

SPIRITUAL SETUPS

~Presuppositions About God and Us that set us up for differing views about spirituality~

The following sets of ideas contain different presuppositions or assumptions that function as foundation ideas for our views about spirituality. They are our “spiritual setups.” These ideas strongly influence—some more conspicuously than others—what we believe about our relationship with God, what God has done in Christ, the activity of the Holy Spirit, and about our own spiritual capacities. These foundation ideas can also be called touchstone propositions, root metaphors, and central intuitions. They form the axioms or pieces for our “spiritual logic.”

We can think of them as “hypogoods.” The prefix *hypo* means below or under (as in hypothermia). Thus, a hypogood is a powerful underlying conviction about what we take to be a self-evident good or a good so basic that we would never even think to examine or question it. Such ideas are foundational to our beliefs about reality. These hypogoods provide a baseline for our theological traditions and Biblical spiritualities.

None of this is to imply that such ideas are merely our own constructions or inventions (though some may be). Many of them are referenced in the Bible. But how we understand and use—or do not understand and misuse—our foundational ideas can vary among us and can be badly distorted when compared against a thorough reading of Scripture. Even so, a thorough and exegetically responsible reading of Scripture has generated some different, interesting, and important differences among Christians across the centuries.

Three typical examples of foundational ideas, each from a different domain of thought, include the dignity of persons, cause-and-effect, and the universal laws of nature (e.g., gravity). We do not question that every person has intrinsic dignity and value, though this has not been a belief common to all times and cultures. We take cause-and-effect for granted though there is no way actually to prove that this principle will operate in the next physical action we observe. And though we assume the laws of nature are uniform throughout creation, this is an assumption that cannot be confirmed. (Note also the notion of privacy. Some observers believe this value is in the process of becoming a hypogood.)

The **purpose** of this document is

See how you respond to these eleven sorts of perspectives that influence our views about spirituality. You can select more than one response for any of them. The selections here are representative. Other responses not listed here are possible.

(Note: this collection of sets is not exhaustive or complete but does include many of the core convictions of the several spiritualities summarized in the companion document, Six Spiritual Profiles.)

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1. The Holy Spirit: When you talk about the leading of the Holy Spirit, you're referring to _____ a. the Spirit bringing us to faith and assurance in Jesus as the way, the truth, and the life: the Spirit leads us to Jesus as our Savior.

- ___ b. an inner testimony of the Spirit that confirms not only faith but leads us to other Biblical truths about which we need answers and clarity: creation texts, sexuality, proper worship, etc.
- ___ c. an inner testimony of the Spirit not only about faith and Biblical truth but also about ideas and decisions regarding action in the church and my own life: “The Spirit told me...”
- ___ d. the Spirit granting me enlightenment through mystical experiences for great spiritual insights about sin, spiritual struggle, the divine inner counsel of the Trinity, etc.
- ___ e. all events and outcomes that happen in the church (and the world) since God is sovereign and in control, and everything happens because God through His Spirit has made it so.
- ___ f. _____.

2. Union with Christ: When you talk about a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, you mean

- ___ a. that we have a direct, two-way union with Christ not mediated by any intervening means, modes, or assistance: “Abide in me and I in you,” Jn 15:4.
- ___ b. that Christ is in us—living, forgiving, consoling, guiding, and directing—as our alter ego and regenerated conscience: “It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me,” Gal 2:20.
- ___ c. that Christ is for us—that we have an abiding trust and reliance in Christ and what he has done for us, and this trust is created by the Holy Spirit’s activity through God’s proclaimed and enacted Word: “If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave himself up for us all, will he not also give us all things with him?” Rom 8:31-32
- ___ d. that we now know through what the Bible says that God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son so that we will—not can or might but will—have eternal life.
- ___ e. _____.

3. Creation: which of these ideas do you take for granted about God’s original creation?

- ___ a. Creation was perfect and was exactly as God intended it to be and remain.
- ___ b. Creation was complete in every way, with nothing else to add, include, or develop.
- ___ c. Creation was very good. On the 6th day God stopped and humans started their activity.
- ___ d. God finished his initiation of creation after which the processes he put in place could then begin and still continue.
- ___ e. The presence of the serpent signals us that creation was flawed or incomplete. Perhaps God intended it this way, or perhaps he put the construction site in place “in the beginning” and is still very much at work.
- ___ f. God created the universe out of nothing (*ex nihilo*), calling it into existence by the power of his word.
- ___ g. Creation itself is divine because it is integral with God himself and what he is doing.
- ___ h. Creation is not divine. Only the Creator is worthy of worship, not the creation.

4. Image of God: which of these do you take for granted regarding the human condition after the fall into sin?

- ___ a. The image and likeness of God are still entirely intact in human beings.

- b. Image and likeness are utterly destroyed and no longer reside in us in any way.
 - c. The image is broken but still in place and is still part of the human spirit.
 - d. The image is irreparably shattered. Fragments remain, but serve little use or purpose.
 - e. We retain the image in our reason and freedom. We have lost the likeness, and our holiness and immortality are gone.
 - f. Original sin is a "fender-bender."
 - g. Original sin is a "37-car-pile-up on the interstate."
 - h. Human nature is totally depraved: every aspect is debased and perverted by sin.
 - i. The Holy Spirit restores the image of God to believers, but not to unbelievers.
5. Purpose of the Bible: which of these functions do you take for granted as the Bible's use?
- a. These things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ.
 - b. "the whole counsel of God"—applying specific texts to life conduct and decisions
 - c. "the whole narrative of God"—applying Biblical principles to life
 - d. if it's mentioned in the Bible, we use it; if it's not mentioned, we avoid it
 - e. if it's mentioned in the Bible, we consider it contextually; if it's not, we are not bound
 - f. The Bible is for our salvation in Christ.
 - g. The Bible is for the life and world that has been redeemed by Christ.
6. Inerrancy and Infallibility: in which of these senses do you take the reliability of God's Word for granted?
- a. Every word of Scripture is there because God has put it there.
 - b. God the Holy Spirit uses the Scriptures without error or mistake as a means of grace to infallibly bring sinners into a trusting relationship with Christ.
 - c. Because the Bible is God's Word for salvation and life, the original manuscripts contain no factual errors since errors of any sort would compromise his truth and promises as fallible.
 - d. God has adjusted the language of the Bible so that it can fit in with man's different and changing cultures and man's changing perceptions of nature. This makes the Bible inerrant by making all God's Word and especially the Gospel available to all peoples.
 - e. While not filling in every detail of nature and history, God's selection of words in the Bible reports its recorded events with realism despite man's relativistic understanding of truth. This preserves the reality of the Gospel for all peoples.
7. Natural Revelation: to what extent do you take for granted nature and our knowledge of it as a source of information about God and faith?
- a. The heavens are telling the glory of God (Ps 19:1) – we have two "books" of revelation about God: God's Word in the Bible and God's "book of nature" in his creation.
 - b. Creation is in futility and bondage to decay (Rom 8:20) – nature now can tell us little that is reliable about God other than it's most general testimony to his power and terror.
 - c. God revealed himself in natural events in Scripture such as the flood and quails for food in the wilderness. God uses natural events to reveal his thoughts to us today.
 - d. In these last days God has spoken to us by a Son (Hebr 1:1-2) We don't look to nature or any other sources to understand the heart and mind of God.
 - e. The Spirit and Word are not bound. We cannot put God in a box. God can use any

method he chooses, including nature, to signal us about his will.

8. Special Revelation: to what extent do you take for granted that God uses special instances of revelation (visions, dreams, burning bush experiences, etc) as a source of information/insight?
- a. Again, in these last days, God has spoken to us by his Son. Though he *could* use special revelations, he does so only rarely if at all so as not to distract from Jesus' words.
 - b. We have several instances of special revelation in Acts. God continues to use these methods among Christians today who are receptive to the Holy Spirit.
 - c. For those new or weak in faith, God sometimes boosts their faith with a special experience. The more mature no longer have need for such assistance.
 - d. The new and young in faith need the milk of simple teaching. Those with a developed faith can receive meatier portions of the Spirit received directly from his indwelling.
9. Human Reason and Rationality: given our fallen sinful condition, how reliable is human reason? What role do you assume rationality plays in arriving at sound spiritual conclusions?
- a. Sin severed our relationship with God but left our reason intact. We continue to use its power for both for human problem-solving and for reasonable interpretation of the Bible.
 - b. Sin tainted all human faculties including reason. While reason is somewhat effective for some human activities, it is helpless and useless in spiritual matters.
 - c. Human reason refers to the instrumental rules and tools of logic. While we do not reason our way to a relationship with God, we use logic to think critically about that relationship.
 - d. Reason includes several human faculties including emotions, decision-making, art, etc., and the Holy Spirit engages all of these to deepen our relationship with God.
10. Mystery and the Hiddenness of God: how much of “the depth of the riches, wisdom, and knowledge of God” (Rom 11:33) do you assume are accessible to us?
- a. We know enough for our salvation. Beyond that, we must wait until heaven before we can enjoy the spiritual depths of God.
 - b. God remains hidden to the unspiritual, but “the spiritual man judges all things” and has “the mind of Christ.” (I Cor 2:15-16)
 - c. The secret things belong to God (Dt 29:29), but we can access that which God has revealed and, with the Spirit's illumination, come to deeper understandings.
 - d. We can learn to distinguish that which remains hidden from that which God has revealed in Scripture. This capacity to distinguish is itself an important spiritual advance.
11. God's chief attribute: which of God's attributes do you regard as the chief characteristic for Christian theology, spirituality, and a Biblical worldview?
- a. God's grace
 - b. his sovereignty
 - c. his holy love
 - d. his wrath against the sin that separates us from him
 - e. his justice and righteousness, esp for the down-trodden
 - f. his mercy

___g. his goodness and benevolence

___h. his transcendence and mystery

___i. his power and majesty (omnipotence, omniscience, etc.)

___j. other _____