What is "Spiritualizing"?

Since we are talking about "spiritualizing" prophecy, let's give one final example that clarifies what might well be regarded as "spiritualizing" the word of God.

John saw a creature resembling a calf. We might say that this signifies the sacrifice of Christ our High Priest which he made when he offered himself to be nailed to a cross (Rev 4:7).

We might say that this is also represented in the Lamb that John saw (Rev 5:6).

That is not "spiritualizing" the vision is it?

However, suppose we took an approach something like this: —"Jesus did not literally die on the cross as a sacrifice for sins. Rather, his death was such an act of injustice that it serves to make people determined to be just, and to liberate others from injustice. The crucifixion thus became an icon of redemption."

Now that sort of statement could be regarded as "spiritualizing" because it makes figurative or symbolic what is really literally true that Christ died for our sins once and for all so that God could forgive us.

We often hear criticism that the message of Revelation (and prophecy in general) is "spiritualized". When people use the term "spiritualized" they mean that prophecy is "not taken literally".

For example where a vision in Revelation has a period of "1000 years" (Rev 20:1-3) this is supposed to represent a literal thousand years in human history.

If you say it signifies something other than that, then you are said to be "spiritualizing" and not taking God at his word.

We need some clear thinking about "taking the word of God literally" and this clear thinking is even more necessary if we are to rightly understand the book of Revelation.

Fortunately, in some cases the book of Revelation interprets itself. So these instances serve as examples of correct interpretations.