

What spiritual qualities make for good attitudes in human life?

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The work of the spirit energizes and organizes the creation. It makes knowledge possible by truthful imagination and accurate discernment. And spirit is closely related to what social scientists call attitudes and St. Paul called the fruit of the spirit, namely "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control." (Galatians 5:22)

A Canadian philosopher, Donald Evans has written a book called [Struggle and Fulfilment: The Dynamics of Religion and Morality](#). (1992) It gives a very helpful analysis of good attitudes and bad attitudes, what Evans calls attitude-virtues and attitude-vices. Evans emphasizes trust as the attitude that is operative in almost every other good attitude and is absent in most bad attitudes. Trust has five constituent aspects: assurance, receptivity, fidelity, hope and passion. Evans explains seven other attitude-virtues that all depend to some extent on trust: humility, self-acceptance, responsibility, self-commitment, friendliness, concern and contemplation.

Here is one example of how the spiritual attitude of trust works. Trust means acceptance of what is real. This means "being open to life energies, cherishing their many manifestations...welcoming...the myriad forms of love and joy, beauty and creativity, harmony and radiance, mystery and presence, meaning and passion." (p.22) When trust is part of the presence of spirit it makes us healthy and works for happiness and hope and passion. St. Paul called love the greatest of all aspects of the spirit and Evans would not disagree. However, as theologian Paul Tillich says "Faith (trust) logically precedes love although in reality neither can be present without the other."

If the receptivity of trust is not there it is replaced by the unspiritual attitudes of wariness, hostility, resentment and miserliness, all opposites of the spirit of love.

Fidelity is an aspect of trust that is replaced by infidelity if the spirit is not there. Humility is a realistic trusting of what I can do and what I cannot do. The opposite is unspiritual self-aggrandizement or self-humiliation.

In friendliness the spirit frees a person to enter the "I-Thou" relationship of respect and love that makes true knowledge of the other possible. Without the spirit of friendliness one remains self-isolated, liable to suspicious illusions about others.

Concern is another aspect of the spirit of love. It extends good will to those with obvious need of help. It can be pastoral concern for individuals in distress or prophetic concern about social issues of many kinds. Lack of concern is the source of self-indulgence.

Finally, contemplation is a form of spiritual love, "the capacity to celebrate the sheer existence of people and things." (Evans p.149) Its opposite is to be mesmerized by self-importance and locked into crippling egotism.

What a spectacular rainbow of spirituality the fruits of the spirit present: good attitudes that occur in all human beings who may or may not be religious. Those of us who belong to a religion will say that religion strengthens and maintains attitude-virtues. That is our experience and our hope.

Someone has determined that a score of different religions contain the Golden Rule. Confucius, for example, said: "What you do not wish for yourself, do not unto others." (Sayings of Confucius, , XV 24) He calls it reciprocity. The United Church of Canada has a New Creed that is often repeated in worship services. Among other things it says "God works in us and others by the Spirit. We are called to love and serve others, to live with respect in Creation, to seek justice and resist evil." We United Church people need to remember this and let it strengthen good attitudes. Going to church and saying it regularly should help to keep it in mind. When you think of the religions with regular rituals or practices like Muslim prayers, or Sikh turbans or Hindu domestic altars or Jewish Sabbattuals one can conclude that those religions are having a regular influence on the spirituality of their followers.

The spirit is there consistently moving to make good attitudes. Why not seek it out?



Paul Newman, author of *Humanity and Spirit: Reasons for Hope* and [A Spirit Christology, Recovering the Biblical Paradigm of Christian Faith](#)