Spirit, Soul & Body

by
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The author has emphasized some words in Scripture quotations in italicized type.

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On March 23, 1968, I had a supernatural encounter with the Lord that revolutionized my entire life. For the next four and a half months, God’s love completely overwhelmed me both day and night. Tasting God’s presence in such a profound way ruined me for ordinary life. My expectations of my relationship with the Lord and my hopes of what He’d do through me literally shot through the roof. As far as I was concerned, Jesus could do anything!

However, once the emotion finally subsided, I felt worse than ever before. My inner expectations and my everyday experience remained worlds apart. The spiritual realities I knew in my heart just weren’t manifesting themselves in the physical realm any more. I longed to experience God again in that same way I had before.

During this period of time, I was drafted and sent to Vietnam. Over there, temptations abounded. Many times I was the only Christian I knew. Everyone else gave themselves to the drugs, alcohol, and prostitutes that were so readily available. Even the bunker where I lived was papered with pornographic images—walls, ceiling, everywhere. Although this constant pressure to sin seemed unbearable at times, I refused to give in.
Out of sheer desperation, I started seeking the Lord by praying and studying the Bible as much as sixteen hours a day. This gnawing inner frustration motivated my quest to discover how I could get from here to where I knew in my heart I could be. I realized Vietnam would change me, so I figured it might as well be for the good.

God began renewing my mind through His Word. Then I started experiencing that same divine reality as before—only this time it wasn’t just in a physical, emotional way. The Lord revealed truths that changed my thinking and released His power in me. Joy and excitement came back again, but now they were based on understanding from the Word. I could recall Scripture and rejoice in it any time I wanted. In this way, God’s Word began to produce an abiding stability in my life.

This understanding of spirit, soul, and body was one of the first revelations I received through studying the Bible. It not only alleviated the frustration and confusion I had but has served as a foundation for almost everything the Lord has shown me since. These important truths freed me from the bondage of much wrong thinking and enabled me to consistently experience God’s supernatural power. Personally, I cannot comprehend how anyone can truly prosper in their relationship with God apart from understanding this basic revelation.

Today, I’m just as excited about this understanding of spirit, soul, and body as when God first showed it to me over thirty-five years ago. In fact, I’ve seen the Lord set more people free
through this one teaching than almost anything else I’ve ever ministered. I believe that it can do the same for you. What you now hold in your hands has the potential to revolutionize your entire Christian life!
Chapter 1
God’s Mirror

The very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

1 Thessalonians 5:23

Even though God’s Word clearly teaches that we are three-part beings, very few Christians practice a functional understanding of spirit, soul, and body in their everyday lives. Most people actually believe that they’re only made up of body and soul. They confuse soul and spirit as being basically the same thing. Therefore, on a day-to-day level, they only acknowledge a physical part and an emotional, mental, inner part (commonly called “personality”).

Even Strong’s Concordance fails to distinguish all three! The Greek word for “spirit” is pneuma and is defined as being “the rational soul.” I don’t mean to criticize anyone’s work, but my study of God’s Word has revealed a very distinct difference between spirit and soul. Therefore, I disagree with this particular definition of the word “pneuma.” Your spirit is your innermost part, not your “rational soul.”
Your body is obvious. It’s the physical part of you that can be seen in a mirror. If you were talking to me face to face, you’d be seeing my body. However, you’d be speaking to my soul, which is my mental, emotional part.

Some people define soul as being your mind, will, and emotions. While that’s certainly true, it’s incomplete because your conscience should also be included. Your soul is what most people call their personality.

No Natural Access

You can feel both your body and your soul. If I put my hand on your shoulder, you’d know that I touched you. I can also touch you whether I’m physically near or not. By speaking to your soul, I can make you glad, sad, or mad. Through my words, I could even “hurt” you without physically touching your body. It’s easy to know how you feel in your body and soul because you’re constantly in touch with them.

By taking a mental inventory, your body can instantly tell you how it feels. You know if your adrenaline’s pumping or if you’re tired, if you’re healthy or fighting a cold, if your head aches, or if the shower’s just right. In fact, you don’t even really have to think about it because your body constantly feeds you such information.

You can also check your soul and know right away how you’re doing. It’s easy to tell if you’re happy or hurt, mentally worn out or sharp and ready to go, or just plain angry. You’d even be aware of fear or depression if it came because you’re always in touch with your soul.
God’s Mirror

That’s not so for your spirit because it can’t be accessed in any natural way. Jesus declared, “That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (John 3:6). He meant that there’s no direct connection between the two. They are interrelated, as you’ll later see, but spirit is spirit and flesh is flesh. You simply cannot contact your spirit through your emotions or your physical body. Herein lies one of the great problems of the Christian life.

If you don’t understand that spiritual reality can’t be felt, then you’ll be confused when God’s Word declares that you have the same power that raised Jesus from the dead (Ephesians 1:18–20). If you think truth can be discerned through your natural senses, then you’ll be baffled when the Bible says that you’re a brand-new creature who can do the same miraculous works that Jesus did (2 Corinthians 5:17; John 14:12). Without understanding spirit, soul, and body, you’ll search your body and soul in bewilderment wondering, Where is it? I don’t really have that kind of power in me. The Bible is so hard to understand! If you can’t see, taste, hear, smell, or touch what the Word reveals about you, you’ll immediately be thrown into conflict. This apparent disparity between your experience and God’s Word will cause you to throw up your hands in frustration and conclude, “It must not be true!”

Unlocking the Spirit Realm

Understanding spirit, soul, and body unlocks the spirit realm so you can experience who you are and what you have in Christ.
Since the spirit realm can’t be naturally seen or felt, the only way to accurately perceive spiritual truth is through the Bible. Simply take God’s Word and believe it.

Jesus said, “It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life” (John 6:63). God’s Word reveals spiritual reality. If you want to know what your spirit is like, you must find out from the Word. You can’t just go by emotion or some other type of perception. God’s Word is spirit and life.

When you look into the Bible, you behold yourself in the spirit. “For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty [God’s Word, specifically the New Testament], and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed” (James 1:23–25). God’s Word is a spiritual mirror.

A Perfect Reflection

When you look at your face in a mirror, you aren’t really seeing yourself. Rather, you’re viewing a reflection. In fact, your eyes have never looked directly into your own face. Think about it—you’ve always seen a reflection! Even though it’s only a representation, you’ve learned to trust it. If you want to know if your hair is combed or if your makeup is on, you don’t just go by how you feel. Since those things can’t be felt, you must look in a mirror and then trust what you see.
It’s the same with your born-again spirit. God’s Word perfectly reflects who you are in the spirit. It’s the only way you can know. You can’t just assume, “If I had God’s power inside of me, I’d be aware of it” because that which is Spirit is spirit and that which is flesh is flesh. It would be like trying to feel if your makeup was on or your hair was combed. Those things just can’t be felt! You must look in God’s mirror (His Word) and trust the spiritual reality you see.

Every born-again believer has undergone a complete inner transformation. “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:17–18). Notice how it doesn’t say that “all things are becoming new” or “have the potential of being new.” This verse declares “old things have passed (past tense) away,...all things have become (present tense—reality right now) new” (NKJV) and “all things are of God.”

If you don’t understand spirit, soul, and body, you’re instantly set up for confusion, frustration, and ultimately unbelief when you see a verse like this. After reading about a total change and all things being of God, you look at your body and immediately start wondering because it hasn’t passed away or become brand new. If you were overweight before receiving the Lord, that didn’t change the moment you got saved.

A time will come when you’ll receive a glorified body, but that hasn’t happened yet. “For this corruptible must put
on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality” (1 Corinthians 15:53). Although Christ’s atonement provided for you physically, your body has not yet been saved. It’s been purchased, but not yet redeemed.

S&H Green Stamps

As a kid, I collected S&H Green Stamps. Whenever my mother bought groceries, we would earn stamps according to the amount of the purchase. She gave them to me so I could keep them organized and paste them into a book. Then she’d take me to an S&H Green Stamp Redemption Center to turn in my completed books and choose anything I wanted of equal value from their store. Although the stamps were purchased, they weren’t redeemed until I turned them in. It wasn’t the stamps themselves I wanted but what I could redeem them for!

Jesus purchased your glorified body through His death, burial, and resurrection. Although full payment has been made, you still have a corrupted body while you wait to receive your immortal, incorruptible one. At this moment, you don’t yet have the redemption of the purchased possession (Ephesians 1:14).

Your soul wasn’t saved either. This sounds strange to many people because they use terminology like “I’m a soulwinner!” and “I came to see a soul saved” in reference to evangelism. In reality, the New Testament only mentions “soul salvation” a few times—and none of them, in context, are talking about the born-again experience (Hebrews 10:39; James 1:21; 5:20; 1 Peter 1:9). Soul salvation happens when an emotionally discouraged and mentally defeated
God’s Mirror

Christian starts believing God’s Word and then experiences victory, peace, and joy again. However, when it comes to being born again, your soul wasn’t the part of you that completely changed.

If you weren’t smart before you were saved, you won’t instantly be smart after being saved. If you didn’t know math before being born again, you won’t instantly know math afterwards either. In fact, if you were depressed before you got saved, you’ll stay depressed until you change the way your soul thinks by believing God’s Word.

Your soul can be transformed now to the degree you renew your mind, change your attitudes, and conform your values to the Word of God. This should happen, and it’s in the process of happening, but it didn’t automatically happen. In your soul, old things didn’t pass away, and all things haven’t yet become new. The transformation of your soul won’t be completed until you go to be with Jesus.

Where the Change Is Complete

When you receive your glorified body, you’ll also receive your glorified soul. First Corinthians 13:9–12 reveals how, when that which is perfect is come (your glorified body), your current partial knowledge will give way to full revelation. You won’t know in part anymore, but you’ll know all things even as also you are known. That’s the coming future fulfillment of transformation and completed change in your body and soul.

On the other hand, 2 Corinthians 5:17 clearly states that any person who is in Christ is right now a brand-new creature. Old
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things *have passed* away. All things *have become* new. This total transformation isn’t just in process; it’s describing a change that’s already been done—an accomplished fact.

Where did this complete change occur? According to God’s mirror—not in your body and not in your soul, but in your born-again spirit.