

The Distinction Between -- the Spirit, the Soul, and the Body

by Watchman Nee

Watchman Nee explores the biblical distinction between the spirit, soul, and body, emphasizing its significance for spiritual growth.

Scripture: Genesis 2:7, John 6:63, 1 Corinthians 15:45, 1 Thessalonians 5:23, Hebrews 4:12

Topics: "Body", "Spirit", "Soul"

Description

Watchman Nee explores the biblical distinction between the spirit, soul, and body, emphasizing that man is not merely a duality of soul and body but a trinity of spirit, soul, and body. He highlights 1 Thessalonians 5:23 to illustrate that the spirit and soul are separate entities, which is crucial for understanding spiritual life and growth. Nee argues that ignorance of this distinction hinders believers from fully experiencing their spiritual lives. He further explains that the soul is produced when the spirit animates the body, making it essential for life. Ultimately, he asserts that recognizing these three parts allows believers to live in accordance with the life-giving Spirit of Christ.

Transcript

Most people today consider man as being divided into two parts: the soul and the body. They think that the soul is the invisible part, the psychological part within man, and that the body is the visible part, the outward form of man. Of course, it is true that the body is the outward shell of man. But it is a question whether or not the soul is a substance. Are the soul and the spirit one thing, or are they two things? Is the soul equal to the spirit, or are the two different? Man's answer is that they are the same thing--that other than a difference in terminology, the two are identical in substance.

Man's answer, however, is not trustworthy. We must take a look at the Bible, the trustworthy Word of God, in order to find out the answer to this question. The Word of God does not divide man into two parts, the soul and the body. Rather, it divides man into three parts: the spirit, the soul, and the body. First Thessalonians 5:23 says, "Sanctify you wholly, and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete." This verse clearly shows a distinction between the spirit and the soul. Otherwise, it would not have said, "Your spirit and soul," but rather, "Your spirit-soul." Since God has said this, we can see that there is a distinction between man's spirit and his soul. From this we can conclude that man is divided into three parts--the spirit, the soul, and the body.

What is the significance of distinguishing the spirit from the soul? There is a great significance. It has much to do with the spiritual life of the believers. If believers do not know the boundary of their spirit, how can they understand the spiritual life? If they do not understand the spiritual life, how can they have a spiritual living? It is because believers are negligent or ignorant of the distinction between the spirit and the soul that they never grow in their spiritual life.

Not only has 1 Thessalonians divided man into three parts, other passages in the Scriptures do the same. For example, Hebrews 4:12 says, "For the word of God is living and operative and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit and of joints and marrow, and able to discern the thoughts and intentions of the heart." Here again, man is divided into three parts: the soul, the spirit, and the joints and marrow (which refer to the organ related to the mind and the will), that is, the body. Since the soul and the spirit can be divided, the two must not be the same thing.

THE CREATED MAN

Genesis 2:7 says, "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." "The dust of the ground" refers to man's body. "The breath of life" breathed into man's nostrils is his spirit. "A living soul" is man's soul. Hence, a complete man is composed of three parts: the spirit, the soul, and the body.

According to the above verse, the soul came into being when the spirit was joined to the body. When the spirit entered the body, the soul was produced. The body was dead, but when it was contacted by the spirit of life, a third entity was produced--the soul. Without the spirit, the body is dead. Only with the spirit can one live. When the spirit is in the body, something organic is produced. This organic result is called the soul.

God's breath of life is the source of man's life. The Lord Jesus said, "It is the Spirit who gives life" (John 6:63). It is the breath of life that gives life. Hence, this breath is the spirit. When the spirit and the body join together, the result is the soul. The Scripture says, "And man became a living soul." This means that when Adam's spirit and body were joined together, a third part was produced, the soul. His spirit and body were both joined to this third part, to his soul. This is why the Word of God calls it "a living soul" (1 Cor. 15:45). When we believers participate in the resurrection life of the Lord, the spirit begins to rule over our whole being. This is because those who have believed in the Lord are joined to the last Adam, who is the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45).

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