

## Spirit and Soul

### Practical Benefits of Recognizing the Biblical Distinction

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We are spirit, soul and body, tripartite beings (1 Thessalonians 5:23). This is not an academic distinction. With our spirit's we know objectively (1 Corinthians 2:11) and worship God (John 4:24). With our souls we emote and think subjectively, in terms of what we can sense and experience (Acts 14:2; 1 Peter 1:22; Matthew 26:38). Our spirit's were affected by the new birth (John 3:5-6) while our souls will be the last thing saved when Christ is revealed (1 Peter 3:7, 9). That means our spirits are saved and our souls are not. This distinction impacts the manner in which we live.

As a result, we can sometimes objectively know something to be true though our souls are at odds. So, in Philippians 1:27, Paul charged the Philippians to stand in one spirit and compete together in one soul. In the last phrase, our English Bible's have "mind" though it is the Greek word soul *psuché* [ψυχή] not nous [νοῦς]. The word "compete together" is the Greek *sunathleō*, which communicates the idea of an athletic team working together. As an illustration of these distinctions. A basketball player may come down the court and see a teammate who is open and in a position from which that player shoots 90%, but the player with the ball has hard feelings toward that player. So, instead of passing the ball, he or she selfishly drives into the lane. Why, because even though the player "knows" objectively the best course of action, hard feelings within his or her soul interfere with clear thinking. Paul was concerned with how the Philippians were accomplishing their God-given ministry. He knew they were struggling in their souls. The book evidences that someone's feelings were hurt and though they knew the truth, they struggled to do it because they were letting their emotions (from the soul) take the lead rather than what they know (from the spirit). Feelings are okay, as long as we do not let them take the lead. We need to lead with what we objectively know from God's Word and bring our souls with their emotions in line.

Paul gave the solution in Philippians 2:1-2: your spirit is encouraged in Christ, your soul is consoled from love, your spirit appreciates fellowship, while your soul appreciates compassion and intense mercy, they needed to frame their minds with the one thing (who they are in Christ and the service which is appropriate to others in the body of Christ, cf Php 2:5ff), and they needed to unite their souls [*sumpsuché* *σύμψυχη*] (one mind in our English Bibles) and this by framing their minds with the one thing (almost the same wording as the first previous phrase in verse two). Christians, remember who we are in the body of Christ. Remember, like Christ, we ought to lay down our lives in service to our fellow believers. Remember, even if your soul hurts because of something another believer did or failed to do for you, you can soothe your soul and align it with what you know in your spirit by directing your thoughts to the truth in Christ. We can then stand together in one spirit as well as work as a team in one soul.

Despite Scripture's plain distinguish between the human spirit and soul, most of Christianity does not acknowledge this distinction, treating the soul and spirit as same. This distinction is important in the book of Hebrews. Hebrews was written to a group of believing Jews who had not left Judaism. They had one foot in Judaism and one foot in the Church. They were continuing to live by the Law in every detail, as Acts 21 demonstrates that they were even involved in the Law's sacrificial system. However, Hebrews demonstrates that these Hebrew Christians had recently been excluded from the temple and synagogues. They were no longer able to participate in the activities of the Law and this hurt. Paul called them to come

outside the camp and bear Christ's insults, meaning, it was time to leave Judaism, and this would be painful (Hebrews 13:13). However, some were entertaining the idea of giving up on Church so they could continue in Judaism where they were comfortable (10:25).

The writer (Paul) told them they needed to rest from their works, by which they were attempting to be acceptable to God (4:9-11). To do this they would need to submit to God's Word which could distinguish between their soul and spirit and in this way act as a critic of their enthusiasms and intentions of heart (4:12). They did not like missing out on the rituals and family activities of Judaism, and this was the experience of their soul. It was hurt, and remaining in Judaism and abandoning the Church had become their enthusiasm; they were excited about returning to the life they liked. In their spirit, they knew what God said and what Christ had done. They knew what God wanted of them, but in their souls, they were uncomfortable with what they were giving up.

Furthermore, by being alienated from the temple and synagogue they no longer could go to the priest and were concerned about how they could talk to God. As believers 2,000 years down the road, we don't get that, because we don't go others so they can pray for us in this manner. But, Christ had entered into heaven as our high priest so we all have full access to the Father through Him. In this way, Christ's presence anchors the soul; it keeps the soul from wanting to drift away from what one knows in his or her spirit (Hebrews 6:19; 2:1-2). If those believers would relate to what they know, they could take control of their souls (Hebrews 10:39). The word "save" or "preserve" is a Greek word emphasizing possession [περιποιησις]. Too many Christians are controlled by their souls. They make decisions based upon how they feel as opposed to what they know from God's revelation. These Hebrews were thinking about abandoning assembling with believers. This would have been "withdrawing" and with those people, God's soul would take no pleasure (10:37-38), but Paul said, we aren't those who withdraw, but those who possess the soul; we can take the reins of the soul. If they would respond properly they would keep their soul from being wearied to the point that they give up (12:3). Even though one might know what God can and will do for her or him, one's soul can become so overwhelmed and worn out, that one gives up and quits. Hebrews bears many similarities to modern Christians' experiences in which we never fully leave that from which we were saved. We like certain aspects of the old way of life too much to give it up. However, we may reach a decision point in which we know we can't have it both ways, but leaving behind the old is painful, our souls do not like it. With our spirits we need to relate to what we know God is doing and will do and rein in our souls. If we do, we can go on to do God's will for us.

Finally, we wish to distinguish the soul and spirit and the problems of our soul in 1 Peter. Peter was writing to scattered believers. Imagine if you were forced from your home with only what you could carry and had to emigrate to another place. You'd be an immigrant and foreigner. In most situations, such people are at the bottom caste of a society, working the jobs no one else wants and living where no one wants to live. That's the lives of these believers. Yet Peter reminded them, they are chosen ones. The world may not treat you as chosen or special, but to God, you are (1 Peter 1:1). While they knew and rejoiced that they had a great salvation (1:2-5), they were also undergoing a testing by fire (1:7). They were slandered (2:12; 3:16), suffering unjustly (2:19; 3:17), and surprised that this fiery ordeal (persecution) had come upon them (4:12). On this backdrop, Peter encouraged them regarding their proper attitude and how they could keep their souls from becoming overwhelmed.

First in 1:7&9 he reminded them that when our Lord is revealed (Rapture) will get the last part of our salvation, the salvation of our souls. In the mean time, they can direct their hope at the grace which Christ will bring with Him when He comes (1:13). Focusing on our future helps comfort us in our present sufferings (cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:17).

Second, in such hard times, believers need both acts of love which do what best (normally from *agapé* type love) but also the warm fondness of friendship and this comes from *philos*, which in 1:23 is *philadelphia*, warm fondness for brothers. In order to have proper warm fondness, one needs to purify one's soul by obeying the Truth. The Truth is a larger doctrine which starts with God's uniqueness and what only God can do, but in this context focuses on God's ability to liberate the believer from the dominion of his or her sin nature. When Jesus first spoke of the Truth, He explained that it would free them from "the sin" or the sin nature (cf. John 8:31-36). It involves walking by the Spirit so ones does not bring to completion lusts (cravings) from the flesh (Galatians 5:17). While the believer experiences freedom from his or her sin nature, the believer is able to have properly use the soul in a warm fondness toward brothers who need friendship. It also will allow brothers to stretch out in love from the heart. The soul is part of the heart, where we make decisions, and if the soul is not purified the heart will not make good decisions. One of the works of the flesh/sin nature is selfish ambition, which would taint one's love or even keep one from loving.

Third, Peter was concerned that his readers not give others a legitimate reason to slander them (2:11-12). They need to abstain from fleshly lusts (see Galatians 5:19-21) which act as a soldier against the soul (2:11). Because the soul is not yet saved and is emotional it is the weak point at which our sinful nature attacks. It does not appeal to our spirit with a list of rational reasons we should engage in works of the flesh. It appeals to how we feel. This will be important when we get to chapter four. If we suffer because we do what God wants (2:19) this is grace (favor) with God, but it isn't grace or benefit if suffer for sinning (2:20). We follow Christ's example of how to suffer, no verbal outbursts but trusting ourselves to Him (2:21-23). Remember, when He suffered, it was for our sins, not His own. He was innocent (2:24). Further, He, our Lord Jesus Christ, is the Shepherd and Overseer (bishop) of our souls. He cares for all of us, not just our spirits. He became man, perfect and unfallen, but still man, He knew what it was like to struggle with the pains of his soul in the face of doing God's will. He cares for you.

Fourth, the gospel is announced to dead people, that is spiritually dead, ones cut off from God (4:6). If any of these believe that message, they are saved and God's plan (according to God) is that they live in the sphere of spirit. God's will for us is that we live by our spirits, living by what we know objectively. Peter repeats ideas he said earlier: focus on the end, remain sober in worship, continue stretching out in love, and be hospitable to your brothers (4:7-9). One way this is worked out is serving others with the gift God has given to you (4:10-11). All this happens only when the believer operates in his spirit, purifying his soul so that it aligns with what he knows, so he can "feel" properly despite being surrounded by troubles and persecution.

Finally, he reminds them of what he said in chapter two, if you suffer, suffer for the right things, suffering for living as a Christian, don't suffer for being a murderer, thief, evildoer or meddler in other's business (4:15-16). When people are being hurt and mistreated, the soul can react by justifying acting wrong. This is never acceptable. Christ was treated horribly but did not retaliate and neither should we. So, when you suffer by the standard of God's will, commit your soul to your faithful Creator (4:19). He cares for you as your Shepherd, Overseer, and faithful Creator. He will care for that hurting troubled soul that feels pained, so that you can do what you know in spirit.

Scriptures distinguishes the human spirit and soul. We should too. It is not a theological nit to pick, but a truth which impacts how we live. It will especially impact how we respond under adversity to our brothers and sisters in Christ and to those who cause adversity. We can do the will of God, not only from our spirit but from our soul, but we have to lead with the spirit and follow with our soul.

In a previous post, I pointed out the importance of distinguishing between soul and spirit as it affects the body of Christ's function as addressed in Philippians 1:27-2:4. In verse 27 the main verb is "stand" and is tied to "one spirit" while "working as a team" (translated variously) is a participle tied to "one soul" or "one mind/purpose" in most English translations. The importance of the main verb and participle is that the verb leads and the participle follows in this case. That means a group of believers cannot work together as a team in one soul if they do not first stand in one spirit. The spirit is the sphere of one's rationale while the soul interprets one's sense and is the center of one's emotions. In 1:28, some struggled in their souls with being terrified. They were opposed by unbelievers and may have feared they would be imprisoned like Paul. How can a local church work together as a team when some fear to participate? Paul addresses this in the following verses.

Now in 2:1 Paul directs something for the spirit and something for the soul. They find encouragement in Christ. That's for the spirit because the believer is in Christ by God's reckoning or imputation, and therefore it cannot be sensed or experienced. The believer in Christ involves a large set of truths about how God chooses to identify us today. It is doctrine. For the soul, they have comfort or soothing from love. This does not mean to speak nonsense to help others but to soothe the terrified (1:28) soul with kindness. Then for the spirit, they have fellowship or that which is genuinely shared in common, which again focuses on who believers are together in Christ. That again involves truth, or doctrine. For the soul they have comfort and mercy. Comfort is a Greek word which originally referred to one's gut or bowels. It came to be used of the gut feeling one experiences upon hearing of another's pain. For example, you hear of a family losing a father and husband and it can feel like someone punched you in the gut. That's OK. God doesn't call us to be stoic. Feel compassion for that person. In the context of Philippians 1:27-2:4, if you see a brother struggling with the terror of persecution (it was very real for them), you don't turn a cold shoulder and tell them to "buck up, buster" but feel some compassion. The second word is word emphasizing very strong feeling of mercy or pity. You really feel sorry for the pain someone is suffer and that's alright. But did you notice in 2:1 that Paul began with spirit and then moved to soul. The believer needs truth and then the kind comforting soothing for the soul. Truth cannot take a backseat. To address one's soul, her or his emotions, apart from truth for the individual's spirit will not help. The believer needs both but in a specific order.

Hebrews 4:12 presents a similar distinction and relationship between the spirit and soul. The Hebrew believers also struggled in their souls. They needed an anchor for their souls (6:19-20). They needed to possess their soul (10:39). They needed to not grow weary in their souls (12:3). They needed to relate to the Word of God (4:12). God's Word is living. It is not a dusty book of the past but always relevant. It is powerful, where the word *ἐνεργής* [*energēs*] indicates a direct work within, for the Word of God is truth which works within an individual. Within the individual it acts like a sword cutting in both directions. God's Word is capable of dividing between soul and spirit. Under great adversity and in pain, individuals can struggle to discern between what they know to be true and the intensity of their feelings. In the same way that the distinction between the bone and bone marrow is a fine line, so the distinction between the soul and spirit is fine. The soul and spirit express themselves in the "thoughts" and "intents" of the heart. The word "thoughts" [*enthumēsis*] refers to those ideas or opportunities which produce the heat of excitement within an individual. The word "intents" are those ideas in the mind which one plans to do. Again, the Word of God or God's truth is necessary to address both the soul and spirit. Only God's Word can act to judge those things about which we become excited, so we know whether they are in keeping with Gods will, contrary to His will,

or perhaps irrelevant busy work. It lets us look at our intents to determine whether God desires us to pursue them or to relinquish them to God's will.

Just as these two first century groups of believers struggled in their souls, so believers today struggle with pain, loss, fear, worry and so many other challenges which can stall our activity or misdirects us solutions which are not from God. We need God's Word. It provides truth which appeals to our spirits and so can help souls. When we use God's Word properly, it allows us to work together with fellow believers, to possess our souls so we do not grow weary. God intends the body of Christ to properly pursue unity and addressing the believer's spirit and soul with truth moves us in that direction.

- A. Is man still in God's image?
1. Man in God's image meant he was originally created surrounded by glory (Psalm 8:6).
    - a) The verb "crown" is *atar* [עטר] "to surround, to encompass" [Alexander Harkvay, *A Student's Hebrew-Chaldee Dictionary to the Old Testament*: 516].
    - b) God wraps Himself in glory (Psalm 104:2). This is a similar verb *atah* [הטה].
    - c) Moses' face shone after meeting with God, demonstrating that this is possible (Exodus 34:29-30, 35). It did not continue (2 Corinthians 3:7, 13).
    - d) Ezekiel saw a "likeness" (*damūth*-the other word in Genesis 1:29) of God (Ezekiel 1:26-28).
      - (1) He saw an expanse (v. 26) - think vast sky.
      - (2) He saw something resembling a brilliant blue throne (v. 26).
      - (3) He saw One resembling a human appearance (v. 26).
        - (a) His upper "body" was like shining metal - electrum-a mix of silver and gold (v. 27).
        - (b) His lower body was similar to fire (v. 27).
        - (c) He is surrounded by brightness (v. 27).
  2. The word "image" *tzelem* [צלם] referred to a shadow and then to that which bears similarity to as a shadow does to that which casts it.
    - a) This word almost always (in 13 passages) refers to an image representing something else (often of idols).
    - b) However, God has no form to which He can be likened, and God ridiculed idolators for this very activity (Deuteronomy 4:15-19; Isaiah 40:18; 46:5).
      - (1) Further, Romans 1:23 states that trying to make God in the image of man was wrong.
      - (2) Therefore, man in God's image cannot mean that man looks like God as to man's physical nature. fiery
    - c) God is spirit, not physical (John 4:24), therefore, God is not physical.
  3. When Adam sinned he was stripped.
    - a) The word "naked" [*arōm*] in Genesis 3:7 is distinct from [*ērōm*] in Genesis 2:25. It means stripped and is always negative.
    - b) By sinning, Adam and Eve lost something, were stripped of something, glory. Unlike God, man does not naturally shine. We probably cannot appreciate what this was like prior to Adam's sin.
  4. Adam generated (begot) a son in his image and likeness (Genesis 5:3).
    - a) The two ideas of Genesis 1 are reversed.
      - (1) His son was in his likeness. His son's mental capacity is now twisted or corrupted from what it once was.
      - (2) His son was according to his image. His son's physical nature, corrupted by Adam's sin, does not allow him to shine.
  5. We now bear the image of the earthy (dusty) but we believers will bear the image of the heavenly (1 Corinthians 15:49; see 40-49).
    - a) Our bodies will have the kind of glory which Christ's body has (Philippians 3:20-21).
    - b) We will not be like God.
    - c) We will be like Christ's glorified humanity (1 John 3:2).
  6. God will change our fallen state (Romans 8).
    - a) We will be jointly-glorified with Christ (Romans 8:17).
    - b) We suffer but will be glorified (v. 18).
    - c) Creation groans in its fallen state (vv. 19-20). Vanity means it cannot produce what it was intended to produce.
    - d) Creation will be freed from this slavery consisting of corruption/decay (v. 21).
    - e) Creation is freed when our glory consisting of freedom as God's children is revealed (v. 21).
    - f) Like us, creation groans (v. 22).

- g) We groan, but we also have the Spirit as “first fruits” which means He provides a sample of the coming glory when our bodies are fully-redeemed (freed) (v. 23). Our groaning is chiefly regarding our sinful corrupt nature.
- h) We are able to reflect God’s glory by the work of the Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:18).
- 7. Christ came into the world in the likeness of human flesh and of sinful flesh.
  - a) He became flesh-real human (John 1:14).
  - b) He became in appearance like a man (Philippians 2:8).
  - c) He became human with the difference that He was not in sinful flesh but just flesh (Romans 8:3).
  - d) Is God “sinful flesh”? NO.
- 8. Man was created in God’s image and therefore, God required the death of those who killed other men (Genesis 9:6).
  - a) Though we now bear the image of the dusty, the fact that
- 9. Man still bears God’s likeness, the ability for rational thought (James 3:9).
- B. Does it make a difference if I accept the view that man is a spirit, a soul and a body?
  - 1. Scripture distinguishes the three parts (1 Thessalonians 5:23). Therefore, if Scripture distinguishes these three, we should also.
    - a) Each part has a definite article distinguishing them from one another in the list.
    - b) The human spirit “knows” objectively (*oida*) (1 Corinthians 2:11).
    - c) The human soul is the seat of sensory emotions: anger (Acts 14:2), warm fondness (1 Peter 1:22), grief (Matthew 26:38).
    - d) Distinguishing between these often involves what we know for certain (God’s revelation) compared to how we “feel.”
    - e) Note that each of these parts are sometimes used of the whole individual: the spirits of righteous men, the souls of those.
  - 2. Salvation is applied to the spirit and soul at different times.
    - a) The spirit is affected by the new birth (regeneration) (John 3:5-6).
    - b) The believer joined to the Lord is one spirit (1 Corinthians 6:17).
    - c) The believer’s spirit part of his mind can play a role in practical renewing in the life of the believer, because the spirit has experienced the new birth (Ephesians 4:23).
    - d) The soul will be the last part of man saved (1 Peter 1:9, 1-9). It isn’t saved now. This is the reason the believers were having problems in their soul and can feel different than they know they should.
  - 3. Scriptures distinguish spirit and soul, and a failure to do so will not help us when we meet these situations. These terms are used in at least 6 passages of distinct ideas or things not the same thing.
  - 4. The human spirit and soul in Philippians.
    - a) In the conflict in the Philippians church, the believers needed to stand in one spirit and compete as a team in one soul (1:27).
      - (1) They could know for the sake of standing.
      - (2) They also needed to work together as a team in one soul, for they had “hard” feelings between each other.
      - (3) They needed different things for the spirit and the soul (2:1).
        - (a) Encouragement in Christ is for the spirit.
        - (b) Consolation from love is for the soul.
        - (c) Fellowship is for the spirit.
        - (d) Compassion and pity is for the soul.
      - (4) They needed to be joined in soul (i.e. feeling the same) by having the same frame of mind (2:2).

- (5) Paul wished to have a good-soul regarding the Philippians (2:19).
- (6) Timothy was of equal soul to Paul, for he genuinely cared for the Philippians (2:20).
- (7) Epaphroditus threw his soul (life) aside because of the work (2:30). Though “life” is probably accurate, it does involve his feelings, that is being sick was miserable.
- 5. Some people have “small souls” needing special care as their emotions tend to overflow and get the better of them (1 Thessalonians 5:14).
- 6. The Hebrew Christians wanted to remain in Judaism practicing the Law and not assemble as Christians, asserting they could mature under the Law (Hebrews 13:13; 10:25; 5:14).
  - a) They needed to submit to God’s Word (4:12).
    - (1) It would divide soul and spirit: how they felt versus what they know.
    - (2) It would divide joints and marrow. This demonstrates how well it can distinguish.
    - (3) It acts as a judge or what gets us excited (generates heat within) and what notions we have.
      - (a) They were excited about keeping the law and trying to escape troubles.
      - (b) They had a notion about God which was faulty, that could would let them stay in the Law and not grow.
      - (c) These are both in the heart, that part of our person where we make decisions.
    - (4) You need to know that sometimes your feelings will not align with what you know.
  - b) The hope of Christ sitting in heaven at the Father’s right hand anchors our soul (6:19).
  - c) The believer can possess his soul (10:39). If the believer approaches the throne, he finds grace and mercy to address adversity.
  - d) The believer needs to not let his soul become wearied so that he gives up (12:3).
  - e) The leaders who teach the Word look out for believers’ souls (13:17). If one obeys the teaching, it will help him possess his soul.
  - f) Remaining with the believers and approaching God through Christ will steady the weary-souled believer.
- 7. Peter’s readers were being persecuted and their soul’s hurt (1 Peter).
  - a) Their souls are the weak point through which the flesh attacks (2:11).
  - b) Jesus is the shepherd and overseer of our souls (2:25). Running from adversity will not fix the soul problem, but returning to the shepherd, Who shepherds through individuals in the church (5:1-2).
  - c) Those who are suffering are to commit the care of their souls to their faithful Creator while doing the good He gave to do (4:19).