

Spirit, Soul, and Body

Part I

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In my denominational upbringing, spirit and soul were treated as being synonymous. Or at least no one ever tried to explain the difference to me. Yet when I really began studying the Bible as a young adult, I noticed again and again that the Scripture speaks at times of the spirit and at times of the soul. For example, in Mary's Magnifica, (her song of praise to the Lord,) she said, "My *soul* praises the Lord and my *spirit* rejoices in God, my Savior." (Lk 1:46 NIV, emphasis added.) Although this language is very poetic, it is also much more. I believe Mary, as a young teenaged Jewish girl, had more understanding regarding the spirit and soul than the average Christian does today.

Let's look at another Scripture.

"The Word of God is living 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." (Heb 4:12 NIV)

The fact that the Word of God *divides* the soul and the spirit means that they must be two different things.¹

Another example is when David the Psalmist wrote, "Why art thou cast down, O my Soul?" (Ps 42:5 KJV) And in the closing of the Apostle Paul's letter to the Galatians he wrote, "Brethren, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit." (Gal 6:18 KJV)

In section of his first letter to the Thessalonians he adds a third dimension to our being, the body.

"May God Himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and *body* be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Thes 5:23 NIV, emphasis added.)

Thus Scripture compels us to conclude that we are in fact triune beings, comprised of spirit, soul and body.

When I began to teach this subject I taught first about the body, then the soul and finally the spirit. Why?

¹ During my research I discovered the writings of the late 19th century author, Jessie Penn-Lewis. She opened a great vista of understanding to me with her teaching on man's spirit, soul and body. Later writers such as DeVerne Fromke expanded my understanding of this subject.

Because when we look at someone we see the body first. As we get to know the person we begin to get to know their soul. Finally, deeper still lies their spirit.

Several years ago I listened to a mature Bible teacher on this subject. He said that he used to teach the same way I did but then he learned that God sees us in the opposite way. God sees us as spirit beings first who have souls and live in bodies. That made great sense to me so I too have reversed the subject around to God's viewpoint, now calling it spirit, soul and body.

I am a spirit being. I have a soul. I live in a body. In Figure 1, the inward circle represents the spirit, the next circle represents the soul, and the outside circle represents the body. Contained in each circle are the senses or faculties of each. I will briefly explain them as we progress. For the moment, suffice to say that it is the body that makes man aware of the physical world. His soul allows him to experience self-awareness. And it is a man's spirit that allows him to have an awareness of and contact with the spiritual world.

There are four New Testament Greek words which help us understand these three spheres of our humanness. They are *pneuma*, *psyche*, *soma* and *sarks*.²

In the original Greek text, the word for spirit is *pneuma*. *Pneuma* is commonly used as the root of several English words such as pneumonia, pneumatology (the study of the Holy Spirit), and pneumatic (air driven). Hence, words beginning with *pneuma* have to do with spirit, breath or air.

The Greek word for soul, *psyche*, is another word with which we are very familiar. Words beginning with *psyche* relate to the human mind. We have a whole array of psyches in the English language. From *psyche* we get the words psychology, psychogenesis, psychotic, etc.

There is also a differentiation between spirit and soul in the original Hebrew texts. The Hebrew word for soul is *nephesh* which corresponds with the New Testament *psyche* having to do with the mind. The Hebrew word for spirit is *ruach* which corresponds to the New Testament *pneuma*.³

The Body

² Scripture references to *Pneuma* - Mat 4:1, Jn 4:23, 1 Cor 2:11; references to *Psyche* - Mat 10:28, Heb 6:19, Jas 5:20; references to *Soma* - Mat 26:12, Lk 11:34, Rom 6:6; references to *Sarks* - Mat 26:41, Rom 8:1, Gal 1:16.

³ In the valley of dry bones in Ezekiel 37:9 (KJV) the Lord said "Prophecy unto the wind," the Hebrew text says, "Prophecy unto the *ruach*," which could be translated as "spirit" or "wind." I believe the valley of dry bones Ezekiel saw was the church prior to the Reformation. As the Spirit of God began to prophesy to the spirits of this valley of dry bones, it came alive. Luther, Calvin, Zwingli and others of the Reformation era began to breath life into the church as we see it today.

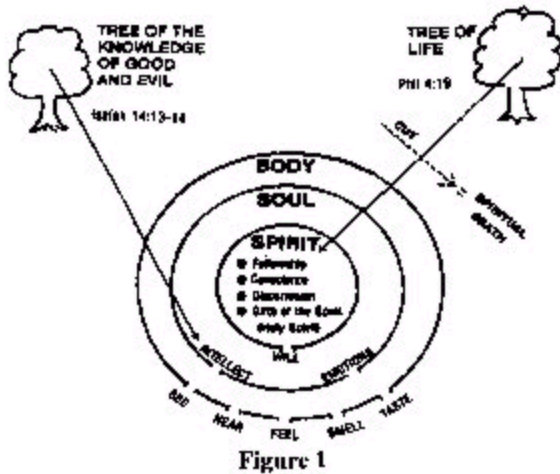


Figure 1

For body or flesh we find two Greek words most frequently used in Scripture. The first Greek word for the body is *soma*. Soma is used to describe the physical body apart from its moral attributes. The second Greek word often used to describe the base nature of man is *sarks*. Sarks is used widely in the New Testament to describe the base, unchecked desires and nature of the body. Today we use the word “flesh” as the English equivalent of sarks but I don’t think it quite conveys all the meanings of sarks.

Note that it is with the body that we maintain contact with the physical world around us. It is easy to understand its faculties which are to see, hear, feel, smell and taste. It is through these five senses of the body that we have an awareness of the physical world. Our bodies are limited by laws of physics, such as gravity, inertia, and so on.

The Soul

Looking at the soul, I believe most would agree that there are generally three faculties of our human soul: our intellect, our emotions, and, standing as a sentry to the human spirit, our human will. Any one of these faculties may be over or underdeveloped. When that happens we are out of balance. For example, we have all encountered people who are very intellectual. They are generally well educated, very logical and believe that everything of significance value can be scientifically proven and/or intellectually discerned. We have also encountered people who are highly emotional. They’re happy one moment and crying buckets of tears the next. They’re very up or very down. They are emotionally driven by the circumstances that surround them. And all of us have encountered those who are quite willful. They are easy to spot, just try to cross them! As you get to know someone, you can readily see the attributes of the soul in that person. Soon enough we can see which aspects of the soul are underdeveloped and/or overdeveloped.

The Spirit

The spirit is a little harder to sense until you know the person better. When someone is born again, the Holy Spirit takes up residence in that person’s spirit. But note from Figure 1 that a person’s spirit is alive in one way even before being born again. The problem is that this spirit is driven by the human soul. It is without Christ or the Holy Spirit. That’s why this spirit can make contact with the demonic realm while being completely dead to the things of God.

But when someone accepts Jesus as his Lord and Savior, the Holy Spirit takes up residence in this person’s body, soul and spirit. This initiates the new life in the spirit with its accompanying faculties of the spirit. The first faculty is fellowship. Have you ever noticed that your deepest *fellowship* comes with those who are born again? You can have a good, cordial, friendly relationship with an unbeliever but as far as genuine *fellowship*, including a spiritual bond, its just not there unless there is a rebirth experience in both parties.

Conscience is also a faculty of the human spirit. The conscience is a very complex subject. Its purpose is to provide proper moral guidance but there’s no guarantee. The conscience is like a computer. If it’s misprogrammed, it will produce the wrong results. On the other hand, if the human conscience is properly taught, it performs well in providing proper moral guidance. Remember when God told the Jews that they were to teach their children under all circumstances, including when they were walking along the road? They were to talk about the Scripture, they were to recite the Scripture, and they were to memorize Scriptures. They were even to put it in little boxes (frontlets) tied to their heads and to put it on their arms in phylacteries. (See Deu 6.)

Why did God give the Israelites this command? Because in so doing, He was programming the conscience of His people throughout each generation. He was making a way to increase the fellowship between Himself and His children. He was also providing through natural channels a means to increase or nourish the spiritual man. That is why it is still so important for us to teach the Scripture to our children. If we don’t teach Scripture to our children, that is, program our children’s minds, their consciences are going to be short-circuited. They are not going to be very old before they begin to hear from their friends that 51% determines what is morally right or wrong. The majority says it’s all right to do thus and so, so that means it’s OK. No longer is it, “thus saith the Lord.” But if we do our job by teaching our children the word of God and His principles, then God will do His part by guiding them through their consciences.

The third faculty is called discernment. A certain amount of spiritual discernment is something that God

gives every born again believer upon rebirth. But that discernment only grows and sharpens as the believer exposes himself to the Word, to Bible teaching, to prayer, to more mature Christians, and to God Himself. I have known people with very keen discernment. Someone may come along and say, "God is saying to do this and God is saying to do that." On the surface what they are saying may sound good. But someone with keen discernment will say, "Well, praise God but something is just not right." Maybe we can't identify the problem or figure out what's wrong, but this dear saint who has been developing discernment for 50 or 60 years is saying that there's something not quite right. And sure enough, time proves her to be dead right. That's discernment at work.

Do you know what a check in your spirit is? It is those occasions when there is a "caution alert" in your spirit? You were going through your normal routine and everything was just fine, when suddenly there was something in your human spirit saying, "Slow down. Stop doing this." That is discernment coming alive inside of you.

God's Creation

Once we really understand these three realms of our humanness, we see more clearly why God made us this way. God created Adam as spirit, soul and body. When He breathed into Adam, He awakened him with the breath of life. Then we see God placing Adam in the Garden. It was God's intention to supply his every need from this beautiful garden.

Yet that wasn't enough for God. In the cool of the day He would come and commune with Adam and have intelligent conversation with him. (Gen 3:8) In other words, God would fellowship with Adam at Adam's level to develop and shape his soul as well as his spirit. Adam had two responsibilities in the garden, one was in the physical realm, the other in the spiritual realm. God put Adam in the garden to dress and keep it, in other words, to physically take care of it. Yet God wanted Adam to also have a fully developed spirit, to be a mature, competent human being with whom He could fellowship on a spiritual level.

Note, I said a fully mature and competent human being. Have you ever seen a Christian who wanted to pray about everything? "I'd better pray about this or that." I once knew a man who was one of the most gifted musicians I've ever seen in my life. But as he played, sometimes even between songs, he would stop, pray and ask God what He wanted him to play next! His whole life was governed by indecision. That's not what God wants for us. When Adam went out to take care of the garden, do you suppose he prayed and asked, "Now God, which tree do you want me to trim today?" No, I believe he used his natural senses, looked with his eyes, drew logical conclusions, and said to himself, "That limb

is hanging down to the ground. I need to trim it." In other words, he would use what God gave him, his intelligence, skills, prior experience, etc. to get the job done.

Not only did God want Adam to be mature and competent in the physical world, it was also God's purpose to develop Adam in his inner man so he would become a very mature person spiritually. To what degree was he to develop spiritually? "... attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ." (Eph 4:3 NIV) God's intent and purpose was to leave Adam in the garden, continually fellowshiping with him and exposing him to His wisdom and intelligence so Adam would grow into the spiritual maturity God desires in all of us.

Tree of Life

God wants spiritual maturity for all His children. That was His purpose in Genesis and He revealed it again in Ephesians, 4. God is not fickle and His eternal purposes never change so it is still His purpose now. With Adam as the first man, God intended that all mankind would grow up into spiritual maturity.

But how was God going to accomplish this? Looking again at Figure 1, God placed a tree in the garden called the Tree of Life. In effect He said, "Adam, you may partake of this tree all you want. Anytime you want this fruit, come and get it. It's free. Take all you want." The Tree of Life symbolizes God's provision to Adam. All Adam had to do to access it was to use his free will. (In the New Testament I believe the apostle Paul associated Jesus with the Tree of Life when he told the church at Philippi, "But my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus." (Phi 4:19 NIV))

Tree of Death

But God put another tree in the Garden, the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. God told Adam "... but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it, you will surely die." (Gen 2:17 NIV) We all know the story. Eve was deceived by the serpent and eventually both Adam and Eve were expelled from the garden.

Notice when God comes speaking to man, He speaks to man's spirit. But when Satan comes, as he did in the garden to Eve, how does he approach mankind? Satan appeals to the carnal nature of man through his body and soul. He usually comes through the ears, through the eyes, through smell, through taste, and through touch. He approached Eve through the faculties of her body but he also spoke into her soul. Appealing to her intellect and pride, he said, "It's going to make you as gods. God is just jealous. He doesn't want you to be like him. Look at it. Feel it. Smell it. Taste it."

Remember, God had specifically already told Adam, "... when you eat from it you will surely die."

Gen 2:17) Satan said, “You will not surely die.” (Gen 3:4 KJV) On the surface it appears that Satan was correct. When Adam and Eve were expelled from the garden it had to be fairly early in Adam’s life. But if God says Adam died that day, we must believe God. Adam died. Since we know Adam was still talking and walking around outside the garden, we must enlarge our definition of death. What God meant was *spiritual* death. *Physical* death obviously occurred for Adam much later but there was a *spiritual* death that occurred the moment he disobeyed God.

strength and power until they finally can control our bodies and our souliness.

Adam’s/Man’s Spiritual Death

Since we are all descendants of Adam, from the time of Adam’s sin on, man’s state has been that of being born spiritually dead to the things of the Kingdom of God. But remember, man’s soul and body are still very much alive and kicking. And even in its dead state, humanly speaking, man’s spirit has a form of life. It may contact or communicate with the demonic spirit world. It is through man’s spirit that spiritist mediums receive their “mysterious” information from the spirit world.

So, now we have a horrible creature walking around on earth. It has a big powerful body with its lustful desires and it has a huge soul with its pride, intellect, and willfulness to guide it. Worse yet, if anyone is not born again, the spirit of that person is dead to the reality of Christ but it can contact the demonic realm! What a mess! And what a huge departure from God’s original plan which was to abide in man’s spirit thereby communing with him concerning all aspects of the Kingdom of God. Then man’s spirit would govern his soul and his soul would in turn govern his body.

In Part II we will continue to examine God’s plan, through Jesus, which allows our spirits to be reborn or come alive in Christ. We will also look at the struggle of our newly alive but weak little spirits to grow in

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