

How 'Soul' and 'Spirit' Are Divided

by Jessie Penn-Lewis

The sermon emphasizes the importance of the dividing of soul and spirit, which is necessary for becoming a truly spiritual man, living according to God in the spirit.

Scripture: Hebrews 4:12

Topics: "Spiritual Transformation", "Dividing Soul and Spirit"

Description

Jessie Penn-Lewis emphasizes the critical distinction between the soul and spirit as outlined in Hebrews 4:12, illustrating how the Word of God acts as a sharp sword to divide these two aspects of our being. She explains that believers must yield to Christ, our High Priest, who discerns the thoughts and intents of the heart, enabling us to live spiritually rather than soulishly. The process involves surrendering our entire being, engaging in persistent prayer, and taking up our cross daily to allow the Spirit of God to work within us. By cooperating with the Holy Spirit, believers can experience a transformation that aligns their soul with the spirit, leading to a life that reflects Christ's love and purpose. Ultimately, this journey requires a commitment to discern and separate the soulish influences from the spiritual life empowered by Christ.

Transcript

" The word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword and piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and quick to discern the thoughts and intents of the heart ... "(Hebrews 4:12, R.V.).

This remarkable passage in Hebrews 4:12 clearly sets forth the distinction between soul and spirit, the need of the "dividing " of one from the other and the means whereby this is done, so that the believer may become a truly " spiritual " man, living "according to 'God in the spirit" (I Peter 4:6). Pember points out, in regard to this passage, that here the Apostle "claims for The Word of God, the power of separating and, as it were, taking to pieces, the whole being of man, spiritual, psychic, soulish and corporeal even as the priest flayed and divided limb from limb the animal for the burnt offering...."

Fausset writes, "the Word of God is 'living' and powerful 'energetically efficacious (Greek)' reaching through even to the separation of the animal-soul from the spirit,the higher part of man "; "piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow .. . distinguishing what is spiritual from what is carnal and animal in him; the spirit from the soul ". " The Word of God divides the closely joined parts of man's immaterial being, soul and spirit..." An image taken from the "literal dividing of joints and penetrating to so as to open out) the marrow by the priest's knife."

These words show how suggestive and full of teaching, the whole passage to the believer whose eyes are opened to the danger of the soul-life dominating him, instead of the Spirit of God acting freely from the shrine of his spirit.

The question at once arises in a believer who desires to be a spiritual man-" What am I to do? How can I discern what is soulish in my walk and service? " The text we are considering shows that we are to yield ourselves to our High Priest Who has "passed into the heavens" and He, before Whom "all things are naked and laid open" (Hebrews 4:13), will exercise His office of Priest and wield the sharp two-edged knife of His Word, piercing to the dividing of soul and spirit within us, discerning even the "thoughts and intents of the heart". The "Greek for ` thoughts ' refers to the mind and feelings, and the word ` intents ', or rather ` mental conception ', refers to the intellect ", again writes Fausset in his commentary.

The High Priest, Who Himself became Man, that He might be a "merciful and faithful High Priest" (Hebrews 2:17, R.V.) able to sympathise and touched with the very feeling of our physical and moral weakness (Hebrews 4:15, Greek), is the only One Who can take the sacrificial knife and patiently "divide" the soulish life from its penetration into thoughts and feelings, the intellect and even mental conceptions. What a work to be done! How can the animal-soul-life, penetrating the very " joints and marrow" be tracked and dislodged so that the spirit indwelt by the Holy Spirit may dominate and every thought be brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ? Our High Priest will not fail nor be discouraged in bringing forth victory out of judgment in all those who commit themselves to His hands and trust Him to wield the knife of His living Word by the Spirit of God.

But what are the steps? What is man's part? How is the believer to co-operate with the High Priest in this great and delicate work?

(1) By definite surrender of the whole man as a burnt sacrifice laid upon the altar of the Cross, with the entire consent of the will irrevocably given that the High Priest, Christ Jesus, should by His Spirit bring the entire being into conformity to His death (Philippians 3:10) i.e., that He should never stay His hand until the animal-soulish life is " divided" from the "spirit", so that the man may become a vessel into which and through which the inflow and outflow of the Spirit of God may flow freely from the shrine of the spirit.

(2) By continual, persistent, watchful prayer and searching the Scriptures, praying that the keen edge of the Word of God may be applied to all that is of the soulish life; the believer implicitly obeying the Word right up to the light given, according to I Peter 1: 22, R.V., "Ye have purified your souls in your obedience to the truth".

(3) By the daily taking of the Cross in the circumstances of life so that the believer has the entire victory over sin and the "works of the flesh", whilst the Spirit of God is doing the more minute work of separating the spirit from the soul and teaching the believer how to walk after the spirit.

How the separation between soul and spirit is carried out in those who thus lay themselves upon the altar (the Cross) and trust the Heavenly High Priest to use the sword of His Word as a knife to do the work in them we see in the calls to the Cross given by the Lord Jesus to His disciples when He walked the earth as man.

I. The Cross and the soul affections "He that doth not take his Cross and follow after Me, is not worthy of Me. He that findeth his life (psuche, soul-life) shall lose it: and he that loseth his life (psuche, soul-life) for My sake shall find it" (Matthew 10:38,39, R.V. and margin).

This passage occurs in the charge given to the twelve when the Lord sent them forth in His Name. He warns them that a

"man's foes shall be those of his own household" and shows that their first following Him in the path of the Cross will mean a "sword" in their family life, when the claims of Christ and the family are not in accord. The " sword " to divide the soulish and the spiritual in the affections generally comes in a clash between the known will of God and the will of the loved ones, which compels the believer to " take his cross ", i.e., " go forth even to crucifixion " and follow the Lord, even though it causes " variance " with father or mother or the " own household " .

It was so with Christ Himself. He Who had said, " Honour your father and your mother," had to say, " Who is My mother and My brethren? " when they judged Him to be " beside Himself ", as He was occupied with His Father's business. The taking of the Cross in this way and the choosing to be obedient to Christ before family claims, means to the natural affections such suffering that it is as a sword piercing the soul, so that in very truth the soul-life in the affections is " lost " and the purified vessel of the " soul " in the aspect of its affections becomes open to the inflow of the love of God by the Spirit, whereby the believer loves the loved ones no longer for himself but for God and in and through God.

The lower life is exchanged for the higher, i.e., the " soul " in its personality and vessel-capacity remaining the same

" soul ", but now dominated from the spirit by the Spirit of Christ-the Last Adam-and not by the fleshly soul-life of the First Adam (see I Corinthians 15:45-48).

In Luke's Gospel the sword-effect of the Cross in connection with the soul's affections is more plainly defined for the Lord uses the word " hate " and says, " if any man cometh unto Me and HATETH not his own father and mother and wife and children and brethren and sisters, yea and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple " (Luke 14: 26). Here again the word " life " is "psuche "-i.e., the animal or soul-life. Matthew gives the test for the will in its choice of God or the loved ones first, in the words " loveth more than Me "; but Luke records the language used by the Lord which describes the ATTITUDE of the wholly devoted follower of Christ to the soul-life in its permeating of the affections-an attitude which is necessary for their purification. Such a believer must " hate " his " own life (psuche) " in its penetration to family relationships, so that he may have " soul " divided from " spirit " in this sphere, and, in the " hating " and " losing " of his soul-life, find the higher and purer love life of Christ permeate the close family ties, ordained and honoured by God Himself through His Son in human form.

2. The Cross and soulish self-interest "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself .. . For whosoever would save his life (R.V. m. soul) shall lose it and whosoever shall lose his life (soul) for My sake shall find it " (Matthew 16: 24-26). Later on Matthew again records a similar statement by the Lord, but this time drawn forth by Peter's words to Him in regard to His own Cross. Peter had said, " Pity Thyself," but the Lord replies that the path of following Him meant " DENY HIMSELF ". Here is the soul-life summed up in the word "himself ", when shown in self-centeredness in any form, i.e., self-pity, self interest, self-shrinking from suffering, in short, all that would make a man " save his life ", rather than go forward in Divine strength to pour out his " soul " unto death for others.

The choosing of the path of the Cross for Christ's sake means the " losing " of the fleshly soul-life, to have the pure Divine life of Christ in its capacity for sacrifice " found " and poured out through the soul-vessel for the blessing of the world.

The Evangelist Mark repeats again the words as given in Matthew's Gospel (Mark 8:34-36), and Luke does the same with the addition of the word " daily ", showing that the Cross in connection with the out-pouring and sacrifice of the soul-life needs to be of daily choice and efficacy and is a distinctly different aspect of the Cross to that given in Romans 6, and the other Epistles, where the death of the old creation is to be apprehended as a COMPLETED FACT, made true as the believer " reckons " himself " dead indeed unto sin " and " alive unto God in Christ Jesus ".

3. The Cross and soulish grasping of earthly things "Remember Lot's wife. Whosoever shall seek to gain his life (soul) shall lose it but whosoever shall lose his life (soul) shall save it alive" (Luke 17:32,33, R.V. m.).

Here we find again the same emphatic words repeated by the Lord in connection with self-interest and the natural instinct of self-preservation and self-grasping of earthly possessions. " Remember Lot's wife," says the Lord Jesus, as He points out the natural tendency of the soul-life to turn back in the hour of danger to save the " goods ", and not to let them go.

The law of gaining the higher spirit-life is to " lose " so as to " gain ". The soulish-life seeks earthly treasures, but these must be renounced and the " dividing of soul and spirit " in this connection will come about again by the attitude of the believer when in the vicissitudes of life the test comes. " They took joyfully the spoiling of their goods," is written of some in days of trial (Hebrews 10: 34) This attitude to " possessions " is sometimes a greater manifestation of Divine grace than the sacrifice of life.

The renouncing of the soul-life in its innate clinging to the things of earth is a necessity for the " gaining " of the Spirit-life of Christ, which, pouring into the vessel of the soul from the spirit, as the seat of the God-consciousness, brings with it such an assurance of abundance in God that earth's treasures are held lightly and are easily forsaken in the times of testing which come to all men.

The undue absorption of the children of God in " house " and " goods " to the neglect of the Kingdom of God, is manifestly an aspect of the " soul " and not the spirit-life and this clinging, or over-occupation with the necessary affairs of earth, needs the knife-work of the Great High Priest in the " dividing of soul and spirit ", so that the affections of His blood-bought ones may be set on things above, in fulfilment of the word : "for ye died and your life is hid with Christ in God" (Colossians 3: 1-4.).

4. The Cross and soulish self-love "He that loveth his life (soul) loseth it: and he that hateth his life (psuche-soul-life) in this world shall keep it unto life (zoe-the higher life) eternal " (John 12:25, R.V.).

Here we have the contrast between the soul-life and the higher life of the spirit manifested in and through the soul-personality, very clearly defined. The soul-life is now shown as summed up in SELF-LOVE-he that "loveth his soul "-which simply means himself. We have seen the soul-life penetrating family affections and manifested in self-pity, self-protection, self grasping of the goods of earth-in brief, summed up in " My family; Myself; My goods "-with self-love in and through all.

All this, the Master says, means loss-eternal loss-for it all comes from the life derived from the First Adam, manifested through the personality of the soul, and prevents that " soul " being dominated by the spirit and giving expression to the pure Divine life of the Last Adam -the Lord from heaven.

Is it " sin " to keep it? Yes, WHEN THE LIGHT COMES, AND WE SEE THE TRUTH. In a deeper sense also it is sin although unknown sin-for all the life of the First Adam -i.e., the " natural man "-has been

poisoned by sin and even in those who apprehend " death to sin " as set forth in Romans 6 and in consequence cease to " walk after the flesh " in manifestation of the " works of the flesh ", it penetrates into the realm of the affections and shows itself in self-love, self-pity, self-grasping and other phases of self-centredness. This must be called SIN, although in less discernible form, working through intellect, emotions and affections.

The Pathway of Freedom

" The love of Christ constraineth us because we thus judge that One died for all, therefore all died and He died for all, that they which live should no longer live unto themselves, but unto Him ... " (2 Corinthians 5:14,15 R.V.).

The work of dividing soul and spirit is done by the Lord Himself, through His Spirit wielding the Word of God, as a living, active " sword ", which penetrates to the inmost recesses of the immaterial being of man.

But the MAN HIMSELF HAS HIS PART TO DO. The Spirit of God cannot carry out His work without the believer's consent and co-working. Briefly summarised, the conditions of co-operation on the man's side are as follows:

(1) The believer needs to see the necessity of the dividing of soul and spirit and as the sacrifice is laid on the altar, definitely consent to the work being done.

(2) The will of the believer must be steadily placed on God's side in the experimental working out of the " dividing " as the circumstances of life require it.

(3) The basis of the Cross as set forth in Romans 6:1-14 must be steadily maintained. As the believer reckons himself " dead indeed unto sin " (Romans 6:11) and actively carries out the command not to " LET SIN reign " in his mortal body, thus finding the "flesh" crucified with its " affections and lusts " (Galatians 5: 24), so must he now reckon himself dead indeed unto sin in its more subtle forms through the soul-life, i.e., the evil " self " conditions, such as inordinate self-love, self-pity, etc.

(4) The believer fulfilling these conditions must now carry out in practice his light, purpose and faith and steadily be faithful to all that he is shown by the Spirit of God, refusing deliberately all intrusion of the soul life and choosing to open himself to the higher life of Christ in his spirit.

(5) The believer must seek in all things to " walk after the spirit "; to discern what is spirit and what is soul, so as to follow the one and refuse the other; to understand the laws of the spirit so as to walk in them and become in reality a

" spiritual " man.

As the believer fulfils these conditions he becomes in truth a new man for the power of the Cross as the sword of the Spirit has been wielded by the hands of the heavenly High Priest, piercing to the dividing of soul and spirit; it has tracked the soul-life even to joints and marrow, to the inner recesses of the soul in the source of its activity and the very " marrow " of its affections; yes, it has even discerned the soulish life in mind and feelings; and in the very conceptions of the mental powers. Now the believer more and more joyfully and easily walks according to the written Word, and takes up the " Cross " as brought to bear upon him daily in the providence of God. Apprehending with ever clearer vision the fact of his death with Christ upon the Cross, the spirit of the man is more and more divided from the soul and joined in essential union

with the Risen Lord who is a Life-giving Spirit-so that he becomes " one spirit " with Him and his human spirit a channel for the outflow of the Spirit of Christ to a needy world.

* " We have become so accustomed to the expression ' taking up one's Cross ' in the sense of being prepared for trials ... that we are apt to lose sight of its primary and proper sense here-a preparedness to go forth even to crucifixion "-Fausset.

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