

# Where Psychology Fails

by T. Austin-Sparks

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*The soul must submit to God's Word and be guided by the spirit in order to fulfill its purpose and avoid soulishness.*

**Scripture:** John 3:3, Romans 6:6, 1 Corinthians 6:17, Galatians 5:24, Ephesians 1:17

**Topics:** "Spiritual Transformation", "The Nature of Man"

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## Description

T. Austin-Sparks addresses the limitations of psychology in understanding the human condition, emphasizing that true understanding comes from recognizing the threefold nature of man: spirit, soul, and body. He critiques the tendency of psychologists to ignore the spiritual aspect, which is essential for divine union with God, and argues that the new birth is a transformation of the human spirit rather than the soul or body. Sparks highlights the importance of the soul as a servant to the spirit, warning against allowing it to dominate and lead to moral failure. He concludes that true spirituality involves the soul being brought into submission to the spirit, enabling it to serve God's purposes effectively.

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## Transcript

Many who read this will be familiar with the position of psychology, and it is just here that we find that point which makes all the difference between the natural, which keeps God out, and the spiritual, which gives Him His full place. For here we find that the scriptural description of man runs entirely counter to the conclusions of 'scientific' psychology. We have observed that the psychologist will not allow the threefold description of man as spirit, soul and body, but only soul--or mind--and body. But still, the psychologist has to confess to the existence of a third element. He recognizes it, finds his chief interest and occupation with it, builds up a whole system of experimentation around it, and often borders on calling it by its right name. But to do so would be to give too much away; and Satan, who has the mind of the natural man well on leash, sees to it that in this, as in other matters, just the word is not used. The psychologist, therefore, recoils and calls the extra factor 'the subconscious mind', or 'the subjective mind', or 'the subliminal self', or 'the secondary personality', etc.

Listen to some of the things which indicate the length to which such teachers go:

'The soul consists of two parts, the one being addicted to the truth, and loving honesty and reason; the other brutish, deceitful, sensuous'.

Or again:

'There is a schism in the soul'.

'The existence of a schism in the soul is not a mere dogma of theology, but a fact of science'.

'Man is endowed with two minds, each of which is capable of independent action, and they are capable of simultaneous action; but, in the main, they possess independent powers and perform independent functions. The distinctive faculties of one pertain to this life: those of the other are especially adapted to a higher plane of existence. I distinguish them by designating one as the objective mind, and the other as the subjective mind'.

'Whatever faculties are found to exist in the subjective mind of any sentient being, necessarily existed potentially in the ancestry of that being, near or remote. It is a corollary that whatever faculties we may find to exist in the subjective mind of man must necessarily exist in its possibility, potentially, in the mind of God the Father'. (All italics ours.)

When we read things like this, two things press for exclamation: first, Oh, why not call it by its right name! The other: What a tragedy that pagan philosophers should have been their sphere of research and that the Bible should have been set aside! It may be thought that it does not matter much what you call it if you get hold of the thing itself. But we hold that it is vital to read that we are dealing with two things which are absolutely distinct and separate, and not with two sides of one thing. It is error to speak of soul-union or soul-communion with God, for there is no such thing. 'Divine union' is with spirit. "He that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit" (1 Cor 6:17), and however highly developed the soul-life is, there is no 'Divine union' until the spirit has been brought back to its right place and condition.

This opens a further big question:

What is it that is Born Again?

This experience is said by Christ to be imperative (John 3:3,5,etc.).

Nicodemus stumbled over the physical question, but was soon told that "that which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit". Firstly, then, and obviously, it is not the body that is born anew. But neither is it the soul! "The sinful body of the flesh was destroyed" (Rom 6:6), and "they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts" (Gal 5:24). The passages similar to these are too many to quote, but look up "flesh", "old man", "natural man", etc. The answer to the question is emphatically that new birth is the requickening of the human spirit by the Spirit of God, an imparting to it of Divine life, and thus a re-uniting of man with God by one life in the inward man. This, of course, is solely on the ground of Christ's resurrection, and is the believer's union with Him therein; implying that all the meaning of His death as atoning, substitutionary and representative, has been accepted by faith, although perhaps not understood. From that time it is "in newness of the spirit" (Rom 7:6). The soul may still be capable of its erstwhile fears, doubts, questionings, feelings, etc., showing that it is not a new soul: but there is something deeper than all this, and God is greater than our souls. That which is the truest thing about the new-born is often deeper than consciousness, and although the soul, and even the body, may derive good and enjoy the blessing, God will seek to wean us as babes from the sensations to the fact and to Himself. Such as must have, and demand, in the senses continuous evidence of their new life will not grow up spiritually, but will remain babes. More on this later. Seeing that we have seemed to give the soul such a completely secondary place, we must hasten to the third question.

## What is the Place of the Soul?

What have we said and inferred as to the soul? We have indicated that it was with his soul that Adam sinned. The result of this was that it is with the soul that the evil powers have become allied. Further, a consequence is that man has become pre-eminently a soulical being as against a spiritual; that is, soul dominates. Thus man is in a disrupted state, and represents an upsetting of a Divine order. This is only one part of a much wider derangement through Adam's sin. In the new creation in Christ the principles of the true Divine order are re-established. The spirit quickened, raised, indwelt and united with Christ is set to be the organ of Divine government over the rest of man, soul and body. In a truly spiritual or born-again person, the soul and body will not have a place of pre-eminence, but in their right place will be very fruitful and useful servants and instruments. By his soul, man functions in two directions--from within to without, and from without to within. The soul is the plane and organ of human life and communication. Even Divine things, which cannot in the first instance be grasped or known by the soul, if they are to become practical in human life, must have an organ constituted to interpret, translate and make intelligible to humans. Thus, what is received by the spirit alone with its peculiar faculties (see later) is translated for practical purposes, firstly to the recipient himself, and then to other humans, by means of the soul. This may be by an enlightened mind for truth (reason); a filled heart, with joy or love etc., for comfort and uplift (emotion); or energized will for action or execution (volition). But it must ever be borne in mind that to really serve Divine ends and to be of eternal value this does not come in the first instance from our own souls, but from God to, and through, our spirits. It must be truth by revelation (Eph 1:17,18 R.V.) not firstly of our own reasoning; joy and love by the Holy Spirit, not our own emotion; energy and strength in Christ, not our own drive and force of will. When these latter obtain, then again the Divine order is upset, a false position exists, and the fruit will perish, although it may seem very good for the time being.

Then, as to the opposite direction. The soul can recognize, appreciate, register and apprehend everything of this world in the measure of its capacity, natural or acquired. All this can stop there and be exhausted upon itself, or it can be brought on to the higher ground and regulated so as to be transmuted into spiritual value (which is eternal), made completely subservient in life, or rejected. The spirit will thus, by its touch with God, dictate as to what is good or evil, or only seemingly good. The soul does not know this of itself. It must have a spiritual organ with spiritual intelligence, conveying Divine standards.

Why is it that so many of the most artistic, poetic and soulful people have been and are so morally defective, degenerate, lustful, jealous and vainglorious? Why is it that dictators whose ego is so all-else-obscuring, are so godless and God-defiant? Why is it that so many great intellectuals are so proud, arrogant and often infidel? Well, the answer is obvious. All this is soul! They know nothing of a balancing, adjudicating spirit-union with God, and therefore their own souls are the last word in every matter. It is not that they all dismiss God from the universe, for they sometimes refer to Him. But there is no correspondence between Him and them, and He exists to no practical moral purpose where they are concerned. We leave this just for the present.

We have sought to show that the soul as a servant--not a master--can, and should, be very fruitful and useful in relation to a superior organ. And thus, when we speak of people being 'soulful', we only mean that soul predominates, not that soul is wrong or necessarily evil. Divine order is always a law of Divine fulness.\*

FOOTNOTE: See Appendix--note on "Natural Man" and "Old Man".

At the same time, we would be careful to point out that the soul is a very responsible servant. Indeed, the human ego--the 'I'--as a conscious and rational self-life, has to answer to God for its submission or vaunting of itself; its 'laying down of its own life', or its exalting and asserting of itself beyond its measure and province. Hence "the soul that sinneth, it shall die" (Eze 18:4) was God's dictum, and still is. Altogether apart from a renewed spirit by new birth, there is a responsibility for God's Word.

In this connection, certain things must be made clear, as clear as possible. While it may not be possible for an unregenerate person to do the revealed will of God, because for this the enablement of the Holy Spirit is essential, yet to such and all others that revealed will makes an appeal and a demand. This may only be to the extent of taking an attitude to be made willing and able. But, as morally responsible creatures, that obligation rests upon us whenever the word of God is presented.

Then with regard to those who are the Lord's people, there is no such thing as an extra spirituality or revelation, which sets God's Word on one side or transcends it. If God says a thing in the Scriptures, that thing stands, and we stand or fall by it. By spiritual illumination we may come into much fuller meaning of the Scriptures and see God's thoughts and intents behind them. But that does not suspend their practical obligation, provided that we are in the dispensation to which they apply practically. We have met a certain type of Christian who, claiming to be acting according to the spirit in relation to the will of God, has been guilty of the most flagrant contradiction of the most obvious and elementary obligations of honesty, righteousness, good faith, trustworthiness and humility.

Sometimes a subtle mental evasion is betrayed by the attempted justification of a course contrary to the Word of God in 'Yes, but the devil can quote Scripture'. It seems incredible; had we not been met by this sort of thing we would feel it too unbelievable to mention. It is, however, something which touches our very subject. Let us ask, How often does Satan try to turn an unregenerate person away from Christ by using Scripture? Have you ever heard of his doing so? It must be the most remote case if you have. No; it is those who are truly God's children with whom he employs the method of using the Word of God. Why is this? It is because he has something very much deeper in view. Let us get at it by taking Christ's own case.

When Satan assailed Christ, our Lord met him with "It is written". In effect, Satan said (within himself): 'Oh, that is your ground, is it? Very well, then--"It is written, he shall give his angels charge concerning thee",' etc. He at once sought to defeat Christ on His own ground. What was his real point of attack? The Lord Jesus had definitely and deliberately taken up the position that He would have and do nothing for or of Himself, but that all should be held in relation to the Father and therefore only by the Father's permission; yes, all things utterly and only for God, and self-interest, soul-gratification, utterly set aside. The thing most likely to move Him from such a position of abandonment to God would be to support any proposed movement or course by the very Word of God itself. It would be useless to say to the Son of God, the last Adam: "Yea, hath God said?" But to say "God hath said" is much more subtle. It is the question of spirit (in union with God) or soul (in self-direction) that is ever the point of Satan's efforts. If Satan quotes Scripture, it is to destroy inward union with God. But the Word of God itself never leads to that; and no one would ever defend a course contrary to the clear Word of God with the rejoinder that 'the devil can quote Scripture', or even have such a thing in their mind, unless they were in themselves wanting to go a certain way. How our soul-life will defend and save itself! But how necessary it is for our own deliverance from our deceitful heart that we are so subject to God that we are alive to the nature and implication of the snare. We have here touched the key to the whole question of the place of the soul. Two things have got to happen to it. Firstly, it has got to be smitten a fatal blow by the death of Christ as to its self-strength and

government. As with Jacob's thigh or the sinew thereof after God had touched it and he went to the end of his life with a limp; so for ever there has to be registered in the soul the fact that it cannot and it must not: God has broken its power. Then, as an instrument, it has to be "won", mastered and ruled in relation to the higher and different ways of God. It is spoken of so frequently in the Scriptures as being some thing over which we have to gain and exercise an authority. For instance:

"In your patience ye shall win your souls" (Luke 21:19).

"Ye have purified your souls in your obedience to the truth" (1 Peter 1:22). "The end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls" (1 Peter 1:9).

We must be careful that, in recognizing the fact that the soul has been seduced, led captive, darkened and poisoned with a self-interest, we do not regard it as something to be annihilated and destroyed in this life. This would be but asceticism, a form of Buddhism. The result of any such behaviour is usually only another form of soulishness in an exaggerated degree; perhaps occultism. Our whole human nature is in our souls, and if nature is suppressed in one direction she will take revenge in another. This is just what is the trouble with a great many people if only they knew it. There is a difference between a life of suppression and a life of service. Submission, subjection and servanthood in Christ's case, as to the Father, was not a life of soul-destruction, but of rest and delight. Slavery in its bad sense is the lot of those who live wholly in their own souls. We need to revise our ideas about service, for it is becoming more and more common to think that service is bondage and slavery; when really it is a Divine thing. Spirituality is not a life of suppression. That is negative. Spirituality is positive; it is a new and extra life, not the old one striving to get the mastery of itself. The soul has to be taken in charge and made to learn the new and higher wisdom. Whether we are able yet to accept it or not, the fact is that if we are going on with God fully, all the soul's energies and abilities for knowing, understanding, sensing and doing will come to an end, and we shall--on that side--stand bewildered, dazed, numbed and impotent. Then, only a new, other, and Divine understanding, constraint, and energy will send us forward or keep us going. At such times we shall have to say to our souls, "My soul, be thou silent unto God" (Psa 62:5); "My soul... hope thou in God" (Psa 62:5); and 'My soul, come thou with me to follow the Lord'. But what joy and strength there is when, the soul having been constrained to yield to the spirit, the higher wisdom and glory is perceived in its vindication. Then it is that "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour" (Luke 1:46). The spirit hath, the soul doth--note the tenses.

So that unto fullness of joy the soul is essential, and it must be brought through the darkness and death of its own ability to learn the higher and deeper realities for which the spirit is the first organ and faculty.

No; do not live a life of suppressing your soul, nor despising it; but be strong in spirit, so that your soul may be won, saved and made to serve your fullest joy. The Lord Jesus desires that we should find rest unto our souls, and this, He says, comes by way of His yoke--the symbol of union and service.

The soul, like some people, will find its greatest value in service, not as a master. It wants to be the latter, but it is blind to the limitations which God has imposed upon it. It thinks that it can, but God says it "cannot". But, in its place, with the self-interest lying under the ban of Christ's death, it can be a very useful servant.

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