

# Spiritual Exercise - the Dividing of Soul and Spirit

by Stephen Kaung

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of spiritual exercise, particularly the dividing of soul and spirit, in our lives and how it helps us to be conformed to the image of Christ Jesus.*

**Duration:** 1:24:35

**Scripture:** Matthew 6:33, 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24, Hebrews 4:12-13

**Topics:** "Spiritual Exercise"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on Hebrews 4:12, which describes the Word of God as living, operative, and sharper than any two-edged sword. The verse also speaks of the Word of God dividing the soul and spirit, joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intents of the heart. The preacher uses the analogy of a sacrifice on an altar to illustrate the need for the spirit and soul to be divided in order for spiritual growth to occur. He emphasizes that the three parts of man (spirit, soul, and body) make up one being and cannot be separated. The preacher also explains the relationship between the body, soul, and spirit, comparing the soul to the bone and the spirit to the marrow.

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## Transcript

Will you please turn to 1 Thessalonians? Chapter 5. We will read verses 23 and 24. 1 Thessalonians, chapter 5, verses 23, 24. Now the God of peace himself, sanctify your holy, and your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And will you please turn to the book of Hebrews? Chapter 4, verses 12 and 13. Hebrews, chapter 4, verses 13 and 12 and 13. For the word of God is living and operative, and sharper than any two-edged sword, and penetrating to the division of soul and spirit.

Or you can say to the dividing of soul and spirit. The growth of joints and marrows, and the discerning of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is not a creature unapparent before him, but all things are naked and laid bare to his eyes, with whom we have to do.

For the word of God is living and operative, and sharper than any two-edged sword, and penetrating to the division of soul and spirit. The growth of joints and marrows, and the discerning of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is not a creature unapparent before him, but all things are naked and laid bare to

his eyes, with whom we have to do.

May we have a further word of prayer. Dear Lord, as we gather in thy presence, we do praise and thank thee for thy presence with us. We do open our hearts to thee.

Speak to each and every one of us. We praise and thank thee because thou dost know us so well. And it is thy desire that thou wilt bring us into all that thou hast predestinated for us.

May thy spirit work today. Bring us into thy truth. And may thy truth set us free.

We give thee all the praise and glory. In the name of our Lord Jesus, we ask. Amen.

This time, we want to share together on this matter of spiritual exercise. Why is it that we want to talk about this matter? Why is it that spiritual exercise is so necessary and important to our spiritual life? One of the foremost reasons is this. Because this is God's eternal will for each and every one of his redeemed.

Anything that is related to God's eternal purpose is worthwhile. Whatever is outside of God's eternal purpose for us is vanity. You remember the book of Romans, chapter 8? It is said, Whom he has foreknown, he has predestinated to be conformed to the image of his son.

That his son might be the firstborn among many brethren. Thank God that he has called us. And his calling is according to his purpose.

And his purpose is nothing less than we be conformed to the image of his beloved son. That we should be like him. That he might be the firstborn among many brethren.

So in other words, God's purpose for every one of his redeemed is that we may be like Christ. And this does not refer to outward appearance. This refers to his image, that is, his character.

And for this reason, he gives us his own life. And it is the purpose of this life in us that we may be transformed and conformed to the image of Christ Jesus. This is God's will for each and every one of us.

Thank God we are redeemed. Thank God we have his life in us. But for that life to be really conformed to the image of God's beloved son.

God has made every provision for it. But on our part, there is a need for spiritual exercise. In other words, that life within us needs to be exercised.

We mentioned yesterday that exercise is not just being active. Exercise must be done according to rule. Our spiritual life needs to be exercised.

But that exercise must be according to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit guides us and directs us in this exercise. We mentioned yesterday that the first spiritual exercise is consecration.

Why is it that consecration is so important in spiritual exercise? This is not because consecration is the first spiritual exercise. It is also the foundation of all spiritual exercises. If anyone is not consecrated, then his spiritual life has never grown.

We cannot go into any other spiritual exercise. All the spiritual exercises are based upon consecration. So dear brothers and sisters, it is so important that every one of us must enter into the door of consecration.

As we have been constrained by the love of God, there is no other way but to consecrate ourselves to Him. Now after we have consecrated to Him, then there is a way of consecration we have to go through. The Holy Spirit will guide and lead us into spiritual exercise.

He will make our consecration real. That we may enter into a consecrated life. And this is what God desires.

Now this afternoon we would like to go into the next lesson. The next spiritual exercise. And that is the dividing of spirit and soul.

I suppose, brothers and sisters, we all know about the making of man. Now even though there are different theological schools, but we want to simplify it. We just go to what the Word of God says.

Now according to God's Word, if you read 1 Thessalonians chapter 5, verse 23, it says the God of peace will sanctify your holiness. That your whole being, spirit, and soul, and body be sanctified. So brothers and sisters, here you'll find the Word said, your whole being is made up of three parts.

Spirit, and soul, and body. The spirit, and the soul, and the body. And that make up the whole man.

These three parts can be distinguished. But they cannot be separated. Because the three parts make up one being.

So when we are talking about the three parts of man, we are not talking about three beings. We are talking about one being with these three parts. Our spirit gives us God consciousness.

Because God is spirit. So in order to communicate with God, you have to use your spirit. You remember many years ago, the Russian astronaut, they went into outer space.

And they say, we looked around, and we didn't see any God. Now that's foolishness. Because God is spirit.

How can you see spirit with your naked eyes? If you want to contact God, you have to use your spirit. And our soul gives us self consciousness. I know I am because I am a soul.

It gives us self consciousness. And our body gives us world consciousness. How do I know the world around me? It is by the five senses of my body.

We all know this body. Because this is visible. This is made of material matters.

It is physical. So we have no problem with this body. But sometimes we have problems with spirit and soul.

Because they are non-material. They are spiritual. So sometimes we may have some difficulties.

We know our spirit. We know our soul by their functions. The functions of our soul are mainly three.

Number one, our emotions. Number two, our mind or our thoughts. Number three, our volition or our will.

These are the three main functions of our soul. I know that I am. Because I feel it.

Because I think. Because I will. Everyone is different.

Because the way you feel is different from the way I feel. The way you think is different from the way I think. And the way you will is different from my will.

That makes us individuals. We know God loves variety. So nobody is the same.

Not only physically speaking. Even twins, the parents know the difference. And it is the same thing with our soul.

Every soul is an individual. It's different. We all have our individuality.

But then you find there is our spirit. How do we know we have a spirit? You know after the fall of man. The common understanding is we are soul and body.

The spirit seems to disappear. You know when I was young. In our family we lived.

There was an American lady who lived with us. She was a missionary. She came to China during the Qing Dynasty.

And she led my father to the Lord. So after she retired she refused to come back to America. She wanted to stay in China.

So she stayed with us. And we called her grandma. And you know whenever she was exasperated.

She would cry out saying oh my soul and body. You know this is an American usage. Where is the spirit? So to the people of this world.

They do not know they have a spirit. Why is it so? Because when God created man. He created man with spirit and soul and body.

You remember God used the red earth to form a body. So the elements of our body are the same as the red earth. Out of the dust and return to the dust.

But they give us world consciousness. Then you remember God breathed his breath into his nostril. Now this breath of God.

Is that which comes out of him. So when it comes into this body. It becomes the spirit of man.

You know God created man according to his image. This is the most wonderful thing. God had never created anything according to his image.

Only man God created according to his own image. Because God set a purpose behind it. God is spirit.

And he breathed his breath into man. That breath becomes the spirit of man. And with that spirit.

Man can communicate with God the spirit. When the spirit and the body came into contact. A reaction comes.

And the soul comes up. So the Bible said. Man became a living soul.

In the Chinese Bible. It says man became a living soul with a spirit. This is the marvel of our creation.

And then God put man in the garden of Eden. In the garden God planted all kinds of fruit trees. In the center of the garden he planted the tree of life.

And by its side he put the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. There are three kinds of trees. Fruit trees.

That's the food for the body. Tree of the knowledge of good and evil. That is the fruit for the soul.

The tree of life is for the fruit. Is for the food of the spirit. But God commanded man and said.

Of all the trees in the garden you can freely eat. Except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Why is it so? Because God's purpose is our spirit may grow.

It is not God's purpose that only our soul grow. If our soul grow alone without the spirit. Then you find something happen.

God's purpose is for man to eat the tree of life. God's purpose is for man to eat the fruit of the tree of life. Because this is the food of his spirit.

If he eats the tree of life. He will receive the divine life into his spirit. To be conformed to the image of God's beloved son.

This tree was put in the center of the garden. So it is as if God is suggesting you should eat it. The next tree was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

God said if you eat it you will die. And unfortunately. Our forefather chose the wrong fruit.

He was tempted by the tempter. The tempter said if you eat that tree of the knowledge of good and evil. You will be God.

You don't need God anymore. You can live your independent life. Because you knew what was good and what was evil.

Without telling him that you know the good but you do the evil. And because of this you are condemned. Man wanted to be independent of God.

So they ate the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. And on the day man ate that fruit. God said you die.

Did Adam die? On that day? No. He lived hundreds of years. His body continued living for hundreds of years.

How about his soul? He had many sons and many daughters. His soul was very active. But one thing.

His spirit died on that day. Now what is death? Death doesn't mean that you are no longer there. Death is the cessation of communication with its proper environment.

That is to say, death is the cessation of the connection with the source of your proper environment. What is the death of the human body? It means that it can no longer communicate with the world. That is the death of the human body.

What is the death of the spirit? It doesn't mean that the spirit as an organ no longer exists. It means that it has lost its communication with its proper environment, which is God. Because God is the proper environment of his spirit.

So when man sinned, the spirit was dead to God. But the spirit as an organ was still there. How do we know? You cannot communicate with God, but you can communicate with evil spirits.

So that proves that the organ was still there. But it is dead towards God. And that is the reason to the people of this world.

They only knew soul and body. Because their spirit was dead to God. But brothers and sisters, thank God we have new birth.

We were born from above. What is meant by born from above? In John chapter 3 we are told, He that is born of the spirit is spirit. The first word spirit is the spirit of God.

The second spirit is the human spirit. In other words, when we believe in the Lord Jesus, the Holy Spirit came into us and reborn our dead spirit. Our spirit became a new spirit.

And the Holy Spirit comes and dwells in our spirit. And that is the reason why when you believe in the Lord Jesus, the first sign was you lift up your eyes and cry, Abba, Father. Your spirit was reborn.

So brothers and sisters, God's purpose is that our spirit has the highest place in our life. Because it is to communicate with God. And our soul takes the central place.

Because it represents I. And our body has the lowest place. So our dear brother Watchman Lee used such example. He said our spirit is like the master.

And our soul is the steward. And our body is the servant. Our spirit is in contact with God the Spirit.

And He will give order to our soul. And our soul is like a steward. And He will tell our body to act it out.

So this is the divine order of spirit and soul and body. Spiritual exercise is in our spirit. But it also affects our whole being.

Now may I remind you, when we are reborn, our spirit is reborn. Our spirit is saved. Often times we say, are you saved? Now what do you mean? If you look at me awkwardly, I'm still that old I. I haven't changed.

Well maybe a superficial change. Because when you believe in the Lord, your long face becomes round face. But that's very superficial.

It is still your old body. How about your soul? Are your soul saved? Well you said, maybe a little bit. Why? Because what is repentance? Repentance is a change of mind.

Well, mind belongs to our soul. So with repentance, it seems as if your soul has changed. But again, that change is very superficial.

Strictly speaking, you were saved. It was your spirit that was saved. So the Bible says, we were saved, we are now saved, and we shall be saved.

The salvation of our spirit was at the time of our new birth. Now there is the salvation of our soul. If you look at 1 Peter 1, you see this term.

Verse 5, verse 9. Receiving the end of your faith, the salvation of your soul. The salvation of the soul is a process going on today. After our spirit was saved, then we begin the process of saving the soul.

How about the body? And if you turn to Romans chapter 8, you will find in verse 23, and not only that, but even we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the spirit, we also ourselves groan in ourselves, awaiting sonship, that is the redemption of our body. The body is the first fruit of the spirit. So this body of ours will be saved in resurrection.

So this is something in the future. And these three are together. So our whole being, spirit and soul and body, they are all saved.

Now these are fundamentals. We are talking about spiritual exercise. Now in spiritual exercise, the next lesson after consecration, is the dividing of the soul and spirit.

To an unbeliever, there is no such experience. Because they are soul and body. They are in the flesh.

But to believers, you will find that after you are saved, the Holy Spirit will begin to work. Now maybe, let me add something to it. To a believer, who has not consecrated himself, this matter of dividing of soul and spirit does not happen.

Or maybe I can put it even in another way. If you have a mistaken idea of consecration, then it will happen that dividing of soul and spirit is not your experience. Now why do I say it? What is consecration? What do you consecrate? What will happen after you consecrate? We say, present your bodies as living sacrifice.

You give yourself to the Lord. For what? Formally, you serve the world. Now, you consecrate yourself to serve God.

So we often hear people say, if you are talented in music, then you should serve God with your music. If you are talented as an executive, then you should be an elder in the church. You should serve God with your own talents.

Now what do you mean? You should serve God with your soul. You should serve God with your emotions. You should serve God with your mind.

You should serve God with your natural will. What you were before, you use it for yourself. Now you use it on God.

Now brothers and sisters, may I ask you a question? Are you serving God with your soul or with your spirit? God is spirit. If you want to worship, you have to worship in spirit. Can you worship God with your soul or with your body? That is the reason why.

We find many people can say, Lord, I cast out a demon in your name. Lord, I preach the gospel. Lord, I even give my body to be burned.

But the Lord said, I do not know you. How sad it is. In Christianity today, even in this matter of consecration, it is consecrated self.

You remember the story of Mrs. Penn-Lewis. Jessie Penn-Lewis. She was greatly used by God.

She was seeking God for power. She gave herself totally to God. She used everything she had for God.

But one day when he was seeking for power from on high, she was already used by God. She brought many to the Lord already. But she was not satisfied.

So she sought earnestly for the power on high. And God said to her, Are you consecrated? Yes, I have consecrated. But God said, It is the consecrated self.

It is still your own self. You are using your energy. You are using your wisdom.

You are using your way. You are serving me. You seem to be consecrated to me.

But everything is self. You have to go to the cross. Unless the cross works, there is no true consecration.

And Mrs. Penn-Lewis yielded to God. And she was greatly used by God. So brothers and sisters, there is the need of the divining of the soul and the spirit.

Now I am now talking to you dear brothers and sisters who knew the meaning of consecration. You are not trying to consecrate yourself and serve God by yourself. Do something for God.

But instead, you consecrate yourself that God may do everything in you. Now, if this is your understanding, when you are first saved, when you are in first love with God, you recall your past experience. During those days, it seems as if you are totally obedient, surrender to God.

It seems as if you are a changed person. There is nothing that God may ask you that you are not willing to give to Him. So you begin to feel now you are a changed person.

But gradually, when your first love began to get cold, you begin to realize that your old habit, your old thinking, your old way began to come back. And you begin to wonder if you are really saved. If you are saved, you should be changed.

But it seems that the change is only for a short period. So are you unsaved? Let me explain. Who dwells in your spirit? Christ dwells in your spirit.

Christ in you, the hope of glory. We who believe in the Lord Jesus, we have Christ, we have the Holy Spirit dwells in us. Where does He dwell? In our spirit.

Who dwells in our soul? Who dwells in our soul? Christ? Not yet. It is your old self. Because when you are saved, it is a story of your spirit.

It is not a story of the soul. Your self, you, I, me, is still the life of your soul. So you begin to realize you are a dual person.

Because within you, there are two lives. In your spirit lives Christ. In your soul lives I. In your first love, the I seems to subside.

It is all Christ. But when your love begins to get cold, you'll find your old self raises its head. You remember Martin Luther said, he said, I am not afraid.

Of the Pope, all the cardinals are outside of me. But I'm afraid of the Pope within me. And his companion, Philip MacLachlan said, He said, little MacLachlan is no match to the great Adam within me.

He said, little MacLachlan is no match to the great Adam within me. You begin to see that even though you are saved, your old habit begins to take over. Your old thinking, your old way of life, even your old idea and opinion begin to govern your life.

But deep down within you, the Holy Spirit is reminding you. He is holy. So whenever your old thing comes back, the Holy Spirit will touch you.

He will touch your conscience. The conscience is like a brake. And the Holy Spirit begins to touch your conscience.

And you find there is conflict. The soul and the spirit struggle against each other. The soul strives against the spirit.

You know within you what is right. You know within you what is holy. But you cannot do it.

Because your soul life is so strong. And you are struggling and struggling. Now I wonder if this is your experience.

If you are a truly consecrated person, I will say within a year of your salvation, this should begin. And you will discover within you there is a civil war. The spirit and the soul are striving against each other.

The life of Christ and my life are struggling against each other. Not only you find your spirit sometimes, most of the time is weak. Because the Christ life in you is young.

But the self life in you is strong. Because Adam is very old. You cannot do what you want to do.

You do what you don't want to do. And not only that, there is another problem. Now you are saved.

In your spirit, you want to please God. But somehow you find it is difficult to know what is the will of God. Is it the will of God? Or is it my own will? Can I do this? If I do this, do I do it out of Christ or out of myself? Now do you have such experience? And make you very nervous? I often say nervous Christians are good Christians.

If you are not nervous, now be careful. You do not know the difference between soul and spirit. And the result will be what you do is mostly soulish.

So you find that in spiritual exercise, the next lesson is gradually you begin to realize there are two lives within you. And they are struggling. And you are weak.

But not only that, you find that often times it is very difficult to discern what is the spirit and what is the soul. What is of Christ, what is of me. Now why is it? Because the way the faculties of the soul work is almost similar to the way the faculties of the spirit work.

You know conscience. Conscience is in your spirit. The Holy Spirit will touch your conscience.

You feel it. Now in your soul there is a factor called feeling. So it is all feeling.

Now whether it is the feeling of the conscience or the feelings of your soul, it is very difficult to distinguish. And the soul has the ability to counterfeit. So you get very puzzled.

The same thing is with thinking. We say the spirit has the faculty of intuition. In other words, the knowledge in our spirit is direct.

It is not something you gather information from outside. The Holy Spirit directly instructs you. So it is a direct knowledge.

Now our thought is an indirect thing. You gather information and you analyze it. And you make a conclusion.

But often times these two things get mixed up. And the same thing is true with worship and our will. Because you find in Galatians there is a will worship.

In Galatians. In Galatians. You find there... No, it is Colossians.

There is a will worship. So you do not know whether your worship is in your will or in the spirit. So when you are in that kind of spiritual condition.

Now what do you do? You try to analyze yourself. You try to say, is this of a spirit? Is this of a soul? Is this of Christ? Is this of I? But brothers and sisters. Self analysis.

Introspection. Is all the activities of the soul. So it does not help.

The more you try to do it. You will be spiritually paralyzed. That is the reason why.

When you are first saved. It seems that it is very easy for you to share the gospel with people. But when this thing happens.

You wonder whether I speak in the spirit or whether I speak in the soul. I do not want to speak in the soul. I want to speak in the spirit.

So you begin to analyze. And you shut your mouth. Paralyzed.

I love that story. There was once a centipede. A centipede had a hundred feet.

And it moves very fast. One day the centipede said to itself. I wonder which of my hundred feet moves first.

So there it was thinking about which feet moves first. And it could not move. So after a while it said I give up.

And off it goes. You know this is our spiritual experience. We got paralyzed.

The spirit and the soul. Need to be divided. If it is not divided.

We will never be able to grow spiritually. But how can it be divided? The bible shows us the way. Thank God for his word.

And that is in Hebrews chapter 4. So will you please turn to Hebrews chapter 4. Verse 12. For the word of God is living and operative. And sharper than any two-edged sword.

And penetrating to the dividing of soul and spirit. Both of joints and marrows. And a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

May the Lord open our inner eyes. And able to see the picture. You know this verse gives us a picture.

Now what is the picture? The picture is there is a sacrifice. Now who is the sacrifice? You are. You are on the altar.

Now what do you do to yourself? You do nothing. Is any sacrifice that is bound on the altar? Try to move around? No. A sacrifice lay dead on the altar.

Now a priest came. Now a priest is a trained butcher. If you want me to kill a chicken, it's a mess.

But a priest is trained knowing how to cut rightly. And he knows he uses a sharp sword. Two-edged sword.

And he will penetrate it and divide it. He will divide the soul and the spirit. Divide the bone and the marrow.

Now here you'll find three things. Divide the soul and the spirit too. And there is the bone and marrow, which is the body.

But here it is not trying to tell us we all need three parts. It is using the relationship of the body to speak of the relation between the soul and the spirit. We have the bones.

Bones are the structure of the body. But within the bones there is the marrow. The marrow is within the bone.

It cannot be seen. But the marrow is the life-giving thing. Because it produces red cells.

The bone is just an outside structure. The important thing is the marrow. You know, brothers and sisters, our soul is in the body.

And our spirit is in the soul. The soul is like the bone. And the spirit is the marrow.

So you find that it has to be penetrated. And then divided. Then the marrow will be seen.

Now this is an illustration. For our spirit and soul to be divided, God's way is using His Word. Because the Word of God is the breath of God.

It is living. And it is operative. Now, when the Word of God is put in paper, they become letters.

The letter kills. But the spirit gives life. So when we read the Bible, we may understand what it means.

But it seems that it doesn't work. For instance, our old Adam was crucified with Christ. Am I crucified? Paul said yes.

But I say no. Because I'm very much alive. Letter kills.

It condemns me. But the Bible says the Word of God is living and operative. It is like a sharp two-edged sword.

It will penetrate. It will divide. How is it? It depends on who is using it.

If I'm using the Word of God, I will cut it to a mess. You know, lots of people are using the Word of God to cut people. And they make a mess of it.

No. We do not know how to use the Word of God. We are not trained.

It is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit takes hold of the Word of God. And when He reveals the Word of God to us, it penetrates.

And it divides. And then you find all the thoughts and intents of your heart are exposed. Your thoughts and your intents, your will, they are all exposed.

Because everything is naked before the eyes of God. So, brothers and sisters, what is our experience? Our experience is if you are striving and trying, you fail. But if you lie there quietly, allowing the Holy Spirit to quicken the Word of God in your heart, then you will find it works.

Then you can see the soul and the spirit are divided. Not only divided, but it gives you the power to overcome. So, brothers and sisters, we need to rest in Christ.

Allowing the Holy Spirit to work in our lives. As a living sacrifice. You tell the Lord, I am not struggling.

I am not trying. I am lying here. Waiting for your Holy Spirit to use the living Word to divide the soul and the spirit.

In other words, you do not need to be paralyzed. You do not need to analyze yourself. Just put yourself in the Lord.

And He will do the work. And this is the way of dividing the soul and the spirit. So, off you go.

Isn't that wonderful? So this is a spiritual exercise that we need to have. You can see very easily, this is a daily matter. Whenever the Spirit of God using God's Word and penetrate and divide.

Because you are consecrated. Therefore, you will yield and surrender. And you are able to do the will of God.

So, as Psalms 131 says, as a weaned child resting in the breast of his mother. This is our situation. So may the Lord help us.

Shall we pray? Dear Lord, Dear Lord, we do offer these few words into your hand. If they are from Thee, Lord, use them to bring us into this spiritual exercise. Bring us out of our own struggling.

And into believing Thy work. We give glory to Thee. In Thy precious name we pray.

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