you have scanned and fulfill the whole law in the prophets.

And this is why we pray our failure to do this every Sunday. I don't know about you, but I pray it every day. This is one of the first prayers I get up and pray.

Most merciful Abba Father. Sometimes I'll change the words right to be more intimate. Abba Father, just acknowledging all this love for me, right? I have sinned against you and thought word and deed.

What I've done and left undone. I haven't loved you with my whole heart. I know there's more.

Please forgive me where I have ignored or I have grieved your Holy Spirit, where I have not been obedient. See, this is a beautiful relationship. This is not necessarily religion.

The way people understand it, but it is a it is a relationship with the father, our heavenly father through Jesus Christ. And so the essence of Christianity, I want to propose to us this morning. His love.

Jesus said a new commandment. I give to you. Monday, Thursday, right? That you love one another.

As I have loved you. And then in the Sermon on the Mount, he says, what good is it if you love those who are good to you and who are your friends and family and neighbors and church folk? Right. I say, love your enemies and those who spitefully use you.

Pray for them. Now, love is taken out of the sentimental zone, the Hallmark card zone, right, to real, real challenging stuff. Now, the reason why I'm saying that Christianity, Christianity is all about love.

We've got to unpack that. But because God is. God is love.

Ontologically, he is love. It says in Hebrews, he cannot lie. There are many things that God cannot do because of his nature.

God is love. Wow. If God is love, God has to be, in a sense, a sweet society within himself.

It has to be a tripersonal God. Where the Holy Spirit becomes the love between the father and the son. Right.

And so in this high priestly prayer this morning, we're getting little snippets of that communion between the father and the son. And I have, you know, I have loved them the way that you love me. And I pray that they may be one as we are one.

Right. And so it's what I'm what I'm getting at is that this love is tied up in the nature of God and you can't be spiritual in isolation. That's where we're going.

You can't be spiritual in isolation because you can't love in isolation. Right. God is not in isolation.

He is a sweet communion of father, son and Holy Spirit, three persons in one divine essence. And then his created unseen beings are all around him, the angels and the archangels and the saints that have gone before us. The church is growing, folks.

The church is growing by death on earth. Well, there is one church, but it's the it's the eternal and the temporal, but that's all one church. Right.

So we're not losing folks. We get to keep them in Christ. That's the communion of the saints.

Right. If you're not little flock, the church is growing. If we can't be spiritual in isolation.

Why has God set the solitary in families? As we heard this morning, so that we can experience love and care and nurture and that can be a mutuality between each other. When God spoke to Abraham, he says, you're going to be able to count your descendants like the stars. For some reason, God is really excited about a people.

God is really excited about a people. It's the kind of excitement that drives him to want to marry them back. Welcome.

I'll refrain. Right. You know, the Bible starts with a marriage and the Bible ends with a marriage in the garden and the marriage supper of the lamb.

This whole thing of love. What is it all about? You think we have to learn how to live? And there's certain crucibles, there's certain crucibles, there's certain there's certain contexts that are excellent for that. Community is one of them.

Community is one way that God has set up so that we can learn. Now, this is the kind of love that you can't will. Can you make yourself feel compassion for another person? I'm just going to will it.

That loud neighbor that, you know, that has like the massive subwoofers, you know, and he had he turns them towards your bedroom every Friday night. We've had neighbors like this and I have tried my best to will compassion, but all I have is rocks in my hands or I'm trying to find the cable where that thing is plugged in so that I can like snip the wires. You can't you can't will that kind of love, that kind of compassion.

But neighbors like that can help you grow in love if you're up for that. Right. Church is a community.

It's another form of community where we call it family. And some of us, that's a nightmare word family, depending on what kind of experience you've had in your family. But, you know, Bonhoeffer addresses this and life together and he talks about community as a wish dream, the ideal of community.

And he has this little phrase within the book, he says, to love community is to destroy community. But to love the brethren, to love the brothers and sisters is to build community. Thus, he's saying, if your ideal of community is community.

Disembodied, kind of like the Charlie Brown kind of thing, I love humanity, it's just people I can't stand. You know, everybody loves church and loves community, but it's those people in the church, you see, but the church is people, right? It's not this gymnasium, thank God, but, you know, we're as glorious people, we're Zion, where God is shining forth. And so these are various little crucibles where God, by his Holy Spirit, the love of God that's been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit whom he has given us.

And so there's the source, the love of God has been poured into us so that we might live together in community. Marriage is another context where we learn how to love. And where we learn how to love more exclusively in an exclusive relationship where Paul tells us husbands love your wives as Christ loved the church.

And what gave himself up for in the Orthodox marriage ceremony, there's this there's this part where actually they put crowns on the heads of those getting married and their martyrs crowns. And there's this understanding that marriage is a form of martyrdom, husbands love your wives as Christ loved the church. And gave himself up, there are daily deaths that we have to walk through to have a good marriage and husbands have to go first.

Even when Paul says, well, he starts out with submission in marriage, he says. Submit one to another. There's a mutuality there, right? Husbands and wives mutually submitting one another.

And then he addresses the wives, wives submit to your husbands, but it doesn't say to the husband to quote that scripture to the wives. It can't be submission unless there's a freedom for the wife to do it without the husband telling her. It never says for the husband to use that as a submission tool.

Paul addresses the wife, he says, you've got the freedom not to do this because, you know, you can't love without absolute freedom. There must be freedom in order to love. Jesus freely gave himself up on the cross, no one placed him there, he said.

So you get that, though, I mean, that's why submission is an act of love, because there's full freedom in the submission where there's a mutuality going forth. Husbands and wives working out agreements and decision making. And it's me submitting to Liz and Liz submitting to me in the bond of holy matrimony where God is involved and where the Lord is leading us and giving us grace to love one another.

Back and forth. And I've never had to do you need to submit to me. Right.

I've never had to say that. Because we've always had the freedom to submit one to another. This is another act of love.

This is where we learn how to love in marriage. It's a lifetime of learning. Amen.

And so it's not just about keeping the rules, is it? Now, one last scripture and I'll close. This is how we know what love is. John is telling us right.

First, John. Everybody knows John 316. Right.

Tell me what John 316 says. Beautiful, beautiful. And that's a beautiful passage.

But most of us never memorize. First, John 316. You know what it is.

This is how we know what love is. Jesus Christ laid down his life for us and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. That's community.

That's cruciform community. Now, that's not church as the nuns have seen it. You know, yes.

But this is the church. This is the way of the cross that Bill so eloquently gave us last week. It is the way of the cross.

The way in is the way forward. It's not a one time. Oh, I came up to the altar and I met Jesus.

But salvation is an ongoing process of healing and adjustment and transformation. So I have been saved, I'm being saved and I shall be. And you know what? At the end of the journey, Paul tells us this encouraging thing.

And this is what I want to leave you with. He is able to keep you from falling. That great right there.

This is Jude. And to present you faultless. He's able to present you faultless before the presence of his glory.

Amazing. And then you may be thinking, yeah, but how about Matthew 25, the sheep and the goats and all that stuff? Well, I'll pull out one thing, Matthew 25, because we will be judged on how we visited number one, those in prison. Right.

Jesus is saying when you did it unto me, you did it unto the least of these. Think about this, we will be judged based on how we treated those who broke all the rules. We'll be judged based on how we treat those who break all the rules.

Because we're all breaking the rules. And so when we visit the prisoner or when we visit the poor, the needy or however, it's not a condescending act, but it's a coming along side. Right, because we understand our common broken humanity, that's what we're all unified in.

In Christ and outside of Christ, we're all commonly broken human beings that are screaming for attention. And so Mother Teresa, in all of her beautiful ministry to the poor, realized that people needed above food, above charity. Above everything that she's noted for doing, people need to know that they're loved, that they're respected as human beings, and she was able to show that.

And what if the nuns and O.N.E.S., so a church that was able to pull all that off, where we're not calling the world to live at the same standard that Jesus has placed on the church. We have grace, you don't, so good luck. You know, if we expect the world to live at the same standard and produce in Washington, D.C., the same policies and all of that, there's a difference here.

I mean, we've been given grace. We're under the grace of God, which enables us to learn how to love with the love of God. How are we doing? It's a challenge, isn't it? But he is able to keep you from falling and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with, on that day, exceeding joy.

That's what it says. The day of judgment. Is that the way you feel it? Go learn the power of grace, if not.

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

---

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/28/SID28620.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/michael-flowers/im-spiritual-but-not-religious-the-new-gnosticism/>

# *Grow in Your Walk with Christ*

---

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

**[www.sermonindex.net](http://www.sermonindex.net)**