

Soul and Spirit

by Jessie Penn-Lewis

The ignorance of Christians concerning the distinction between soul and spirit is a primary cause of the lack of full growth in the spiritual life, and understanding this distinction is crucial for regeneration and spiritual growth.

Scripture: Genesis 2:7, John 3:3, John 6:63, John 14:26, John 16:13, 1 Corinthians 2:14, Ephesians 2:12, Ephesians 4:18, 1 Thessalonians 5:23, Hebrews 4:12

Topics: "Spiritual Growth", "Distinction between Soul and Spirit"

Description

Jessie Penn-Lewis emphasizes the critical distinction between the soul and spirit, arguing that many Christians lack understanding of this difference, which hinders their spiritual growth. She explains that the soul serves as a medium between the spirit and body, and that the fall of man has led to a confusion where the soul often dominates the spirit. Penn-Lewis highlights the importance of the Holy Spirit in teaching believers this distinction, enabling them to experience true spiritual understanding. She warns that without this knowledge, Christians may be deceived by false imitations of spiritual life. Ultimately, she calls for a return to the biblical understanding of man's tripartite nature to restore proper order in spiritual life.

Transcript

(Hebrews 4: 12)

THE ignorance of Christians concerning the distinction between " soul " and " spirit " is very general, and is a primary cause of the lack of full growth in the spiritual life in many devoted and earnest believers. G. H. Pember points out as the cause of this ignorance the popular phraseology of " soul and body ", which has caused a deficiency in the English language. He says that although we have the nouns " spirit and soul " which are too often treated as synonyms-we have no adjective from the latter, with the consequence that the omission of such an adjective has almost concealed man's tripartite nature in the versions of the English Bible, where the " Greek word which signifies ` pertaining to the soul ' " is sometimes rendered " natural " and sometimes " sensual " (see I Corinthians 2:14, James 3:15, Jude 19).

Of course Greek scholars know well the different words in the original which stand for spirit pneuma; soul-psyche; flesh-sarx; but to the generality of Christians these distinctions are veiled, with the result that they are unable to discriminate in experience between things that differ, and yet which vitally belong to their peace. The need of knowledge is becoming of more than academic importance, for the fallen

Archangel, with his superhuman wisdom, knows the make-up of human beings, and is now, as an angel of light, bringing to bear all the power of the knowledge which he possesses, upon counterfeiting the working of the Holy Spirit, and CREATING IN THE REALM OF THE SOUL such perfect imitations of the pure life of the Spirit of God indwelling the man's spirit, that the most earnest Christians are liable to be deceived. It is therefore necessary that the teaching of the Scripture upon the distinction between soul and spirit, should be brought within the range of the apprehension of the youngest believer, and made as clear as possible from the Word of God.

The writer is not attempting to meet the need of those who are able to go direct to the Greek Testament, and read for themselves, but to assist those who must have other help, as they earnestly seek the aid of the Spirit of God to enable them to grasp the truth, and receive spiritual understanding of spiritual facts set forth in the Scripture as necessary for their growth in life and godliness. Let the reader, then, pause at this point, and in an act of faith take the promise of John 14: 26-" The Holy Spirit ... shall teach you all things . . ." and John 16:13, "He will guide you into all truth " with confidence that the Spirit of God will fulfil His office to the teachable child of God. The Holy Spirit is able to teach the believer in experience the distinction between " soul and spirit ", without his ever knowing the truth intellectually; and vice versa, the scholar may see clearly the difference as expressed in the Greek without knowing all that the words mean experimentally-i.e., he may hold the truth in mental instead of spiritual power, and then it is but the letter of the Word without the spirit. Moreover, the believer who has been taught experimentally by the Holy Spirit the dividing of " soul and spirit " before apprehending the distinction with his intelligence, is better able to understand, and " rightly divide the word of truth ", than the reader of the Greek who is untaught of God, for back of the words in the Scriptures there are spiritual verities which cannot be understood by the natural man-i.e., the " pertaining to the soul " man (lit. I Cor.2: 14)-and can only be known by revelation.(See I Cor.2:10-12)

But first as to the missing adjective ! G. H. Pember says that an attempt is being made to use the Greek word " psychic " for expressing in English the adjective for soul. The word is, however, too " Greek ", so to speak, to commend itself for general use. In connection with ames iii. 15, Pember uses the word "soulish ", and this seems more nearly to express what is needed. Stockmayer also uses this same word-" soul-ish "-to signify that which " pertains to the soul ", for he says in reference to i Corinthians ii. 14, " the Greek text has it, the ` soulman ', or ` soulish-man '. As spiritual is the adjective of spirit, so is soulish the adjective of soul ". The word " soulish " therefore might well be generally accepted by English readers as the missing adjective, which will enable us to speak of the " soulish " as well as the " spiritual "(ICor. 3:1) or " carnal " (fleshy), Christian, and the meaning be understood. For this purpose it will so be used in the present treatise.

As to the distinction between soul and spirit, Gall points out that not only in the English language is the distinction made, but in every classic language from Hebrew downward. In the English New Testament two passages only bring out the distinction clearly, viz., Hebrews iv. 12Dividing soul and spirit "-and I Thessalonians 5:23Sanctify you, spirit, soul and body ". These two, however, are sufficient, for the English reader, to see that man is tripartite, and not only " soul " and " body ".

The " soul " (psuche) and its functions

The next point for consideration is the question, What is the ` soul' in distinction from the spirit, and what are its functions ? " Here some quotations from other writers will help us before we turn to the Scriptures, to discover what the Apostle means by the " dividing of soul and spirit ", and thus more clearly understand

how spirit, soul and body " can be sanctified, and preserved blameless unto the coming of the Lord.

Tertullian, one of the Fathers who wrote in the early centuries of the Christian era, calls the " flesh "-or physical being-the " body of the soul ", and the soul the vessel of the spirit ". The soul stands between the spirit and the body, for " direct communication between spirit and flesh is impossible; their intercourse can be carried on only by means of a medium " *-the " soul " being that medium.

The " soul was the meeting place, the point of union between body and spirit ", also writes Dr. Andrew Murray. " Through the body, man-the living soul (Gen.2:7)-stood related to the external world of sense "; through the " spirit he stood related to the spiritual world ".

Pember explains the function of each very clearly when he says, " The body we may term the sense-consciousness; the soul the self-consciousness; and the spirit the God-consciousness ". Again he says, the body " gives us the use of the five senses "; and the soul, the " intellect which aids us in the present state of existence, and the emotions which proceed from the senses ", whilst the spirit is the highest part which " came directly from God, and by which alone we apprehend and worship Him ".

Dr. Andrew Murray accords with this, when he writes that the gifts with which the soul was endowed when man became a " living soul ", were those of " consciousness, self-determination, or mind and will "; and these were to be but the " mould or vessel " into which the life of the spirit was to be received. Dr. Murray also says " The spirit is the seat of our God-consciousness; the soul of our self-consciousness; the body of our world-consciousness. In the spirit, God dwells; in the soul, self; in the body, sense ".f

Again, Pember writes concerning the creation of man, and how the tripartite being was formed-" God first moulded the senseless frame, and then breathed into it the ' breath of lives ' (Genesis 2:7. The original is in the plural)," and this " may refer to the fact that the inbreathing of God produced a two-fold life-sensual (in the meaning of pertaining to the senses) and spiritual...." He adds, in a footnote, that possibly the meaning of the use of the plural in the " breath of lives ", is that " the inbreathing of God became the spirit, and at the same time by its action upon the body, produced the soul ".

Briefly, we see that all these writers practically define the " soul " as the seat of the personality, consisting of the will and the intellect or mind; a personal entity standing between the " spirit " with its openness to the spiritual world, and the " body "-open to the outer world of nature and sense-having the power of choice as to which world shall dominate or control the entire man. For instance, when Adam walked in the garden of Eden, the spirit breathed into him by God dominated his " soul "-i.e., intellect, mind, will-and through the vessel the " soul " shone out in, and through, the earthly tabernacle of clay-the body-making it luminous with light, impervious to cold and heat, and able perfectly to fulfil the object of its creation.

The Fall of Man

But-alas, that a " but " has to be written-man fell, and after a time the result was seen as described by the Lord Himself in His words, " Every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually " (Genesis 6:5, R.V.). The " Fall " apparently began in the intellectual department of the soul, for it is said that Eve saw that " The tree was to be desired to make one wise " (Genesis 3:6 R.V.). The appeal of the serpent was not made to the vessel of clay, or the outer man, for the body was then perfectly dominated by the Spirit; but it was directed to the intellect and understanding of man, and based on a lawful desire to advance in knowledge and power in the unseen realm of another world. " Ye shall be as God," said the serpent, not " ye shall be as the beasts ", created by God ! The temptation was KNOWLEDGE, and the

very knowledge which probably God meant to give in due season, but grasped before its time, and out of God's will.

The words of the Apostle Paul in I Corinthians 1: 19, are therefore very significant in connection with this aspect of the Fall, for the " word of the Cross ", is said by the Apostle to be the power of God to " destroy the wisdom of the wise ". Since sin entered through the avenue of the intellect, salvation comes by a Cross which destroys the fallen " wisdom " by the very acceptance of its message, for the preaching of " Christ crucified " is to the wisdom of men " foolishness " (I Cor. 1:18-25) Thus God, in His wisdom, provides salvation in a way which deals with the cause by which the Fall came about ! Therefore Paul writes, " If any man thinketh that he is WISE among you ... let him become a fool, that he may become wise, for the WISDOM OF THIS WORLD IS FOOLISHNESS WITH GOD " (I Cor. 3: 18,19 R.V.)

Eve, moreover, fell through yielding to the very temptation which had caused the fall of Satan himself, for she had said " I will be like the Most High . . . " (Isa. 14:13,14) The tempter knew how to attract Eve, by suggesting to her something higher than she possessed, for she was limited by a body made of dust, but had a soul capable of appreciating knowledge and growth, through the higher part of the tripartite being.

The full effect of the downfall we do not see until years afterward, when the record of the condition of the race shows that the road down was rapid, for the " wisdom " which gave knowledge of good and evil in the Garden of Eden reached its ultimate in due course, in a complete sinking into " flesh ", so that the part of man's tripartite nature which he had in common with the animal creation, obtained the upper hand. Then it was that God looked down upon the fallen race, and said, " My Spirit shall not abide in man ... for in their going astray they are flesh " (Gen. 6:3) And so it is, that not only has " death reigned " over the fallen race of Adam, but every human being born in the likeness of the first Adam is of the " earth, earthy ", and is dominated by the flesh instead of the spirit; the soul, which is the personality of " himself " (see Luke 9: 23) a slave of the flesh and the earthly life, instead of being a handmaid of the spirit.

Thus the condition of the unregenerate man is now (1) his human spirit severed from God, fallen and alienated from His life (Ephesians 4: 18) " without God ", separate from Christ (Ephesians 2: 12), and incapable of fellowship with Him; (2) the soul-intellect, mind, will, self-consciousness may rule over the body, or (3) the body in its desires and appetites may be enslaving and dominating the soul. But while the human spirit is thus " dead " to God, and in darkness, it remains as full of activity as mind or body. In some instances the spirit part of the unregenerate man may be so large in its capacity that even in its dark condition, it dominates the soul and body. Then the man may be said to be " spiritual ", in the sense of possessing more " spirit " than others, who are mainly soulish or fleshly. These are the ones who seek intercourse with the spirit-world apart from the Holy Spirit of God, and become " mediums ", capable of exercising " occult powers ", such as clairvoyance, etc., bestowed upon them by satanic means, for unless the human spirit of a man is regenerated and indwelt by the Holy Spirit of God, it is in accord with the fallen spirits of Satan, and governed by the prince of the power of the air, the spirit which now works in the children of disobedience (Ephesians 2: 2, 3).

We see, therefore, that the fallen spirit of man-bereft of God at the Fall-sank down, so to speak, into the vessel of the " soul "; and the " soul " again sank down into the fleshly body, under, what Paul the Apostle calls, " the power of the flesh ", so that in the unconverted " the soul, manifested sometimes in intellectuality, some times in sensuality, often in both, reigns over them with undisputed sway. This is what Jude wishes to set forth in his 19th verse, which should be rendered, ' These be they who separate, men governed by soul, not having spirit. .

Fausset very clearly brings out this in his commentary on this passage, for he writes, " In the three-fold division of man's being ... the due state in God's design is that ` the spirit' . . . should be first, and should rule the soul, which stands intermediate between body and spirit, but in the ... natural man, the spirit is sunk into subserviency to the animal-soul, which is earthly in its motives and aims. The ' carnal' sink somewhat lower, for in these the flesh, the lowest element ... reigns paramount ".

In regeneration it is the darkened and fallen " spirit of man, which is quickened again and renewed ".t This is the meaning of the Lord's words to the " Master in Israel ", to whom He said, in spite of all that he knew in intellectual religious knowledge, " Ye must be born FROM ABOVE " (John 3:3, also margin 5:7), and later on to His disciples, " It is the Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing " (John 6:63).

The way that the new life from above reaches the fallen spirit of man is shown in the Lord's words. " The Spirit breatheth where [He] listeth ... so is every one that is born of the Spirit " (John 3:8 R. V. m.); and the cause of the Spirit of God quickening the spirit into new life, is given in John 3:14 as the death of the God-Man upon the Cross in the place of the sinner, that "whosoever believeth into (lit. Greek) Him should not perish, but have eternal life."

The Cross and the Fall exactly and perfectly correspond -the one as the remedy for the other. First by the death, of the Saviour on the Cross, the sin had to be put away, and the way made possible for the Holy God to pardon the sinner, and secondly the sinner must be given a way of escape from the bondage of soul and body into which he had fallen. The tripartite nature of man could then be again adjusted, with the spirit once more in domination, and the body acting merely as the outward and material vessel-the instrument of the spirit through the soul.

This way of escape is made clear in many parts of Scripture where we are shown the death of the sinner with the Saviour. Its mode of application for deliverance we shall see later on, as we consider the full meaning of the Cross.

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