

Spirit and Soul

by Watchman Nee

The human spirit is a vital part of a person that enables them to commune with God and experience spiritual life, and it possesses functions such as conscience, intuition, and communion.

Scripture: Genesis 41:8, Proverbs 25:28, Matthew 26:41, Luke 1:47, John 4:23, Romans 1:9, Romans 8:16, 1 Corinthians 2:11, 1 Corinthians 6:17, 1 Corinthians 14:14

Topics: "Communion with God", "Spirit vs. Soul"

Description

Watchman Nee emphasizes the necessity for believers to recognize their spirit, as it is the primary means through which God communicates with humanity. He explains that many Christians confuse the functions of the spirit with those of the soul, leading to a limited understanding of spiritual communion. Nee outlines the three main functions of the human spirit: conscience, intuition, and communion, asserting that true worship and knowledge of God occur in the spirit, not the soul. He warns that without discernment, believers may remain trapped in soulish experiences, hindering their spiritual growth. Ultimately, he calls for a deeper understanding of the spirit to foster a genuine relationship with God.

Transcript

IT IS IMPERATIVE that a believer know he has a spirit, since, as we shall soon learn, every communication of God with man occurs there. If the believer does not discern his own spirit he invariably is ignorant of how to commune with God in the spirit. He easily substitutes the thoughts or emotions of the soul for the works of the spirit. Thus he confines himself to the outer realm, unable ever to reach the spiritual realm.

I Corinthians 2. 11 speaks of "the spirit of the man which is in him." 1 Corinthians 5.4 mentions "my spirit." Romans 8.16 says "our spirit." 1 Corinthians 14.14 uses "my spirit." I Corinthians 14.32 tells of the "spirits of prophets." Proverbs 25.28 refers to "his own spirit." Darby Hebrews 12.23 record "the spirits of just men." Zechariah 12.1 states that "the Lord ... formed the spirit of man within him."

The above Scripture verses sufficiently prove that we human beings do possess a human spirit. This spirit is not synonymous with our soul nor is it the same as the Holy Spirit. We worship God in this spirit.

According to the teaching of the Bible and the experience of believers, the human spirit can be said to comprise three parts; or, to put it another way, one can say it has three main functions. These are conscience, intuition and communion.

The conscience is the discerning organ which distinguishes right and wrong; not, however, through the influence of knowledge stored in the mind but rather by a spontaneous direct judgment. Often reasoning will justify things which our conscience judges. The work of the conscience is independent and direct; it does not bend to outside opinions. If man should do wrong it will raise its voice of accusation. Intuition is the sensing organ of the human spirit. It is so diametrically different from physical sense and soulful sense that it is called intuition. Intuition involves a direct sensing independent of any outside influence. That knowledge which comes to us without any help from the mind, emotion or volition comes intuitively. We really "know" through our intuition; our mind merely helps us to "Understand." The revelations of God and all the movements of the Holy Spirit are known to the believer through his intuition. A believer must therefore heed these two elements: the voice of conscience and the teaching of intuition. Communion is worshiping God. The organs of the soul are incompetent to worship God. God is not apprehended by our thoughts, feelings or intentions, for He can only be known directly in our spirits. Our worship of God and God's communications with us are directly in the spirit. They take place in "the inner man," not in the soul or outward man.

We can conclude then that these three elements of conscience, intuition and communion are deeply interrelated and function coordinately. The relationship between conscience and intuition is that conscience judges according to intuition; it condemns all conduct which does not follow the directions given by intuition. Intuition is related to communion or worship in that God is known by man intuitively and reveals His will to man in the intuition. No measure of expectation or deduction gives us the knowledge of God.

From the following three groups of Scripture verses it can readily be observed that our spirits possess the function of conscience (we do not say that the spirit is conscience), the function of intuition (or spiritual sense), and the function of, communion (or worship).

A) The Function of Conscience in Man's Spirit

"The Lord your God hardened his spirit" Dent. 2.30

"Saves the crushed in spirit" Ps. 34.18

"Put a new and right spirit within me" Ps. 51.10

"When Jesus had thus spoken, he was troubled in spirit" John 13.21

"His spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the
city was full of idols" Acts 17.16

"It is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit
that we are children of God" Rom. 8.16

"I am present in spirit, and as if present, I have already
pronounced judgment" 1 Cor. 5.3

"I had no rest in my spirit" 2 Cor. 2.13 AV

"For God did not give us the spirit of timidity" 2 Tim. 1.7

B The Function of Intuition in Man's Spirit

"The spirit indeed is willing" Matt. 26.41

"Jesus perceiving in his spirit" Mark 2.8

"He sighed deeply in his spirit" Mark 8.12

"He was deeply moved in spirit" John 11.33

"Paul was pressed in the spirit" Acts 18.5 AV

"Being fervent in spirit" Acts 18.25

"I am going to Jerusalem, bound in the spirit" Acts 20.22

"What person knows a man's thoughts except the spirit of the man which is in him" 1 Cor. 2.11

"They refreshed my spirit as well as yours" I Cor. 16.18

"His spirit was refreshed by you all" 2 Cor. 7.13 AV

C The Function of Communion in Man's Spirit

"My spirit rejoices in God my Savior" Luke 1.47

"The true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth" John 4.23

"Whom I serve with my spirit" Rom. 1.9

"We serve ... in the new life of the spirit" Rom. 7.6

"You have received the spirit of sonship when we cry Abba Father" Rom. 8.15 "The Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit" Rom. 8.16

"He who is united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him" I Cor. 6.17

"I will sing with the spirit" 1 Cor. 14.15

"If you bless with the spirit" I Cor. 14.16

"In the spirit he carried me away" Rev. 21.10

We can know by these Scriptures that our spirit possesses at least these three functions. Although unregenerated men do not yet have life, they nevertheless possess these functions (but their worship is of evil spirits) - Some people manifest more of these functions while others less. This does not however imply that they are not dead in sins and transgressions. The New Testament does not consider those with a sensitive conscience, keen intuition or a spiritual tendency and interest to be saved individuals. Such people only prove to us that aside from the mind, emotion and will of our soul, we also have a spirit. Prior

to regeneration the spirit is separated from God's life; only afterwards does the life of God and of the Holy Spirit dwell in our spirits. They then have been quickened to be instruments of the Holy Spirit.

Our aim in studying the significance of the spirit is to enable us to realize that we as human beings possess an independent spirit. This spirit is not man's mind, his will or his emotion; on the contrary, it includes the functions of conscience, intuition and communion. It is here in the spirit that God regenerates us, teaches us, and leads us into His rest. But sad to say, due to long years of bondage to the soul many Christians know very little of their spirit. We ought to tremble before God, asking Him to teach us through experience what is spiritual and what is soulish.

Before the believer is born again his spirit becomes so sunken and surrounded by his soul that it is impossible for him to distinguish whether something is emanating from the soul or from the spirit. The functions of the latter have become mixed up with those of the former. Furthermore, the spirit has lost its primary function-towards God; for it is dead to God. It thus would appear that it has become an accessory to the soul. And as the mind, emotion and volition grow stronger, the functions of the spirit become so eclipsed as to render them almost unknown. That is why there must be the work of dividing between soul and spirit after a believer is regenerated.

In searching the Scriptures it does seem that an unregenerated spirit functions no differently from the way the soul does. The following verses illustrate this.

"His spirit was troubled" Gen. 41.8

"Then their spirit was appeased toward him" judges 8.3 Darby

"He that is hasty of spirit exalteth folly" Prov. 14.29 Darby

"A downcast spirit dries up the bones" Prov. 17.22

"Those who err in spirit" Is. 29.24

"And shall wail for anguish of spirit" Is. 65.14

"His spirit was hardened" Dan. 5.20

These show us the works of the unregenerated spirit and indicate how similar are its works to those of the soul. The reason for not mentioning soul but spirit is to reveal what has occurred in the very depth of man. It discloses how man's spirit has become controlled and influenced completely by his soul with the result that it manifests the works of the soul. The spirit nonetheless still exists because these works come from the spirit. Though ruled by the soul the spirit does not cease to be an organ.

SOUL

Aside from having a spirit which enables him to commune with God, man also possesses a soul, his self-consciousness. He is made conscious of his existence by the work of his soul. It is the seat of our personality. The elements which make us human belong to the soul.

Intellect, thought, ideals, love, emotion, discernment, choice, decision, etc., are but various experiences of the soul.

It has been explained already that the spirit and the body are merged in the soul which, in turn, forms the organ of our personality.

That is why the Bible sometimes calls man "souls," as though man has only this element. For example, Genesis 12.5 refers to people as "souls" (ASV). Again, when Jacob brought his entire family down to Egypt, it is recorded, that "all the souls of the house of Jacob, that came into Egypt, were threescore and ten" (Gen. 46.27 ASV).

Numerous instances occur in the original language of the Bible

where "soul" is used instead of "Man." For the seat and essence of the personality is the soul. To comprehend a man's personality is to comprehend his person. Man's existence, characteristics and life are all in the soul. The Bible consequently calls man "a soul."

That which constitutes man's personality are the three main faculties of volition, mind and emotion. Volition is the instrument for our decisions, revealing our power to choose. It expresses our willingness or unwillingness: "we will" or "we won't." Without it, man is reduced to an automaton. Mind, the instrument for our thoughts, manifests our intellectual power. Out of this arise wisdom, knowledge and reasoning. Lack of it makes a man foolish and dull. The instrument for our likes and dislikes is the faculty of emotion. Through it we are able to express love or hate and to feel joyful, angry, sad or happy. Any shortage of it will render man as insensitive as wood or stone.

A careful study of the Bible will yield the conclusion that these three primary faculties of personality belong to the soul. Too many Scripture passages exist to quote them all. Hence only a few selections can be enumerated here.

A) The Souls Faculty of Volition

"Give me not up to the will (original, "soul") of my adversaries" Ps. 27.12

"Thou dost not give him up to the will (original, ,soul,) of his enemies" Ps. 41.2

"Delivered you to the greed (original, "soul") of your enemies" Ezek. 16.27

"You shall let her go where she will (original, "soul") Dent. 21.14

"Aha, we have our heart's desire (original "soul")" Ps. 35.25

"Or swear an oath to bind himself (original, "soul") by a pledge" Num. 30.2

"Now set your mind and heart (original, "soul") to seek the

Lord your God" I Chron. 22.19

"They desire and lift up their soul to return to dwell there" Jer. 44.14 Amplified

"These afflictions my soul refuses to touch" job 6.7

Amplified "My soul chooseth strangling, death, rather

than my bones job 7.15 Darby

The "will or "heart" here points to the human will. "Set the heart," "lift up their soul," "refuse" and "choose" are all exercises of the will, having their springs in the soul.

B) The Souls Faculty of Intellect or Mind

"Whereunto they lift up their soul, their sons and their daughters" Ezek. 24.25 Darby "That a soul be without knowledge is not good' Prove 19.2 Darby

"How long must I bear pain (Syriac:Hebrew: hold counsels) in my soul?" Ps. 13.2 "Marvelous are thy works, and that my soul knoweth right well' Ps. 139.14 Darby "My soul continually thinks of it" Lam. 3.20

"Knowledge will be pleasant to your soul Prov. 2. 10

"Keep sound wisdom and discretion . . . and they will be

life for your soul" Prov. 3.21,22

"Know that wisdom is such to your soul Prov. 24.14

Here "knowledge," "counsel," "lift up," "think," etc., exist as the activities of man's intellect or mind, which the Bible indicates as emanating from the soul.

C) The Souls Faculty of Emotion

1) EMOTIONS OF AFFECTION

"The soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and

Jonathan loved him as his own soul 1 Sam. 18.1

"You whom my soul loves" Song 1.7

"My soul magnifies the Lord" Luke 1.46

"His life abhorreth bread, and his soul dainty food"

job 33.20 Darby

"Who are hated by David's soul 2 Sam. 5.8

"My soul was vexed with them" Zech. 11.8 Darby

"You shall love the Lord your God . . . with all your

soul Dent. 6.5

"MY soul is weary of my life" job 10: 1 Darby

"Their soul abhorreth all manner of food" Ps. 107:18

Darby

2) EMOTIONS OF DESIRE

"For whatever thy soul desireth ... or for whatever thy
soul asketh of thee" Dent. 14.26 Darby

"What thy soul may say" I Sam. 20.4 Darby

"My soul longs, yea, faints for the courts of the Lord"
Ps. 84.2

"Your soul's longing" Ezek. 24-21 Darby

"So longs my soul for thee, O God" Ps. 42.1

"My soul yearns for thee in the night" Is. 26.9

"My soul is well pleased" Matt. 12. IS

3) EMOTIONS OF FEELING AND SENSING

"A sword will pierce through your own soul also" Luke 2.35

"All the people were bitter in soul" I Sam. 30.6

"Her soul is bitter and vexed within her" 2 Kings 4.27 Amplified

"His soul was grieved for the misery of Israel" judges 10. 16 Darby

"How long will ye vex my soul" job 19.2 Darby

"My soul shall exult in my God" Is. 61.10

"Gladden the soul of thy servant" Ps. 86.4

"Their soul fainted within them" Ps. 107.5

"Why are you cast down, O my soul. 42.5

"Return, O my soul, to your rest" Ps. 116.7

"My soul is consumed with longing" Ps. 119.20

"Sweetness to the sour" Prov. 16.24

"Let your soul delight itself in fatness" Is. 55.2 Amplified

"My soul fainted within me" Jonah 2.7

"MY soul is very sorrowful" Matt, 26.38

"Now is my soul troubled" John 12.27

"He was vexed in his righteous soul day after day" 2 Peter 2.8

We can discover in the above observations touching upon man's various emotions that our soul is capable of loving and hating, desiring and aspiring, feeling and sensing.

From this brief Biblical study it becomes quite obvious that the soul of man contains in it that part known as will, that part known as mind or intellect, and that part known as emotion.

THE SOUL LIFE

Some Bible scholars point out to us that three different words are employed in the Greek to designate "life": (1) bios (2) psuche (3) zoe. They all describe life but convey very different meanings. Bios has reference to the means of life or living. Our Lord Jesus used this word when He commended the woman who cast into the temple treasury her whole living. Zoe is the highest life, the life of the spirit. Whenever the Bible speaks of eternal life it uses this word. Psuche refers to the animated life of man, his natural life or the life of the soul. The Bible employs this term when it describes the human life.

Let us note here that the words "soul" and "soul life" in the Bible are one and the same in the original. In the Old Testament the Hebrew word for "soul"-nephesh-is used equally for "soul life." The New Testament consequently employs the Greek word psuche for both "soul" and "soul life." Hence we know "soul" not only is one of the three elements of man but also is man's life, his natural life. In many places in the Bible, "soul" is translated as "life."

"Only you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood " Gen. 9.4,5

"The life of the flesh is in the blood" Lev. 17.11

"Those who sought the child's life are dead' Matt. 2.20

"Is it lawful on the sabbath-to save life or to destroy it?" Luke 6.9

"Who have risked their lives for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ" Acts 15.26

"I do not account my life of any value" Acts 20.24

"To give his life as a ransom for many" Matt. 20.28

"The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" John 10.11, 15,17

The word "life" in these verses is "soul" in the original. It is so translated because it would be difficult to understand otherwise. The soul actually is the very life of man.

As we have mentioned, " soul" is one of the three elements of man. "Soul life" is man's natural life, that which makes him exist and animates him. It is the life whereby man today lives; it is the power whereby

man becomes what he is. Since the Bible applies nephesh and psuche both to soul and to man's life, it is evident to us that these two, though distinguishable, are not separable. They are distinguishable inasmuch as in certain places psuche (for example) must be translated either as "soul" or as "life." The translations cannot be interchanged. For instance, "soul" and "life" in Luke 12.19-23 and Mark 3.4 are actually the same word in the

original, yet to translate then, with the same word in English would be meaningless. They are inseparable, however, because these two are completely united in man. A man without a soul does not live. The Bible never tells us that a natural man possesses a life other than the soul. The life of man is but the soul permeating the body. As the soul is joined to the body it becomes the life of man. Life is the phenomenon of the soul. The Bible considers man's present body a "soulical body" (I Cor. 15.44 original), for the life of our present body is that of the soul. Man's life is therefore simply an expression of the composite of his mental, emotional and volitional energies. "Personality" in the natural realm embraces these different parts of the soul but only that much- Soul life is man's natural life.

That the soul is man's life is a most important fact to recognize for it bears greatly upon the kind of Christian we become, whether spiritual or soulish. This we shall explain further on.

SOUL AND MAN'S SELF

Inasmuch as we have seen how soul is the site of our personality, the organ of volition and the natural life, we can easily conclude that this soul is also the "real I"--I myself. Our self is the soul. This too can be demonstrated by the Bible. In Numbers 30, the phrase "bind himself" occurs ten times. In the original it is "bind his soul." From this we are led to understand that the soul is our own self. In many other passages of the Bible we find the word "soul" is translated as "self." For instance:

"You shall not defile yourselves with them" Lev. 11.43

You shall not defile yourselves" Lev. 11.44

"For themselves and for their descendants" Esther 9.31

You who tear yourself in your anger" job 18.4

He justified himself" job 32t.2

"But themselves go into captivity, is. 46.2

"What every one (original, "every soul") must eat, that only may be prepared by you" Ex. 12 ' 16

"Who kills any person (original, "kill any soul") without intent" Num. 35.11,15

"Let me (original, "let my soul,) die the death of the righteous" Num. 23.10

"When any one (original, "any soul") brings a cereal offering" Lev. 2.1

"I have ... quieted myself" Ps. 131.2 AV

"Think not that in the king's palace you (original, "soul") will escape" Esther 4.13

"The Lord God has sworn by himself original, "sworn by his soul")" Amos 6.8

These Scriptures from the Old Testament inform us in various ways how the soul is man's own self.

The New Testament conveys the same impression. "Souls" is the original rendering for "eight persons" in I Peter 3.20 and for "two hundred and seventy-six persons" in Acts 27.37. The phrase in Romans 2.9 translated today as "every human being who does evil" is given in the original as "every soul of man that works evil." Hence, to warn the soul of a man who works evil is to warn the evil man. In James 5.20, saving a soul is considered to be saving a sinner. And Luke 12-19 treats the rich fool's speaking words of comfort to his soul as speaking to himself. It is therefore clear that the Bible as a whole views man's soul or soul life as the man himself. A confirmation of this can be found in the words of our Lord Jesus, given in two different Gospels. Matthew 16.26 reads- "For what will it profit a man, if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life (psvche)? Or what shall a man give in return for his life (psvche)?" Whereas Luke 9.25 renders it: "For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself (eautov)?" Both Gospel writers record the same thing; yet one uses "life" (or 11 sour') while the other uses "himself." This signifies that the Holy Spirit is using Matthew to explain the meaning of "himself" in Luke and Luke the meaning of "life" in Matthew. Man's soul or life is the man himself, and vice versa.

Such a study enables us to conclude that, to be a man, we

must share what is included in man's soul. Every natural man

possesses this element and whatever it includes, for the soul

is the common life shared by all natural men. Before regeneration

whatever is included in life-be it self, life, strength, power, choice, thought, opinion, love, feeling-pertains to the soul. In other words, soul life is the life a man inherits at birth. All that this life possesses and all that it may become are in the realm of the soul. If we distinctly recognize what is soulical it will then be easier for us later on to recognize what is spiritual. It will be possible to divide the spiritual from the soulish.

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