

Spirit, Soul and Body

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As I sit down and attempt to put into words something that has been developing in my spirit and in my understanding, I am aware that I am participating in an emerging word-portrait that will involve the contribution of others as they also take up brush and palette. I will be providing merely a first, rough outline and a few broad brush strokes, but others with finer brushes will add the details of more extensive Biblical support. Though my thoughts are broad and general, they are a result of God fine-tuning His word in my heart. (I am indebted to J. Preston Eby for that word-picture, of God fine-tuning His Word in this hour, shared at Alamagordo, N.M., in 1998).

The human mind requires a conceptual model, a point of beginning and a frame of reference in order to begin to grasp the truth it is seeking. This is obvious with all theologians and philosophers and is true of the thought processes of us all. We build upon presupposition. We need an intellectual framework for the edifying of our minds. Yet invariably, the Lord comes along to disturb our conceptual model and to rearrange our intellectual framework. This is not to say that the initial model was necessarily without value, but only that it needs restructuring.

Some time ago, I began to sense the breath of the Spirit in my mind causing both disturbance and sweet refreshing as I meditated on the ancient question, "What is man....?" (Job 7:17; 15:14; Ps. 8:4; 144:3; Heb. 2:6). I had been schooled in an understanding based upon the conceptual model found in a simple definition. Briefly stated, it goes something like this: man is a spirit; he has a soul, and he lives in a body. This definition was very helpful to me for a long time, but, at a certain point, I began to find it somewhat stifling and inadequate in and of itself. A major influence that started my re-thinking the above definition came from the Lord through my dear friend and mentor, Harry Robert Fox. (Forgive me, Harry, if I fail to recall your thoughts as accurately as they deserve). Brother Fox shared with a small gathering of friends and brethren, that at the heart of the fall of man

lies this problem: Men are inclined by the fall to attempt to be either human or divine, instead of both. (In Christ, we certainly are both). When he shared this, my spirit leaped within me, and though lacking any real understanding, I intuitively grasped the spiritual weight of his thought. His words watered a seed that God had planted in my heart years before and a new flowering of understanding began to occur.

It is, in principal, right and proper for us to seek to know who and what we are for we have the promise that "We shall know as we are known" (I Cor. 13:12). I raise a question first: Are we a simple one-dimensional being (spirit) who possess something called a soul contained in a body? Or, to leap into the subject, are we a multi-dimensional being who, in the image of God, express the triune God through our tripartite nature? If we do not accept every dimension of our being, there will be a serious impediment as we seek the ultimate goal of radiating God through all that we are.

Let us take up the matter of soul first. All through scripture, God speaks of men as souls and says He made them to be souls as opposed to merely having souls. "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" (Gen. 2:7). That is, God, by breathing into the body of man, made him to be, constituted him as a living soul. I refer you to Gen. 46:15-27 (KJ) to see that the scripture identifies persons as souls and in many newer translations the Hebrew word for soul is translated "person" or "being." Is this to say that man is not a spirit? Of course not! He is created in the image and likeness of God, and since God is Spirit (Jn. 4:24), man must be a spirit as well. Man is a spirit and he is a soul. He is first a spirit who became a soul, and having become a soul, he is a soul but, does not cease to be a spirit. In fact, it just occurred to me as I write this, that it would be just as accurate to say that man is spirit as well as being a spirit. That is, his very substance is God-substance (spirit) and he is that as well as an individual person and personality (soul). Stay with me, dear reader. It is not my intention to split doctrinal hairs or be contentious at all. I believe there are important conclusions to be drawn from these distinctions.

Let us proceed to the matter of man's body. Is the human body simply a living outer shell, at best a temporary covering, that we

would do well to be rid of some day in order to function as pure spirit? The Apostle Paul heads off that idea at the pass by clearly stating that we do not look forward to being "unclothed" but "clothed upon" (II Cor. 5:4). But I'm getting a little ahead of myself. Let's trace the origins of the physical dimension of man. The scripture informs us that "The Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, " It does not say that God formed a body for man to live in. He formed man of the dust of the ground. Man is formed dust. "For dust thou art" (Gen. 3:19, KJ)

Concerning both genders of man, we are taught, "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother and shall cleave unto his wife and they shall be one flesh." (Gen. 2:24, KJ). The physical dimension of man is part and parcel of his very being. Could it be that the reason the "flesh lusteth against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh" (Gal. 5:17), is because we are at odds with ourselves through being alienated from God? The question is rhetorical.

We have the various dimensions of our being each claiming to be the true person because the enemy has conquered us by dividing us. As "soul" is synonymous with "person" and "being," so "flesh" is synonymous with "humanity," "humanness," and "human." The mighty prophet Isaiah proclaimed, "

And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together" (Is. 40:5).

Dear fellow Christian, please consider this: "As the body is many members, so also is Christ" (I Cor. 12:12). Does the Bible contradict itself when it speaks of Christ as a life-giving Spirit (I Cor. 15:45) and also affirms that He is "a many membered body?" (I Cor. 12:14). No, the contradiction lies within us. We still lack understanding concerning the relationship of spirit and body. Can it be said that the spirit is the body intangible, invisible, and the body is the spirit tangible, visible; that they are one? The soul (person) came into being when breath (spirit) was breathed into dust (flesh) and each and all must be lovingly embraced as our true being and personhood, if we are to "show forth the praise of Him who called us out of darkness and into His glorious light." (I Pet. 2:0). Surely, it is the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil that has alienated us

from our creator and Father and has caused us to war against our own being; our own selves. I am fully aware that what I have written raises many questions and I would welcome dialogue with any readers. I am also aware of how often the Bible presents the flesh in a negative way. In the negative sense, the body provides a beachhead for evil as it hopes to occupy and control the totality of a man, but our spirit is the dimension in which God has chosen by His salvation to establish His beachhead and be assured, brethren, "The battle is the Lord's" (I Sam. 17:47). He will have us, all of us, and all that is us!

The body is the spirit in expression. To say the same thing another way, the body expresses what it is spirit. Religion, Christian or otherwise, tends to alienate the two and to understand them as totally distinct. And since the soul emerged as God breathed spirit into flesh, the soul is dependent upon the relationship of flesh and spirit. The soul is immediately affected when the consciousness of their (flesh and spirit) oneness is disturbed. At that point, the soul becomes lost, forgets its (His) identity and goes looking for new sources of life, i.e. false gods and idols. The implications of Paul's teaching in Eph. 5:22-23 are profound and endless, but I will just barely touch on it by drawing your attention to Vs. 28-30, where the Apostle instructs husbands to love their wives as "their own bodies" and goes on to say that in so doing, he loves himself. He equates a man's body with the man himself. To the religious mind, that sounds frighteningly hedonistic, but if our bodies are such profane things, then why does Paul exhort us to present our members as instruments of righteousness? (Rom. 6:13).

He does so because we are to present our members to God as what they indeed are, instruments of righteousness! No amount of suppression of fleshly appetites will make the body fit for God's use. The Lord has made us (in this case, "us" meaning the members of our bodies) to be instruments of righteousness. Thus, that's what they are! The time is at hand for us to get it together and live as one in three and three in one. Father, I pray that you will give us light that we might truly understand these things and be enabled to live them out to your glory.

The Nature of Human Nature

Contemporary fundamentalist theology overtly or covertly tends to encourage an understanding of human nature as intrinsically evil. Modernist theology tends to look at human nature as intrinsically good. (Global events of the past century have somewhat tempered their optimism). They are both categorically wrong! Human nature possesses no good or evil of its own. Man, along with the rest of creation, is pronounced good by the Creator, because when God was done creating, He saw that it was all good for the purpose He created it, especially man. Man is not good-for-nothing. He is good for someone. He is good for filling. He is a perfect vessel, fit to be "filled with all the fulness of God" (Eph. 3:19; 4:13). God is the filler and we are the "fillees." (Great writers are allowed to make up new words, only kidding, folks). That's what we're good for; to be infused, filled, permeated and saturated with God and His goodness. Having been made to be filled, we are sitting ducks when our attention is diverted to what appears to be "good for food," "a delight to the eye," and "desirable to make one wise" (Gen. 3:6). We will suck up anything that promises to fill us up.

But, praise God, the false fillers only serve ultimately to convince us that nothing really fills us but God Himself. When we've had our last disappointment, our last frustration, our last futility, our last hang-over; when our despair is suffocating, Jesus steps up and joyfully exclaims, "Fill 'er up?" We have the perfect kind of emptiness for God's kind of fullness. Our poverty is a perfect complement to His riches. Our ignorance awaits His wisdom. "He that believeth in me as the scriptures have said, 'Out of his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water'" (Jn. 7:38).

Stay tuned for future serious, seminal samplings.

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