

Spirit, Soul and Body

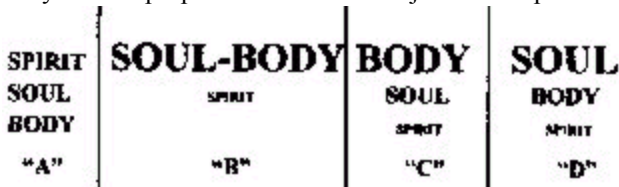
Part II

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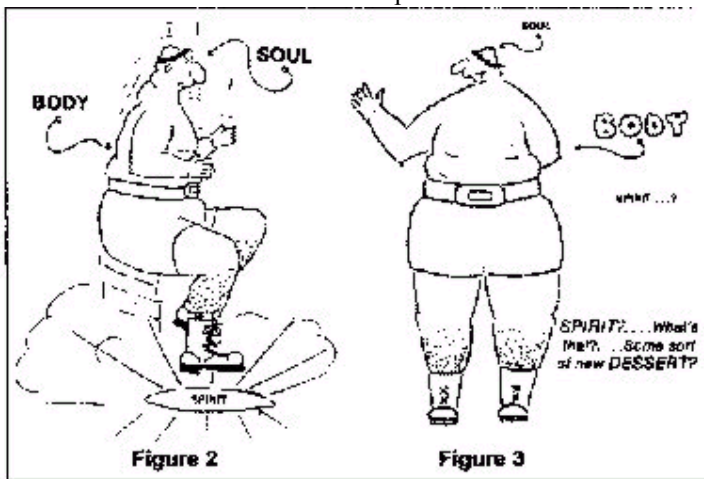
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In Part I of this teaching we examined how God created mankind with the different attributes of the spirit, soul and body. We also looked at Adam in the Garden of Eden in his original state as well as after the fall.

Remember we saw that what God intended for Adam and all mankind was to be spiritually alive having the Holy Spirit and the human spirit in control of the soul and the body. In "A" below we see a dominance of spirit with the soul and body in their proper state which is subject to the spirit.



If we submit to this hierarchy of control, then we are walking in the spirit and God directs our human spirit. Our God-directed human spirit says, "You need to do this. You need to do that." and our soul falls in line. Then our body serves the needs of the soul and the spirit.



Looking at Figures 2, 3, and 4 below, we see the various forms that have developed in man as a result of his spiritual death. Notice that even in spiritual death, the spirit is still there. But it is separated from the Tree of Life and therefore from the things of God so it is truly spiritually dead. However, it does derive some power from its human source with the soul and body in control. That's why the spirit of the unsaved can connect with the demonic realm. And by God's grace, it can connect with the Holy Spirit as in the moment of decision for salvation.

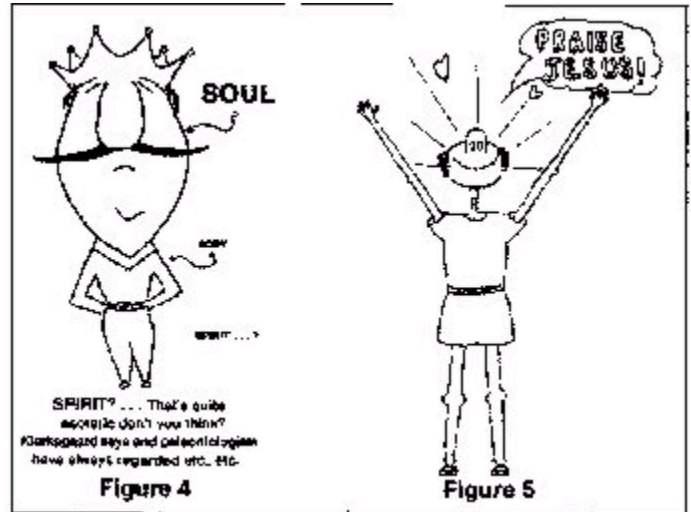


Figure 2 is a person who is overwhelmingly focused on both getting his own way as well as meeting his physical desires. Figure 3 is the person who is overly concerned with the body's demands, be they health, sensuality, overeating, etc. Have you ever known people who live to eat? Most likely they have a little wimpy soul following this big body around. And the human spirit is a very tiny little thing. Figure 4 is the person with the overdeveloped soul, that is his intellect, his emotions, and/or his will. This person has little regard for the physical or spiritual. Here you have a big powerful soul and a little wimpy body though it might be muscular. There is still the spirit down there, underdeveloped, underfed, deprived and subjugated.

Figure 5 portrays the mature, balanced Christian!

Man's Rebirth

Looking at Figures 2 through 4, we have these horrible, distorted creatures running around doing all sorts of damage. For four thousand years God had to tolerate spiritually dead mankind. What was God's plan to allow us to become spiritually alive again and to reestablish fellowship with mankind? This brings us to good, sincere, yet fearful Nicodemus in John's Gospel.

"There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night and said, 'Rabbi,' [pretend that you are Jesus and you have never heard this passage before. Listen very carefully to this statement]. "'Rabbi, we know you're a teacher who has come from God for no one could perform these miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him.' [Now Jesus' answer], 'I tell you the truth, unless a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.'" (Jn 3:1-3 NIV)

What does Jesus' answer have to do with Nicodemus' statement? They appear totally unrelated, don't they? Was Jesus ignoring Nicodemus? Was He trying to put him down by not addressing or responding to his statement? No, Jesus went directly to the heart of the matter. Let's read on.

“How can a man be born when he is old?” Nicodemus asked. ‘Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born.’ Jesus answered, ‘I tell you the truth. Unless a man is born of the water and of the spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.’” (Jn 3:4,5 NIV)

What did Jesus mean? I believe He was telling Nicodemus that being born of the water is natural birth and being born of the spirit is spiritual birth.¹ Flesh gives birth to flesh. Spirit gives birth to spirit. Nicodemus went to Jesus with an earnest heart. (We know he was earnest because he and Joseph of Arimathea were the only ones in the city who had enough courage to ask for Jesus' body after He was crucified.) Here is the answer to the seeming disconnect between Nicodemus' question and Jesus' answer. Nicodemus had *natural* questions, Jesus responded with *spiritual* answers. That's why the two were on different levels. Nicodemus said, “We know,” (*intellect*, natural knowledge.) Jesus, by His response, was saying, “I'm not going to respond to your mind, Nicodemus, because it's fruitless. But I'm going to plant a seed in your human spirit. And that seed will soon be watered by the Holy Spirit after I've been crucified, buried and resurrected. When that seed is watered, you're going to experience *spiritual rebirth* to eternal life.”

I'm certain Nicodemus left Jesus that night just as perplexed and confused as when he came if not more so. He didn't know any more in his intellect when he left than before he talked to Jesus. He was probably thinking, “What in the world was that all about? What does He mean, ‘be born again?’ or, ‘born of the spirit?’” But we see that Nicodemus' *spirit* now had something planted in it. Jesus planted the seed and left it there to germinate until His resurrection.

Remember, chapter one of the Gospel of Matthew is not the beginning of the “New Testament.” It is the beginning of the *book* or document we call the New Testament. New Testament means the new covenant. Our new covenant is in the blood of Jesus. So when did the new covenant actually begin? It was after Jesus' blood was spilled so somewhere around Matthew 28 the New Covenant truly came into force. So Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus was really in Old Testament time. Even during Jesus' earthly ministry the covenant between God and man was still that of Moses, *Old Testament*.

But when Jesus was resurrected from the dead, He opened the door and made the way for fallen mankind to be born again. At the time the Holy Spirit came and watered the seed in Nicodemus' spirit he no doubt said

something like this, “Oh! Now I understand what He meant when He said, ‘You must be born again.’”

Let's look at John's Gospel, chapter 20. The scene is the night of the resurrection when Jesus appeared behind closed doors to the disciples. Upon His appearance Jesus said,

“Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.’ And with that He breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.’” (Jn 20:21 NIV)

What was the significance of His breathing on them? Remember *pneuma*, or spirit and breath? That event of breathing the Holy Spirit into them and saying, “Receive the Holy Spirit,” caused those ten human beings to become the first recipients of “new birth” or they became “born again.”

Spirit Dominance

Now God really had a problem on His hands. He had given spiritual life to some of the human beings that look like Figures 2, 3, and 4. And that problem is still with us today! At the moment of our spiritual rebirth we still have the old man, don't we? Recall Peter's words, “Lord, though everyone forsake you, I'll die for you.” When Peter said this he still had an overdeveloped soul with a powerful will always outspoken and apparently quite emotional. But when Peter became born again, his spirit came alive and suddenly this sin/death line was jumped. At that moment Peter's tiny newly born spirit began saying for the first time, “Hey, I'm supposed to be the boss.” And the big, powerful soul responded, “What's that you're saying, boy?”

Now let's look at the people represented in Figures 2, 3, and 4, as new Christians who are struggling with the “thou shalt nots” in the Word of God. The old soul still wants to reign supreme! Our new baby Christian trips and falls and may very well get involved in blatant sin because his soul and/or body is still dominant and doesn't want to yield to his spirit. That soul or body has been the boss for a long time and simply hasn't been conquered yet. Then our new Christian comes to church on Sunday morning, prays and repents of the sins he continues to commit. His little undernourished spirit comes back up again until the next time the boys invite him out for an evening. Or Monday morning comes and the spirit is bullied down again and the same routine is repeated. This may go on for a period of time while God is beginning to work the doctrine called *sanctification* in his life. Sanctification is the *process* of restoring man back to God's order.

Doesn't this describes the Christian we often see and ask, “Is this person really saved?” Well, yes, they probably are but they have a flip-flop spirit, soul and body. The dominant force of their character is not yet the Holy Spirit guiding their human spirit. After rebirth it takes years, and I mean this literally, for the human spirit to become truly yielded to the Holy Spirit. The best way to pray for folks in this situation is to ask that God's Spirit

¹ I believe that some have struggled over the meaning of the phrase “born of the water,” trying somehow to tie the meaning of Jesus' statement to the doctrine of water baptism. Following one of the basic rules of biblical interpretation, that of allowing the context to interpret Scripture, Jesus' very next statement, “flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to the spirit” makes it quite plain that “born of the water” is referring here to the process of natural childbirth.

will dominate their spirit and that their spirit will quickly come to dominate their soul and bodily desires.

This process is part of God's plan, too. The instant someone is born again we like to see them become mature in Christ. Such cases are rare, rare exceptions. I know a young man whose stated ambition was to die while high on drugs. He would consume every drug he could get his hands on. A friend took him to a Catholic Charismatic meeting and God sovereignly saved him, filled him with the Spirit, and delivered him from his habit all in one night! The next night he was out in the streets where he used to go to get high, preaching the gospel to his friends. He didn't know three Scripture verses but he was out there preaching. He truly was delivered from drugs. Yet he still had problems in many areas of his life. I didn't condemn him. I encouraged, taught and occasionally admonished him. God was doing His work in his human spirit all the while.

Let me say here that I don't believe the Lord will wait forever for a person to start to really move along in the sanctification process. Nor do I think the church should continue to cut slack to a believer who has been born again a number of years and who wilfully continues involving him or herself in sin. At some point the human will can begin to rebel against what a believer knows is the word of God as well as the convicting inner work of the Holy Spirit. When this occurs some sort of personal discipline may need to be imposed on our wayward Christian.

One of the biggest mistakes in the church today is taking a relatively new Christian, generally a man, who is intellectually, physically, emotionally, and/or psychologically mature in every worldly sense of the word, and who is prominent in the community, and quickly give him prominence in the church. This is a terrible mistake! His discernment, his judgment, and his spiritual maturity are that of a small child. We've all seen it done and we've all seen the results. To do this is to bring the world's standards into the church. The apostle Paul said not to even make anyone a deacon unless he or she has been tried and proven, proven through a lifestyle

that evidences that the human spirit is in control of the soul and body and that the Holy Spirit is in control of all three.

Question: How does the spirit get strengthened?

Answer: By nourishment. The process is not really much different than nourishing the body. The body must have certain foods in the right proportion and balance in order to grow. We all know how to take care to provide our bodies with what we need. I once heard a preacher say, "We will lay out a banquet for our natural man on a table from wall to wall with sweets, meat, and everything imaginable. Then we'll toss our spiritual man a small candy bar and forget about him." Translation: We may pray a few minutes each day or each week or read one or two Scripture verses and in so doing we're tossing our spiritual man a candy bar while our natural man is saying, "Hey, let's go get some *real* food!"

Of course, a big part of this process is getting the will under control. It is very encouraging to know that even though someone has a strong will, God has a stronger will. "For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose." (Phi 2:13 NIV) We have free will and I'm glad we do but God knows just how and when to tighten the screws. A half turn every day and after two or three weeks, or three months, or three years, we're asking, "What was it you were saying, Lord? Where do we start? Only just take this thing off my head!" He doesn't force our will, He just makes us willing.

The spirit is strengthened through the Word, through prayer, through fellowship with other believers, through preaching, through teaching, through communion, and through worship. Then exercise, exercise, exercise these practices. Eventually we strengthen our spirit to the point that allows Christ, through the Holy Spirit, to rule over our human spirit. Jesus said, "I came to do thy will, O God." (Heb 10:7 KJV) When we can honestly say, "I came to do thy will, O God," and mean it, the placing of our soul and body in subjection to our spirit is becoming a reality! Hallelujah!

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Rev. Jim Murphy and his wife, Carolyn, of Blue Jay, California, United States, head Hundredfold Ministries, International. They write Christian teaching literature and travel to the Developing Nations of the world teaching Christian leaders. Hundredfold Ministries, Int'l is a cross-denominational Christian ministry dedicated to strengthening the church in the Developing Nations of the world.

Hundredfold Ministries, Int'l provides in-country Bible school courses and leadership training seminars. The classes and seminars are taught by seasoned, anointed teachers. The subject matter is directed towards the development and maturing of Christian leaders. The goal of the Ministry is to produce leaders who will be better equipped to lead and direct national churches.

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